Jerusalem in Renaissance Italy

The Holy Sepulchre on the Sacro Monte of Varallo

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The iconography of St Charles Borromeo (1538–84) contains some interesting instances of the kneeling saint in the immediate vicinity of the recumbent figure of the deceased Christ. The Saviour's largely nude body, head sometimes still crowned with thorns, is placed on a catafalque or marble slab. An example is a painting executed after 1615 for the Church of Santi Carlo e Giustina in Pavia, by the Milanese artist Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574–1625), now in Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera (Fig. 9.1). The work represents St Charles, dressed as a cardinal, kneeling and looking up to an angel who is pointing at the body of Christ.¹ What is especially striking in this painting and images like it is that they suggest the real presence of the sixteenth-century Milanese archbishop at Christ's bier. By uniting the figures of Christ and St Charles in one and the same space, realistically proportioned to each other, the painters emphasize that, to the saint, the body of the dead Christ is almost tangible. It is as if, long after the biblical events of Christ's crucifixion and burial, Borromeo found a miraculous way to go back in time some one-and-a-half millennia to find the Saviour's body inside the hermetically closed tomb.

However improbable the scene may appear, these paintings reflect a specific religious experience and practice, as they are documented in the earliest written accounts of Charles Borromeo's life. In 1610, Giovanni Pietro Giussano became the first hagiographer of Borromeo, who was canonized in that same year. On several occasions, the author stresses the fact that the cardinal cherished a special devotion to Christ's Passion. According to Giussano's account and other biographical sources, in October 1584 Borromeo travelled to a pilgrim's sanctuary known as *Sacro Monte* ('Holy Mountain') near the town of Varallo Sesia in Piedmont, some one hundred kilometres northwest of the archiepiscopal see in Milan. In Varallo, St Charles visited the chapels where paintings and sculptures depicted episodes from Christ's Life and Passion, to which the chapels were dedicated. Borromeo turns out to have given special

1 For the iconography of Charles Borromeo, see e.g.: Carlo Borromeo 1997 (for the theme St Charles at the bier of Christ: pp. 248–50); Carlo e Federico 2005.

FIGURE 9.1 *Giulio Cesare Procaccini, St Charles Borromeo, the Deceased Christ and an Angel, 1615, oil on canvas, 200 × 160 cm, MILAN: PINACOTECA DI BRERA.*
 PHOTO: CENTRUM VOOR KUNSTHISTORISCHE DOCUMENTATIE, RADBOUD UNIVERSITY NIJMEGEN.

attention to the theme represented in the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre. In the legend of the Saint, this devotional exercise became closely linked with his own death, which occurred days later, on 4 November 1584, when he was back in Milan. Indeed, St Charles prayed in this chapel on the Sacro Monte ‘as if he

FIGURE 9.2 *Anonymous, Deceased Christ, 1491, wood, Varallo: Sacro Monte (Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre).* PHOTO: BRAM DE KLERCK.

saw his own end nigh',² and contemplated the death of the Saviour, whose likeness was – and still is – present in a life-sized, veristically painted figure carved in wood by an anonymous sculptor of around 1490 (Fig. 9.2).

Charles Borromeo must have been well aware of the representative power of this kind of recreation of the sacred sites. It was he who famously praised Varallo's sanctuary as *La nuova Gerusalemme* ('the New Jerusalem'), an epitheton which can still be read in the Latin inscription over the arch on the magnificent entrance gate to the site.³ The present contribution is concerned with references to the sacred sites of Jerusalem, as they became manifest in Western Europe and more specifically in Italy during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Recreations of sites in the Holy Land, in the form of Calvaries, Holy

2 '[...] come se vedesse vicino il suo fine': Giussano 1610, p. 483; for an art-historical interpretation of this episode, see: De Klerck 1999, pp. 120–21; De Klerck 2009, pp. 203–04.

3 The inscription reads: 'HAEC NOVA HYERUSALEM VITAM SVMMO [...] LABORES ATQ. REDEMPTIO-NIS OMNIA GESTA REFERT'. To be sure, the characterization 'new Jerusalem' or just 'Jerusalem' for places reminiscent of the sacred sites in the Holy Land, is hardly original and can be found in countless other instances.

