

**Iowa State University**

---

**From the Selected Works of Jelena Bogdanović**

---

October, 2010

# The Rhetoric of Architecture and Memory of the Holy Sepulchre in Byzantium

Jelena Bogdanović, *East Carolina University*



Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/jelena\\_bogdanovic/9/](https://works.bepress.com/jelena_bogdanovic/9/)

The emergence of the domed-hall church in eleventh century, as the dominant type in Cyprus, reflects several cultural changes. The late-tenth century reconquest of Cyprus by the Byzantine Empire led to a restriction of insular practices. In order to reintegrate Cyprus, the Empire appointed non-Cypriot officials who could enforce imperial law in opposition to the local government. Likewise, the Empire encouraged the formations of monasteries and fortifications affiliated with communities outside the island. As these monasteries grew and replicated themselves, they would eventually influence the policies of the autocephalous Church of Cyprus. Monastery adopted the domed-hall church because they were a traditional type, which could be constructed by local builders using native materials, but better suited to serve exclusive foreign communities.

## **The Rhetoric of Architecture and Memory of the Holy Sepulchre in Byzantium**

Jelena Bogdanović (East Carolina University)

The actual physical appearance of the *Anastasis*-Golgotha complex in Jerusalem during Byzantine times is not documented archaeologically. The extent and significance of the Byzantine interventions between the seventh and eleventh centuries, after the destructions by the Persians, from earthquakes, and devastating fire set by the Caliph al-Hākīm in 1009, remain understudied. Presumably, after each destruction the first structure restored for veneration was the major *locus sanctus*, the Holy Sepulchre. Because it is doubtful that the Byzantines kept records on the architectural design of the Holy Sepulchre, their reconstructions were not based on a definite pictorial scheme, but rather on the combination of particular motifs, which the Byzantines built upon their belief system and related imagery. In this paper, I examine mnemonic links the Byzantines may have used for their reconstructions of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

The Byzantine descriptions of the Holy Sepulchre often rely on theological and exegetical accounts and not on personal experience. In the ninth century, when Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople writes *About the Tomb of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, it is not the first-hand experience. Yet, the description is echoed in the pilgrim account by the Russian abbot

Daniel of Chernigov, who visited Jerusalem in 1106/08. Similarly, surviving imagery from the *eulogiai*, ivories, illuminated manuscripts, or monumental decorative programs, may have depicted the physical appearance of the Holy Sepulchre or its constitutive parts, but these sources also include imagined features of the Tomb. Textual and visual evidence is repetitive and suggests the significant role of the ornaments, such as columns, lamps, enclosing features, canopy-like roof, as well as materials, such as copper, silver and marble, for descriptions and memory of the Tomb.

The emphasis on repetitive descriptions, often borrowing its images from the Gospels, hymnography, and/or liturgical practices, are analogous with the medieval construct of memory the method of loci, or mnemonic link system based on places. The Byzantines did not distinguish “verbal” from “visual” memory. Rhetorical pedagogy, *progymnasmata* and *ekphrasis* were crucial for the recollecting, remembering, and visualizing works of architecture, both real and imagined. Though mnemonic images for the Holy Sepulchre may differ, their cognitive value representing the essence of the Holy Sepulchre as the place of testimony of Christ’s Resurrection, however, remained unchangeable regardless whether any or neither of these images resembled the actual architecture. The role of ornaments in the Holy Sepulchre mirrors the role of ornaments in rhetorical composition for concentration, contemplation, and remembrance, gathering site-related associations into a “place.” Consequently, mnemonic images could enable each Byzantine rebuilding of the Holy Sepulchre, which was never an exact replica of the previous building. Moreover, under the Byzantines, the Holy Sepulchre also functioned as a church, while its Tomb aedicula acquired canopy-like roof to resonate the miracle of the Holy Fire. These new elements marked the discontinuity in the physical reality of the original, fourth-century Holy Sepulchre, while their cognitive value of novelty was crucial for the collective memory of the Holy Sepulchre by the Byzantines, for we remember best what is unusual.