Sous la direction de
Mathieu Beaud, Sébastien Biay et Isabelle Marchesin

Matrice et *signum*

Fonctions et usages de la croix dans la culture du Moyen Âge

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Orientations of the Divine in Medieval Urbanism

Christian Frost

It is beyond question that sacred geometry and the cross had immense symbolic power in relation to different aspects of mediation in the architecture of the medieval period—as other chapters in this book eloquently argue—however, the use of the cross and other geometrical forms in relation to the specific intent of the artificer in the planning of medieval cities is still much debated. The ability to make connections—symbolic, economic, ecclesiastical, or political—between form, idea, and material evidence in the urban realm has been made possible in the first place because so little was written about the foundation and layout of cities at the time they were made. This fact, combined with the tendency of medieval commentators on cities to write panegyrics, has led many to believe that such ideas were also a significant factor in shaping the city.[1] For example, in trying to understand the nature of Gothic architecture and medieval cities, scholars often elide discussions relating to the mundane geometry necessary for the construction of buildings and the layout of successful cities with discourses on sacred geometry collected from various Neoplatonic medieval sources.[2] Such attempts to fill in the gaps in the knowledge of urban history have also shaped much of the historiography of the discipline, allowing contemporary writers such as Marvin Trachtenberg to argue that the urban plan of Florence was in fact a medieval implementation of planning techniques that appeared more explicitly in the Renaissance.[3]

In a single book chapter, it would be impossible to cover every aspect of this debate in full, and so three different examples related to architecture and the city will be used to explore some key themes relating to this problem and suggest some other factors that may have been influential in the layout of medieval cities. The example of medieval Chester will be discussed first, followed by brief discussions of Salisbury and Florence.

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[1] "In the Italian Middle Ages panegyrics of cities were a literary genre." Leonardo Bruni, *In Praise of Florence: The Panegyric of the City of Florence and an Introduction to Leonardo Bruni's Civil Humanism*, Amsterdam, 2005, p. 45.

[2] For examples of such interpretations, see Christian Frost, *Time, Space, and Order: The Making of Medieval Salisbury*, Oxford, 2009, p. 75ff.

[3] See, e.g., the work of Marvin Trachtenberg, who superimposes ideas present in the early Renaissance onto the late medieval period. Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye: Urbanism, Art, and Power in Early Modern Florence*, Cambridge, 2008.
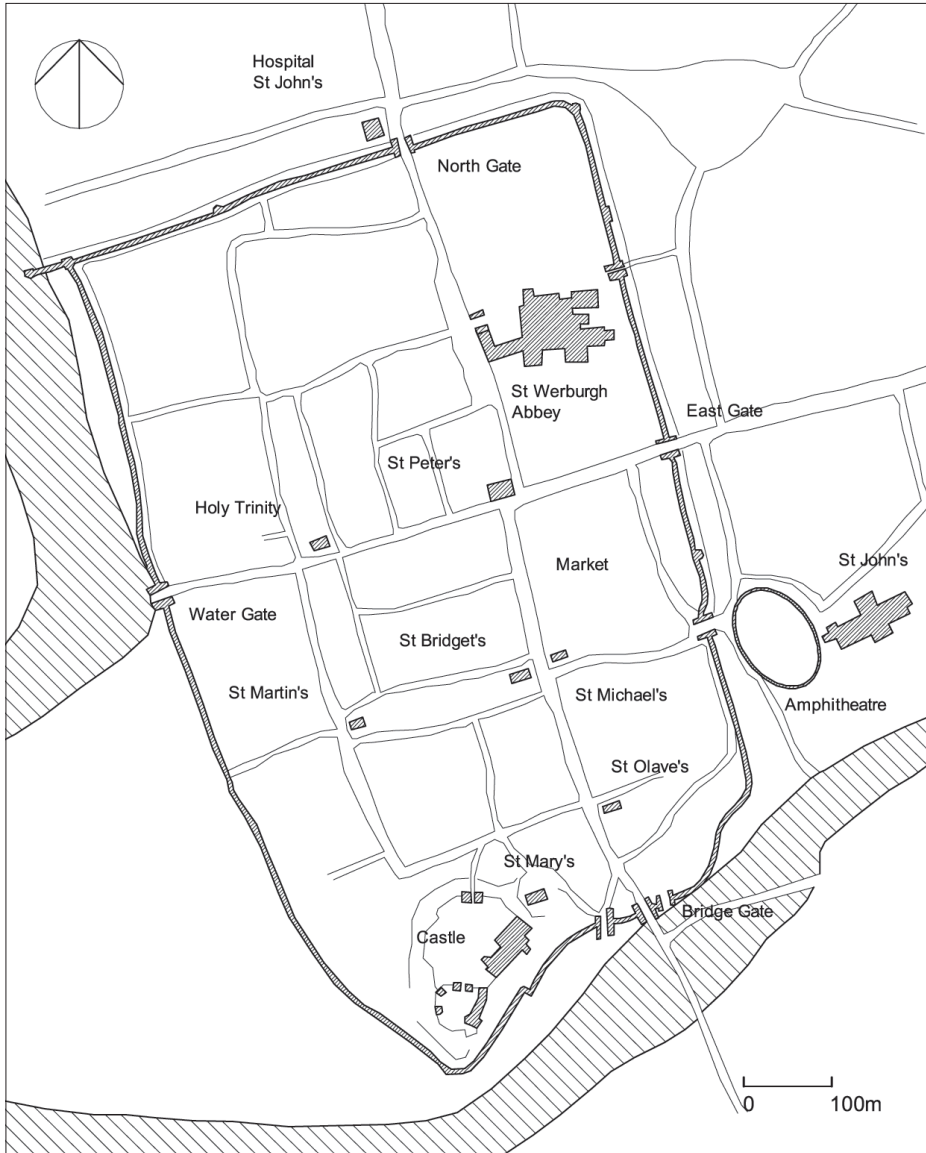
1   Plan of Chester circa 1195

Chester: Iconography after the Event

Chester is often cited as one of the most significant Christian cities in the United Kingdom where the cross is writ large over the urban environment (fig. 1). This is mostly due to a text written by Lucian, a monk of the city Abbey of Saint Werburgh, in the late twelfth century. The text, which Lucian called *De Laude Cestrie* (On the Glory of Chester), is around eighty-two thousand words in

length. Early on in the piece, Lucian begins to allude to the geometry of the city, implying a direct relationship with Jerusalem:

> [Chester] has two perfectly straight streets intersecting like the blessed cross, which form four roads, culminating in the four gates, mystically revealing that the grace of the Great King dwells in the very city, who, through the four evangelists, showed the twin law of the old and the new testaments to be completed through the mystery of the holy cross.[4]

And then later, accompanied by a small image of a cross:

> It should also be understood how the monastery of St Werburgh is surrounded by four houses of Cistercian monks . . . which are dedicated to our lady, the queen of heaven, for the consolation and future peace of those adrift in this world. For to the front Combermere, to the back Basingwork, and to the sides, these monasteries are arranged in the shape of a cross, like the praises of heralds, suggesting that whatever is found in the middle will be bright and nourishing. Certainly the east-west axis, representing the living tree and gallows on which the Lord died, is somewhat longer, and the north-south axis, like the cross-bar of the cross, is shorter.[5]

Mark Faulkner has plotted this description on a map and shown that, given some licence, the four monasteries do indeed form this cross.[6] However, we can see that still, as late as 1588, with William Smith's map of Chester (fig. 2), the use of mapping is not accurate in a formal geometrical sense, with the main cross of the Roman plan of the city and the larger medieval city walls reoriented to the cardinal points, and the rather more random southern wall somewhat straightened.

