

Section 1. History and archaeology

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QUEEN MELISENDE OF JERUSALEM: THE CONVERGENCE OF CULTURES IN THE HOLY CITY

Abstract. Jerusalem is the center of religions and cultures. However, it was not always like the convergence of many nations nowadays. Throughout the history, many people influenced the composition of population in the Holy City. One of the most influential leaders of the city was Queen Melisende. As a daughter of a French king and an Armenian queen, she brought both cultures into Jerusalem along with other cultures such as Byzantine culture. This essay discusses how this convergence was displayed through art works created and architectures built during her reign.

Keywords: History, architecture, Jerusalem, Melisende.

The Psalter of Melisende

Around 1135, the Psalter of Melisende, the queen of Crusader Jerusalem, was created. Containing psalms and illustrations of important events in the Bible, this psalter for Melisende was created in the monastery of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The six artists who worked on this piece of art combined Western European and Byzantine art when creating the drawings [7; 26]. The volume was painted on parchment with ink, paint, and even gold. The book has a sculpted ivory binding that reflected the importance of the psalter and the prestige of its owner.

The covers of the volume were made from ivory and decorated with turquoise and other gems. The first twelve pages include illustrations of scenes from the New Testament. This way of organizing content was identical with Western psalters, but the styles employed in of the images are more commonly found in Eastern Orthodox liturgy [27]. The scenes depicted include the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, and many others. The next thirteen through twenty-

one pages show the Christian calendar and its text. Folios twenty-two through one hundred and ninety-six contain the text of the psalter itself, which has verses of the psalms from Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Hebrew Scriptures [28]. The psalms are written in northern French scripts. The illuminators painted the initial letters of each psalm at each division in the text, taking up the entire verso side. The initial letters are drawn with gold lettering on a purple background, which displays the influence of Italian and Islamic art on the psalter [29].

The Psalter represents one of the most important artifacts from the First Crusade because it shows how Queen Melisende was able to unite different Christian traditions in Jerusalem. It is perhaps not an overstatement to say that, during this period, Queen Melisende was the most important politician in the transformation of Jerusalem into a Latin city. Her reign is often heralded as a period of cultural innovation. Under her rule, Jerusalem's architectural and artistic traditions reflected the convergence of Latin,

Eastern Orthodox, and Armenian traditions. In order to illustrate this aspect of her reign, the following paper will examine how her Armenian heritage and the different building projects that she undertook in the city reflected her interest in bringing together a variety of Christian tradition in the Holy City. After giving a brief description of her rise to power, the following paper offers an analysis of three buildings that she commissioned or expanded during her reign: The Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Christian Quarter, The Church of Saint Anne in the present-day Muslim Quarter, and the Church of Saint James in the present-day Armenian Quarter.

The Historical Background of Melisende's Reign in Jerusalem

In order to understand Melisende's contributions to art and architecture during her reign, it is necessary to begin with a brief sketch of her rise to power, beginning with a general description of the outbreak of the First Crusade and moving toward a more detailed description of her ascension as Queen of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. In the beginning of the 11th century, the Muslim Seljuks, a Turkish tribe of the steppe, rose to power and won significant victories against Byzantine armies [5]. As a result, the Seljuks gained control over many lands and great cities, such as Edessa and Antioch. The Byzantine emperor requested help from the West in order to repel the Turkish force. This request from the Byzantine emperor showed how, during this period, Eastern Christians were caught between Muslim empires in the east and the Holy Roman Empire in the west [5]. The Latin church needed a reason to support the Byzantines. They decided their cause would be an act to regain control of the Holy City.

In 1095, Pope Urban II publicly called for a crusade as a response to the request by the Byzantine emperor for help against the Seljuks. In the call for the Crusade, the Pope stated as follows: "For you must hasten to carry aid to your brethren dwelling in the East, who need your help for which they have often entreated... Jerusalem is the navel of the world; the land is fruitful

above all others, like another paradise of delights... This royal city is now held captive by her enemies and made pagan by those who know not God. She asks and longs to be liberated and does not cease to beg you to come to her aid" [25]. Following this speech by the Pope, tens of thousands of people journeyed from Western Europe to Jerusalem to recover the long-lost Holy Land, and they were known as the famous crusaders of the First Crusade. The main force of the faithful first captured several Turkish cities, including Nicaea and Antioch, and they defeated the Seljuk Turks at Dorylaeum. During those missions, they massacred thousands of enemy soldiers and citizens. In June 1099, around 1,200 cavalry and 12,000 infantry soldiers arrived at the gate of Jerusalem, built great towers, and started a siege that lasted seven weeks [15].

On July 14, the Frankish army penetrated the defense of the city and finally achieved their aim. In just four years, the Crusading armies had arrived at the walls of Jerusalem and began besieging the city. The main chronicler of this event is William of Tyre, who gave us a detailed description of the assault on the city from the Crusaders' perspective [30]. William of Tyre was a Franco-Syrian politician, churchman, and historian. After receiving his education in France, William returned to Palestine and was later made the archdeacon of Tyre. After a few years, he became the tutor of Baldwin, son of King Amalric I of Jerusalem. When King Amalric passed away, King Baldwin IV made William chancellor of the kingdom and archdeacon of Nazareth. Later, in 1175, William became the archbishop of Tyre. His book *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* (History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea) about the history of the Latin Kings of Jerusalem is preserved and viewed as one of his most important works [1].

Soon after the First Crusade, one prominent ruler of the Frankish East was selected to be the first king of Jerusalem, King Baldwin I. Baldwin I was the father of Queen Melisende. King Baldwin won his reputation by patient and arduous industry and by boldness of enterprise. After arriving in Jerusalem,

the new king decided that the Muslims would eventually return and attack the city; thus, he initiated attacks on several cities and land occupied by his opponents. Even though he did not capture any land, his actions frightened the Arabs and caused them to lay silent for a few years. The next few years of Baldwin I's rule was under constant invasions and battles, especially against the Egyptians. In 1102, the king lost a battle against his opponents and was even thought to have died [31].

Queen Melisende of Jerusalem was born in 1105. Her father was Baldwin of Bourq, one of the original Crusaders, and the king of Edessa. Her mother was the Armenian queen Morphia. After the death of the King of Jerusalem in 1118, Baldwin was chosen to become the next king. Because king Baldwin II didn't have any male heir to the throne, he decided to let his daughter to take power and become queen of Jerusalem. However, he chose a French nobleman, Count Fulk V, to become Melisende's husband and act as a co-regent of the country.

After the death of Baldwin II in 1131, Melisende and Fulk were crowned king and queen of Jerusalem. Even though they were both crowned, Fulk did not intend to share power with his wife. Soon, the country divided into two different factions, one supported Fulk, one supported Melisende. Eventually, Melisende ended the issue by hiring assassins who threatened Fulk. Later, after Fulk's death in 1143, Melisende became co-regent of the state with her son [32]. However, she had most of the control over the politics and the kingdom. Her son wanted to stop being in the background of the politics and rule the country himself. This resulted in another political clash, this time between mother and son. In 1145, Baldwin III was supposed to take full control of the country, but his mother wanted to hold onto power, and she continued to rule the country. Baldwin III complained about this situation to the High Court of Jerusalem. The latter divided the city, giving half of it to Melisende and the other half to Baldwin III. Eventually Baldwin III attacked his mother and

gained full control of the kingdom. After the conflict, Melisende served as an advisor to her son. Under her rule, some Islamic countries regained control of lands occupied by the Christians. Her conflict with her husband and her son weakened the kingdom and allowed their rivals to grow.

