The *Theodore Psalter* and the Rebuilding of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem

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Jerusalem had great strategic and emotive importance to the late Roman and Byzantine emperors. By building a richly decorated church complex in Jerusalem to mark the place where Christ was crucified and buried, later known as the Holy Sepulchre, Constantine acknowledged the importance of that city to the new religion. However, after he developed an imperial administration in Constantinople in 324, this city was seen as the new Christian capital, the core of the Christian world.

The relevance of Jerusalem to Constantinople is evident in an important group of psalters, generally called the ‘marginal psalters’. These, so named because the margins contain illuminations, date from between the ninth and fourteenth centuries. They are all in some way connected in terms of their illustrations, with the later ones directly or indirectly dependent on the earlier. The discussions on the various recensions have been extensive.

It is important to note that the *Theodore Psalter* (London, British Library, Add. MS. 19352) has two significant illustrations that set it apart from the others. Miniatures on folios 36r and 128r appear to visually mark the eleventh-century rebuilding of the structures at the Holy Sepulchre, which had been virtually destroyed in 1009. The unique nature of these illuminations has not previously been addressed. They indicate that certain aspects of the *Theodore Psalter* were both innovative and topical.

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3 For a summary of the issues with references, see Barber, ‘Readings’, pp. 13-14.
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In the Theodore Psalter, unlike in the other marginal psalters, important details of production are identified in a colophon. This shows that it was completed in February 1066 at one of Byzantium’s most prestigious foundations, the Studios monastery in Constantinople. It was made by the hand of Theodore for the patron Michael, the abbot of the monastery.4

The buildings erected at the site of the Holy Sepulchre by Constantine the Great remained the chief focus for Christian worship in Jerusalem from the 330s and throughout the Byzantine period. The complex combined a rotunda, known as the Anastasis (resurrection), over the supposed rock tomb which was enclosed in an aedicule; a basilica, known as the Martyrion; and, at least from c. 348, a relic of the wood of the cross at the site of Golgotha within a courtyard.5

The site of the Holy Sepulchre was largely maintained until the beginning of the eleventh century. Martin Biddle considered that descriptions given by pilgrims in the period up to 1009 indicate that the fourth-century aedicule was largely still in its original form. However, in 1009 the basilica and the aedicule were virtually destroyed by the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim (996-1021). Rebuilding started very shortly after, probably in 1012. Opinion differs on the completion date, but it was probably sometime between 1040 and 1048, under Michael IV the Paphlagonian (1034-41) or Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-55).6 The new complex was smaller, with chapels around the courtyard, but there was still a rotunda, probably cone-shaped, over the aedicule. The Constantinian basilica was not rebuilt.

It is generally held that the illuminations of the Theodore Psalter are related, probably via an intermediary model, to those in the ninth-century Khludov Psalter (Moscow, Hist. Mus. MS. D.129), which was also made in Constantinople. This manuscript has an illumination showing the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (fig. 1).7 The Temple of Solomon had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and was rebuilt by the Israelites when they returned from exile several decades later. The miniature illustrates the text of Psalm 95:1, composed to celebrate the Lord, as stated in the verse, ‘When the house was built after the captivity, a song by David. Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth’. The illustration seems to represent a Byzantine building site. The construction crew is busily working on the scaffolding: a column is being hauled up on a pulley and the foreman hangs over the side giving instructions.

In the Theodore Psalter, the illustration linked to this verse does not show the building site but rather a completed building. It is tall, probably three storeys high, raised on two steps with high golden doors beneath a tympanum and with a tower above and a red roof. The inscription

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4 For a short description of the manuscript and the colophon, see Barber, ‘Readings’, pp. 1-2.
6 M. Biddle, The Tomb of Christ (Stroud, 1999), pp. 79-80; Johannes Skylitzes, in John Skylitzes A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057, ed. and trans. J. Wortley (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 365-6: ‘Aziyios [Hakem] the Egyptian was mad and the cause of many woes for the Christians. He tore down the Church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ at Jerusalem but, after he had died the most horrible of deaths, his son (born to him by a captive Roman woman) permitted those who wished to do so to rebuild the church. The Emperor generously hastened to send [resources] for the reconstruction but he was interrupted by death and it was Michael, his successor, who completed the task’; for Monomachos as the restorer, see R. Ousterhout, ‘Rebuilding the Temple: Constantine Monomachus and the Holy Sepulchre’, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, xlvi (1989), pp. 66-78.
7 Khludov Psalter, f. 96r; images of the construction of the Temple are also in the mid-ninth-century Paris Psalter, gr. 20, f. 4r but not in the ninth-century Pantokrator Psalter (Mount Athos, Pantokrator Cod. 61) where the folio (f. 136r), is damaged; see J. C. Anderson, ‘Further Prolegomena to a Study of the Pantokrator Psalter: An Unpublished Miniature, Some Restored Losses, and Observations on the Relationship with the Chludov Psalter and Paris Fragment’, Dumbarton Oaks Papers, lii (1998), pp. 305-21 (pp. 312-3, figs 21-3).
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reads simply, Ὁ οἶκος, ‘The House’ (fig. 2).  

