

Iconography of Buildings and the Politics of Crusading: York Minster Chapter House at the Eve of the Jewish Expulsion

Stefania Merlo Perring

The centrally planned chapter house of York Minster, built from the late 1270s and completed by the mid-1290s, is part of a late 13th-century group of polygonal chapter houses. However, in addition to themes common to the whole group, York Minster Chapter House presented innovative design features and an innovative decorative programme. The iconography of the building structure can be traced from late Antiquity and related to contemporary groups of buildings in continental Europe. In this article the building's iconography and its decorative programme will be interpreted arguing that, in addition to being a reference to the 'classical tradition' and thus the authority of Antiquity, it represented the sacred geography of Jerusalem. This will be discussed in the context of the late 13th-century preoccupation with Crusades at a time when Christendom was losing control over the Holy Land and of the role of the Church of York in promoting Edward I's internal politics. Among the multiplicity of meanings connoted by this complex building, its visual impact on the landscape and part of its decorative programme may have been a cultural appropriation of a distant city, connected with preaching for a new crusade and the persecution of the Jews, culminating with their expulsion from England in 1290.

Introduction

York Minster chapter house is a late 13th-century centrally planned building associated with a secular cathedral. It is considered to represent a development of a peculiarly English type of building: the centrally planned chapter house. Its plan and size, in addition to innovative elements introduced in its design compared with earlier English models, makes this building comparable with a number of contemporary buildings across Europe. These are centrally planned churches and chapels, the form of which can be interpreted as an expression of the 'classical tradition' in architecture. Because of its form, size, connections with the cathedral building and its multiplicity of secular uses, York Minster chapter house is also comparable with another group of contemporary buildings: the octagonal

baptisteries annexed to Italian cathedrals built between the 12th and the 14th centuries. Their size and form was not justified by their primary function of administering baptism or even by their alternative secular functions. Instead their iconography has been associated with that of the Holy Sepulchre in the period between the First Crusade (1096) and the fall of Acre (1291). This paper will investigate the connection between the structure and decoration of York Minster chapter house and the iconography of Jerusalem.

Representations of Jerusalem in sacred and secular space were part of the collective imagery of the medieval period and later. Some studies have mainly emphasised their devotional role and how these created a perception and experience of the sacred (Spicer 2000; Coldstream 2002; Lidov 2009b; WS1). However, the same material culture that was active in creating sacred

space was also a form of cultural appropriation of a contested place underpinned by political agendas (Ashley and Plesh 2002; Howard 2000; Goldhill 2005; Wharton 1995; Wharton 2006). This paper will take an approach focusing on how the iconography of buildings may have been used to construct a political discourse of power and oppression (Foucault 2002). It will attempt an interpretation of the structure and decoration of York Minster chapter house in the context of the loss of control of the Holy Land by Christendom and of the role of the Church of York in promoting a new crusade and in redirecting crusading efforts towards other objectives at a national and local level, such as the expulsion of the Jews from England.

The iconography of buildings

The discipline of iconography was founded by Abi Warburg (1866–1929) and was intended as a method to link the formal elements of art works to the society and culture that produced them (Warburg 1999). The study of the iconography of buildings was inaugurated by Richard Krautheimer (1942a), who applied it to late Antique and medieval architecture. He noted that elements of architectural design had symbolic meanings, that some buildings were copies of other influential buildings and that this had a deliberate devotional or political purpose. The link between a copy and its original could be mediated by a ‘third comparison’ and copies sometimes can appear quite different from the original; moreover only one or more elements could be selected to represent a whole building or to recall a distant landscape.

Although Krautheimer (1942b) continued Warburg’s political approach to iconography, it was the aspect of his theory (Krautheimer 1942a) linking the form of buildings to abstract concepts and philosophical ideas that was primarily developed in the 1950s by architectural historians such as Bandmann (1951), Sedlmayr (1950) and Panofsky (1951). During the 1960s and 1970s under the influence of post-structuralism the subject went out of favour with architectural historians, but in the 1980s studies in the iconography of buildings underwent a revival of interest and a change in approach. Kidson (1987) and Crossley (1988) offered a critique on the validity and limits of iconography. The architectural form was no longer seen as being shaped by philosophical or abstract concepts. Instead the theory of ‘architectural quotation’ by Kunst (1981) turned the attention to ‘quoted’ building forms. Architectural quotations are representations not of philosophical ideas

but of other buildings and should be interpreted in the light of political alliances or rivalries (Crossley 1988, 121). In addition the concept of ‘copy’ of buildings in the Middle Ages has undergone scrutiny by Hans Böker (1999). His critique has shown that an archaeological study of buildings allows us to relate formal elements to different sets of political interpretations from the ones that can be inferred from historical sources alone.

A renewed interest in the symbolic meanings of buildings was introduced in architectural thinking in the 1950s by practising architects as a reaction to modernism and functionalism. From the early 1960s a post-structuralist semiotic of architecture (Venturi et al 1986) has recognised that buildings are polysemic, and that the codes to interpret them are specific to the context for which they are intended and thus different messages may be intended for different groups of people (Eco 1980, 25–34; Jenks 1980, 107–10). Eco makes a distinction between the utilitarian ‘denoted’ primary functions and ‘connoted’ secondary functions, which are related to communication of social and cultural meanings. He points out that ‘connoted’ functions are sometimes more important than the primary ones. However, with time, meanings that were originally intended may be forgotten and others not originally intended may occur. The codes that link a sign with its meanings are located in the specific cultural context of the user. The link between architectural form and the meanings it had for different people in the past is thus problematic and depends on the strength of specific contextual information. This is a problem that archaeologists have also recognised and debated (eg Hodder 2003, 156–205; Barrett 1988).