Queen Melisende was a figure of extraordinary importance in the Latin kingdom from 1131 to 1161. William of Tyre tells us that Melisende commissioned the building of St. Lazarus at Bethany and was a part of several major works. For instance, she rebuilt the Church of St. Anne, commissioned a new program of mosaic decoration on the Dome of the Rock, and ordered the movement of the royal residence from the Templum Solomonis to the south side of the citadel. The most important project was the rebuilding of the church of the Holy Sepulcher, which mainly occurred in the 1140s. These building projects reflect the queen's dedication to architecture and the arts in the twelfth century and show how she was able to craft innovative styles that reflected the period as the convergence of Western European, Armenian, and Byzantine cultural influence [33; 34]. The following section will outline some of the specific projects that she commissioned during her reign and how these projects introduced a new era of Christian architectural style into the Holy City.

The Convergence of Architectural Styles under Melisende

Having outlined the background of Melisende's rise to power in Jerusalem, we can now examine the contributions that she made during her reign. She is perhaps most revered in history for her contributions to the arts and her support of large construction projects in Jerusalem. These projects reflected her interest in converging traditions from Western Europe, Byzantium, and Armenia. In the following section, I describe and analyze three of the most significant building projects that Melisende commissioned and supported as a way to explain how her reign reflected the convergence of several different cultural flows associated with the period of the Crusades in the Holy Land. The following

begins with the earliest project that she carried out, the reconstruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, then turns to the Church of St. Anne, and finally addresses the Armenian Church of St. James.

The construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was not commissioned by Queen Melisende. However, Melisende commissioned many of the church's renovations and alterations. According to Folda, on November 30th, 1160, King Amalric made a gift to this grand church in Jerusalem, and it was recorded to be joined by Queen Melisende. The famous Psalter of Melisende was also located in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Folda argues that the façade of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher reflected Melisende's interest in bringing together different Christian traditions. For instance, the sculpture used in the church's south transept façade combines Byzantine, Romanesque, and Arab Christian influences [7, 465]. According to Folda, "Architecturally, this façade is a remarkable combination of ideas found in both East and West, some very current ideas indeed. For the entry portal, the architect no doubt drew on the design of a local Jerusalem, city gate, the Golden Gate, from the east side of the Haram al Sharif, for its double portal configuration. This architectural motif thereby alluded symbolically to the belief that, at the Second Coming, Christ would enter the holy city through the double portal of the Golden Gate, just as Christians enter the holy place of the CHS through its comparable double portal" [7].

Jaroslav Folda also notes, "It constitutes a remarkably ecumenical artistic statement in which pilgrims could recognize their own distinctive visual tradition located within the artistic variety and multiculturalism that was crusader art in Jerusalem" [35].

Of all the architecture Melisende built or helped renovate, the Monastery of St. Anne is the one to which she gave the greatest effort. When her sister Iveta entered the religious life, Melisende thought that it was unfitting for a "king's daughter to be subject to the authority of a mother-superior, like an or-

dinary person" [36]. Therefore, Melisende surveyed the whole country in order to find a proper place for her sister. This patronage at Bethany is the only major commission that William of Tyer includes in his stories. Jaroslav Folda emphasizes how Melisende took a creative approach to the renovation of the church by mixing Byzantine styles with Latin ones. Folda notes, "St. Anne's also is important as an example of Crusader builders taking over Byzantine characteristics for Latin use, such as a domed crossing integrated within the western longitudinal plan, and the rich eastern decorative repertoire" [9, 467]. Folda further emphasizes that her interest as a benefactor for these churches in Jerusalem was related to her own family background in Eastern Christianity [9, 469].

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher

Because the larger effort of the First Crusade was centered upon the recapture of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, attention turned to rebuilding this church in the early twelfth century [7]. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher was one of the most important churches in the Holy City of Jerusalem. Due to the fact that it was built on the site of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, many pilgrims had been making pilgrimage to it since the fourth century when the Byzantine emperor Constantine had erected it on the western hill of the city. The importance of the church derived from the description of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels. This tradition about the significance of the church derived from the Christian Gospels, which narrate the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Christians call the Christ, the Greek term for Messiah. Jesus was killed by crucifixion. After his death, Joseph, a righteous man, took Jesus's body from the cross and buried him under an enormous rock. After three days, the people couldn't find the body of Christ, and they remembered that "The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again."