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4   "[h]abet . . . plateas duas equilineas et excellentes in modum benedicte crucis, per transuerum sibi obuias et se transeuntes, que deinceps fiant quattuor ex duabus, capita sua consummantes in quattuor portis, mistice ostendens atque magnifice, magni Regis inhabitantem graciam se habere, qui legem geminam noui ac ueteris testamenti per misterium sancte crucis impletam ostendit, in quattuor euangelistis" (fol. 11). Excerpts from the Latin text and an English translation, edited by Mark Faulkner, available online through *Mapping Medieval Chester*, URL: https://www.medievalchester.ac.uk/texts/reading/Lucian.html [accessed: 30.04.2021].

5   "Illud etiam intuendum, qualiter ipsum uirginis monasterium ambiatur quatuor mansionibus alborum monacorum . . . qui Reginam celi profitentur dominam, ad consolationem presentis exilii et requiem futuram. Nam a fronte Cumbermare et a tergo Basinwerc et a lateribus, ad euidentissimum modum crucis, competenter et pulcre distinctis spaciis a quattuor monasteriis, uelut preconum laudibus comendatur, ut almum et album sit quicquid medium inuenitur. Quippe instar uitalis ligni et dominici patibuli, que ab oriente in occidentem protensa sunt, paululum longiora sunt, et que ab aquilone in austrum, iuxta transuersum crucis lignum, breuia sunt" (fol. 60v).

6   Both the image of the cross in the margin of Lucian's text and the mapping of the monasteries can be seen in Mark Faulkner's introduction to *De Laude Cestrie*, URL: https://www.medievalchester.ac.uk/texts/introlucian.html [accessed: 30.04.2021].
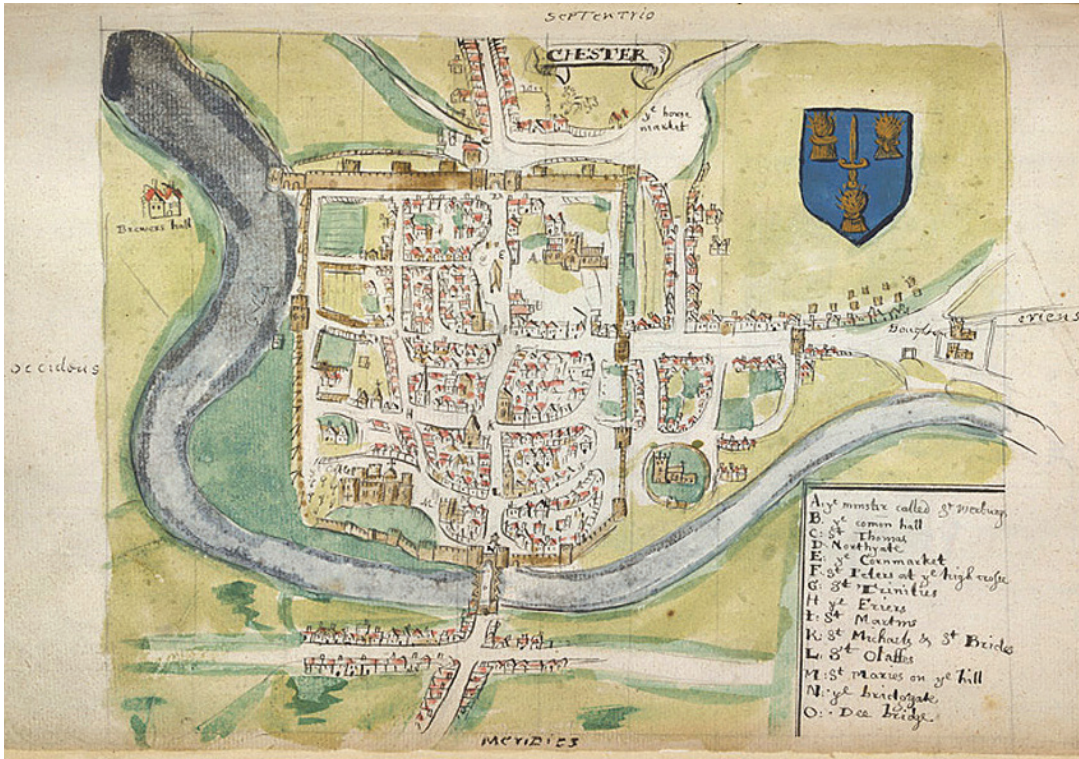
2 Plan of Chester by William Smith. Published in *The Particuler Description of England:
With the portratures of certaine of the cheiffest citties & townes* (1588)

The fact that the city was a Roman foundation is obviously significant. Although in *De Laude Cestrie* Lucian associates the city primarily with Jerusalem, its links to Rome (an association that was to become more significant in fifteenth-century Christian Europe) are clearly imprinted upon the form of this once borderland fort/town of the Roman Empire.

The iconography of Jerusalem and Rome emerge from the same tradition as can be seen in a relief depicting an army camp from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) at Nimrud (fig. 3). This four-quartered division, when transferred to the Christian context, is also evident in many representations of Jerusalem (fig. 4. is from the twelfth century), and through its association with biblical exegesis the city developed four layers of meaning, as suggested by John Cassian (ca. 360–ca. 435 CE):

Jerusalem can be taken in four senses: historically [literally], as the city of the Jews, allegorically as the Church of Christ [in the sense of the institution rather than the building], anagogically as the Heavenly City of God "which

3   Assyrian reliefs from
the Northwest Palace
of Ashurnasirpal II at
Nimrud, 883–859 BCE

4   Map of Jerusalem,
twelfth century

is mother of us all," (Gal. 4:26) tropologically, as the soul of man, which is frequently subject to praise or blame from the Lord often under this title.[7]

In representational terms this understanding often resulted in heavenly Jerusalem being depicted as a circle and earthly Jerusalem as a square, relating back to the Neoplatonic discourse on geometry, where the relationship of the circle to the square is used as a form of symbolic mediation—the two shapes being linked by irrational numbers.[8] However the critical point to make here is that this tradition of representation of cities is actually the representation of the rite of foundation of a city; and, in the Roman case, the foundation rite of any Roman camp was mimetically a refounding of Rome.

Although the initial foundation of Rome was Etruscan (according to the myth of Romulus and Remus), the tradition continued under republican rule in Rome and then gathered renewed momentum with Caesar Augustus's commission of Virgil to write *The Aeneid*, linking the story of Rome to that of Troy and the time of the gods.[9] Since the republican period, the foundation of Rome has been celebrated on 21 April in a feast—*parilia*—born out of rural fertility rites aimed at the purification of shepherds and their sheep.[10] The feast had both a rural and an urban component; Ovid (43 BCE–ca. 18 CE) describes the significant aspects of the urban element of the feast in his *Fasti*:

> Or is this nearer the truth, that when Rome was founded
> They were commanded to move the Lares to their new homes,
> And changing homes the farmers set fire to the houses,
> And to the cottages, they were about to abandon,
> They and their cattle leaping through the flames,
> As happens even now on Rome's birthday.[11]

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7   Iohannis Cassiani, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 13, *Conlationes* 24, Michael Petschenig (ed.), Vienna, 1886, p. 405. Translation in Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, vol. 11, *Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian*, New York, 2007, p. 438 (original emphasis). See also Hugonis de S. Victore, "De Arca Noe Morali," in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, vol. 176, Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), Paris, 1882.

