



Fig. 13.1: Isaac van Geelkerck, city plan of Christiania, 1648. National Library of Norway (Nationalbiblioteket), Oslo.

Eivor Andersen Oftestad

## Chapter 13

# Christiania 1651: A Spiritual Jerusalem

In this brief case study, Eivor Andersen Oftestad presents a description of Christiania (the name of Oslo 1624–1924), the capital of Norway, from 1651 (cf. Fig. 13.1). In this text, the spiritual significance of the Temple of Jerusalem is transferred to Christiania, and according to the author, secured by the true worship in the newly built cathedral.

## Christen Staffensen Bang's *Descriptio Civitas Christianensis* 1651

On 17 August 1624 the city of Oslo in the south-eastern coast of Norway was burning. The fire lasted for three days and was the most terrifying fire in living memory. The wooden city, which had housed about 3000 souls, was completely damaged.<sup>1</sup> Oslo had burned several times before, and another city had always been built again. This time however, King Christian IV decided – despite the citizens' protests – to move the city westwards, beneath the protective walls of Akershus Castle. The King arrived from Copenhagen and pointed out the new streets and the place of the new church – and he named the city after himself: *Christiania*. It was already founded after some weeks, on 28 September of the same year.

Some decades later, in 1651 the Danish–Norwegian pastor Christen Staffensen Bang (c.1588–1678) edited a description of the city, *Descriptio Civitas Christianensis*, as a new year's gift to the citizens.<sup>2</sup> The book was 250 pages long, and was printed in Christiania where the first printing office had been established on Bang's invitation in 1643.<sup>3</sup> The title gave a detailed description of the contents:

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**1** The city was described as a renaissance city, as several buildings had been rebuilt in the new style after a fire in 1567. Only some central buildings were preserved after the fire: the hospital, the bishop's residence, and most of the Latin school.

**2** Christen Staphensøn Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis* (Christiania: Valentin Kuhn, 1651). It was published at the author's expense, as with Bang's other publications.

**3** Tyge Nielssøn arrived as the first bookprinter in Norway in 1643. He returned to Denmark after one year because of economic disagreements with Bang. Some years later, the German Melchior Martzan, who was successfully established in Copenhagen, opened a branch in Christiania. In

*Descriptio Civitatis Christianensis, Which is: A Description of the city of Christiania, which is the capital of Norway: and about the noblest Cardinal-Virtues which the citizens of a Christian city, and all Christ-loving, both those who teach, those who fight and those who labour should seek / on the way to gaining more happiness and blessings from God.*<sup>4</sup>

The backdrop of Bang's exhortation to the citizens was the constant threat of new fires and catastrophes. How should one avoid new disasters caused by the wrath of God, and instead receive God's blessings?<sup>5</sup> The mirror Bang looked into when he gave his description and advice, was the history of the citizens of Jerusalem, the former people of God.<sup>6</sup> Bang addressed the citizens of Christiania as their successors and described Christiania as a city where Jesus himself lived with his Word – as he had lived in Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Capernaum in his flesh.<sup>7</sup> The *Descriptio Civitas Christianensis* reflects on how the Reformation was an urban event and the Protestant cities saw themselves as holy communities.<sup>8</sup> Hence, in his description, Bang does not differentiate between the community of the City and the community of the Church. Further, he construes a connection between the earthly community (*civitas terrestre*) of Christiania and the heavenly community (*civitas celeste*). In this construction, the city and history of Jerusalem play a particular role. It all starts, however, where it once began – in the Garden of Eden.

## Eden – Jerusalem – Christiania

God placed Adam and Eve in the delightful garden for them to be as a *Metropolis* and *Capital*, Bang relates.<sup>9</sup> The reason was, according to Bang, that God did not want them to be like wandering pilgrims without a home, but to reside at a specific place. After the fall, Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden. The next move was that their descendants – through the semen of Abraham – were allowed to build cities. Among the cities of the chosen people, there was Jerusalem – without

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1650, this was sold to Valentin Kuhn, who published the *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, Tarald Rasmussen, "Christen Staphensøn Bang," in *NBL* (2009).