The study on which this paper is based (Perring 2004) was a comparative analysis of the plan and elevation of York Minster chapter house with contemporary and late Antique buildings. Its main theme was the use of the ‘classical tradition’ in the context of 13th-century England; one of the conclusions was that references to both Antiquity and Jerusalem were present in that building. This paper will explore further the significance of the representation of Jerusalem in the chapter house.

Politics, administration and York Minster chapter house

The building of the chapter house was the responsibility of the Dean and Chapter of York Minster. The chapter was composed of 36 prebendaries and four dignitaries.

Fig 1

Map of York Minster ground plan from OS 1961 (© Landmark Information Group Ltd and Crown Copyright 2012)

The prebends of York Minster were among the richest of the medieval English Church. They were granted by the archbishop of York as benefices and he was under political pressure to assign these offices to candidates supported by the king and by the Church in Rome. Between 1220 and the 1290s there were rarely

more than eight or nine canons (the holders of the prebends) resident in York at any one time (Dobson 1977, 50–52) so the size of the chapter house with 44 stalls was excessive for the needs of chapter business (Brown 2003, 57). The richest prebends tended to be in possession of non-residents and were often given

to Edward I's senior administrators. Since the time of Archbishop Gyffard (1266–1279) a tradition of links between the royal chancery and the clergy of York was established (Dobson 1977, 57, 80). During the 1280s many non-resident canons were also papal candidates and there were many Italian canons in the chapter, although most of them may have been absentees (Dixon and Raine 1863).

The dean was the first in the chapter house according to the cathedral statutes, but the archbishop had the right of visitation and was elected by the chapter, which in the second half of the 13th century was still able to support its candidate from the Church of York, without the interference of the king or of the pope. The estate of the Dean and Chapter of York was very rich but by contrast the archbishop of York was under-endowed with landed estates and provision for income, so the six archbishops who served under Edward I suffered from financial crises (Dobson 1991, 61). The chapter house was built when Robert of Scarborough was dean. He was a very wealthy pluralist, who held many benefices and charges in other cathedrals and this led to bitter conflicts with Archbishop John le Romayn (1285–96), who was protesting about the extent of absentee canons in his chapter. It seems unlikely that the archbishop of York contributed to the project of the chapter house (Brown 2003, 57), but aspects of the Rayonnant design of the vestibule derived from France and the decoration of the stained glass have been related to Archbishop le Romayn's personal patronage (Brown 2003, 57). The construction of the chapter house could have been a symbol of the increased independence of the Dean and Chapter after Archbishop de Gray's re-structuring of cathedral institutions (1215–55; Brown 2003, 56). However, one of the aims of the 13th-century restructuring of chapters, which gave away part of episcopal estates, was to increase the perception of episcopal authority as spiritual, thus making the Church fitter to combat heresy (Miller 2000, 216–52; Tyler 1999, 11–30). Therefore, even if the estate of the Dean and Chapter paid for the construction, the chapter house represented the spiritual supremacy of the Church of York in the North of England. In fact the chapter house was the place where the supreme courts of the spiritual jurisdictions of both the Dean and Chapter and the archbishop were held (see below).

The building

A detailed description and structural analysis of the building has been made by Sarah Brown (2003, 47–85), who has discussed the many issues surrounding its design and construction phases. Therefore, only essential points will be summarised here and reference will be made to Brown's work throughout the paper. York Minster chapter house is an octagonal building situated on the north-east side of the cathedral church (Fig 1) and directly connected to the north transept with an L-shaped vestibule. It is built in limestone ashlar in the Gothic style (Fig 3) and composed of eight bays, seven of which are perforated by pointed tracery windows (Figs 2, 3, 5). Below the windows, internally, the walls are articulated with niches, which form the back of the seating stalls (Figs 2, 4). Above the stalls there is a miniature gallery (Brown 2003, 62, fig 2.15). A double doorway on the east side of the vestibule led to the chapter house through its western bay. Between the two arches of the chapter house doorway there is a trumeau carved with the image of the Virgin Mary (Fig 4). In the space between the inner and outer arches of the doorway, to the left, there is a door that gives access to the newel staircase to the gallery and to the mason's loft above the vestibule. The octagon has an internal diameter glass to glass of 19.2m (Fig 2). The height from floor level to the apex of the window arches, is c20m (Fig 6). The vault of the chapter house is made by wooden ribs starting like fans from the responds and converging to a circle in the centre before heading toward a central boss. The central boss is decorated by the lamb with a flag (Brown 2003, 48, fig 2.4). The octo-pyramidal lead roof is steeply pitched and reaches a height of c38m from ground level. The vestibule abuts the west side of the octagon to the level of the roof.

Given the absence of building accounts the date of construction has to be inferred on stylistic or archaeological grounds. Coldstream (1972) suggested that the decorative sculpture belongs to the cultural context of the 1280s. Brown (2003, 51–3, 88) similarly suggests that the decorative scheme of the windows could not have been conceived earlier than 1270. Both scholars agree that major works in the chapter house must have been completed by 1292, when the construction of the cathedral's nave had started. The surviving paintings on panels formerly part of the ceiling of the chapter house have been dated on stylistic grounds to c1290 (Norton 1996, 39). This date matches the results of dendrochronological analysis of the timbers of the roof, which were felled

Fig 2
 York Minster chapter house ground plan (after OS
 1852 and Masiewicz 1977 in Brown 2003)



Fig 3
 York Minster chapter house exterior from the north
 (Photo: Perring)

in 1288, although earlier timbers were also re-used (Brown 2003, 294–298). Thus whilst the start of the construction cannot be defined with precision, the building was roofed soon after 1288, ceiled shortly afterwards and probably glazed by the early 1290s; the vestibule probably followed immediately after (Brown 2003, 51–2, 54). Certainly by 1296, when a session of the Parliament was held in the chapter house (*Cal Close Rolls 1288–96*, 517) it is reasonable to think that work in both buildings was completed. The building does not seem to have had many major structural modifications,