8   These ideas come from Plato's *Meno* 84d and link the relationship of the circle and the square to *Anamnesis*, the rediscovery of knowledge that is already there. *Meno* was translated into Latin in the twelfth century by Henry Aristippus (1105/1110–1162). In the Middle Ages this idea is visible, for example, in Matthäus Roriczer's steps in the design of a pinnacle, from 1486.

9   That there was a continuity of ceremonial civic life in parts of Europe is clear from Villani's (1276–1348) account in *Chronicle* I.38 of the foundation of Florence, an account that was itself built of earlier chronicles of the city, including the *Gesta Florentinorum*. Villani cites Vigil, Sallust, Lucan, Titus Livius, and Valerius (amongst others) in his descriptions of history, festive life, and identity. But behind this literary continuity there lies a festive continuity, whereby many Roman feasts became a part of the Christian calendar, later to be taken over by more civic practices. See Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, Ithaca, 1991.

10 W. Warde Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic: An Introduction to the Study of the Religion of the Romans*, Piscataway, 2004, p. 79.

11 Translation quoted from Ovid, Fasti, book 4, trans. A. S. Kline, URL: https://poetryintranslation.com/

This feast, situated in the Roman calendar in a group of feasts including Robigo on 25 April (which transferred into the Christian calendar as Saint Mark's or Rogation Day),[12] were related to agricultural, seasonal rites of fertility and renewal as well as the "beating of the bounds" typical of Christian Rogation processions.[13] Even though this heritage was agrarian in nature, its transition to the iconography of the city was easily made by the Etruscans and the Romans, and then later by Christians during the development of the medieval town and city.

Depictions of the founding of Rome relate to the Roma quadrata, where the setting up of the boundary was the critical act, resulting in a four-quartered landscape oriented to the cosmos.[14] Hyginus Gromaticus, writing later in the imperial period (circa first or second century CE) states that "the origin [of the setting up of boundaries] is heavenly, and its practice invariable. . . . Boundaries are never drawn without reference to the order of the universe for the *decumani* are set in line with the course of the sun, while the *cardines* follow the axis of the sky."[15] In interpreting such texts, it would be easy to drift into the language of "ideal" cities, but such language would not have been recognized at the time. As Richard Krautheimer argues in his "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture,'" during this period particular geometries (such as circles or octagons) were often considered interchangeable.[16] Consequently, when a regular plan is visible, it is easy to argue that these were the "proper" manifestations of Roman order, with only the geographical anomalies of mountains and rivers and such distorting cities, which would otherwise have been rectilinear with a more rigorous four-quartered form.[17] But this leap of faith forgets that the primary act of foundation was ritualistic; ancient cities were founded through rites organized to sacralize the ground and create boundaries. As Joseph Rykwert argues:

> as ancient authors suggested, orthogonal planning was the product of grafting a law of land tenure on to some form of quasi-astronomical surveying, which gave landed property divine, and in particular celestial

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PITBR/Latin/OvidFastiBkFour.htm [accessed: 30.04.2021]. "Hoc tamen est vero propius, quum condita Roma est, / Transferri jussos in nova tecta Lares, / Mutantesque domum tectis agrestibus ignem / Et cessaturae supposuisse casae; / Per flammas saluisse pecus, saluisse colonos. / Quod fit natali nunc quoque, Roma, tuo." Ovid, Fasti, 2005, book 4, lines 801–806, URL: https://gutenberg.org/ebooks/8738 [accessed: 06.10.2015].

12 Terence Bailey, *The Processions of Sarum and the Western Church*, Toronto, 1971, p. 94.

13 Rogation refers to the annual processional circumnavigation of parish boundaries to reestablish the legal jurisdiction and bless the whole area for the coming year.

14 The Roma quadrata possibly included only a small number of the seven hills.

15 Quoted in Joseph Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World* [1988], London 2010, p. 90. The *decumani* and *cardines* (Decumanus and Cardo) are the two main streets that bisect Roman settlements, with the forum at their intersection in the centre.

16 Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5, 1942, 1–33.

17 Such a plan is visible, e.g., in Timgad and other "grid"-like Roman foundations.

sanction. . . . The [orthogonal foundation] rite was of course completely independent of anything as conscious, as explicit, as a planning theory. The origin of this kind of rite cannot ever be found in speculation, whether "rational" or "mythical." Its origin will always be in a *dromenon*, in an action, and such origins are always lost. The search for the "pure" and original form of the rite would be entirely fruitless.[18]

Classical urban layouts were the result of a number of factors, symbolic and mundane, but the overall layout was made through ritual. Consequently, the evident continuity of some ritual practice within many European urban centres into the medieval period argues for a reconsideration of this inherited tradition. This particular passage develops two points that are critical to this chapter's argument: first, that orthogonality was not necessarily the primary aim of Roman planning; and second, that the origins of a city founded by rite are lost unless they are commemorated and continually reenacted, and that in their reenactment they adapt and change in line with the times. The first point is confirmed by the plan of Rome itself, where the relationship of the various imperial fora to the republican forum and to one another is not structured with an overarching geometry. Instead, and like other imperial examples such as Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli and the Piazza Armerina in Sicily, the plan reveals a clear formal structure between groups of rooms with more informal relationships between these groups. The second point is confirmed by the continuing tradition of foundation rites within the Christian tradition, which forms much of the latter content of this chapter.

Therefore, Smith's map of Chester can now be revisited, with the recognition that the plan comprises corrected cardinal points and straightened walls, both of which echo Lucian's symbolic description but fall short of an accurate representation of the city as it actually was. This is not to deny the value of Lucian's contribution to the iconography of the city; rather, it is to articulate that this is an interpretation of an existing form rather than an operative explication of the cross as a means to organize a city. Lucian, writing over a millennium after the city's Roman foundation,[19] adds another layer of meaning onto the existing form, as described here by Keith D. Lilley:

Locating "the cross" in Lucian's mind meant "mapping" Christ's body onto and through Chester's urban topography. This cross is not just an intersection of streets—a crossing place—but a manifestation of Christ's enduring temporal and spiritual presence in Lucian's (urban) world, the city thus "crossing itself" as a sign of Christ's body. Through its cross-shaped form of streets, Lucian extends "the cross" beyond one

18   Rykwert, 2010 (note 15), p. 88.
19   Roman Chester was founded in 79 CE.

topographical location (The Cross), so that is encompasses the whole city and its people. By so doing, Lucian is using the city's topography to connect Chester with Christ and the wider world.[20]