<sup>4</sup> *Descriptio Civitatis Christianensis, ded er: Christianiæ Stads Beskrivelse, som er Hofued Stad i Norrige: Oc omb de fornembste Cardinal-Dyder, som en Christelige Stads Indwonere, sambt alle Christ-elskende, baade i Lære-, Werge- oc Nære-Stater stædse skulle beflitte sig paa, diss større Lycke oc Velsignelse hos gud ad formode.*

<sup>5</sup> On the belief of disasters as a result of God's wrath, see also the case of the 1681 fire in Trondheim, in Chapter 18 (Eystein Andersen), 344–67.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Bang, *Descriptio Civitatis Christianensis*, 44, 47–48. See also Leppin in Chapter 2, 49–53, and Andersen Oftestad on the destruction of Jerusalem in Danish sources, Chapter 12, 235–57.

<sup>7</sup> Bang, *Descriptio Civitatis Christianensis*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Heinz Schilling, "Urban Architecture and Ritual in Confessional Europe," in *Religion and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400–1600*, eds. Heinz Schilling and István György Tóth, Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 116–37.

<sup>9</sup> The following description starts in Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 5.

comparison the richest and most beautiful city, Bang assures. Because Jerusalem was the place of the Temple, it was also the place for God's fire, his fireplace. The Temple was built at King Salomon's command, demanded by God, constructed over twenty years by thousands of men. Bang describes the service at the Temple and the different feasts attended by the Jews.

In this period Jerusalem was also a city blessed by God. According to Bang this meant that the citizens lived together in peace and practiced the virtue of coexistence. It was because of this that God himself protected the city. In other words, the virtues practiced within the city walls were the defense of the people, not the city walls themselves.<sup>10</sup>

From Jerusalem and other cities in the East, Bang, in his text, moves towards the North. God did not forget the Nordic countries and the descendants of Japheth, he states,<sup>11</sup> and there existed excellent cities in Europe as well. God had privileged them with richness and outward splendour, but most importantly with the most precious treasure – his only and holy saving Word, and the true Christian faith and religion.<sup>12</sup> The fire of God, which is the Gospel, according to Lutheran understanding, was thus also given to the cities of Europe. Finally, God also chose to place his golden lampstand in our region, Bang asserts, even in Christiania. This lampstand is the preaching of his word, in which Christ is always present.

Christiania's resemblance to Jerusalem was, however, not only as a city endowed with the presence of God through his Word. Bang also describes a topographical resemblance. The new city of Christiania was built beneath the walls of Akershus castle, and Bang reminds the reader that this was just as Jerusalem was built beneath the walls of the castle of Zion.<sup>13</sup> This similarity contained a warning. As had been demonstrated when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, strong city walls with their several towers were not enough. Despite the strong material defense, Jerusalem fell when she was attacked – the city walls were no use when God in his wrath used the Romans to destroy the city.

The means to avoid the wrath of God, according to Bang, was the rightful worship and the virtue of true unity of the citizens. Hence, the core – and the most

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<sup>10</sup> Bang, *Descriptio Civitatis Christianensis*, 7–8.

<sup>11</sup> Bang, *Descriptio Civitatis Christianensis*, 6, 43. The understanding of the Danes as descendants of Noah's son Japheth, was an established belief of early modern historians, see Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historiography at the Court of Christian IV (1588–1648): Studies in the Latin Histories of Denmark by Johannes Pontanus and Johannes Meursius* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002), 100–01. While Saxo presented the Danes as an autochthonous people originating from King Dan, already late medieval authors had established the missing link between Dan and biblical persons. Skovgaard-Petersen points to how Dan's father is soon presented as a descendant of Japheth, son of Noah, as in the fifteenth-century Rhymed Chronicle (Den dansk Rimkrønike). On this, cf. also vol. 1, Chapter 20 (Kristin Aavitsland), 424–53.

<sup>12</sup> Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 29.

important place in the city – was the cathedral where the citizens could gather together and demonstrate their true Christian unanimity. The Church of the Holy Trinity had been newly raised in the city square (see Fig. 13.2).<sup>14</sup> As part of the project to move the city towards Akershus, King Christian IV – not unlike King Salomon in Jerusalem, we may add – had ordered it to be built. The most prominent citizens had taken charge of the building project, and in March 1639 the church of the Holy Trinity had been consecrated by Bishop Ludvig Munthe. The expenses came to double of the initial projection, about 40,000 *riksdaler*.