Mountains, and suchlike sanctuaries, have been a subject of scholarly debate in the last few decades. Recent publications tend to treat them as isolated monuments or as belonging to regionally and chronologically limited groups. In a recent contribution, Bianca Kühnel even argues that one reason for the traditionally rather fragmented approach to these 'Holy Landscapes' is that – 'serving popular devotional practices and heavy with naturalistic detail' – they have long been considered by art historians to belong to the realm of 'low art'.⁴ However, it could also be argued that some of the monuments in question are clearly the products of artistic conceptions connected to the Renaissance humanistic tradition. The present contribution focuses primarily on the devotional function of a few fifteenth- and sixteenth-century 'copies' of the Holy Sepulchre, by juxtaposing, and at the same time relating, the coarse expressiveness of the chapel on the Sacro Monte to a highly refined Early Renaissance monument like the shrine designed by the famous Renaissance architect Leon Battista Alberti for the Cappella Rucellai in Florence.

Varallo

Founded in the last decades of the fifteenth century, the Sacro Monte of Varallo is the first sanctuary of its kind. In the course of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, many other 'Holy Mountains' were constructed, both in Italy and abroad.⁵ Each consists of a series of individual chapels, of which the interiors are decorated with frescoes and sculptures. In the case of Varallo they depict episodes like the Nativity, the Adoration of the Shepherds, the Arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem (Fig. 9.3), *Ecce Homo*, and the Crucifixion.⁶ The last chapel in the sequence of the narrative – which was in fact one of the first to be constructed on the Sacro Monte – is the one dedicated to the Sepulchre.

Over time, the decorations in the chapels of Varallo were executed by anonymous craftsmen and by documented local artists such as the painter and sculptor Gaudenzio Ferrari (1475/80–1546) from nearby Valduggia, and the painter Tanzio da Varallo (1575/80–1632/33). Foreign artists also worked on the

4 Kühnel 2012, p. 244.

5 For the intriguing phenomenon of *sacri monti*, in Italy, elsewhere in Europe as well as in the Americas, see: e.g. Kubler 1990; Barbero 2001; Zanzi and Zanzi 2002; De Klerck 2009. For a more personal discussion of the nine sanctuaries in Lombardy and Piedmont that, as a group, have been introduced to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2003, see: Nieuwenhuis 2006.

6 The chapels in other *sacri monti* sometimes depict different themes: for instance, in Varese (Lombardy) it is the life of the Virgin; in Orta (Piedmont) the life of St Francis.

FIGURE 9.3 Gaudenzio Ferrari, *The Arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem* (detail), fresco, stucco, 1520–28, Varallo: *Sacro Monte* (*Chapel of the Magi*). PHOTO: BRAM DE KLERCK.

Sacro Monte, for example sculptor Jean de Wespín, called ‘Il Tabacchetti’ (ca. 1567–1615) from Dinant in far-away Wallonia. The decorations consist of frescoes on the walls and vaults of the chapels, combined with life-sized sculptures of human figures carved in wood or modelled in terracotta or stucco, painted in vivid colours or sometimes even sporting real clothes, hats and other attributes, and with real hair on skulls and cheeks. These fascinating ensembles convey the impression of show-boxes or *tableaux vivants* inviting the devout beholder to join and participate. The Sacro Monte offered the possibility of completing a pilgrimage without having to set out on the long and hazardous journey to the Holy Land. This is exactly what must have been the intention of the founder of the sanctuary, Bernardino Caimi, a later beatified Franciscan of the rigorous Observant branch of the Order, who himself had been in Palestine and visited the sacred sites.⁷ After he died in, or shortly after, 1499, Observant Franciscans were to remain administrators of the sanctuary.

7 In publications on the Sacro Monte, Caimi is often defined as an administrator of the sacred sites, or guardian of the Holy Sepulchre. In reality he was more of a diplomat and trouble shooter who was often sent by his Order and religious authorities to solve prob-

Initially, the general layout and the location of the chapels on the Holy Mountain of Varallo, loosely and on a much smaller scale, followed the topographical disposition of Jerusalem. A comparable design characterizes a second Sacro Monte, constructed slightly later than Varallo, this time not in the Alpine regions of Piedmont and Lombardy where all subsequent Holy Mountains on the Apennine peninsula are to be found, but in Tuscany. Shortly after 1500 the Sacro Monte of San Vivaldo was founded near the town of Montaione in Valdelsa. The arrangement of the chapels, and to some extent even the shape of the mountain itself, as well as the hills and valleys surrounding it, call to mind the map of the city of Jerusalem. The plan of the Tuscan sanctuary more or less reflects the location of, for example, the Valley of Jehoshaphat and the Mount of Olives, the places where Calvary and the Sepulchre were believed to have been in Jerusalem, as well as the geographical features in and around that city.⁸ The suggestion of commensurable topographical characteristics and (proportioned) distances has always been important in these and similar sanctuaries. Even after the original topological layout of the chapels on the Sacro Monte of Varallo had been changed into one with a more chronologically ordered sequence in the 1560s, a local seventeenth-century cleric not only defined the site, rather commonplace for that matter, 'our own Jerusalem', but also stressed that in his view the nearby rivers Mastallone and Sesia, as well as Lake Orta, mirrored the waters in the Holy Land:

the neighbourhood is the exact counterpart of that which is in the Holy Land, having the Mastallone on the one side for the brook Kedron, and the Sesia for the Jordan, and the lake of Orta for that of Caesarea.⁹

The earliest chapels in Varallo were built according to local traditions of vernacular architecture. Later in the sixteenth century, from 1565 to 1568, a drastic renovation and reorganization of the site and the chapels was carried out after

lems and settle discord. In 1478 he was in the Holy Land to temporarily substitute the guardian of Mount Zion who had died the previous year, and to arrange elections for a successor. Possibly he made a second journey eastward, with the same mission as the first, somewhere between 1487–1490. Morisi 1973.

8 Vannini 1989; Siew 2008, especially pp. 40–44.

9 In the words of the nineteenth-century English novelist, Samuel Butler (1835–1902), quoting one canon Torrotti in 1686; Butler 1888, p. 26. Apparently, the canon was not very aware of the topography of the Holy Land. Caesarea is a town on the Mediterranean in the north of Israel, i.e. more than a hundred kilometres northwest of Jerusalem, whereas Lake Orta is situated some twenty kilometres *east* of Varallo.

designs by the architect Galeazzo Alessi (1512–72).¹⁰ Many chapels were redesigned or newly constructed in Alessi's elegant and varied late Renaissance classicist style. As a result, the exteriors of neither the early nor the later chapels contain direct references to the forms of the sites in the Holy Land – even insofar as they were known at the time. However, architectural elements and parts of the interiors of several chapels evidently do aim at imitating aspects of the (real or imagined) original edifices. The chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, which was constructed in 1491 and provided with the wooden statue of the deceased Christ mentioned earlier, is a case in point.

Relics and Recreations

Apparently, as becomes clear from Charles Borromeo's demeanour during his pilgrimage to the Sacro Monte, but also from the great popularity the sanctuary enjoyed, attracting devout by the hundreds, even thousands, from as far away as Switzerland,¹¹ the chapels in Varallo served as satisfying substitutes for the places in the Holy Land. This, to be sure, was nothing new. In medieval and early modern Europe, biblical sites have been recreated time and again, and in a great variety of forms and a multitude of appearances. One especially intriguing instance is the house where the Virgin Mary lived. Popular belief has it that the so-called 'Holy House', towards the end of the thirteenth century, had been transported in clouds from Nazareth to Dalmatia. A few years later, angels were to once again carry it airborne to Loreto, a town located some thirty kilometres south of Ancona on the Adriatic coast of Italy where the house is still venerated in a shrine. The Basilica della Santa Casa was erected around it during the sixteenth century. In reality, remains of a house at the time believed to have been the Virgin's dwelling place were shipped to Italy by crusaders in the thirteenth century. Many similar chapels, more or less following the shape and/ or measurements of the Holy House of Loreto have followed, everywhere in Europe.¹²

Loreto's *sancta casa* is a special case, if only because of its size. In a way, however, it is just one of the many secondary relics of the Virgin Mary. These

¹⁰ Alessi's drawings have been published in Brizio and Stefani Perrone 1974.

¹¹ Samuel Butler quotes the already mentioned canon Torrotti who, in 1686 had written about visitors from Piedmont and Milan, adding that 'From elsewhere processions arrive daily, even from Switzerland, and there are sometimes as many as ten thousand visitors extraordinary come here in a single day ...'. Butler 1888, pp. 25–26.

¹² For the Holy House of Loreto, see e.g.: Sacello Santa Casa 1991.

types of objects, big and small, are scattered all over the Christian world, often provided with certificates or inscriptions to testify to their authenticity. Pieces of rock and other material scraped or cut from sacred sites were brought back home by pilgrims, but also less direct remains like oil from the lamps above the Holy Sepulchre. To return to Varallo, an interesting example can be found right next to the entrance of the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre. Here, a piece of stone only a few inches high has been walled up in a niche closed by a wrought iron lattice (Fig. 9.4). A Latin epitaph underneath explains that the object is part of the 'stone of the Holy Sepulchre of our Lord Jesus Christ which is in Jerusalem'.¹³

Apart from this relic, apparently taken from the Sepulchre, it is clear that sanctuaries like the one at Varallo are not particularly concerned with actual, physical remains of the sites in the Holy Land. Rather, they present the visitor with imitations that not only refer to the originals but must even have taken their place in the imagination and religious experience of the visitors to the sanctuary. For instance, just a few steps away from the small reliquary just mentioned, far more eye-catching is a slab of stone of a man's height, exposed in a niche (Fig. 9.5). It is provided with a marble epitaph with an inscription in Italian revealing that 'this stone in every respect *resembles* [my italics] the one with which the sepulchre of our lord Jesus Christ was covered in Jerusalem'. There turns out to be something miraculous to the object as well, because the text goes on to explain that the stone has not been man made, but rather 'found when digging the first foundations of this sacred place',¹⁴ suggesting that the site was in a way predestined.