10 This appears to represent the rebuilt church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site seen as a replacement for the Temple.  

11 It is perhaps an explicit reminder of the importance of the Holy Sepulchre as a symbol of God’s House and the convergence of the idea of the Temple and of the Holy Sepulchre in Early Christian but also in later thinking.

If this interpretation is correct, the illumination shows a symbolic or conceptual view of the Holy Sepulchre, perhaps incorporating the chapels around the courtyard, which were a substantial feature of the rebuilt structure. The image of the church appears to have tall doorways with tympana above, but without a dominant rotunda. One might argue that this depiction of the Holy Sepulchre does not closely resemble the edifice itself. However, it is generally understood that photorealism is not a feature of medieval illuminations. It is the significance of buildings and their associations, rather than their physical structure, which determines their portrayal in much Byzantine art.

The building site image from the Khludov Psalter illustrating Psalm 95 is used in the Theodore Psalter, in a simpler form, at Psalm 126:1, a point not illustrated in the other manuscripts (fig. 3). The text is ‘Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.’  

When the new image celebrating the completed building was inserted for Psalm 95, the representation of the building site from the model was moved here, where it fits the text.

A further addition to the Theodore Psalter that probably also refers to the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre is an illustration derived from the apocrypha and taken from a text known as the Paraleipomena Jeremiou, ‘The things omitted from Jeremiah’ (fig. 4).  

The iconography illustrating Psalm 32:10 focuses on the period of the Babylonian exile (indicated by the sleep of Abimelech) and the moment when Baruch sends a message (through an eagle) to Jeremiah and the Israelites in exile, which promises their return to Jerusalem. The image of Jerusalem, thus labelled, is in a form very similar to the church in the image illustrating Psalm 95. The illumination presumably represents the return of the Israelites and the rebuilding of the Temple after their time in exile, a period not unlike the years between 1009 and the rebuilding of the Holy Sepulchre later in the eleventh century.  

This illustration does not occur in any of the earlier or related manuscripts, suggesting it had specific significance at this time. Moreover, neither of the above-mentioned Theodore Psalter images occur in the eleventh-century Barberini Psalter (Vatican, Barb. gr. 372), which is also believed to be based on the same intermediary model of the Khludov Psalter.  

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8 Folio 128r, Der Nersessian, L’Illustration des psautiers, pp. 47, 67-8, fig. 206.


10 For instance, this is a recurring theme in S. Ćurčić and E. Hadjitryphonos (eds), Architecture as Icon: Perception and Representation of Architecture in Byzantine Art (New Haven, CT; London, 2010); in regard to replicating buildings, particularly the Holy Sepulchre, see Krautheimer, ‘Introduction to an “Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture”’, Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, v (1942), pp. 1-33.  


12 Folio 36r, Der Nersessian, L’Illustration des psautiers, pp. 25-6, 84-5, fig. 61; on this image, see B. Crostini, ‘Commenting the Psalter in Eleventh-Century Constantinople: An Image of the Paralipomena Jeremiou in the “Theodore Psalter”’, Ars Edendi Workshop Proceedings, 2010, 1-14; Crostini refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 1009, but not directly to the rebuilding of the Holy Sepulchre, see pp. 11-13; on the text, A. Hentschel, ‘Beobachtungen zur Textüberlieferung der Paralipomena Jeremiou (Langversion)’, Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, xcix (2008), pp. 149-66. I thank Barbara Crostini for alerting me to these references when this paper was first presented in March 2013.


It is also significant that the *Theodore Psalter* appears to suggest contemporary attention to the identification of Jerusalem and Constantinople, the Temple and the Church in the eleventh century. As has been well attested before, Sion is often imaged as the Virgin, as an empress, or as a building. In her detailed study of the manuscript, Sirarpie der Nersessian saw the connection between emperors, empresses and Sion as a clear indication of the identification of the City of God with Constantinople. This was further confirmed for her in another image inscribed ‘the Christian empire’, which shows a seated youthful emperor by the text from Psalm 133:3, ‘May the Lord bless you from Sion’. Taking the idea further, Mati Meyer argued that the image of a church illustrating Psalm 50:20, which depicts an imperially dressed Sion standing in front, relates to Heavenly Jerusalem and to sites in Constantinople such as Hagia Sophia. Alexei Lidov, commenting on the mid-ninth-century *Khludov Psalter*, suggested that a representation of Sion as a building with the Virgin and Child by it symbolizes the Holy Sepulchre complex, a manifestation of Heavenly Jerusalem; this argument could equally apply to the closely related images in the *Theodore Psalter*. In these cases, again, the depictions are merely indicative of a site and not graphically close.