Bang described the wonderful ornamentation of the church – the newly painted altarpiece, the chandeliers, the pulpit – all paid for by renowned citizens. Next to the cathedral, a new Latin School, the Gymnasium, was built. As Bang had earlier described concerning the Temple of Jerusalem, there was also worship in the cathedral of Christiania, both in the morning and the afternoon. The boys' choir from the Gymnasium held evening and morning service with prayers, singing, and lectures. This service was the reason, Bang proclaimed, that the cathedral was a spiritual Zion, a figure and depiction of the heavenly residence and spiritual Jerusalem in the kingdom of God.<sup>15</sup>

The connection between the earthly city of Christiania and the *civitas celeste* was first and foremost a sincere and devoted worshipping. In addition to the Christian virtues, this was what demonstrated that Christiania was modeled on the heavenly city. As Bang assured, it was not enough to have built a beautiful church, one also had to use it according to true fear of God. Moreover, one should gather in the church not only on Sundays and special feasts, but should also keep devotion at other times, within the household in the homes.<sup>16</sup>

When Bang exhorted the citizens to true worship, he reminded the reader at the same time of how the same exhortation was given by the prophet Jeremiah to the Jewish people: if they kept the Sabbath, then kings and princes should enter their gates. If not – God would put the city in fire.<sup>17</sup> In other words, if the citizens of Christiania worshipped in truth, they could expect the same blessings as the citizens of Jerusalem.

The opposite scenario was to give the Lord reason – because of evil deadly sins and vices – to punish the delightful newly built city. This was what the citizens had already experienced twice according to the memory of elderly people: first through the

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<sup>14</sup> The description of the Church is found in Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 16–17.

<sup>15</sup> Because of the devotion and psalm singing, Bang declares it to be a spiritual Zion: “Oc maa fordi vel kaldis et Christeligt oc Gud velbehageligt huus / ja een aandelige Zion / oc een Figur oc Affmalning til ded himmelske Regenze oc aandelige Jerusalem som er her ofuen i Guds Rige.” Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 19.

fire in 1567 and again in 1624.<sup>18</sup> The memory of the two fires – with the destruction of Jerusalem as the mirror – should also exhort them to repent and pray to encourage God to protect the city.<sup>19</sup>

## The Continuity of the Temple

How did the history and city of Jerusalem function in establishing the connection between the community of Christiania and the heavenly community? One function was as an example and a mirror, as mentioned above. This is in line with the pedagogical example of Jerusalem, which was referred to repeatedly in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup> In the mirror Bang saw the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as a warning of an eventual destruction of Christiania in the future. The history of Jerusalem was constitutive to the storyworld within which Bang navigated.

But in Bang's *Descriptio*, the city of Jerusalem was more than a pedagogical example. Bang also refers to the logic of *translatio templi*, when he describes Christiania in continuity with Jerusalem. According to the Christian master narrative, the earthly temple in Jerusalem was the representation of the heavenly temple, and hence if Christiania was supposed in some way to represent the heavenly city, it depended on a transfer, a *translatio* of the Temple as seat of this representation.<sup>21</sup> In Bang's text, the symbol of this *translatio* is one of the main objects from the Jerusalem Temple, the lampstand.

As explained in the introduction to this volume, Martin Luther and the Protestant reformers claimed that continuity was not legitimated by relics, succession or holy matter, but by the transfer of the Gospel – from the *protogospel* in the Garden of Eden, through the promises to the Jewish people, to the Church where it had been hidden – and then rediscovered in the sixteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

In line with this Bang clearly states that it is the true worship as a response to the true Gospel – in the cathedral and among the citizens – that constitutes continuity with the Temple. But to describe the presence of God, through his Gospel, Bang refers to the golden lampstand. Through evangelical preaching, God has chosen to place his golden lampstand in our region also, Bang states, and even in Christiania:

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<sup>18</sup> Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> See Introduction (Eivor Andersen Oftestad), 12–48, and Chapter 12 (Eivor Andersen Oftestad), 235–57.

<sup>21</sup> See also Andersen Oftestad on *translatio templi* in vol. 1, Chapter 3 (Eivor Andersen Oftestad), 49–55.

<sup>22</sup> See Introduction (Eivor Andersen Oftestad), 12–48.