Of a more deliberate nature are the efforts to refer to the holy places in certain details or in the architectural design of parts of several chapels on the Sacro Monte. The chapel of the Nativity, for instance, has a concave space made out of rough stonework which reflects the form of the niche above the altar in the Grotto in Bethlehem where Christ was believed to have been born. Beneath the altar in Varallo there is also a copy after the fourteen-point silver star which in Bethlehem marks the exact spot of the Nativity. And the entrance to the chapel in Varallo has its portal and half-circular steps copied after those which in Bethlehem lead from the Church of the Nativity to the subterranean cave (Fig. 9.6). The burial chamber which is part of the Sepulchre chapel in Varallo

13 'Lapis sancti Sepulcri Domini nostri Iesv Christi quod Yierosolimis est inde translatus et erectvs Hic in Titvlm'. For the veneration of stone from the Holy Sepulchre as relics, see: Ousterhout 2003.

14 'QUESTA PIETRA È IN TUTTO SIMILE A QUELLA CON LA QUALE FU COPERTO IL SEPOLCRO DEL NOSTRO SIGNOR GESÙ CHRISTO IN GERUSALEMME TROVATA NELLO SCAVARE I PRIMI FONDAMENTI DI QUESTO SACRO LUOGO'.

FIGURE 9.4 *Varallo, Sacro Monte, reliquary with a piece of rock from the Holy Sepulchre, ca. 1490. PHOTO: BRAM DE KLERCK.*

FIGURE 9.5 *Varallo, Sacro Monte, replica of the stone covering Christ's tomb, ca. 1490. PHOTO: BRAM DE KLERCK.*

FIGURE 9.6 *Varallo, Sacro Monte, entrance to the Chapel of the Nativity, 1514. PHOTO: BRAM DE KLERCK.*

has been designed to resemble the Tomb of Christ in Jerusalem. To emphasize this, an inscription over its entrance reads: *SIMILE E IL S[AN]TO SEPVLCHRO DE Y[ESV] XR[IST]O* ('Similar [to this] is the Holy Sepulchre of Jesus Christ'; Fig. 9.7).

'Reproductions' of the Holy Sepulchre

Buildings referring in one way or another to the Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the so-called 'Anastasis Rotunda' (literally 'Rotunda of the Resurrection') in which it is enclosed, were constructed in Western Europe from at least as early as the fifth century onward. In the Middle Ages a great variety of edifices were considered imitations or variants of the Holy Grave. Quite a few churches, free-standing chapels, or chapels within churches were dedicated to and/ or named

FIGURE 9.7 Varallo, *Sacro Monte*, Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, entrance to the burial chamber, 1491. PHOTO: BRAM DE KLERCK.

after the Holy Sepulchre. Sometimes written sources attest to the intention to construct those edifices as copies of the church in Jerusalem. As a rule however, in outward appearance such buildings are not even close to faithful ‘copies’ as we would nowadays understand the concept.¹⁵ Often they are characterized only by a selection of rather vague or merely symbolical references to the original. Elements in a surprising variety of degrees of obviousness and probability, turn out to have been chosen as distinguishing for the Rotunda and the Holy Sepulchre.¹⁶

15 A pioneering study on the practice of ‘copying’ buildings in the Middle Ages is Krautheimer 1942, especially section 1, ‘Copies in Mediaeval Architecture’, pp. 2–20 (see also the German translation in Krautheimer 1988, Ch. VI, with updating postscripts by the author, pp. 190–97). In later years, Krautheimer’s views have met with criticism, especially concerning the use of the concept of ‘copy’, and the lack of documentary evidence to ascertain the intentions of architects and patrons (see Schenkluhn 1999, Carver McCurrach 2011). Krautheimer’s analysis of the relations in form and meaning between different medieval religious buildings, however, remains a useful point of departure for the aspects of architectural imitation which concern us here.

