

THE Holy Sepulcher

*Treasures from the
Terra Sancta Museum, Jerusalem*

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Introductory Gallery

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem stands as Christianity's most sacred site—the place where, according to tradition, Jesus Christ was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead. The Roman emperor Constantine built the first church here in the fourth century, and ever since that time, pilgrims have journeyed to worship at this hallowed ground. Today, six Christian communities—Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic, and Ethiopian—share responsibility for the church and its services.

In the early fourteenth century, the pope entrusted the Franciscan order with care of the Christian holy sites in the Middle East, establishing the Custody of the Holy Land. For seven hundred years, the Franciscans have maintained these sacred places, welcomed pilgrims, and preserved the extraordinary gifts sent by Catholic monarchs across Europe—goldsmith work and liturgical vestments intended for worship at the Holy Sepulcher.

These treasures remained largely unknown until scholars began studying them in the 1980s. A new museum now under construction at Jerusalem's Monastery of Saint Saviour—the Terra Sancta Museum—will provide a permanent home for the display of this remarkable collection.

This exhibition is organized by The Frick Collection, New York. All works are on generous loan from the Custodia Terrae Sanctae and the Terra Sancta Museum, Jerusalem. Organized by Xavier F. Salomon with Benoît Constensoux and Jacques Charles-Gaffiot

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The Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Photo: Gerd Eichmann, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Common



The works of art in this exhibition were created by the finest European craftsmen of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—goldsmiths, silversmiths, and textile artists working at the height of their powers. Catholic monarchs from France, Spain, Portugal, Naples, and the Holy Roman Empire commissioned these magnificent objects as gifts for the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, where Franciscan friars have used them in worship for centuries. Many remain in active liturgical use today.

Known collectively as the Latin Treasure, these works are rich in Christian symbolism. Scenes from Christ's Passion—from the Last Supper through the Crucifixion to the Resurrection—appear throughout, linking the objects to the very site for which they were made. The Jerusalem Cross, with its five crosses representing Christ's wounds, recurs as a unifying motif. Royal donors also left their marks: the French fleur-de-lys, the towers and lions of Spain, Habsburg imperial eagles, and other heraldic devices identify each gift's origin.

The survival of these extraordinary items bears witness to centuries of devotion. Similar treasures elsewhere in Europe were often melted down or lost; here, protected by the Franciscans in Jerusalem, they endure as testaments to the faith that inspired their creation.

Pontifical vestments, made by Alexandre Paynet (or Penet) in 1619 and offered by King Louis XIII of France in 1621. Photo: Nadim Asfour/CTS





Palestinian craftsmen

Model of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher

18th century

Olive and pistachio wood, mother-of-pearl, camel bone

Craftsmen in Bethlehem created intricate models of Christianity's holiest sites as gifts for important donors to the Custody of the Holy Land. This example depicts the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, built over the traditional site of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

Made from local materials—olive and pistachio wood, mother-of-pearl from Red Sea shells, and camel bone—the model opens like a dollhouse to reveal the church's interior. For Europeans who could not make the difficult journey to Jerusalem, such models offered a tangible connection to sacred ground.



Robert Landry (active in Paris 1618–1635)

Reliquary of the True Cross

1628–29

Gilt silver, glass

In the fourth century, Empress Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, traveled to Jerusalem seeking relics of Christ. According to tradition, she discovered the cross on which Jesus was crucified, prompting her son to build the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on the site.

Since that time, fragments believed to come from the True Cross have been among Christianity's most venerated relics. This Parisian reliquary, with angels flanking a small crucifix containing a wooden fragment, is displayed in Jerusalem on two feast days: May 6, celebrating Helena's discovery, and September 14, the Exaltation of the Cross.

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East Gallery



Spain or Middle East

Humeral Veil

Late 16th or early 17th century

Silk, gold and silver thread

This striking textile began as a Muslim fabric, likely made for clothing or furnishing, before being transformed into a Christian liturgical object. A humeral veil drapes over a priest's shoulders; he uses it to hold the monstrance displaying the consecrated bread of Holy Communion, so that his hands do not touch the sacred vessel directly.

The embroidered coat of arms of King Philip II of Spain (reigned 1556–98) was transferred from an earlier, damaged vestment sent to Jerusalem by the king.



Juan Rodríguez de Babia (c. 1525–1594)

Chalice

1587

Gilt silver

This chalice, among the earliest objects in the exhibition, shows a restrained elegance. A gift from King Philip II of Spain, it bears the name of Don García de Loaysa y Girón, the royal chaplain and tutor to the king's son.