Thus, this explanation of the formal structure of the medieval city is already twice removed from the original foundation and the Roman iconography of the ritual foundation of the Roman fort in 79 CE. It is possible that Chester maintained some rituals related to the original Roman foundation rite, but there is no documentation substantiating this and so it would be difficult to prove. The abbey church had rituals involving processions, many of which would have extended beyond the boundaries of the church and into the surrounding landscape, but to look at this possibility we will now shift to Salisbury, which is useful in this part of the discussion as it was not a Roman foundation.
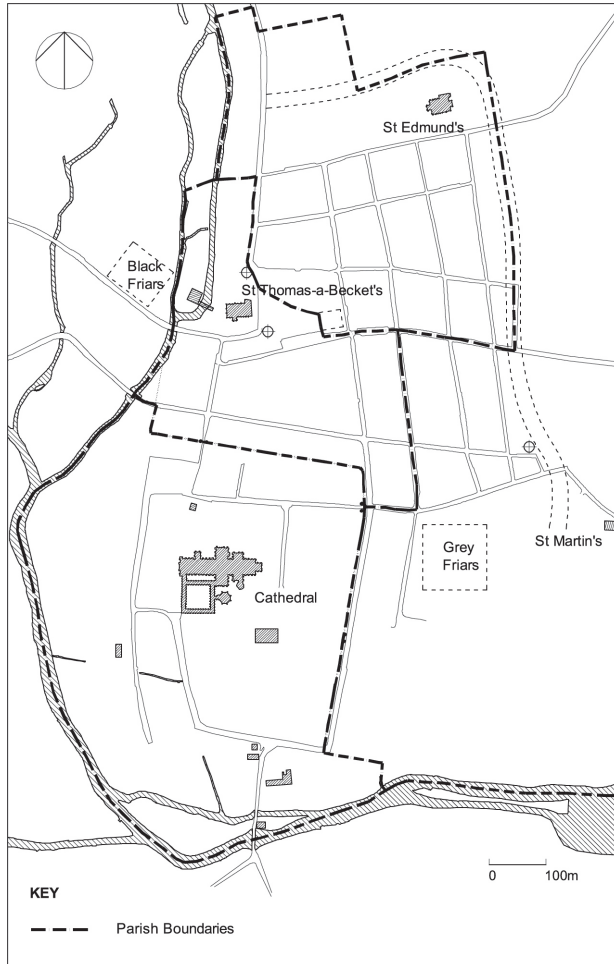
Salisbury

The city and cathedral of Salisbury were built with one "voice" on virgin land (owned by the bishop) from 1219 to 1260, around the same time that Lucian was writing his *De Laude Cestrie*. In art and architectural history Salisbury Cathedral is often denoted as early English, which Paul Frankl further described as manifesting "horizontal fusion" because the string courses disconnect the vertical shafts of the main columns.[21] Frankl's observation is true, but this design also accentuates the connectivity of the spaces throughout the length of the cathedral, setting up a narrative of continuity across a variety of spaces on the ground that are divided but also linked regularly during processional activity. A study of the cathedral close and the wider city in addition to the cathedral seems to reveal that ideas of orientation and connectivity were also built on the Use of Sarum, one of the most popular liturgical rites throughout Europe at the time, which included over 120 processions throughout the year.

The research summarized here, which I published in *Time, Space, and Order: The Making of Medieval Salisbury*, offers an explaination for the form of the city based on the way the cathedral processions were able to unite the cathedral and close with the city's three parishes (fig. 5). The conclusion reached in that research was that the tilted grid was created in relation to the ceremony for the translocation of the remains of the founding saint, Saint Osmund, and that the close, centred on the cloister, was a symbolic replacement of the king's hill fort of Old Sarum (fig. 6). The critical point to note here is that although the results

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20 Keith D. Lilley, "Urban Mappings: Visualising Late Medieval Chester in Cartographic and Textual Form," in Catherine A. M. Clarke (ed.), *Mapping the Medieval City: Space, Place and Identity in Chester, c. 1200–1600*, Cardiff, 2011, p. 35, and see pp. 19–41; Lilley, *City and Cosmos: The Medieval World in Urban Form*, London, 2009.

21 Paul Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 2nd edition, New Haven, 2001, p. 123.

5   Plan of thirteenth-
century Salisbury
showing the parish
boundaries

of this research are often shown in plan, the image as seen on the streets is more critical, depicted by reconstructions of some key processions. But this research turned out only to be the beginning. The suggestion of formal relationships built on ideas of origin—here related to a procession linked to the putative saint (although only canonized much later)—led to other discoveries relating to the processional structure of the city.

Around the time of the move from the old to the new cathedral, the bishop's chapter wrote a new *Consuetudinary* and *Processionale* that were used in both cathedrals.[22] I used these documents to locate the key processions that extended

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22   The documents used for this study can be found in the following volumes. They correspond to the surviving *Consuetudinaries, Kalendars*, and *Processionals* from the period in Latin and in English. *Processionale ad usum insignis ac praeclarae ecclesiae Sarum*, W. G. Henderson (ed.), Westmead, 1882; Walter Howard Frere, The Use of Sarum, 2 vols., Westmead, 1969; Catholic Church and Walter Howard Frere, *The Use of Sarum*, Cambridge, 1898; William Henry Rich Jones, *The Register of S. Osmund*, 2 vols., London, 1884.

6   Map of
    Salisbury in
    relation to
    Old Sarum,
    indicating the
    relationship
    between the two

beyond the cathedral and the close into the city (on both sites)—the most significant of which were the Rogation processions, which occurred on the three days prior to the Feast of the Ascension. In Old Sarum, the descriptions suggest, these three processions left the cathedral and close and visited a church beyond the limits of the fort, linking aspects of a landscape dominated by feudal rule with the small hill fort owned by the king and the smaller close run by the bishop and his secular chapter.[23]

The same descriptions interpreted in relation to the new city offer interesting possibilities for understanding the foundation of the city as a whole in relation to three parish churches contained within the city walls—a transformation of the beating of the bounds associated with Rogation and annual renewal within the fledgling urban environments of the thirteenth century.[24] Of the three parish

23   Frost, 2009 (note 2), p. 39ff.
24   Ibid., p. 212ff.

churches, only the church of Saint Martin existed before the new foundation. The new church of Saint Thomas Becket broke the line of the old north-south road leading to the king's fort, and the church of Saint Edmunds was moved off the cardinal orientation in line with the "shifted gridiron," perhaps in recognition of the symbolic links established with the original foundation of Saint Osmund. The text in the *Processionale* related to the feast days makes it clear that over the three Rogation days, each procession departed through a different close gate and then visited one of the city churches, framing the church to be visited as the procession left the close. Following this disclosure, it can be assumed that like the beating of the bounds in rural churches during Rogation tide, the processions would follow, as closely as they could, the parish boundary of the church scheduled to be visited, where mass was to be held. The result is very clear. Each procession built on the vision of the one before, crossing the market square at some point on the way back to the cathedral. The initial views from the cathedral gates were not designed as vistas; they did not structure the landscape in a way similar to later urban strategies, but rather acted more as an opportunity for orientation. In contrasting the difference between the paradigmatic destination and the actual, pragmatic path taken, the processions enacted a metaphor for the imperfections of Christian life within the growing urban context. These three processions created an ever-increasing narrative of incorporation, until the final day, when it is likely that the procession to and from Saint Edmunds followed the boundary of the city as a whole (figs. 7 and 8). On the following day, the procession for the Feast of the Ascension circumnavigated the cathedral within the boundaries of the close.