16 For the reception in Western Europe of the Rotunda in Jerusalem: Krautheimer 1942, and more recently e.g. Krüger 2000, pp. 188–93. For the many variants of the Holy Sepulchre in Europe: e.g. Rüdiger 2003; Morris 2005.

What this last edifice looked like at any given date, is very hard to reconstruct. To begin with, very little has remained of the rock-cut tomb that some three hundred years after Christ's death on the cross was identified as the one where he was buried.¹⁷ The so-called 'Aedicule', which now stands in the monumental Rotunda on the spot of that tomb, is a much later construction built in 1809–1810 after its predecessor had been destroyed by fire. By then, moreover, it had already lived through centuries of destruction and rebuilding. In 325–326 a tomb believed to be Christ's burial place was discovered, and after that the Roman Emperor Constantine was responsible for the construction of a huge church as well as the first Aedicule on the spot of Christ's entombment and resurrection. After most of the complex had been destroyed in 1009 by orders of the Egyptian Caliph al-Hakim, it was reconstructed later in the eleventh century. Yet another reconstruction of the Aedicule was carried out in 1555 by the Franciscan Boniface of Ragusa, *custos* of the Holy Land. It was this edifice that was to perish in the 1808 fire. The various appearances of the Aedicule have in common a ground plan divided into two spaces: the so-called 'Chapel of the Angel', leading to the burial chamber itself.

In the Christian world many chapels and other edifices, sometimes containing relics taken from Jerusalem, were considered imitations of the Aedicule from at least the ninth century on. Often they played a part in Easter ceremonies celebrating Christ's Death and Resurrection.¹⁸ In Italy, a few interesting instances exist. In 1003, for the presbytery of the Benedictine abbey church of Fruttuaria, some twenty kilometres northwest of Turin, the monk-architect Guilielmo da Volpiano (known in English as St William of Dijon) designed an edifice documented as the 'Sepulchre'. Excavations have revealed that this was a freestanding chapel on a circular ground plan. Something similar can be found in the old town of Aquileia in the Northern Italian region of Friuli, where, in the years around the middle of the eleventh century, a 'Holy Sepulchre' was built. This edifice also has a circular plan, and a tapered roof reminiscent of what the earliest Constantinian Aedicule in Jerusalem might have looked like; but it also has twelve columns which probably refer to those of the Rotunda surrounding it. A comparable combination of elements charac-

17 For the building stages of the Holy Sepulchre and the church surrounding it, see: Krüger 2000, pp. 34–167; for an overview of the history and various forms of the Aedicule, see: Bridle 1999.

18 Kroesen 2000; Morris 2005 (with previous bibliography). Towards the end of the Middle Ages, these chapels lose their independent architectural form and become incorporated in churches as lateral chapels or parts of towers. Kroesen 2000, p. 45, traces this development in Late Gothic Northern France; Schmiddunser 2008, pp. 21–22, mentions even earlier examples of Holy Sepulchre chapels under church towers, in eleventh-century Spain.

terizes the Aedicule which is part of Santo Stefano in Bologna: a complex of no less than seven churches and chapels, known as 'Jerusalem' at least since 887. One of these edifices is the centralized, octagonal church of San Sepolcro which was doubtlessly intended to refer to the Rotunda in Jerusalem. Inside this building an imaginative construction built after 1141, perhaps based on an even earlier one, shows a remarkable combination of an edifice reminiscent of the Aedicule and, with a cross on top, elements of Calvary.¹⁹ In Germany, and of a somewhat later date, there is the copy of the Aedicule in Eichstätt in Bavaria, built originally around 1160, and rebuilt in the seventeenth century in its present location in the Capuchin convent of the town. The centralized structure with slightly projecting, blind arches on the exterior evokes aspects of the Aedicule in Jerusalem.²⁰

A change occurred during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when patrons in Germany and Italy seem to have asked for more visual and archaeological accuracy. The Aedicule in a lateral chapel of the Church of St Anne in Augsburg, built in 1507–08, is a more or less half-size reconstruction of the Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Probably due to the limited space in the chapel of St Anne, the interior of this variant lacks the Chapel of the Angel. In Italy, the already mentioned Sacro Monte of San Vivaldo in Tuscany boasts a freestanding imitation of the Aedicule (dated to before 1516, perhaps as early as 1509), complete with a Chapel of the Angel. Here, the burial chamber itself is placed within a centralized structure with blind arches on half-columns at the exterior. Inside, in a rectangular space covered with a bohemian vault, a terracotta statue of Christ lies in a sarcophagus.²¹

Already four or five decades earlier and in an entirely different, Renaissance-humanist context a highly interesting Aedicule had been built in the so-called Cappella Rucellai in Florence. Today, this chapel remains the only consecrated part of the former church of San Pancrazio, originally a medieval structure which is now a museum dedicated to the twentieth-century Tuscan sculptor Marino Marini. Together with the completion of the façade of the nearby church of Santa Maria Novella (completed in 1470), the renovation of Palazzo Rucellai (ca. 1460), and the construction of the Loggia Rucellai (ca. 1466), the chapel is the result of the collaboration of the architect, Leon Battista Alberti

19 Morris 2005, pp. 158–59 (Fruttuaria), pp. 159–61 (Aquileia), p.124 (Bologna). For a monographic study of the complex of Santo Stefano at Bologna, see also Ousterhout 1981.