Spanish kings traditionally presented three chalices to churches on January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, commemorating the gifts brought by the three Wise Men to the infant Jesus.



Castile

Pair of Holy Oil Vessels

Before 1640

Silver

These small vessels held oils blessed for sacred rites: chrism, the scented oil used in baptism and confirmation, and oils for blessing the sick or performing exorcisms. Both are decorated with the royal arms of Spain and the Jerusalem Cross, linking the Spanish Crown to the holy city.



Damián de Castro (1716–1793)

Chalice

c. 1778–80

Gold

Damián de Castro was the leading Spanish goldsmith of the late eighteenth century, working in both Madrid and Córdoba. On the base of this gold chalice, donated by Spanish benefactors, angels hold instruments associated with Christ's Passion—the crown of thorns, the whip, and the nails. The stem features figures of Christ at the Column and the Virgin of Sorrows.



Attributed to Fabio Vendetti

Sanctuary Lamp

1786

Silver

This monumental lamp has no equal among surviving Spanish silver of the period. Its design follows Italian models, and it may be the work of Fabio Vendetti, an Italian silversmith active in Madrid. The lamp bears the arms of both the Custody of the Holy Land and the Kingdom of Spain.

The four large figures represent the authors of the Gospels with their traditional symbols: Matthew with an angel, Mark with a lion, Luke with an ox, and John with an eagle.



Lisbon

Sanctuary Lamp

1740s

Gold

Although commissioned by King John V of Portugal, this gold lamp did not reach Jerusalem until 1752, after the king's death. It arrived as part of a shipment from his successor, Joseph I. The lamp is a rare survival of Portuguese goldsmith work from this era—many comparable pieces were destroyed in the catastrophic Lisbon earthquake of 1755.



Lisbon

Lectern Cloth from the “Palm Leaf” Set of Pontifical Vestments of Portugal

1728

Silk velvet, gold and silver thread

King John V of Portugal (reigned 1706–50) sent quantities of precious fabrics to Jerusalem in 1728. This sumptuous velvet, woven in Genoa with a pomegranate pattern, was described in documents as “an opulent piece of material, with a silver ground to be used on the outside of the Most Holy Saint Sepulcher.” In 1735, the king sent a matching set of pontifical vestments. This remarkable length of cloth displays the virtuosity of Genoese weavers at their finest.



Portugal

Basin

1673

Silver

This large basin was used to wash the feet of pilgrims arriving at the Holy Sepulcher. On Holy Thursday, commemorating the Last Supper, the Custos—the Franciscan Father overseeing the Custody of the Holy Land—washed pilgrims' feet just as Christ humbly washed those of his disciples. Today the Latin Catholic Patriarch of Jerusalem continues this tradition.

The basin bears the royal arms of Portugal and the Jerusalem Cross. It was a gift from the future King Peter II, who served as regent from 1667 and reigned from 1683 to 1706.



Milan or Genoa

Chasuble from the Dark Purple “Arma Christi” Set of Pontifical Vestments

c. 1600

Silk velvet, gold and silver thread

Sent from the Franciscan Commissariat in Milan, likely to commemorate the Jubilee Year of 1600, this chasuble is decorated with the Arma Christi—the “weapons” used against Christ during his Passion. The crown of thorns, column and whips, ladder, lance, and sponge each represent an episode from the Gospel accounts of Christ’s suffering and death.

Interspersed among these symbols is the Jerusalem Cross—five crosses grouped together, representing Christ’s five wounds. The somber color indicates that this vestment was worn on Good Friday.



Jean Hubé (active in Paris 1636–1687)

Ciborium

1668–69

Gilt silver

A ciborium holds the consecrated bread offered at Holy Communion. The reliefs on this vessel illustrate scenes relating to Christ's Passion and the Eucharist: the Last Supper, the Agony in the Garden, the Crucifixion. On the domed cover, Old Testament scenes prefigure the Christian Eucharist.

The ciborium was likely a gift from Charles Olier, Marquis de Nointel, the French ambassador to Constantinople, who visited Jerusalem in March 1674.



Claude Caignet (active as of 1609)

Two Ceremonial Basins

1620–24

Gilt silver

During Pontifical Mass—a solemn celebration led by a bishop or the Custos—ceremonial dishes are displayed on a credenza in the choir. These large basins, decorated with the arms of France and Navarre and covered with fleurs-de-lys, were sent to Jerusalem in 1635 as a gift from King Louis XIII (reigned 1610–43).