While this interpretation is speculative—the church documents do not give a total account of the processions—the arrangement of the city itself supports this argument for the processional ordering of this particular thirteenth-century city. The evidence available from looking at the fabric of Salisbury, combined with instructions from the Use of Sarum, provides a much more compelling argument than any suggestion of a cross formation related to the gates. Such an implied cross does create a virtual point of intersection at the edge of the marketplace, broadly in the location of the Poultry Cross, but this cross was only built in 1307, nearly thirty years after the completion of most of the city and so cannot be seen as a significant element in the early ordering of the city (fig. 9). It is more likely that the circular nature of the Rogation processions echoed the inauguration of the Roman *templum*, including its four-quartered structure, and did not follow the route of this implied cross.

Such an approach to the urban plan is also supported by the political issues of the time. In thirteenth-century Salisbury, the reforming chapter was interested in breaking away from the rule of the king, establishing its own ground, and opening up the representational order of the liturgy to a wider audience. This concentration on the pastoral aspects of preaching or the liturgy more generally is also reflected in a sermon from Stephen Langton (1150–1228), the Archbishop
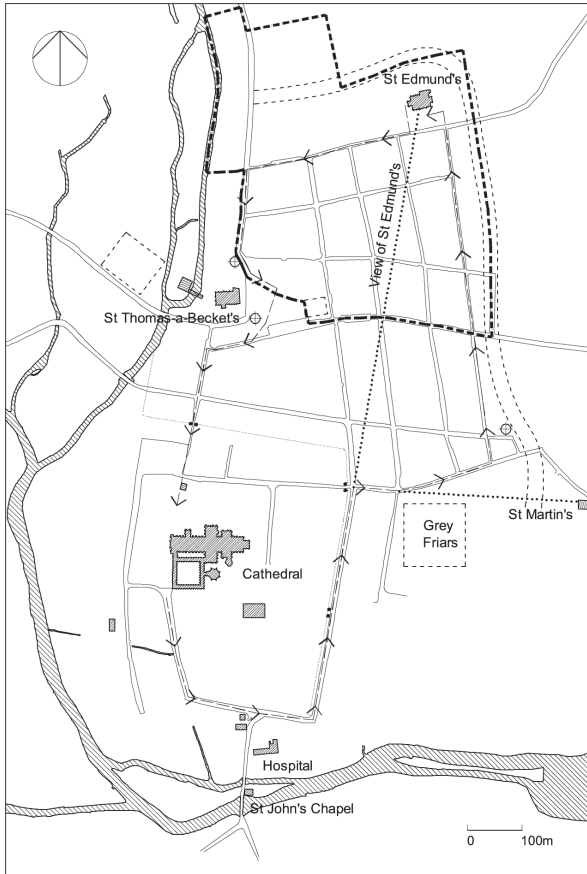
7   Plan of Salisbury showing
    the likely path of the third
    Rogation procession in the
    thirteenth century

8   Collage of view towards
    the church of Saint
    Edmunds for the third
    Rogation procession
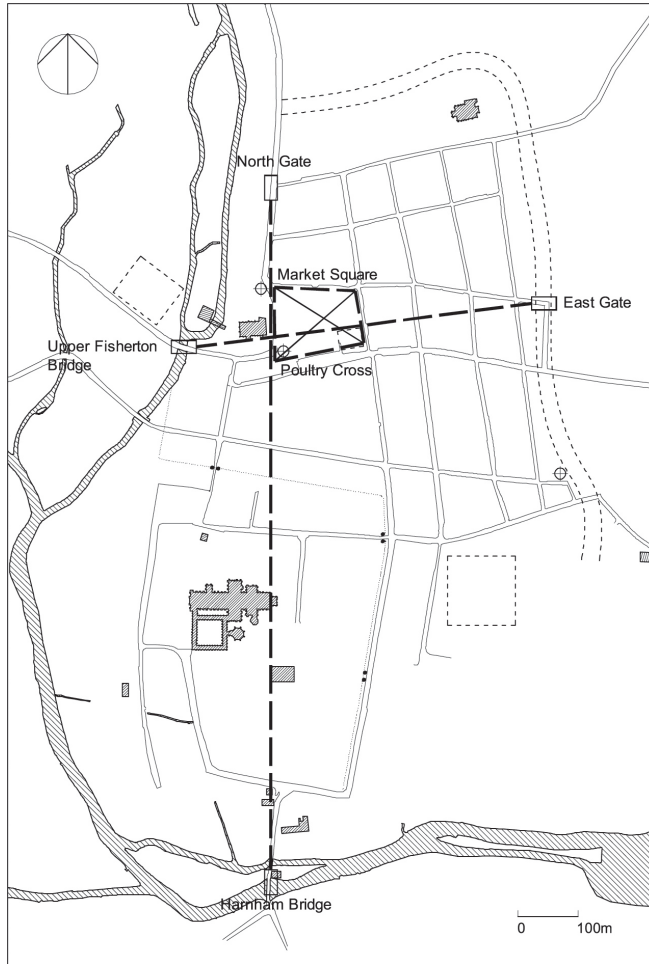
9 Plan of Salisbury gates, an implied cross and the location of the marketplace and Poultry Cross, built in 1307

of Canterbury, who tutored Salisbury's bishop, Richard Poore, in Paris. The sermon, which commented on Judges 3:31, recounted the story of how Samgar killed six hundred Philistines with a ploughshare while Ehud dispatched only one with a sword:

> See! This makes clear that the preacher should not always use polished, subtle preaching, like Ehud's sword, but sometimes a ploughshare, that is rustic exhortation. Very often a popular story is more effective than a polished, subtle phrase. Ehud killed one man only with a two-edged sword, Samgar six hundred with a ploughshare; so, whereas the laity are easily converted by rude, unpolished preaching, a sermon to clerks will draw scarcely one of them from his error.[25]

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25 George Lacombe and Beryl Smalley, "Studies on the Commentaries of Cardinal Stephen Langton," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge* 5 ,1930, p. 173.

Salisbury's processional development, which formed a structure of the city, was a part of this programme. A different city would have perhaps implemented these ideas in a different way. The next example to be discussed is Florence, which developed its processional structure in relation to very different concerns about the growing civic nature of the urban landscape.

Florence

The Florentine Baptistery of San Giovanni has a complicated decorative programme that gathers many thirteenth-century themes together with those linked to its original foundation in the sixth century (fig. 10). The plan and section are well known and include references to the Anastasis Rotunda of Jerusalem, linking the ritual of baptism to the death and resurrection of Christ. These themes are built into the thirteenth-century vault mosaic, which should also be read as an artificial perspectival, vertical continuation of space bearing Old and New Testament themes. On the side of the vault facing visitors as they enter through the eastern door is a large image of Christ as Pantocrator-Almighty. This is one of three representations of Christ, the final one depicting the Lamb of God within the baldachin above Scarsella Chapel (fig. 11).[26] However, the most striking aspect of the building is perhaps the cosmatesque revetment on the rear wall of the chapel, constructed around themes of the circle, the square, and the number eight—signifying the day of the resurrection and the act of baptism—with a central image of a cross in light stone (figs. 12–13).[27]

By 1577, when the central font was removed by Bernardo Buontalenti to make way for new decorations for the baptism of Prince Filippo, firstborn to Grand Duke Francesco, the importance of the rite would have already altered significantly.[28] Although Franklin Toker suggests that this font had been there since 1128, when the new building was raised,[29] the dating of the font panels in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Florence contradict this, placing the final version contemporaneous with the installation of the screen at San Miniato al Monte, the building of the new Scarsella Chapel, and the laying of the existing cosmatesque pavement (ca. 1200–1205).[30] The pre-1577 layout, with an octagonal presbytery (reconstructed in a sequence of images as part of my research),

26   The third image of Christ is just above the head of the large Christ, flanked by four evangelists.

27   For a longer description of this argument, see Christian Frost, "Reclaiming Architectural History: The Baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence," *Art History Supplement* 3/5, 2013, URL: https://arthist.net/archive/5782 [accessed: 30.04.2021].