This is why it is necessary for us / that we highly esteem the great deed of Our Lord / that he even at our place has his golden Lampstand / which is the preaching of his holy Word / at which and in which Christ is always present. But if he moves his golden Lampstand / which is / his holy Word from us / then it will turn out badly.<sup>23</sup>

In the Protestant church the material transfer of the Temple, represented by the objects from Jerusalem, such as the golden lampstand, the Ark of the Covenant, the Torah scroll, and the staffs of Aaron and Moses, had no meaning. While they were present in several medieval legendary sources and constituted continuity in the Roman liturgy,<sup>24</sup> they are – as far as I can see – absent from the early modern Protestant sources. The physical objects disappeared from the story, and could therefore reappear as rhetorical tools.<sup>25</sup>

When we read Bang's description according to his own logic, the lampstand should be understood as a *pars pro toto*. It meant that the qualities of the Temple were transferred to Christiania, which in turn guaranteed the presence of God. The lampstand in Bang's text was merely a metaphor and nothing physical, and hence nothing exclusive pertaining to one place only.<sup>26</sup> According to Bang it symbolized the word of God preached by the servants of God, as the lampstand would shine wherever God's true Gospel was preached. As a consequence of this thought, an important motivation in Bang's text was to extend the time of grace and prevent God's removal of his candelabra by the preaching of true fear of God.<sup>27</sup>

According to Bang, the people of the true Gospel were surely the new Israel. Their joy and privileges were even greater than that of the Jews.<sup>28</sup> As long as the premises for a true Christian City were kept, and as long as the lampstand was still in Christiania, the people could burst out with the psalms along with the Jewish people: "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."<sup>29</sup>

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**23** "Derfaare er ded os fornøden / ad wi høyt æstimere saadan vor HÆRRIS store Velgierning / ad hand endocsaah hos os haffuer siin gyldene Liusestage / som er sit hellige Ords Prædicken / hos huilket oc udi huilket Christus altiid er nærværendis tilstæde. Men dersom hand flytter siin gyldene Liusestage / ded er / sit hellige Ord fra os / saa vil ded gaa os ilde i haand." Bang, *Descriptio Civitatis Christianensis*, 45.

**24** See Eivor Andersen Oftestad, *The Lateran Church in Rome and the Ark of the Covenant: Housing the Holy Relics of Jerusalem* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2019).

**25** Such objects also disappeared from the Catholic tradition. What was reckoned as the Ark of the Covenant in the Lateran church experienced a gradual slide towards oblivion in the early modern period before it was finally removed on the order of Pope Benedict XIV in 1745 and hence lost. Cf. Oftestad, *The Lateran Church in Rome*, 13–15. Regarding the lampstand in sixteenth-century Roman tradition, see also Charles L. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 201–06. Cf. Oftestad, *The Lateran Church in Rome*, 188–90.

**26** See a related discussion on the spiritual Israel in Chapter 7 (Nils Ekedahl), 119–45.

**27** Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 44–45, 48.

**28** Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 12–14, 43–45.

**29** Ps 127:1. Bang, *Descriptio civitatis Christianensis*, 47.



**Fig. 13.2:** Francois Roger de Gaignerres, *Veuve de la Ville de Christiania*, 1685. Akershus Castle is depicted to the left, and Holy Trinity Church is in the middle of the image. This imaginative print is the only extant representation of the church, which burned down the following year. Oslo Museum, Oslo.

## Spiritual or Military Defense?

A few decades after Bang’s warnings and predictions, the story had a peculiar end. Despite Bang’s efforts to secure the new city of Christiania through spiritual means, it was not enough. On 21 April 1686, yet another huge fire burst out in Christiania. It started with a lightning strike on the tower of the Church of the Holy Trinity – the bells melted and the building was in fire. The fire spread quickly and one third of the houses in the city of Christiania were destroyed. The church which Bang had described as a spiritual Zion, was damaged, but was not totally destroyed. The sources relate that it might had been possible to save it, but the commander at Akershus Castle argued that the church was in the way of the artillery range of the castle. The location of the church prevented what was viewed as the more important protection of the city – not the spiritual, but the military defense. This conclusion was the reason for the decision to raze the church to the ground. Today there remain no traces of the Church of the Holy Trinity beneath Akershus, “the castle of Zion.”