Nicolas Dolin (active 1648–1684)

Chalice and Paten

1661–63

Gilt silver, glass, semiprecious stones

This magnificent chalice arrived in Jerusalem on May 4, 1665, a gift from King Louis XIV. On its base, St. Louis (King Louis IX) holds the crown of thorns and nails he acquired in Constantinople and brought to Paris as relics of Christ's Passion. Small figures of Christ, St. Francis, and St. Anthony of Padua adorn the stem.

The paten—a plate for the Eucharistic bread that could cover the wine vessel—depicts the Assumption of the Virgin.



Claude Caignet (active as of 1609)

Large Sanctuary Lamp and Large Processional Cross

1617–18 (lamp); c. 1620 (cross)

Gilt silver

In 1621, King Louis XIII of France sent a magnificent gift of silver objects to the Custody of the Holy Land. The hanging lamp and processional cross displayed here were part of that shipment, along with the ceremonial basins in the nearby case and four of the six candlesticks on the adjacent platform.

All bear the arms of France and Navarre and are covered with the fleurs-de-lys of France. During the reign of Louis XIV, most French royal and ecclesiastical silver was melted down to finance wars. These objects, preserved in Jerusalem, are extraordinarily rare survivals.



Nicolas Dolin (active 1648–1684)

Crozier

1654–55

Gilt silver, glass, semi-precious stones

A crozier is a bishop's staff of authority, shaped like a shepherd's crook to symbolize his role as caretaker of the faithful. At the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Custos uses this crozier during important ceremonies.

Created in Paris by goldsmith Nicolas Dolin, this was a gift from King Louis XIV. It is decorated with fleurs-de-lys and two small statues: St. Louis, the thirteenth-century king of France, and his nephew St. Louis of Toulouse, a Franciscan bishop. Both were ancestors of Louis XIV.

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Alexandre Paynet (or Penet) (active 1615–1656)

Red Pontifical Vestments: An Antependium, Three Copes, and Two Dalmatics

1619

Silk, gold and silver thread

These French vestments were sent to Jerusalem in 1621 by King Louis XIII. At the back stands an antependium, or altar frontal. Three copes—cape-like garments worn in processions and solemn masses—display a radiant dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit. Two sleeved dalmatics, worn by deacons, complete the set.

Throughout, royal symbols appear in the embroidery: the crowned arms of France (blue) and Navarre (red) and the intertwined initials of King Louis and Queen Anne of Austria. The silver and gold embroidery originally had a white background; when the silk deteriorated, the needlework was transferred to red silk.

No other vestments or silver of this importance survive from seventeenth-century France.



Claude Caignet (active as of 1609) and an anonymous Parisian goldsmith

Six Altar Candlesticks

1620–45

Gilt silver

These candlesticks and the liturgical vestments displayed nearby were gifts from King Louis XIII and his wife, Anne of Austria, acting as regent for their young son, Louis XIV. Here they are arranged as they might appear during Mass, flanking the altar.

Like the other French silver in this gallery, all are decorated with the royal arms of France and Navarre and the fleurs-de-lys of France.



France

**Set of Pontifical Vestments: Cope, Chasuble,
and Dalmatic**

1741

Silk, gold and silver thread

Delivered to Jerusalem in April 1741 from the Commissariat in Paris, these vestments were a gift from the Kingdom of France under Louis XV (reigned 1715–74). The chasuble, with its equal front and back panels, is worn by priests at Mass. The cope drapes over the shoulders for processions and solemn masses. The dalmatic, with its distinctive sleeves, is worn by deacons.

The fabric, probably woven in Lyon, represents the finest French silk production of around 1735–40. Flowers and fruits tumble across a curling framework, including red pomegranate blossoms—an ancient symbol of rebirth and resurrection.



Spain

Dalmatic from the White Pontifical Vestments of Spain

1758–60

Silk, gold and silver thread

This dalmatic comes from a set of twenty vestments that arrived in Jerusalem in June 1760, a gift from King Ferdinand VI of Spain and his wife, Queen Maria Barbara of Portugal. Made for Good Friday services at the Holy Sepulcher, the vestments were originally black.

In 1885, they were sent to Spain, where the Sisters Adorers of Valencia painstakingly transferred the embroideries to white satin. One side displays scenes from Christ's Passion—here, the Crucifixion—while the other bears the royal arms of Spain.