During the co-rule of Melisende and her son Baldwin III, the church went through major renovations and expansions to meet its major functions. These ren-

ovations and expansions incorporated a diverse mix of architectural traditions from Byzantine, Romanesque, and Arab Christian styles. The concepts of the reconstruction of the architecture were ambitious, including a new two-story, double portal entrance inspired by the Golden Gate in Jerusalem. Numerous sculptures and mosaic decorations were incorporated on the entry portals and on the interior of the church. The façade of the church was also one of its kind. The designers used sculptural medium to express the authentic root of the church in Early Christian and Byzantine origins. They also included sculptural styles around the world, including Early Christian, Byzantine, Romanesque, and Arab Christian. Romanesque style was characterized by the use of semi-circle arches. Romanesque buildings were usually symmetrical. They had thick walls, sturdy pillars, round arches, large towers, and decorative arcading. Byzantine architecture was Eastern Roman architecture. It often consisted of a large dome in the middle of the church, representing heaven. Smaller domes were ringed around the central one.

Both styles are represented in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. For instance, the central dome of the Byzantine style was included, and the symmetrical shape of Romanesque was also included.

Church of St. Anne

Another significant example of a building project associated with Melisende is the Church of St. Anne. Whereas the Church of the Holy Sepulcher featured a mix of Byzantine and Crusader styles, the Church of St. Anne came to represent a more Western style of architectural tradition in the Holy City [37]. Today, the church is located in the Muslim Quarter, but it was originally built in a location that had many associations with early Christian events. Christian tradition holds that the location where the church was built was also the location of one of the miracles of Jesus describes in the New Testament (John 5:2) [37]. The Church was built around 1131 to 1138, during the rule of Queen Melisende. It was built on the site of what was believed to be the childhood home of the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ's mother [2]. Unlike many

of the crusader churches, St. Anne's wasn't destroyed by the Mameluke. It was abandoned and later restored.

The characteristic of the church is its simplicity due to the Frankish Romanesque style of architecture. The interior and the exterior are simply adorned by clean lines. St. Anne also has a stark cross-vaulted ceiling and gigantic pillars that expresses the majesty of the architecture. The pillars are also characterized by simple capital, although scholars speculate that the capitals may have originally contained frescoes [2]. The entrance and doorway to the church exhibit a similar style to that of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the northwestern quarter of the city. This is not surprising given that Queen Melisende was responsible for commissioning work on both buildings during her reign. Under the building, in a vault, is an altar dedicated to Virgin Mary. To the south of the main altar of the church is a flight of stairs that leads down to a crypt that, according to tradition, marks the spot where the Virgin Mary was born.

The Church of Saint James

Perhaps from an Armenian perspective the most significant new building that Melisende constructed in the city was the massive Cathedral of St. James. This church was different from the other two because it was constructed as an Armenian church instead of a church that would represent different Christian groups [14].

Another religious building that illustrates the cultural aspects of Melisende's rule is the Cathedral of St. James, located in the present-day Armenian Quarter. The cathedral is a 12th – century Armenian church located at the center of this quarter of the Old City. This church was dedicated at the time of its origins to two saints: James the son of Zebedee and James the brother of Jesus. The church's architecture reflects that it has been constructed and added to over many centuries. For example, the oldest part of the church is the Chapel of St. Menas, which was built in the fifth century CE [24]. The sacristy around the Chapel went through centuries of construction. The bulk of it was built during the twelfth century in the time period of Melisende, but most of the

decorations that are visible today stem from the eighteenth century and later. The church resides in the center of the Armenian community in this quarter.