Fig 4
 Entrance of York Minster chapter house from vestibule
 (Photo: Perring)



Fig 5
 York Minster chapter house interior with model of
 roof structure (Photo: Perring)

Fig 6
Interior of chapter house in the 18th century (Halfpenny 1795)

did not suffer any structural failure and has always been used for the purpose for which it was built. The interior decorations, however, were damaged by iconoclasts during the Civil War in 1644–5. The vault was altered in 1798 when the carpenter Halfpenny replaced the painted wooden panels with plaster webs. Only two originals survive (not *in situ*; Fig 9). Before their removal Halfpenny had produced an etching of the original interior (Fig 6). In 1844–45 most of the Purbeck colonnettes of the stalls were replaced and a Minton tiled floor replaced the original one. Sydney Smirke was responsible for the appearance of the present interior. Many sculptures were repaired with new carvings and the vault was painted. The damaged glass of the east window was copied and reinserted.

The chapter house is a problematic building and there have been many issues surrounding its design and structure. In particular architectural historians have questioned the extent to which the building was planned from the start or had evolved during construction (Hughes 1955, 475; Kidson et al 1965, 108; Melmore 1970, 348; Coldstream 1972, 18–19; Gee 1977, 139–141; Brown 2003, 58–59; Giles 2005) and have also discussed the possibility of an earlier building on the same site (Norton 1998, 15). But

the main problem in the structural history of York Minster chapter house is its most innovative element: the absence of a central column and the presence of a timber vault. All the major chapter houses belonging to cathedrals had a stone vault supported by a central column with a timber and lead roof which was almost flat or barely raised above the parapet. There is no firm evidence that the chapter house in Lincoln had a steep roof (Wilson 2010, 56). The design of the flat roof of Westminster chapter house thus continued the tradition of Worcester, but it was also a consequence of decisions made with regard to the roofs of their respective naves (Wilson 2010, 57). At York, Gee (1977, 139–141) suggested that a stone vault at a lower level than the present, probably supported by a central column, was originally intended and built but a change in design had occurred during construction. However, Brown (2003, 66–68) concludes that a building different from established models for chapter house designs may have been planned from the start. The design of York Minster chapter house roof therefore was innovative and the whole structure of the building was purposely designed to support it. The roof has a central king post made of three timbers and created in three stages (Fig 5); it was not prefabricated but the joints were made and assembled *in situ*. Precedents for the three stages have been found in Ottonian architecture (Hughes 1955, 476–77) but the scale of the York dome is unprecedented.

In conclusion the form of the chapter house appears to have been planned from the start; elements of its design were refined during 20 years construction but without considerable changes. Therefore the iconography of the building can now be analysed in the cultural context of this period.

Origins and functions of chapter houses

Chapter houses were not consecrated buildings; they served the main purpose of housing the chapter assembly in monasteries and cathedrals. The centrally planned chapter house is believed to have originated in England (Stratford 1978, 51) in the first quarter of the 12th century and rectangular chapter houses continued to be used in continental Europe. However, more research needs to be done because the small 12th-century octagonal chapter house of the monastery of San Paolo a Ripa d'Arno, the old cathedral of Pisa, still survives (Donati 1975). Over 30 centrally planned or polygonal chapter houses, built between the early

12th century and the late 14th century once existed in the British Islands (Gardner 1976, 297–298).

Centrally planned chapter houses were rarely built by the middle of the 14th century and the last was built in Manchester *c*1500 (Gardner 1976, 288–290). The first surviving example is the circular chapter house of the priory cathedral of Worcester, built *c*1115, at that time representing a considerable departure from the accepted form of the building. Stratford (1978, 53–55) observes that the central plan was less convenient for the chapter assembly, which required the monks to look toward the cross and the abbot. In addition accommodating a round chapter house in the layout of the monastery required a re-arrangement of the monastic space in the cloister. Stratford concludes that the reasons for adopting this inconvenient layout must have been quite powerful. Gardner offers an iconographic interpretation for the adoption of the type. He notes that liturgical, penitentiary, judicial, commemorative, and funerary function of chapter houses (1976, 173–194, 185) had strong parallels with the ones of the early medieval baptisteries that once existed in England (Gervers 1972, 360–362). However, a continuity of the form cannot be established because of lack of archaeological evidence.

From the 1230s, other cathedrals also started to adopt the central-plan for chapter house design. In Lincoln (1235) the chapter house was decagonal and in Lichfield (1249) octagonal. After the construction of the chapter house of Westminster (1247–55) the octagonal plan was firmly established and adopted by Salisbury (1260s), York (1280s) and Wells (completed 1307). All but York Minster chapter house had a central pillar supporting a stone vault. Their size ranges from 18 to 20m in diameter; similar in size to the inner shells of late Antique buildings such as the Holy Sepulchre, Agios Sergios and Baccos in Istanbul, San Vitale in Ravenna and the drum of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (Perring 2004, figs 6 and 10) in addition to 11th- and 12th-century Italian baptisteries at Florence and Pisa. Chapter houses of this size are so far only known in cathedral complexes; in other minor centres and in monastic contexts, with the exception of Westminster, the buildings were much smaller regardless of the size of the chapter assembly or of the shape of the plan. Other chapter houses without central columns, as Southwell, Thornton (Coldstream 1972, 18–19) and in London St Paul's (Schofield 2011, 154–7), have a much smaller diameter and are chronologically later than York. It must be concluded that centrally planned chapter houses were meant

to form, with the cathedral church, a monumental complex visible from the surrounding landscape.