Southern Italy (Naples or Sicily) or Spain

Antependium

c. 1675–1700

Silk, linen, gold and silver thread

An antependium decorates the front of an altar during Mass. This richly embroidered example, likely made in southern Italy as a gift from the Spanish Crown, features an exuberant display of flowers and foliage worked in gold and silver thread. The pomegranate seeds and flower centers are highlighted with French knots that give the design a three-dimensional quality.



Venice

**Chasuble and Miter from the Pontifical Vestments in
Crimson Velvet of Venice**

1669–72

Silk velvet, gold and silver thread, semiprecious stones

A complete set of seventeen vestments was sent from Venice to Jerusalem between 1669 and 1675. The Venetian Republic played a vital role in connecting Europe and the Holy Land. From the Middle Ages onward, most pilgrims embarked on their journey east from Venice's port, and the Republic supplied the Franciscans with glassware, medicines, books, and paper.



Genoa, probably Workshop of Domenico Piola (1628–1703)
Cope from the Red Pontifical Set of Vestments of Genoa
1686–97

Embroidered silk

This cope belongs to a remarkable set of thirteen vestments given by Genoa to the Custody. Their distinction lies not in costly materials—there is no gold or silver thread—but in the virtuosity of the embroidery and the quality of the design, attributed to the Genoese painter Domenico Piola and his workshop.

The central scene on the hood depicts St. George, patron saint of Genoa, slaying the dragon. The decorative bands combine the arms of Genoa and the Custody with scrolling flowers.

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Attributed to Johann Caspar Kriedemann (active 1734–59)

Sanctuary Lamp

c. 1758–59

Gold, gilt silver

In 1757, Greek Orthodox clergy attacked the Franciscan friars at the Holy Sepulcher, ransacking and smashing much of the Latin Treasure—including a gold lamp given by Emperor Charles VI. This replacement, made in Vienna, may incorporate gold salvaged from that earlier lamp.

A gift from Empress Maria Theresa in honor of her parents, Charles VI and Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, the lamp arrived in Jerusalem in May 1759. Reliefs depict the Nativity, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ.



Daniel I. Schäffler (1659–1727)

Ewer and Basin

c. 1721–25

Gilt silver

A ewer and basin set is used for ceremonial hand-washing—in this case, the washing of the Custos's hands during Mass before the consecration of the Eucharist. This set reached Jerusalem in August 1730, part of a shipment of gifts from Emperor Charles VI of the Holy Roman Empire.

Daniel Schäffler, originally from Dresden but working in Augsburg, specialized in ceremonial pieces for both church and home.



Vienna

Chalice

1737

Gilt silver, enamel, semiprecious stones

Enamel plaques on this splendid chalice depict episodes from Christ's Passion. On the base: the Flagellation, the Crowning with Thorns, and the Bearing of the Cross. On the bowl: the Agony in the Garden, the Last Supper, and the Crucifixion. Angels in relief hold instruments of the Passion—whip, crown of thorns, and spear.



Michael Gotthardt Unterhuber (1657/58–1743)

Dish

1732

Gilt silver

This large dish, one of a pair, is engraved with the imperial coat of arms surrounded by the chain of the Order of the Golden Fleece. It was a gift from Emperor Charles VI, who sent another pair in 1736. Such dishes serve no practical purpose in the liturgy—they are made purely for display on a credenza during pontifical ceremonies.



Master IK

Tray and Cruets

1740

Gold, gilt silver, precious and semiprecious stones

Cruets hold the water and wine poured into the chalice during Mass. The decoration of this magnificent set reflects its purpose: wheat and grapes—bread and wine—surround four reliefs depicting biblical scenes of water and feasting, including the Wedding at Cana and the Last Supper. The cruets themselves bear figures of the four virtues: Faith, Hope, Charity, and Meekness.

A gift this luxurious most likely came from the emperor. Its maker, who signed with the initials IK, was an important Viennese silversmith whose name remains unknown.



Naples

The Resurrection

1736

Silver

At the heart of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher stands the tomb where Christ was buried and from which, Christians believe, he rose three days later. This monumental silver relief depicts that defining moment: Jesus emerging triumphant from his tomb while Roman soldiers sleep.

Designed and made in Naples, the relief is nearly the size of a wall inside the actual tomb in Jerusalem. The anonymous sculptor may have based his design on paintings by Francesco Solimena (1657–1747), the leading Neapolitan artist of the day.



Pietro Juvarra (c. 1609–1705), Eutichio Juvarra (d. 1682), and Sebastiano Juvarra (d. 1701)

Six Candlesticks and Four Vases

c. 1673

Silver, gilt silver, gilt copper, glass, precious and semiprecious stones

These candlesticks and decorative vases, also made by the Juvarra workshop in Messina, flank the Throne of Eucharistic Exposition. Embellished with towers and lions—symbols of Castile and León—they were gifts from Charles II, who succeeded his father Philip IV in 1665.