20 Briddle 1999, p. 31.

21 Briddle 1999, p. 31 (Augsburg), pp. 31–34 (San Vivaldo). For San Vivaldo, see e.g.: Gerusalemme San Vivaldo 2006.

FIGURE 9.8 *Leon Battista Alberti, Tomb Aedicule, finished 1467, Florence: Rucellai Chapel.*
PHOTO: CENTRUM VOOR KUNSTHISTORISCHE
DOCUMENTATIE, RADBOUD UNIVERSITY
NIJMEGEN.

(1404–72) and his patron, Giovanni di Paolo Rucellai (1403–81). This wealthy Florentine merchant commissioned it to be his own burial place.

The design of the chapel has been universally attributed to Alberti ever since Vasari in the 1550 edition of his *Vite* connected the learned architect's name with the project (Fig. 9.8).²² The interior of the barrel-vaulted space, which was originally open toward the church, is a wonderful example of Alberti's refined architectural design. The so-called *Tempietto del Santo Sepolcro* is centrally placed, a construction on a rectangular ground plan with a semi-circular apse. The elegant 'small temple' is adorned with fluted Corinthian pi-

22 The first to discuss the chapel monographically is Heydenreich 1961. For more recent discussions of the monument, see, e.g.: Borsi 1977, p. 105–12; Tavernor 1994, pp. 371–74; Paciani 2006; Naujokat 2008, Belluzzi 2009, and the monograph published on the occasion of the recent extensive restoration: Naujokat 2011.

lasters supporting an entablature with an inscribed frieze, above which a band of ornamental merlons in the shape of stylized lilies is placed. The walls are covered with slabs of white marble, decorated with small circular incrustations and framework in green. The only opening to the interior of the edifice is the low entrance at the front. A Latin inscription above it gives the date of 1467 in Roman numerals, and identifies the patron Giovanni Rucellai, who is explicitly said to have wanted the chapel to be like the tomb in Jerusalem (... *ad instar Iherosolimitani sepulchri*).²³

Alberti's *tempietto*, which on the inside lacks a Chapel of the Angel, has often been called a rather free variant of the shrine in Jerusalem as it looked at the time. Giovanni Rucellai is known to have sent an agent to Jerusalem to study and take measurements of the Sepulchre. In a letter to his mother the merchant writes that he had sent 'a technician and assistants' to the Holy Land, to bring him 'the right design and measurements of the Holy Sepulchre', because it was his intention to 'have built one similar to it [*a quella simiglianza*] here in our chapel which at the moment I am having constructed in the Church of San Pancrazio'.²⁴ We know of at least one other instance in which a patron sent an agent to the Holy Land to gather information on works of architecture. To be able to erect a church *ad similitudinem s. Iherosolimitane ecclesie* ('similar to the church in Jerusalem'), the eleventh-century Bishop Meinwerk of Paderborn sent Abbot Wino of Helmershausen to Jerusalem to study the Rotunda and bring back *mensuras eiusdem ecclesie et s. sepulgri* ('the measurements of that church and of the Holy Sepulchre').²⁵ Still, the church built in Paderborn – supposedly on the basis of Abbot Wino's information – and consecrated in

23 'IOHANNES RUCELLARIUS PAVLI F VTINDESALVTEM SVAM PRECARETVR VNDE OMNIVM CVM CHRISTO FACTA EXT RESVRECTIO SACELLVM HOC AD I[N]STAR IHEROSOLIMITANI SEPVLCHRI FACIVNDVM CVRAVIT MCCCCLXVII'. For more on this and the other inscriptions, see: Sperling 1989.