28   Mirko Tavoni, "On Dante's Baptismal Font," in Antonio Paolucci and Carlo R. Chiarlo (eds.), *Baptistery of San Giovanni, Florence*, Modena, 1994, p. 205.

29   Franklin Toker, "A Baptistery below the Baptistery of Florence," *Art Bulletin* 58/2, 1976, pp. 157–167, here p. 165.

30   Enrica Neri Lusanna, "The Original Arrangement of the Presbytery and the Baptismal Font. Theories surrounding the Remains," in Paolucci/Chiarlo, 1994 (note 28), p. 191.
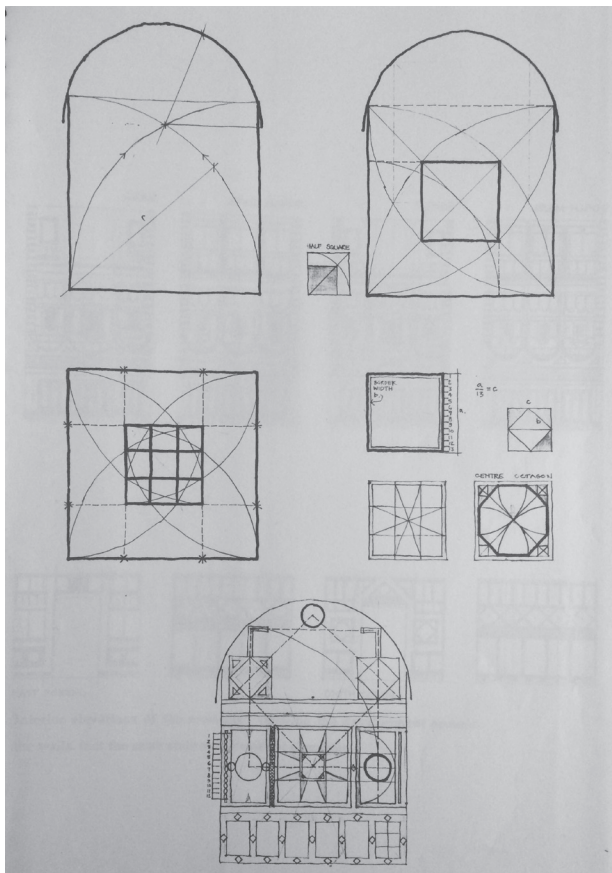
10 Baptistery of San Giovanni, Florence, circa 1897

11 Ceiling mosaic in the Baptistery of San Giovanni circa 1225–1325

12 San Giovanni
Battista, Scarsella
Chapel circa
1202–1265

13 Geometry of
the Scarsella Chapel

indicates that the approach to the font would offer different visions of parts of the building reflected in the water.[31] There are different theories regarding how people entered and left the building during the sacrament of baptism, and with so many people in the building on Easter Saturday and on the eve of Epiphany it is difficult to establish exactly what these reflections would have been to the various participants in the ritual. Even so, it appears that as the font was approached, much of the internal revetment, up to and including gallery level, would have been reflected in the surface prior to a segment of the vault mosaic and, finally, the light from the lantern. These reflections in the font, just like the iconography of the building, would have varied from matter to heavenly light via material, geometry, proportion, numerology, and image, but all would have been present in the same place—the font where the mystery of the sacrament of baptism was also seen to occur.

This almost magical transformation of the various reflected images (particularly if approached from the east)—changing from stone, through the image of Christ, to light itself—offers a compelling narrative for the initiation of the catechumen into the death of the old (Adam) and resurrection of the new (Christ), and also suggests (like Salisbury) that medieval architecture was understood more as a setting for ritual than as an object of material culture.

But this condition did not last. As has been stated, the font was removed by 1577, apparently no longer viewed as a necessary accessory to the ritual of baptism into the church and commune. There are many possible arguments for this decline, but the shift of the main rituals of civic identity and belonging out of the baptistery and into the streets, particularly during the Feast of San Giovanni (the founding saint's day of the city), is certainly significant. The sophisticated urban elites of Florence were interested in broadening the identity of what it was to be Florentine within an already highly articulated church ceremonial. In their attempts to secularize the feast day and offer a broader representational horizon, they moved the feast into the streets and utilized much of the Roman civic identity that had survived in Florence and in urban centres of the region despite the many invasions from the fourth to the eleventh centuries. This Roman heritage, linking religious activity with commerce, theatre, games, and civic governance, contributed to the transformation of the urban landscapes of the region particularly through the form of urban festivals, which united different territories, institutions, and activities.

Nevertheless, even given this increased articulation of urban institutional power, the form of the city did not become transformed by ideas of geometry and orthogonal planning. A key indication of this point is illustrated by the fourteenth-century image of the city portrayed at the base of the *Madonna della Misericordia*, currently in Florence's Museum of Bigallo (fig. 14). This painting shows the key buildings of the city that were engaged in church processions

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31   Frost, 2013 (note 27), p. 30.

14   Image of Florence at the base of the *Madonna della Misericordia*, mid-fourteenth century, attributed to the school of Bernardo Daddi (1280–1338)

and civic parades, but it does not locate them in the correct relationship to one another or the city itself.[32] The baptistery is clearly visible in the centre, with the developing façade of Santa Reparata to the left. If that is the correct spatial relationship, then the viewer is observing from the southeast. However, the Palazzo Vecchio with its tower is clearly visible just above these two buildings, with what appears to be a loose representation of the Bargello to its left, which would suggest a view from the northwest. It would be a mistake to suggest that such "loose" spatial accuracy is due to a lack of skill or that it is not significant. While order in this painting does not appear to be established by mimicking real spatial relationships, it does "gather" the principal monuments active within civic life into the centre of the image. For example, the decorated tower to the left of the baptistery is the (now) demolished campanile of San Piero Maggiore, the first church visited by any new bishop of the city following their inaugura-tion. Thus, the implication is that significance, in this image, was built from a hierarchical order of buildings and institutions rather than from the pictorial accuracy that became more important in later images of the city, such as Giorgio Vasari's (1511–1574) *Foundation of Florentia* (1563–1565), painted as part of the transformation of the Communal Palazzo della Signoria into the Ducal Palazzo

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32   *The Madonna della Misericordia* is attributed to the school of Bernardo Daddi (1280–1338).