The silver flower bouquets serve a liturgical purpose: when fresh flowers cannot be obtained, only silk or precious metal substitutes are permitted on the altar.



Pietro Juvarra (c. 1609–1705), Eutichio Juvarra (d. 1682), and Sebastiano Juvarra (d. 1701)

Throne of Eucharistic Exposition

1665

Silver, gilt silver, gilt copper, glass, precious and semiprecious stones

A Throne of Eucharistic Exposition provides a setting for displaying the Holy Sacrament in a monstrance. This richly ornamented example arrived in Jerusalem in April 1666, a gift from King Philip IV of Spain (reigned 1621–65), whose kingdom included Sicily.

Rather than coming from Spain itself, the throne was made in Messina, Sicily, by the prominent goldsmith Pietro Juvarra and his sons Eutichio and Sebastiano. The costs were paid from the Sicilian treasury.



Gennaro De Blasio (active 1724–1740)

Antependium

1731

Silver and gilt bronze

This altar frontal arrived in Jerusalem on June 8, 1731. Its central relief depicts Pentecost—the moment when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Virgin Mary and the apostles after Christ's resurrection. Flanking figures in niches represent St. Bonaventure (left) and St. Louis of Anjou (right), both Franciscan saints.

The theatrical composition, framed by Corinthian columns and rich drapery, exemplifies the finest Neapolitan silver of the period. Figures in the foreground project boldly, their draperies alternating between matte and polished surfaces, with selective gilding adding to the visual splendor.



Al San Lorenzo Giustinian Workshop

Pair of Torchères

1762

Silver and gilt silver

After the Greek Orthodox attack on the Holy Sepulcher in 1757, the Franciscans recovered what they could of the damaged Latin Treasure. More than 1,300 ounces of silver from unsalvageable objects was sent to Venice, where it was transformed into new liturgical pieces, including these torchères, which reached Jerusalem in June 1765.

Decorated with scenes from Christ's Passion and figures of the four Evangelists and three Theological Virtues, they were made by one of Venice's leading silversmith shops, identified not by the artisan's name but by its sign: "at the sign of St. Lorenzo Giustiniani," a fifteenth-century Venetian patriarch and saint.



Naples

Monstrance

1746

Gold, precious stones

Made of solid gold and set with emeralds, rubies, and diamonds, this spectacular monstrance is an extraordinary survival of Neapolitan goldsmith work. Its Eucharistic symbolism sparkles in the upper section: ears of wheat in gold and diamonds, clusters of grapes in rubies.

The inscription on the base identifies it as a gift from the Kingdom of Naples during the reign of King Charles of Bourbon (1734–59). It arrived in Jerusalem in January 1747.



Antonio de Laurentiis

Throne of Eucharistic Exposition

1754

Gold, gilt copper, glass, precious and semiprecious stones

This is the most magnificent object in the Latin Treasure—and one of the most important survivals of eighteenth-century European goldsmith work anywhere in the world. Sent from Naples to Jerusalem in October 1755, it was designed to display the gold monstrance nearby, positioned on the platform beneath the floating crown and dove of the Holy Spirit.

The throne bears the arms of King Charles of Naples and his wife, Queen Maria Amalia of Saxony. It is signed on the base by Neapolitan goldsmith Antonio de Laurentiis, usually known for much smaller works in gold-inlaid tortoiseshell and snuffboxes.



Naples

Crucifix

1756

Gold, lapis lazuli, precious and semiprecious stones

Delivered to Jerusalem in June 1757, this opulent crucifix was a gift from King Charles of Naples and “his most faithful subjects.” The base bears the arms of the Commissariat of Naples: the Jerusalem Cross above a running horse, surmounted by a royal crown. Depending on the occasion, the crucifix can be placed in the niche of the Throne of Eucharistic Exposition in place of the monstrance.



Naples

Crozier

1756

Gold, glass, precious and semiprecious stones

This glorious crozier, sent to the Holy Sepulcher in June 1757 along with the gold crucifix, is made in four sections that screw together, each encrusted with precious stones. Cherubs' heads support the central portion, which features standing figures of Saints Francis of Assisi, Januarius, Louis of Anjou, and Bonaventure.

The shepherd's crook terminates in a Jerusalem Cross set with rubies and small diamonds. In all of Neapolitan goldsmith work, no comparable crozier survives.

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