

2nd Biennial Conference of the British Archaeological Association

“Romanesque and the Eastern Mediterranean”

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“12th Century Jerusalem and Bethlehem Pilgrims:

Points of Contact between Europe and the Near East”

The art patronage of pilgrims to the holy land in the 12th century provides ample evidence for the diversity of European visitors to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. On the one hand reliquaries of the True Cross were commissioned to be sent back to various sites in the West from Jerusalem, and in one instance a small devotional icon was ordered which linked patron saints associated with the three great world pilgrimage sites at the time, including Jerusalem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela. Meanwhile pilgrims to Bethlehem engaged local painters to provide icons that would commemorate their patron saints, linking the holy place of the birth of Christ with their European homeland. These large icons, which decorate columns of the nave and aisles of the Church of the Nativity, include a surprisingly diverse array of saintly figures that include cult images of the Virgin and Child, along with the images of apostles, bishops, deacons, ascetics, soldier-saints, holy kings, and important female saints, some of which also appeared in certain 12th century churches of Palermo. On rare occasions the images of the pilgrims who may have commissioned the column paintings were also represented.

These paintings in Bethlehem, all done after 1130, reflect the multicultural Christian presence by both the artists and the pilgrims during the Crusader period. For the painters, some of whom settled in the Crusader States and learned the local artistic tradition, there is the famous passage by Fulcher of Chartres, “For we who were Occidentals have now become Orientals. He who was a Roman or a Frank has in this land been made into a Galilean or a Palestinian. He who was of Rheims or Chartres has now become a citizen of Tyre or Antioch. ... Some already possess homes or households by inheritance. Some have taken wives not only of their own people by Syrians or Armenians or even Saracens who have obtained the grace of Baptism. One has his father-in-law as well as his daughter-in-law living with him, or his own child if not his step-son or step-father. Out here there are grandchildren and great-grandchildren. ... People use the eloquence and idioms of diverse languages in conversing back and forth. Words of different languages have become common property known to each nationality, and mutual faith unites those who are ignorant of their descent. ... He who was born a stranger is now as one born here; he who was born an alien has become as a native.”

For the artists and the pilgrims, John of Würzburg, a German pilgrim himself writing about 1170, described the diverse peoples whose places of worship he encountered in the holy land: ... “there are Greeks, , Bulgars, Latins, Germans, Hungarians, Scots, people of Navarre, Britons, Angles, Franks, Ruthenians, Bohemians, Georgians, Armenians, Jacobites, Syrians, Nestorians, Indians, Egyptians, Copts,

Capheturici, Maronites, and many others.” Crusader Jerusalem was veritable tower of Babel, and he is only listing the Christians. Moreover for him the Franks refer to the French, because he names the other European people separately, and he does not even mention the Scandinavians who are very much represented in the Bethlehem icon paintings.

In sum, with the diversity of Romanesque Europe in mind, we propose to explore the extent to which we see this diversity in the unique pilgrimage art of Crusader Jerusalem and Bethlehem, especially in the 12th century painting.

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