One of the main merits of Gardner's work (1976) is to have highlighted the multiplicity of uses of these buildings. However, during the 13th century there were changes in the functions of chapter houses. In Westminster the custom of burial inside the chapter house was abandoned and it seems unlikely that the practice was still carried out in York, since the floor seemed quite even in antiquarians drawings (Brown 2003, 80). In York the chapter house was used to house the chapter assemblies concerned with the administration of the Minster. The tribunals of the Peculiar Jurisdiction of the Dean and Chapter, dealing with serious spiritual violations and heresies, were held there. Trials for minor spiritual offences were carried out more publicly in the cathedral's north transept, by the doorway of the chapter house vestibule (Brown 1984, 19). The court of appeal of the spiritual jurisdiction for the archdiocese was held in the chapter house (Tillott 1961, 143–4) and the archbishop had private access to the vestibule from his Palace (Brown 2003, 67, fig 2.25). The same door may have been used for the transit of prisoners to and from the archbishop's prison in the Palace Yard (Perring 2010, 236). The access to chapter houses was private and secluded protecting the activity taking place there. In Worcester, Westminster, Salisbury and Lincoln the access was from the cloister. In York, Wells and London St Paul's the chapter house was linked to the northern transept of the cathedral by an L shaped vestibule, signalled by a monumental entrance (Brown 2003, 65).

Royal connections

In addition to the usual functions, Westminster chapter house had a special status because it housed the Parliament (Carpenter 2010). During the reign of Henry III, the king's council with the feudal lords met increasingly in Westminster. The first secular assembly is recorded in 1257 soon after the building's completion. The right of the king to use the room took priority above chapter business. The design of York Minster chapter house was a development of the model of Westminster (Rodwell 2010, 89–90; Wilson 2010, 61–5). It was on a similar scale and included architectural quotations of buildings of the 'classical tradition' connected to imperial power (Perring 2004; Wilson 2008, 64–5). In addition the decorative

programme, now partially lost, depicted bishops and kings in company with royal and ecclesiastical saints (Fig 6). There were paintings of kings and bishops in the blind tracery above the doorway and on the ceiling, now lost but recorded by antiquarian sources and the theme is also present in the stained glass (Norton 1996, 41). The heraldry on the stained glass of the windows celebrates the presence in York of King Edward I and the dignitaries that accompanied him in the ceremony of the translation of the relics of St William on 9 January 1284 (Brown 2003, 52–54). The decorative programme, therefore, not only was the expression of the authority of the Chapter, but was also a celebration of the relationship between the Church of York and royal power.

At Westminster, the shell formed by eight arches supported by eight angular responds was an innovation in chapter house design. As mentioned above, Henry III was a king who took personal interest in the design of architecture and the building had a range of connotations of which he was probably aware (Wilson 2008, 64–5). The form of the octagonal palatine chapel, as represented by Aachen, would have been one of these. Dawton (1990, 48–54) has suggested that octagonal chapter houses were related to the cult of Mary and compared them with the plan of the 4th-century martyrion on the tomb of the Virgin in Josaphat and the 5th-century church in Garizim, also in Palestine. His argument rests on the fact that the image of Mary is prominent on the building entrances in Westminster, Salisbury and York. However a number of scholars have rejected Dawton's hypothesis (Brown 2003, 74; WS2). A more plausible comparison is the one with the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (Zukowsky 1977). This Muslim sanctuary and its annexed mosque were misinterpreted in the medieval period as the rebuilt Solomon's Temple and Palace and were copied by other prestigious buildings in Europe (Howard 2000, 180–181; Goldhill 2005, 122). Henry III likened himself and St Edward to Solomon (Coldstream 1994, 123–125, Binski 1995, 61–62). The reference to Jerusalem and association with the Holy Land may indeed have played a part in the choice of the design. Henry III received an ampule with the Holy Blood as a gift in 1247 from the Patriarch of Jerusalem who was desirous of a new crusade and for assistance in Acre (Vincent 2001, 19–25). The Holy Blood was carried in procession with great pomp from Holborn to Westminster by the king himself, emulating Louis IX carrying the relics of the True Cross in procession to La Sainte Chapelle in Paris in 1241. In the 13th

century the relics of the Passion were seen as important elements legitimising the sacredness of kingship.

The 'classical tradition' and the idea of Jerusalem have together been associated with legitimising secular power in medieval society and beyond since Constantine (Settis 1986, 440–443; Howard 2000; Fortini Brown 1996; Settis 2004, 96–101; Krautheimer 1942b). Architectural citation and *spolia* were often rediscovered and reused when secular power needed to be legitimated by religious power. But to further the argument in support of Jerusalem connotations in York Minster chapter house and its connection with the politics of Crusades it is necessary first to discuss another group of buildings.

Baptisteries of medieval Italian cathedrals

Baptisteries were rarely built after the 6th century since with the spread of baptism soon after birth, the communal ritual of initiation via immersion in water fell out of use. However, while baptisteries ceased to be built in the episcopal centres of the Byzantine Empire, in the Christian West there was a revival of the type later in the Middle Ages (Wharton 1995, 137). In many of the city-states of north and central Italy baptisteries were built from the 11th to the 13th century. As baptismal halls they were obsolete since there were no changes in the ritual of infant baptism. Moreover they were of a much greater scale than their late Antique counterparts. Their associations with cathedrals created a monumental complex in the heart of the city, which dominated its topography and advertised an episcopal centre (Wharton 1995, 109–113, 137).