24 '[...] vi do avviso come ieri finii di fare la spedizione in Terra santa, avendo colà inviati due legni a tutte mie spese con ingegnere et uomini, acciò mi piglino il giusto disegno e misura del Santo Seplocro di Nostro Signore Giesù Cristo, e che colla maggior celerità gli sarà possibile in qua ritornino e me le portino, perchè io possa adempire al mio desiderio con farne edificare uno a quella simiglianza qui nella nostra cappella, che nuovamente fo fabbricare nella chiesa di S. Pancrazio nostra cura, quale come voi sapete è a buon porto, non mancandovi altro per renderla perfetta che il modello di così ricco e prezioso tesoro. Ve ne ho voluto dare questo avviso, sapendo quanta sia in voi, come pure regna in me, la devozione verso quei santi luoghi'. The undated letter (kept in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale) has come down to us in an eighteenth-century copy only, see Giovanni Rucellai 1960–61, vol. 1, p. 136, 181 n. 1.

25 Krautheimer 1942, p. 4.

1036, is one of those examples of reproductions in medieval architecture in which accuracy remains limited to a selection of essential features – in this particular case merely a centralized ground plan referring to the Rotunda.²⁶

More than four centuries later, Giovanni Rucellai had something else in mind. As for the degree of accuracy of the information his delegates gathered in the Holy Land, we grope in the dark, and it has been suggested that in fact Alberti, rather than looking to Jerusalem, looked to Early Christian buildings in Florence and Rome for inspiration.²⁷ But still, the *tempietto* in San Pancrazio shows unmistakable allusions to characteristics of the Jerusalem Aedicule. For instance, the basic form has the rectangular ground plan and apsidal niche of the original, and the articulation of the exterior of the prototype, with blind arches on half columns is reflected in Alberti's pilasters supporting an entablature on the side walls. The low entrance echoes the one of the burial chamber in Jerusalem, just as the circular lantern-like aedicule on top is similar to the structure on the roof of the fifteenth-century 'original'. Although the monument in Florence is much smaller, its proportions follow those of the shrine in Jerusalem. Thus, Alberti's design turns out to be a stylized, harmoniously classical adaptation of the original. In his 1961 study of the monument, Ludwig Heydenreich suggests that this way of treating architectural essentials and proportions should not so much be considered a Renaissance variant of the medieval practice of the imitation of architecture. Rather it seems that Alberti did not in the first place set out to present a faithful rendering of the edifice as it looked like around the middle of the fifteenth century. His is an 'ideal', Renaissance image of the original as it was imagined to have been in Early Christian, i.e. Late Antique, times.²⁸ It is no coincidence that he chooses the green and white marble incrustation referring to a Tuscan tradition in architecture, of which some instances, like the Florentine Baptistry, were believed to be of Antique origin.

26 The original church was located in what is now the Busdorf convent in Paderborn. Excavations have made clear that it was an octagonal structure on a circular base, provided with four protruding rectangular chapels. It lacked supports to divide the interior: Krautheimer 1942, p. 4, Fig. 1b.

27 Borsi 1977, p. 106, mentions a few churches which themselves have been based on aspects of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, such as Santa Costanza and Santo Stefano Rotondo in Rome. The green and white marble incrustation refers to 'proto-Renaissance' architecture in Tuscany like San Miniato al Monte and the Baptistry of Florence.

28 Heydenreich 1961, pp. 222–25. See also: Paciani 2006, esp. pp. 372–73.

'Realism' on the Sacro Monte

The Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre on the Sacro Monte of Varallo is fully integrated in a larger architectural complex. It does not have an articulate, separate exterior, let alone one that refers to the Jerusalem Aedicule. The chapel's interior, however, reflects the Aedicule's two rooms: the 'Chapel of the Angel' on a semicircular ground plan, and a barrel-vaulted burial chamber on a rectangular one. However much Alberti's idealizing, humanist convictions differ from the high-pitched emotionalism expressed by the Sacro Monte decorations, the basic idea in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was, in a way, comparable. For both monuments aim at bringing the sacred closer to the individual devout by means of a 'realistic' reproduction. Obviously, there is the formal difference, connected to an original function and the original public, between realism in the Renaissance sense of a rather detached, idealizing reconstruction on the one hand, and a less sophisticated but at the same time much more tangible reproduction on the other. Apparently, however, both Alberti in Florence and the Franciscans in Varallo valued a recreation of Christ's tomb as it was believed to have looked in the early days of Christianity – be it in an idealized archaeological sense in San Pancrazio, or be it on the Sacro Monte, by including the protagonist, or protagonists, of the biblical event. For here, not only is the figure of Christ present in the form of a very lifelike sculpture, but there is also a statue of Mary Magdalene kneeling in a niche in the Chapel of the Angel.