15   Giorgio Vasari, *Foundation of Florentia*, 1563–1565 , Palazzo Vecchio, Florence

following Cosimo I's elevation to the dukedom in 1537 (fig. 15). Unlike in the *Misericordia*, Vasari's image captures the correct basic spatial arrangement of the city in relation to the Roman archaeology known at the time. However, even here Vasari makes explicit the relation of the city boundary to civic rites, by representing the Roman foundation ceremony. In the centre of this image can be seen a plough, pulled by a cow (inside) and an ox (outside), being carefully guided by the founder, head covered, ensuring the ploughed earth falls on the inside, (probably) lifting the plough at every gate.[33]

Although some current scholarship on the articulation of the original Roman foundation of Florence concentrates on the compositional aspects of the

33   The ox and cow are clearly distinguishable, even if they are not the white colour they should be according to the Roman rite. Rykwert, 2010 (note 15), p. 65.

possible layout of the city, this tends to skew the argument more towards the mundane aspects of geometry and away from the more active and performative ideas that were described at the beginning of this chapter.[34] When one places the path of the San Giovanni procession circa 1300 (after Richard C. Trexler) onto the city and compares this path to the limits of the original Roman foundation, it is clear that they overlap (figs. 16–17).[35] Thus, the procession for the patron saint of Florence, in circumnavigating the city, reenacts the original *dromenon* of the foundation, reestablishing the original sacred boundary linked to the baptistery and the cathedral while engaging with all the administrative areas of the city (the six *sestri*, as well as most of the sixteen *gonfalone*, which combined to make four *quartieri* in 1343). This linking of the various administrative areas of the city though annual processional rituals was also evident in the Rogation processions of the city, which traversed all of the *sestri* (fig. 18). However, unlike the procession of the Feast of San Giovanni, which was embellished and developed by the emerging civic institutions of the city, these Rogation processions followed a path that was prescribed by the church, set out in the *Ritus in ecclesia servandi* (ca. 1205).[36] Although both Franklin Toker and Marica S. Tacconi assume that these paths are designed to make a cross upon the city, it is more likely that the iconography of medieval processions would not have supported such an assumption.[37] Lines on the ground, both in their legacy from Roman exemplars in their relation to the rites that occurred within the church, did not operate on this level. If there was a trace on the ground it is more likely to have been mimetic, following the boundary of the Roman city (after the Roman foundation rites), thus more related to the Roma quadrata than to a "cross."[38] As mentioned already, this "quartering" related to the orientation of the city to the heavens (via the *cardines*) and the rising and setting of the sun (via the *decumani*) and consequently—within the Christian context—to Jesus's second coming. The path of the procession orientated the city through an act or *dromenon* in relation to the time of history as well as eschatological time, both enacting and remembering the Roman and Christian traditions of the city.

In maps and plans it is often possible to find traces of the cross, in non-Christian as well as in Christian cultures. The right angle has symbolic meaning in many cultures. Therefore, the question of the use of the cross in these areas of medieval

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34 Carol Martin Watts, "The Geometry of the Master Plan of Roman Florence and Its Surroundings," in Michael J. Ostwald and Kim Williams (eds.), *Architecture and Mathematics from Antiquity to the Future*, Cham, 2015, pp. 177–188.

35 Trexler, 1991 (note 9), p. 250.

36 *Ritus in ecclesia servandi*, ca. 1205, fol. 52r–v. The original Latin text and a translation are available in Franklin Toker, *On Holy Ground: Liturgy, Architecture and Urbanism in the Cathedral and the Streets of Medieval Florence*, London, 2009.

37 Toker, 2009 (note 36), p. 121; Marica S. Tacconi, *Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence: The Service Books of Santa Maria Del Fiore*, Cambridge, 2006, p. 111.

38 Or, as on Palm Sunday, a mimetic reenactment of Christ's entry into Jerusalem.
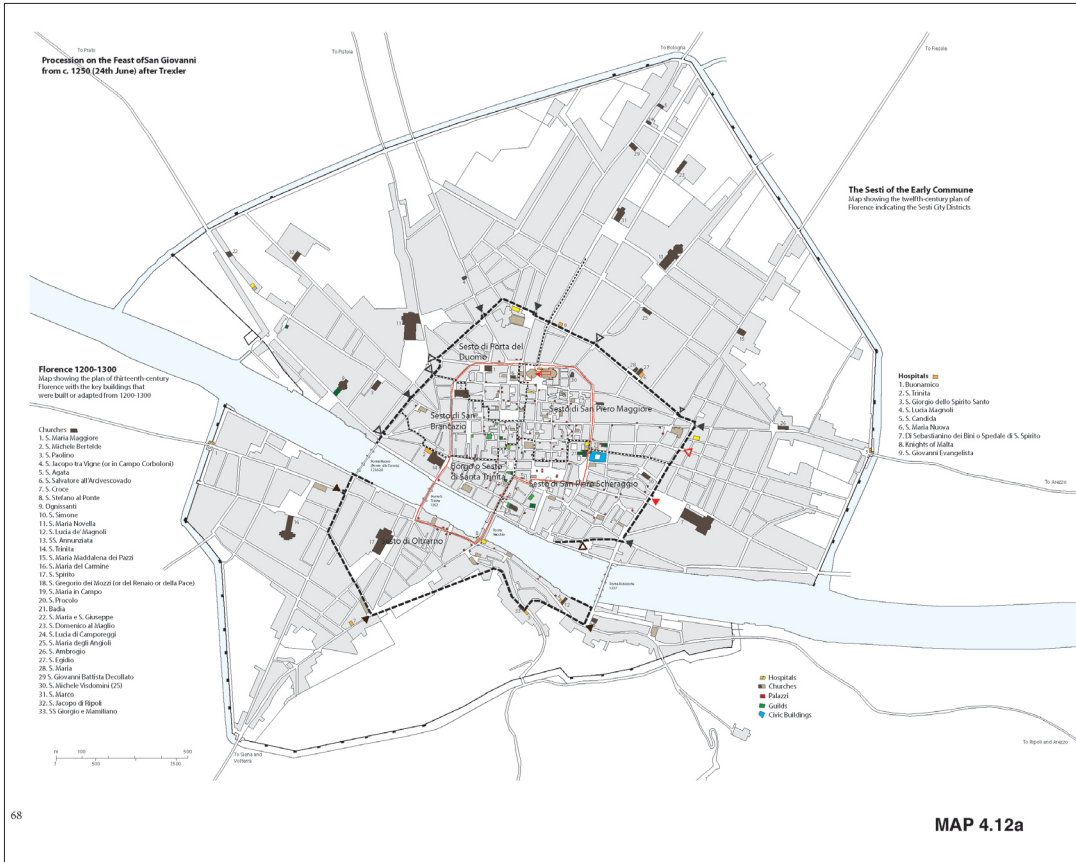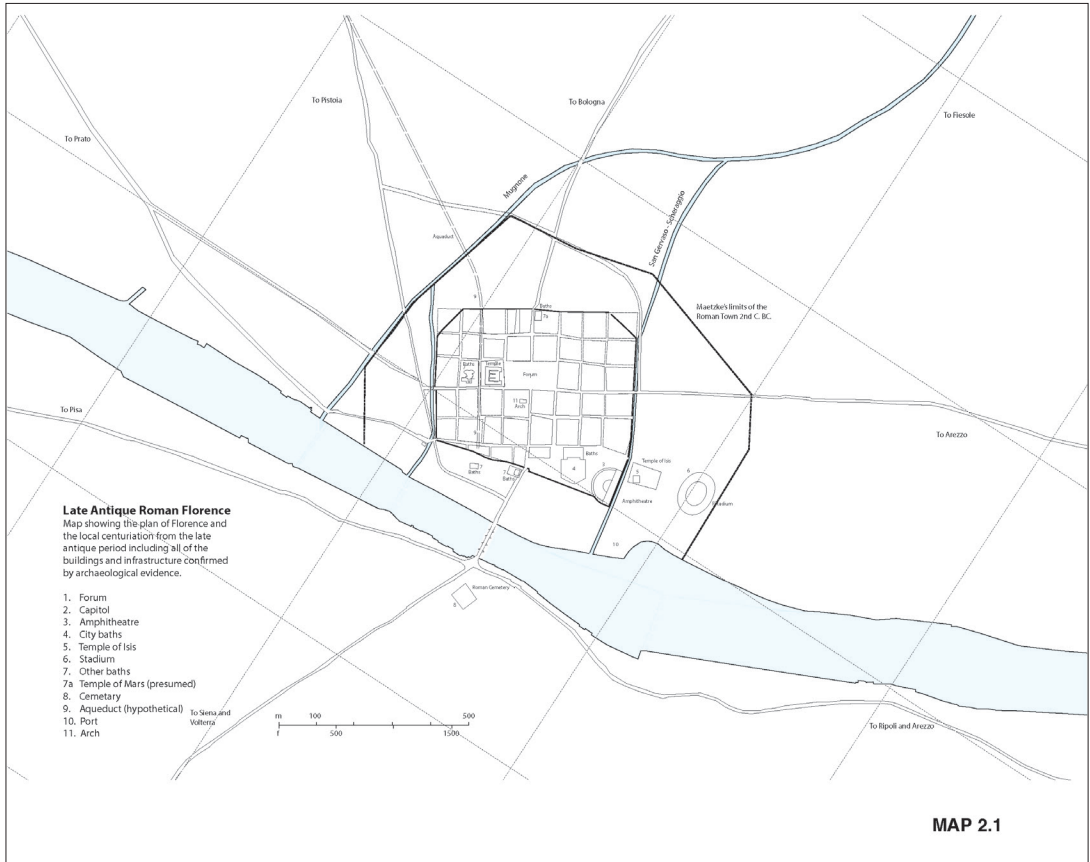
16   The path of the procession on the Feast Day of San Giovanni in Florence, circa 1300