A detailed description of the church's architecture and decorations paves the way for understanding how it reflects Armenian Christian style. On the wall of the entrance of the cathedral one sees the inscription of 1432 Mameluke [14, 239]. The entrance way leads to a porch decorated with inscribed crosses, called *khatchkars*, which are an archetypal sign of Armenian pilgrims. The function of these *khatchkars* at the front of the church is to give visible testimony to the church as a place where pilgrims have visited over the centuries. Inside the cathedral is a forest of ornate lamps made with silver and gold hanging from the ceiling. All the lamps found in the church have been donated by villages, guilds, and rich individuals from Armenia. On the floor all the way to the altar are Armenian tiles, accompanied by luxurious carpets. Above the ground are paintings of saints against the simple walls of the building. During the most dramatic moments of religious rituals, the altar is concealed by an immense blue curtain which has an image of the life of Jesus and the saints. Beside the altar is a set of three chapels with doors inlaid with tortoise shell and mother of pearl. The Chapel of St. James is said to contain the head of St. James, who was beheaded by Herod Agrippa in the year... There are many other chapels inside the cathedral, including Chapel of St. Macarius, Chapel of St. Menas.

The Armenian Quarter is one of the four quarters in the old city of Jerusalem. It is in the southwest of the city and has an approximate 0.126 km² land. When the Armenians adopted Christianity, they arrived at Jerusalem and settled there in the 4th century CE [4]. The holy city can be considered the oldest living diaspora community outside the Armenian Homeland. The quarter is developed around the Cathedral of St. James. The Armenian Quarter is one of the few well-preserved quarters in the Old City of Jerusalem.

The French and the Armenians established contact early in the 12th century [38]. During the Crusades, Armenia was the last Christian haven before

going into territory controlled by the Islamic caliphate. The French and Armenians had the same religion; thus, they were able to form a bond. During the Crusades, Armenian support was crucial to the French crusaders. The location of Armenia served as a way for the army to enter the east and conquer. Many French princes and kings married Armenian princesses to strengthen their alliances [38].

There are several ways in which the Cathedral of St. James reflects the architectural style of the Armenian tradition. The dome of St. James is a four-columned cross-domed church which is popular in the eastern Mediterranean and is present in Armenian and Byzantine architectures [16]. The use of compound piers instead of columns resembles the style of Armenian architecture as well. Another detail which relates the church of St. James with the Armenian architecture style is the aisle of the church. Most Armenian churches didn't have aisles in the 11th and the 12th century; however, the ruined churches in the Cilician Armenian kingdom do appear to have an aisle. The aisle's features are also found in the Cathedral of St. James [16, 90]. The church of St. James is more similar to the Anavarza Armenia instead of Highland Armenia. According to World Monument Funds, the reason why the Armenian architectural style present in the Cathedral of St. James changes over time is because it is modified and beautified by Armenian merchants throughout the centuries. The architecture also resembles several architectural styles of countries other than Armenia. For instance, the four-columned church and chapels found in the Cathedral of St. James are also found in Italian churches and is derived from Byzantine architectures.

Conclusion

Queen Melisende was one of the most influential figures in the constructions of several churches in the kingdom of Jerusalem. More importantly, she served as the conjunction point of different cultures in the holy city. Her identity as the daughter of a French prince and Armenian princess allowed her to unify these two groups. Her acceptance of Byzantine, European, and Armenian art is reflected in

the Psalter, paintings, and architecture she commissioned during her reign. Without her contribution on the convergence of traditions of those cultures, the holy city would be largely different from what we know of it today. While many people tend to focus understandably upon the atrocities associated with the period of the Crusades, this period also brought

with it a considerable amount of cultural innovation and vibrancy. If one were to travel to the city of Jerusalem today, the remains of what Melisende commissioned are still prominently visible in many areas. Indeed, few women in history left a stronger imprint upon the physical development of the holy city as Melisende, the Queen of Jerusalem.

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