The presence of the Magdalene brings to mind Easter plays in which many a re-creation of the Holy Sepulchre played a part during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period.²⁹ Frequently, the emptiness of the tomb received specific attention in these plays, as it indicated Christ's triumph over mortality. This aspect is emphasized also in Giovanni Rucellai's chapel: the prominent inscription on the frieze literally quotes St Mark from the Vulgate: *YHESVM QVERITIS NAZARENEM CRVCIFIXVM SURREXIT NON EST HIC ECCE LOCVS VBI POSVERVNT EVM* ('ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him': Mark 16: 6). According to the Evangelist, it was with these words that an angel greeted the Three Marys who had come to the grave to anoint Christ's body which was not there anymore.

Indeed, like in many reproductions of the Holy Sepulchre, the catafalque inside Rucellai's Aedicule is empty. At Varallo, however, Christ's body has been

29 Interestingly, at Varallo, the Magdalene is depicted as she came to Christ's grave on Easter Morning, as yet unaware of the resurrection of the Saviour. For this play with dramatic irony, see: Hood 1979, esp. p. 301.

made present: he is not only visible but also physically tangible, inviting the pilgrim to contemplate the death of the Saviour.³⁰ Life-sized sculptures of the deceased Christ had become increasingly popular in Europe since, amongst others, thirteenth-century Franciscans in Italy and the Modern Devotion Movement in Northern Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries began to make a point of a more emotional, personalized religious experience.³¹ In fifteenth-century Italy, Emilian artists such as Guido Mazzoni from Modena (1450–1518), and the Bolognese Niccolò dell'Arca (ca. 1435–94) made highly expressive terracotta groups of the Lamentation. Fifteenth-century Piedmont also saw an increase in production of life size wooden statues of the deceased Christ.³²

The presence of such an image in the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre in Varallo, confronts the devout beholder in a direct and emphatic way with the essence of the human suffering of the Saviour. It was exactly this aspect that was central to the pilgrimage to the Sacro Monte of Varallo, as we know from two sixteenth-century guide books to the sanctuary. They reflect a type of devotion in which imagination, emotional participation and identification are essential factors. One of those guides is a 22 page booklet entitled *Questi sono li Misteri che sono sopra el Monte de Varalle*, published in Milan by Gottardo da Ponte in 1514.³³ In rhyming verse, it offers a description of the chapels of the Sacro Monte and the episodes depicted in them. The verses narrating Christ's sepulchre are exemplary for the way in which the text directs the pilgrim in what he should see, think and feel, emphasizing the similarity of the chapel to the Holy Sepulchre:

Quivi contempla o anima devota
 El to signor qua morto riposato
 Quivi di pianto ognun si se percota
 Sol ammirar il loco asomigliato

30 The glass case, in which the wooden sculpture is placed, is a later addition.

31 See e.g.: Schmiddunser 2008, esp. pp. 37–70.

32 For this kind of sculpture in Emilia, see e.g.: Verdon 1978; *Emozioni in terracotta* 2009. For Piedmont and Lombardy, see e.g.: *Tra Gotico e Rinascimento* 2001, pp. 86–87, 112–13; *Legni sacri e preziosi* 2005, pp. 92–93. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, images of the deceased Christ became especially popular in France and Spain; see: Martin 1997; Schmiddunser 2008, which is concerned mostly with Spanish *yacentes* and the sculptor Gregorio Fernández (1575–1636).

33 For a facsimile and discussion of the guide, see: Stefani Perrone 1987. A second guide, Francesco Sesalli's *Descrittione del Sacro Monte in Varallo in Valsesia*, was published in Novara in 1566. See: Hood 1984, pp. 299–302.

El luoco scuro tali si pernota
 Simil sepulcro marmore intagliato
 Dalata a christo doi Angeli stano
 Lun la corona e laltro i giodi in mano.³⁴

[There, o devout soul, you contemplate
 your Lord who has been deposed here,
 there each chastises himself with grief
 upon merely seeing the place which resembles
 the place where He passed the night,
 like the sepulchre cut in marble.
 At Christ's side there are two angels,
 one holding the crown, the other the nails.]

This way of immersing the devout, both mentally and physically, in sacred stories and places is typical of devotional practices as they emerged during the first decades of the sixteenth century in Northern Italy in the context of the Catholic Reformation. Later in the century, Charles Borromeo was an exponent *par excellence* of this movement which in the meantime had evolved into the Counter-Reformation. This devotional background was exactly the reason that St Charles appreciated Varallo's Sacro Monte so highly, and why, in later paintings, he came to be depicted as being present in Christ's tomb, mourning for his deceased Redeemer. As if he himself were there, inside the Holy Sepulchre, in Jerusalem.

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34 Stefani Perrone 1987, pp. 31–32.

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