Italian baptisteries in this period were new buildings, even if they may have replaced earlier ones on the same site. Their form has been long recognised by architectural historians as using the formal language of classical antiquity such as the ones in Florence (11th–12th century) and Parma (first half of the 13th century; Krautheimer 1942a; Argan 1977, 309–310). In Pisa (c1150–1300; Fig 7) the baptistery is a double-shelled building originally built in striped white and grey Carrara marble with a lead-covered conical roof and was a deliberate copy of the Holy Sepulchre (Krautheimer 1942a, 32). Baptisteries in late Antiquity did not have internal galleries; however, in the 11th century, galleries make their first appearance in octagonal baptisteries and also in German architecture (Krautheimer 1942a, 32–33). They are created by an internal articulation of the walls and do not constitute a

Fig 7
Pisa, Battistero, plan and elevation c1150 (after Fletcher 1921)

double-shelled building. Although they may have been influenced by the design of the Pantheon, Krautheimer (1942a, 32–33) has suggested that the appearance of galleries can be understood as a conflation of the iconography of the Holy Sepulchre with that of the baptistery stimulated by the rebuilding of the Anastasis (the rotunda part of that complex) after the sack of 1009 and the start of the Crusades. In York Minster chapter house the small gallery supported by Purbeck marble colonnettes (Fig 5; Brown 2003, 60, 62) was an innovation by comparison with English prototypes, recalling the arrangement of contemporary Italian baptisteries.

The case of the Republic of Pisa making close references to Jerusalem in religious architecture is significant. In the 12th century (as one of the principal seaports) pilgrims and crusaders would have stayed in the city prior to the sailing to the Holy Land. They were housed and cared for by the Crusader Order of the Hospitalers of St John of Jerusalem in and around the Santo Sepolcro church (mid-12th-century; Fig 8). This and other domes inspired by the form of the Holy Sepulchre conflated the iconography of the Anastasis



Fig 8
Pisa, Santo Sepolcro church, from the south-east
(Photo: Perring)

Rotunda with the one of the octo-pyramidal roof of the aedicule (chapel above the Sepulchre itself) within that church and with the one of the Dome of the Rock. The reference to buildings of Jerusalem signalled the

special connection between Pisa and the Holy Land and the start of the pilgrim and crusading experience. It is generally accepted that the Crusades had an impact in the diffusion of centrally planned buildings all over Europe between the 11th and 14th centuries (Ousterhout 1990; Coldstream 2002, 154). The Dome of the Rock was completed by 690 and its form was inspired by the late Antique architecture of Byzantium and was a response to the Holy Sepulchre (Grabar 1996b, 22). The surface of the 7th-century building was covered by *spolia*, which consisted of polychrome marbles reused from Roman buildings. In the much more intact interior there are re-used capitals, columns and sheets of marble covering the walls. In 1545–46 the exterior of this building was covered with glazed tiles. The one that can be seen today were made in Italy in the 1960s to a 16th-century design. Horizontal banded stripes of stones seem to be a constant element in buildings connected with Crusaders or with pilgrimages to Jerusalem, such as Santo Stefano in Bologna (Ousterhout, 1981). It is tempting to attribute the same connotation to the polychromy of Worcester chapter house; however, a direct link cannot be established.

English Chapter Houses and Italian 13th-century baptisteries formed a monumental complex with the cathedral church, had the same range of dimensions, similar form and were multipurpose buildings. They both can be understood as an expression of the ‘classical tradition’ in architecture. For the Italian baptisteries a reference to the sacred geography of Jerusalem could be established, but for the English chapter houses further elements need to be considered.

York Minster chapter house’s symbolism of Jerusalem

Innovative dome

The most innovative element in chapter house design and at the same time the one that makes York Minster chapter house more similar to the prototypes of Antiquity is the absence of a central column supporting a stone vault. This must have required a great degree of ingenuity in devising its technical solution. The span of the building may have been too wide for a stone vault. The advantages and value of an open space must have overridden the prestige of a stone vault, which was traditional and significant in chapter house design. Wooden vaults are documented earlier (Hearn and Thurlby 1997) and have a precedent in Lichfield cathedral, around 1240, but it is only after York’s

experience in the transept (1250) and in the chapter house that they become widely diffused (Kidson 1965 et al, 108). The roof was a very important element in the construction of a building; the whole structure had to be planned with the ability to support the weight of the roof and also the additional force exercised by the wind at high levels (Mark 1974, 8). It represented a huge investment in the budget for the building and the supply of timbers had to be sourced and planned in advance. Those considerations in addition to the structural stability of the chapter house may lend support to the suggestion (Brown 2003, 66–68) that the present form of the building was planned from the start and was not the result of a later change in design. The method of covering centrally planned buildings with a timber and lead dome and an inner vault of wood or plaster and wood has a long history and was part of the late Antique tradition. This method of roofing buildings had spread from the East, Anatolia or Persia, from the age of Constantine, who adopted it as an innovation for his new Christian architecture. It was a solution adopted for many early Christian centrally planned buildings and domed basilicas (Verzone 1967, *passim*); the Golden Octagon in Antioch and the Holy Sepulchre (Krautheimer 1986, 74, 76–77); the Dome of the Rock, the Great Mosque in Damascus and a number of buildings in the Byzantine areas, were covered in this way (Howard 2000, 100–101).

The form of the chapter house roof can also be linked to the iconography of the Holy Sepulchre, which was rebuilt in the 11th century after its partial destruction in 1009. Oleg Grabar (1996a) has reconstructed its appearance and impact on the landscape. It was a conical dome, timber framed and covered in lead, probably with an oculus left open on the top. Its form was known in Europe through the diffusion of coins and seals such as the lead seals of the Canons of the Augustinian Priory of the Holy Sepulchre, 1175, and Templar coins from Jerusalem of 1205 (Grabar 1996a). In England, churches were also built by Templar Knights and other fraternities as a reference to the Holy Sepulchre (Gervers 1972). They had conical or pyramidal roofs, such as the original dome of the Temple church in London and possibly the one of the Holy Sepulchre church in Cambridge. Thus the form of the conical roof would have been recognisable in 13th-century England.

Conical domes of more modest dimensions (c10m in diameter) were also known at Orford and Conisbrough castles. The one covering the mid-12th-century hall of Orford castle has been interpreted as inspired by the

roofs of Byzantine triconch halls, which were described as built by Persians, connoting Antiquity and nostalgia for the Arthurian legend by the aristocratic patrons (Heslop 1991, 51–3; Brindle 2012, 72). But by the mid-13th century, the spiritual ideals of the church and aristocratic power were bound up together in the secular cult of chivalry (Honeywell 2006, 2). This reinforces the idea that the iconography of Antiquity may have been conflated with the idea of Jerusalem in late medieval England. The enmeshment between sacred and secular is exemplified by the career of warlike churchmen such as Anthony Bek (Honeywell 2006, 2, 31, 38). He belonged to a family of knights and was the nephew of the former archbishop of York Walter De Gray. He had a first-hand knowledge of the Middle East having fought outside Jerusalem with Edward I between 1270–2 in the ninth Crusade. On his return he was made precentor of York Minster, giving him a role in the cathedral administration, and in 1285 was elected Bishop of Durham. He fought alongside Edward I in the Scottish wars and was celebrated in the *Song of Caerlaverock*; in 1301 he was made Patriarch of Jerusalem (Fraser 2004). In addition in 1289 when the roof was being built, a Franciscan former bishop of Byblos served as suffragan bishop in York and Durham (Robson 1997, 16). He was an eye-witness of the defeat in the Holy Land and his role was to preach in the North of England for a new crusade. The archbishops of York also had the role of promoting the new crusade, as I will discuss later. This suggests that the reference to the landscape of Jerusalem may have indeed been embedded in the construction of the chapter house, but how many people would have understood it in this way? Archbishop John le Romayn, as his predecessors, travelled to Italy to be invested by the pope in Rome between 1282 and 1284 (Dixon and Raine 1863). He would have been familiar with a range of crusader churches and baptisteries. In the late 13th century a constant stream of people travelled between England and the Continent. Clergy visited the papal Curia in Rome on routine business. Franciscans friars, knights and pilgrims voyaged to the Eastern Mediterranean on crusade and pilgrimage and merchants traded in wool with many European countries. Raban (2000, 153) observes that *'all these factors tied England securely into the wider European scene and ensured a cosmopolitan outlook in many of the upper ranks of society'*.

Microarchitecture

Crusaders and clergy may have known the meaning of the building but also the people outside might have understood the iconography of Jerusalem from the exterior. The building is c22m in diameter excluding buttresses, c38m total height, of which the dome is 19m in height. It is placed on the raised platform of the Roman Fortress (Fig 1) and even today, set against the massive Gothic Minster, is a prominent feature of the York skyline. In the late 13th century it was associated with a smaller and lower Norman basilica and its impact in the surrounding landscape must then have been considerable. Despite its size it has been observed that its form is reminiscent of the architecture of ciboria, aedicules and sedilia and it is a precursor of the decorated style that make great use of them (Wander 1978, 46–47). The decorative language is one of microarchitecture (Brown 2003, 69), which started with the depiction of Jerusalem on the portal of Chartres Cathedral in the mid-12th century (Coldstream 2002, 163). The exterior silhouette of York Minster chapter house (Fig 3) can be read as a central drum surrounded by slender pillars, represented by the second stage of the buttresses and pinnacles, supporting a foliate frieze and an octo-pyramidal roof. With the attached vestibule it is reminiscent of the form of the aedicule built by Constantine above the tomb of Christ, the iconography of which had been reproduced in many media for many centuries in the Christian world. The appearance of the aedicule has been reconstructed by Wilkinson (1972) with the help of models that 13th-century and later pilgrims brought to Europe from the Holy Land and a range of iconographic material expressed in many media. Martin Biddle (1999) has conducted a survey on the site and reconstructed the various phases of the aedicule on the basis of archaeological evidence. The building was composed of a cylindrical drum and of an octo-pyramidal roof supported by a ring of seven columns. A porch was attached on two sides of the octagon. The aedicule was damaged in 1009 and rebuilt in the 11th century to a different design. However the Constantinian model maintained its iconic role for a long time after its disappearance. For the people of York, the city street became a symbolic Jerusalem during the Holy Week rituals, such as the Palm Sunday procession (Hohler 2007, 281, 285–90) and the performance of the York Corpus Christi Plays (Coldstream 2002, 151). It is possible that the chapter house was understood as part of this sacred geography.

The New Jerusalem

William Schlink (1998, 275–6) has attacked the iconographic interpretation of the Gothic cathedral as the New Jerusalem by Sedlmayr (1950), suggesting that this concept would be better forgotten altogether. He argued that this was a construction elaborated in a national-socialist milieu from the 1930s (Schlink 1998) and the only iconographical study allowed by the Nazi regime (Böker 2005, 251). However, despite Schlink's objections, in the iconography of York Minster chapter house there are references that could be related to the Book of Revelation, reinforcing the iconography of the terrestrial Jerusalem. Therefore the cultural appropriation of the East was also a medieval idea (Ashley and Plesh 2002). In the middle of the ceiling vault there was the image of the lamb holding the cross, representing Christ as the Lamb of God arriving from the sky to meet his bride, Jerusalem (Revelations 21:2). This iconography developed since late Antiquity and was connected to centrally planned buildings, notably San Vitale in Ravenna. Moreover the gilded and glazed interior of the chapter house, looking like a reliquary, full of light and colour has been compared to La Sainte Chapelle in Paris, which besides holding the relics of the Passion, has been interpreted as a representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Coldstream 2002, 151). The Virgin Mary, in a liminal position facing people approaching the chapter house, holding the infant Jesus and crushing the beast under her feet (Fig 4), could be a reference to the iconography of *Ianua Coely* meaning the Gate of Heaven. She is the woman who opens the gate of Paradise, which the first woman had closed. Eve, quite appropriately, is depicted just inside the entrance on a capital of the blind tracery above the doorway (Brown 2003, 75) and would have been seen by people leaving the chapter house. The concept of *Heavenly Jerusalem* in the 13th century was also connected with the idea of the Last Judgement. In the context of the chapter house it may have been a reference to the use of this building as the tribunal of the spiritual jurisdiction of the Dean and Chapter and the supreme court for the Northern Provinces for the most serious spiritual offences, such as heresy. It is significant that the words '*separating these goats from the sheep*' were used by John Ross in the *Annales Lincolniae* referring to the expulsion of the Jews on 1 November 1290 (Mundill 2010, 123).

Ecclesia and Synagoga

A theme in the decoration of the chapter house, whilst further reinforcing the connotation of Jerusalem in the building, introduces a new element. It sheds light on growing religious intolerance and the role of the Church of York in this. A surviving panel from the ceiling of the chapter house depicts *Synagoga*, blindfolded and with a broken flagstaff, the crown falling from her head (Fig 9). The board was paired with one depicting *Ecclesia* triumphant with a covered

Fig 9
Synagoga. Wooden vault web removed from the chapter house ceiling now in York Minster undercroft (Detail of AA98/17619 © Crown Copyright, NMR, with kind permission)

cup with the blood of Christ (Brown 2003, 80). The *Synagoga* theme is also repeated in one of the sculpted heads of the stalls (bay IV, 17a; Aberth 1989, 41) and on the glass of the chapter house vestibule (Brown 2003, 82). This imagery was not uncommon in the late 13th century and was represented on the south porch of Lincoln cathedral and Crowland Abbey (Alexander and Binski 1987, n 344, 246–247). It was also found in Trier, Strasbourg cathedral and Notre Dame in Paris (Mundill 1998, 54). The juxtaposition of Church and Synagogue was a precise reference to the victory of the teaching of the Church over the Talmud (Mundill 2010, 123–43). The origin of this iconography is a sermon of Eusebius bishop of Tyre, who participated in the consecration ceremony of the Holy Sepulchre in 336 AD and whose writings are one of the main sources for the early history of the Holy Sepulchre. Eusebius likened the contraposition of the empty and derelict platform of the Jewish Temple, facing the newly built Holy Sepulchre on the opposite hill of Jerusalem, to the victory of *Ecclesia* over *Synagoga* (Wharton 1995, 94–99). Theological debate about this theme waxed and waned for all the medieval period, but intensified in Europe by the mid-13th century (Mundill 2010, 123–9). In England it culminated in 1286 with a papal letter to the archbishops of Canterbury and York, attacking the Talmud and pressing for the conversion or persecution of the Jews (Mundill 2010, 140–2).

The chapter house, as already mentioned, was the tribunal where cases of religious dissent were judged and the depiction of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* was appropriate. However, this building was much more, representing the connection of the Church of York to the Papacy and the Crown and therefore it is necessary to understand better the role of this institution in the last quarter of the 13th century.

The Church of York

The Church of York was second only to Canterbury and there was antagonism between the two churches (Dixon and Raine 1863). During the reign of Edward I, especially after the death of Alexander III in 1286 and the involvement of the king in the Scottish succession, the City and the Church in York became more important for the politic of the king (Dobson 1991, 54). But even before that, the links between the king and the church of York were growing. Archbishop Walter Giffard (1266–79) in 1272 facilitated the untroubled succession for the new king Edward I, who was on

Crusade at the death of Henry III (Dobson 1991, 51). A tradition of links between the royal chancery and the clergy of York was then established (Dobson 1977, 57, 80; 1991, 54). Edward I visited York only on a few occasions before 1290, but there is no doubt that the Church of York was the central agency of his authority in the North (Dobson 1991, 54). Two of the stalls in the chapter house, the ones each side of the entrance bay, are distinguished from the others by the presence of carved heads representing kings and prelates and by a battlemented parapet above the canopies. Two stalls singled out by symbols of authority may have been for the representatives of the king and of the pope. The Dean and Chapter were in this way recognising those authorities in the context of the chapter house.

The Church of York and the Crusades

One of the major achievements of the archbishops, in the last quarter of the 13th century, was to bring ecclesiastical order to the unruly north of England. In particular the implementation of the decrees of the Fourth Lateran council (1215) was the principal concern of the programme of the archbishops of York (Dobson 1991, 50). Another important encumbrance fell on the archbishop of York in the 1280s. Edward I gave him the principal responsibility for promoting a new Crusade in the Holy Land (Dobson 1991, 54–55). By the last quarter of the 13th century England was at the forefront of the crusading movement and Edward I was seen in Europe as its leading figure (Raban 2000, 152–153). He aimed to achieve peace in England and Europe through his diplomatic work, in order to organise a military expedition to free Jerusalem from Muslim hands (Prestwich 1988, 326–333, 565). The Franciscans in York were active preachers in trying to re-ignite Crusading fervour and in York, Archbishop Giffard in 1276 and John le Romayn in 1291 appointed them to preach in the archdiocese (Robson 1997, 15–6). In the following decade, crusading interest was redirected towards other objectives. The Scottish campaign started by Edward I in 1296 ruled out a new crusade in the Holy Land. The archbishop of York extended the benefits usually reserved for crusaders by empowering two Franciscan friars to hear the confessions of men from the province of York who were prepared to fight against the Scots and to absolve them in advance (Dobson 1991, 55). York Minster chapter house was being built in the years when the propaganda for this new crusade was at its peak.