In Byzantine understanding, Constantinople is seen as the city of God and capital of the Chosen People. There is an illustration in the *Theodore Psalter* that shows the city of God represented as a single church and labelled ἡ πόλις, ‘the city’, referring to the text from Psalm 45:5, ‘The flowings of the river gladden the city of God’ (fig. 5). It is a Byzantine church, with a large dome surmounted by a cross and may be a reference to Hagia Sophia, thus locating the City of God in Constantinople. This image is not in the earlier *Khludov Psalter*, and was probably an original insertion in the *Theodore Psalter*.

There is a similar example of contemporary thinking in the early-eleventh-century *Bristol Psalter* (London, BL, Add. MS 40731). Here there is another depiction of a church that also does not appear in the preceding psalters (fig. 6). The miniature shows the house of the Lord, the Temple, accompanying Psalm 25:8, ‘O Lord, I have loved the beauty of thy house, and the place of the tabernacle of thy glory’. The label reads οἴκου εὐπρέπεια, ‘the beauty of thy house’, a reference to the Temple. The illustration may again be intended to represent Hagia Sophia, with its prominent dome. This scene is not illustrated in the *Theodore Psalter* but it shares the Theodorian identification of Hagia Sophia and Constantinople with the Temple and Jerusalem.

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15 For instance, as the Virgin on ff. 106r (with a small building behind), 115v (set on a large building); Der Nersessian, *L’Illustration des psautiers*, figs 174, 191; as an empress on ff. 65r (in front of a building), 130r (in front of a building), 134v (the crowned head of Sion above a building); ibid., figs 105, 210, 217; as a building on f. 79r (Christ imaged in a building with an emperor below); ibid., fig. 126.
16 Ibid., pp. 85-6.
17 Folio 173v, ibid., pp. 85-6; fig. 275.
18 Theodore Psalter, f. 65r, Meyer, ‘Personification of Sion’, esp. pp. 12-14, figs 1-3; comparable illustrations occur in Khludov, f. 51r, Barberini, f. 88r.
19 Lidov, ‘Heavenly Jerusalem’, pp. 343-4; Khludov, f. 86v; Theodore, f. 115v; further examples are Khludov, f. 51r, Theodore, f. 65r; alternatively Grabar considers these and two further representations in Khludov and two in the *Pantokrator Psalter* to represent the church of Sion, see Grabar, ‘Quelques notes’, pp. 62-6.
20 Folio 57v, Der Nersessian, *L’Illustration des psautiers*, p. 31, fig. 94.
21 This image is discussed in Grabar, ‘L’Art religieux’, p. 167.
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The rebuilding of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the holiest site in Jerusalem, is one of the most important events in medieval religious and political history. Its recognition in the Theodore Psalter, as marked in the illuminations on folios 128r and 36r, is therefore of considerable importance. As noted, the themes of Sion, Constantinople and Heavenly Jerusalem have been well established in the interpretation of the marginal psalters. This new evidence, suggesting that the rebuilding of the church was both acknowledged and celebrated in one of the most prestigious Byzantine manuscripts of the time, makes an important addition to prior analysis and to the understanding of Byzantine thinking in the mid-eleventh century.
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Fig. 1. Khludov Psalter, Historical Museum, Moscow, gr. 129 fol. 96v, Building the Temple. From M. Ščepkina, *Miniature Chludovskoj psaltyri: Grečeskij iliustrirovannyj kodeks IX veka* (Moscow, 1977)
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Fig. 2. Theodore Psalter, London, BL, Add. MS. 19352, f. 128r, The House. © British Library
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Fig. 3. Theodore Psalter, London, BL, Add. MS. 19352, f. 170r, A building site. © British Library
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Fig. 4. Theodore Psalter, London, BL, Add. MS. 19352, f. 36r, Jerusalem. © British Library
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Fig. 5. Theodore Psalter, London, BL, Add. MS. 19352, f. 57v, The City. © British Library
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Fig. 6. Bristol Psalter, London, BL, Add. MS. 40731, f. 41r, The beauty of thy House. © British Library