culture must address aspects of understanding as well as interpretation. Hans Georg Gadamer describes this thus:

> For the structure of the historical world is not based on facts taken from experience which then acquire a value relation, but rather on the inner historicity which belongs to experience itself. It is a living historical process and its paradigm is not the discovery of facts, but that strange fusion of memory and expectation into a whole that we name experience and that we acquire through experiences.[39]

For the medieval burgher of Chester, Salisbury, or Florence, as well as for the contemporary city dweller, the festival offers such an opportunity. The festival, at once both ritual and mundane act, was utilized within medieval culture as a way of reenacting and revealing the principal ordering of the town. The

39   Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, William Glen-Doepel (trans.), London, 1979, p. 195.

Late Antique Roman Florence
Map showing the plan of Florence and the local centuriation from the late antique period including all of the buildings and infrastructure confirmed by archaeological evidence.

1. Forum
2. Capitol
3. Amphitheatre
4. City baths
5. Temple of Isis
6. Stadium
7. Other baths
7a. Temple of Mars (presumed)
8. Cemetary
9. Aqueduct (hypothetical)
10. Port
11. Arch

MAP 2.1

17 Late antique Roman Florence, following its foundation circa 44–31 BCE

particular sense of time out of time inherent to such events,[40] as well as the "liminal" nature of the experience,[41] offered medieval culture access to the divine through a ritual act within the urban landscape. And, although it is possible for traces of these paths to be fixed and documented and then interpreted as particular shapes and forms (such as with Lucian's image of Chester), in the urban landscape of the medieval period it would appear that outside of architecture, in the streets

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40 It is in the nature of periodic festivals to be repeated. We call that the return of the festival. But the returning festival is neither another event nor the mere remembrance of the one that was originally celebrated. The originally sacral character of all festivals obviously excludes the kind of distinction that we know in the time experience of the present (memory and expectation). The time experience of the festival is rather its celebration, a present time sui generis. Ibid., p. 110.

41 Victor Turner, after Arnold van Gennep, suggests that such festivals offer three phases of engagement: separation, transition, and incorporation. The actual participants in the festival, who deny their own identity, are "incorporated"; everyone who witnesses the event is "separated" into a community "out of time"; and in the middle are those who experience "transition," "a sort of limbo which has few . . . of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states." Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York, 1982, p. 24.
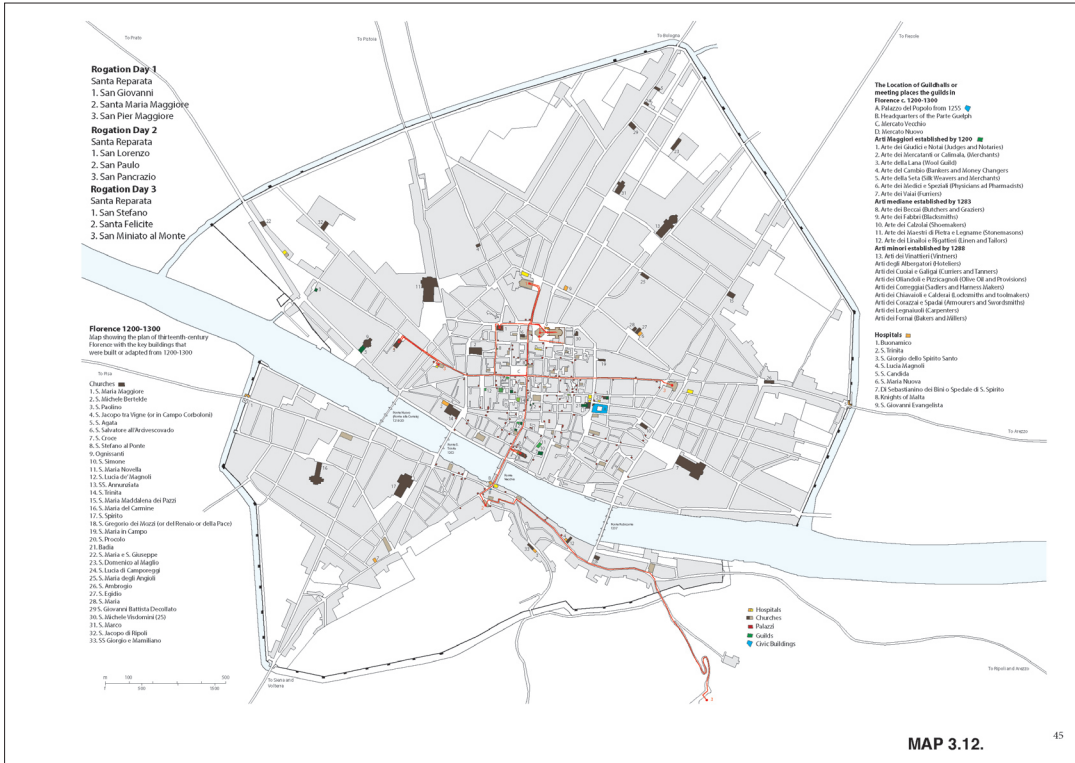
18   The paths of all three Rogation processions in Florence, circa 1300

of the city, iconography remained mainly rooted in "actions" (the *dromenon*) rather than in formal relationships. That is not to say that images of the cross cannot be traced and argued for in city form; rather, the conclusion is that these layers of meaning have often been overlaid upon a more complex set of ideas related to mimesis of praxis, which, in the Christian milieu, becomes a representation of creation itself.