The Church of York and the Jews

The complex social and economic reasons for the increasing hostility towards the English Jews resulting in their expulsion from the country in 1290 have been widely debated by historians (Mundill 1998). The revival of crusading enthusiasm in the 1280s has been connected with the escalation of hostility toward the Jews (Salzman 1968, 94; Mundill 1998, 69, 252–253). Some of the rulings of the Fourth Lateran Council were designed to oppress and restrict the activities of the Jewish population (Mundill 1998, 271), but in the decades following the Lateran Council there was still a degree of tolerance toward their communities. In England, the Dominicans were supporting papal policy and were in charge of converting Jews to Christianity. But from the late 1250s there was growing turbulence and harassment; in 1275, Edward I enacted the Statutes of the Jewry, concerning taxation and limiting their rights. The increasing influence of the Franciscans and a distinct change in papal attitudes meant that by the 1280s there was mounting hostility towards Jews. The former Franciscan archbishop of Canterbury, John Pecham (elected 1279) played a critical role in this process (Mundill 1998, 272–3). The pope in 1280 wrote to the archbishops of Canterbury and York ordering them to take action toward alleged abuses perpetrated by the Jews. The archbishops of York Walter Giffard in 1271 and John le Romayn in 1287 supported the campaign of the Franciscans to deprive the English Jews of their rights (Dobson 1974, 44). The archbishops and the Chapter may have had vested interests because the former had been borrowing from the Jews and the canons became the alternative money-lenders after the expulsion (Dobson 1974, 41). This campaign culminated in 1290 with Edward I ordering the expulsion of all Jews from England (Mundill 1998, 249–285; Prestwich 1988, 344–346).

In York, the Jewish community had been dramatically reduced by the massacre of 1190 in Clifford's Tower (Dobson 1974, 36). However, their numbers recovered and the community flourished between c1220 and c1258. Their major business was to lend money to local landowners and Aaron of York was a financier of the Crown. They lived in high status stone-built mansions in the area around Coney Street; a synagogue or *schola* stood by the River Ouse, close to their properties. The decline started from 1255 and was further affected by the 1275 statutes. On 15 November 1279 Queen Eleanor granted the *schola* and its surrounding area to two Christian citizens of York (Dobson 1974, 45–6), showing the extent of the loss

of population and the growing hostility of the royal family. The Jewish cemetery was excavated outside the walls to the south-east of the city, in the area called Jewbury (Lilley et al 1994). Funeral processions in the city streets to extramural cemeteries attracted hostility from the Christian population and Royal edicts in 1253 and 1283 prohibited singing psalms loudly (Rees Jones 1994, 309; Grayzel 1966, 71). The analysis of burials confirmed the historical record establishing that the population was much reduced by c1275, to perhaps 150 people (Lilley et al 1994, 526–38). By 1290 it appears that only a few households mainly run by widows remained (Dobson 2003, 152). King Edward I showed that intolerance had a limit and ordered that the families leaving York with all their household and goods should not be molested (Dobson 2003, 156).

In the 1270s and 1280s the theme of *Synagoga* and *Ecclesia* in art emphasised the distinction between Christians and Jews (Mundill 1998, 54). In Lincoln, where there was a large community of Jews, the fallen *Synagoga* was sculpted in full view on the 13th-century south porch of the cathedral, the principal entrance for everyday use. In the interior space of York Minster chapter house, the choice of such iconography may have been a direct reference to the Church of York's compliance not only with the rulings of the Lateran council but also with the politics of the king culminating with the expulsion in 1290. Moreover the iconography of the fallen *Synagoga* was significant not only because it referred to theological issues but also to economic issues. In fact this was the court house where financial bonds between lenders and borrowers were signed and kept (Brown 1984, 6).

Conclusions

York Minster chapter house was the assembly room and the court house of the Dean and Chapter and represented the spiritual and secular powers of the Church of York. Its architectural form was in continuity with the model of major 13th-century chapter houses such as Lincoln and Westminster, but there were innovative elements that made its space even more similar to late Antique buildings and continental baptisteries. Its octo-pyramidal roof can be interpreted as a reference to the sacred landscape of Jerusalem, but in England this form is present also in aristocratic castles, perhaps inspired by the Arthurian legend. This may have constructed ideas of chivalry bounding together secular and religious powers. The presence

in the Chapter of Crusader knights, in addition to the heraldry of Edward I and of northern aristocratic knights (Brown 2003, 52–3) in the glazed windows of the chapter house, reinforce this interpretation.

Medieval York was the second capital of England and cosmopolitan people would have understood the religious and political messages communicated by the building. But it is difficult to appreciate how much of these meanings would have been perceived by the population of York or whether the Franciscans made use of the connotations of the building to preach about the crusades. An important theme that can be read in the iconography of the building is anti-Semitism, reflecting the political role of the Church of York in the 1280s. Despite problems of interpretation, an iconography of the building relating form with ideology is worth pursuing as a way of exploring the multiple strategies of political discourse (Foucault 2002). It is significant that among the first scholars that had to flee Nazi Germany were architectural historians such as Panofsky, Krautheimer and Pevsner (Böker 2005, 251), concerned with symbolism and social meanings of buildings.

Stefania Merlo Perring is a post-doctoral Research Assistant in the Department of History and Research Associate of the Department of Archaeology, University of York. Her research interests are mainly in social archaeology focusing on the study of buildings and landscapes in the medieval and early modern periods.

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