In his *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Mircea Eliade describes the archetypical need to remain in direct communion with a “center” producing the sacred:

> The rocks, springs, caves and woods venerated from the earliest historic times are still, in different forms, held as sacred by Christian communities today. (...) But what the continuity of the sacred places in fact indicates is the autonomy of hierophanies; the sacred expresses itself according to the laws of its own dialectic and this expression comes to man *from without*. If the ‘choice’ of his sacred places were left to man himself, then there could be no explanation for this continuity.¹

The autonomy of hierophanies and the continuity of the sacred in *Nature from without* are embedded in the medieval Legend of the Wood of the Cross and the transmission of knowledge about the protoplasts. How do the narrative, visual, and material aspects of this legend relate to the figure of Adam? I will present three approaches to untangle this matter: the contextualization of the Legend of the Wood of the Cross, a focus on the figure of Seth in Christian tradition, and the impact of Seth and the legend on medieval iconography.

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1 Adam, Seth and Sacred Space in the Legend of the Wood of the Cross

Sensing the approach of death, Adam sends his son, Seth, to the earthly Paradise for solace. From the Tree of Life, Seth receives three twigs. The angel Michael allows him a glimpse of Paradise. There he sees a child crying in the top of a tree that first was dry and then became green. The child weeps over the fratricide between his elder brothers Cain and Abel. He promises salvation in 5500 years. Returning home, Seth plants the twigs on the grave of his erstwhile deceased father. In a vision, Moses is asked to go and get the tree at Hebron, which he does. He makes the bitter waters of Marah sweet with the tree, and later plants it in the land of Moab where he dies. In another vision, David is also asked to pick up the tree in the land of Moab. On his way to Jerusalem he heals a leper and turns an Ethiopian into a white man by merely touching them with the tree. At home the tree roots so deeply that David has to divert the city walls. Beneath the tree there is a well. David composes his psalms beneath the tree, which becomes very large and beautiful by the time of Solomon, who fells it for the construction of the Temple. But the beam constantly changes its dimensions, refusing to fit the Temple, and instead is used to construct a bridge that spans the river Kedron. It is on this wooden bridge that the meeting between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba takes place. As the Queen crosses, she is filled with the spirit of prophecy, and foretells that the wood on which she walks will one day support the Messiah, who shall be executed by the Jews. Filled with mistrust, Solomon tosses the beam into a puddle, the *Piscina Probatica* (today near Saint Anne’s). Centuries later, the Jews find the Holy Wood floating in the pool, and from it fashion the Cross upon which Jesus is crucified.²

Thus goes the legend as it became widespread in the thirteenth century.³ The famous compilation *Legenda aurea* (c. 1260) by Jacob de Voragine includes a summary version of the story that omits the vision of Seth and the roles of

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² Hereafter follows the Finding of the True Cross. This is the feast of May 3. The story picks up again on September 14, with the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. The relic of Helen was stolen by the Persian Cosdras, but Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor, recovers it in a battle, kills Cosdras, baptizes his son and brings the relic back humbly barefoot through the Porta Aurea of Jerusalem.

³ It is beyond the scope of the present article to investigate in detail all aspects of the complex literary history of the formation of the legend. For this see W. Meyer, *Die Geschichte des Kreuzholzes vor Christus* (Abhandlungen der philos.-philol. Classe der königlich bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 16.2; 1882), A.R. Miller, “German and Dutch Versions of the Legend of the Wood of the Cross. A Descriptive and Analytical Catalogue” (Ph.D. Dissertation: