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Writing on the Burial of Christ in the Twelfth Century: An Absent Presence in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem

Preamble

Before turning to Jerusalem, let us start with a diversion to Assisi. In the *Vita* of Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226), his biographer Thomas of Celano writes:

> Wherever he [Francis] found any writing, divine or human, whether by the way, in a house, or on the floor, he picked it up most reverently and placed it in some sacred or decent place, in case the name of the Lord or anything pertaining thereto should have been written on it. And one day, when one of the brethren asked him why he so diligently picked up even writings of pagans, and writings in which the name of the Lord was not traced, he gave this answer, "My son, it is because the letters are there whereof the most glorious name of the Lord God is composed. The good, therefore, that is in the writing belongs not to the pagans nor to any men, but to God alone, of whom is all good." And, what is not less to be wondered at, when he caused any letters of greeting or admonition to be written, he would not suffer a single letter or syllable to be cancelled, even though (as often happened) it were superfluous or misplaced.[1]

Even though its extremism seems to surprise his brothers, Saint Francis's attitude is not unique. It runs throughout the Middle Ages. Isidore of Seville already testified to this in the sixth and seventh centuries with his attention to all aspects of writing, as a convinced etymologist showing his respect for the written word as a mysterious sign of truth, but also as an exegete showing that every graphic sign is material support for the revelation recorded in scripture.[2] This medieval thought is very well explained by Vincent Debiais in the first chapter of *La croisée des signes*, showing that the graphic

1 *Saint François d'Assise: documents; écrits et premières biographies*, ed. by Desbonnets/Vorreux, 262f. (1Cel 82). Thomas of Celano wrote this first *Vita* of the saint at the request of Pope Gregory IX in time for his canonisation in 1228. This passage also recalls Francis's insistence on the letter of the Gospel, in the sense of following it literally. There are also many reminders to the friars to follow the rule to the letter and without gloss. Finally, this quotation should be seen in the context of the whole of Chapter 29, entitled "Francis's love for all creatures because of the Creator." For comparisons between Assisi and Jerusalem, see Moore 2017, 124–129.

2 Fontaine 1959, 57, 60.

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dimension of revelation was omnipresent in manifestations of divinity, in the modalities of its action on men and in the definition of its being. It is by keeping in mind this 'God-Logos' (according to Genesis and the first verse of the Gospel of St. John) and 'God-Littera' (following the revelation at Sinai and the vision of the apocalypse) that we can understand visual representation in the Middle Ages and the abilities of writing and images to become signs of the truth.[3]

1 Introduction

This Franciscan excursus allows us to enter fully into the theme of the iconic, even sacramental, presence of writing in liturgical spaces in the Middle Ages. The three concepts involved are not new and have already been addressed: presence,[4] iconicity[5] and sacramentality.[6] The originality of this contribution lies in their intersection and articulation with a focus on places where rituals take place and on their activation during the performance of the liturgy.[7] To deal with this, I have chosen the holiest place in the Christian world, the tomb of Christ in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. This choice is, however, paradoxical at three levels:

1) This place is one of absence since the tomb is empty. This absence is the foundation of the Christian mystery, a tension between incarnation and resurrection. The notion of an "absent presence" or a "presence of absence" of God revealed by the sacraments constitutes one of the fundamental points in Christian sacramental theology.[8]
2) The central aedicule that we see today below the dome of the rotunda, which enclosed the tomb, was rebuilt in 1809–1810 after a great fire,[9] so we cannot observe the iconic aspect of the inscriptions.

Nevertheless, fifteenth and sixteenth century paintings and drawings give an idea of the previous aedicule. Moreover, the inscriptions were carefully transcribed by pilgrims over the centuries. This study will focus on accounts by two German pilgrims from the twelfth century: John, a cleric of the church of Würzburg, who visited the

3 Debiais 2017.
4 To cite just a few works, a volume devoted to the limited presence of writing in pre-typographic societies, Frese/Keil/Krüger 2014, inspired by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (in particular Gumbrecht 2004) and Parret 2006.
5 On the iconicity of the writing, see Christin 1995; Eastmond 2015 and Bedos-Rezak/Hamburger 2016.
6 Debiais 2017.
7 On the liturgy and the activation of the senses, see Palazzo 2014.
8 Chauvet 2008.
9 On the history of the Holy Sepulchre, see Corbo 1981; Biddle 1999; Griffith-Jones/Fernie 2018. On the recent restoration works, Osman/Moropoulou 2019.

Fig. 1: The present aedicule in the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Holy land c. 1160; and Theodoric, who did so in 1169. They both wrote a *Libellus de Locis Sanctis*, important accounts of the architectural and political history of Jerusalem between the Second and Third Crusades.[10]

10 I use the 1994 edition by Huygens.

3) Finally, it is also a paradox because as is explained in the first couplet of the consecration inscription in the Holy Sepulchre of 1149:

Est locus iste sacer, sacratus sanguine Christi / Per nostrum sacrare sacro nichil addim(us) isti.

(This place is holy, consecrated by the blood of Christ. By our consecration we add nothing to this sanctuary.)[11]

The polyptoton on *sacer*, that is to say wordplay on the same root *(sacer, sacratus, sacrare, sacro)*, emphasises the holiness of the place. Then what do the inscriptions do? In what way do these texts participate in this sacredness? What are the multi-level modalities (visual, material, sensorial) of their action in the construction, commemoration and communication of this sacredness?

To answer these questions, the inscriptions on the tomb will be first presented as an exegesis and an anagogical process. Then the epigraphic staging and its interaction with the specific liturgy of the Holy Sepulchre will be analysed. Finally, the iconic importance of the script in the multigraphic context of the holy place will be examined.

2 Exegesis and the Anagogical Process of the Tomb Inscriptions

Before dealing with the inscriptions and their active presence, which aims to elevate the soul, let us briefly explain the structure of the aedicule and the arrangement of the epigraphic texts.

2.1 Description of the Spaces and the Location of the Texts

The Holy Sepulchre is not a building but a complex of buildings begun by Constantine which has undergone numerous alterations over the centuries. When the Crusaders conquered Jerusalem in 1099, they found the church restored by the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachus (1042–1055) after its destruction by caliph al-Ḥākim (996–1021) and completed by Michael IV the Paphlagonian (1034–1041) after the earthquake of 1033. While preserving the buildings, they made a radical innovation by bringing all the buildings together under one roof. They also restored the aedicule.

This ‘little house’ – which is the meaning of the Latin word *aediculus* used during the Middle Ages – is the heart of the church. Like a reliquary for the tomb, it is itself enveloped by the various layers of the Anastasis Rotunda.[12]

11 John of Würzburg, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, ed. by Huygens, 123, l. 1104–1107; Theodoric, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, ed. by Huygens, 156, l. 438–442. For the entire inscription and the debate on whether the consecration is of a part or the whole church, see Ingrand-Varenne 2023.

12 On the image of the reliquary, see Boomer 2020.

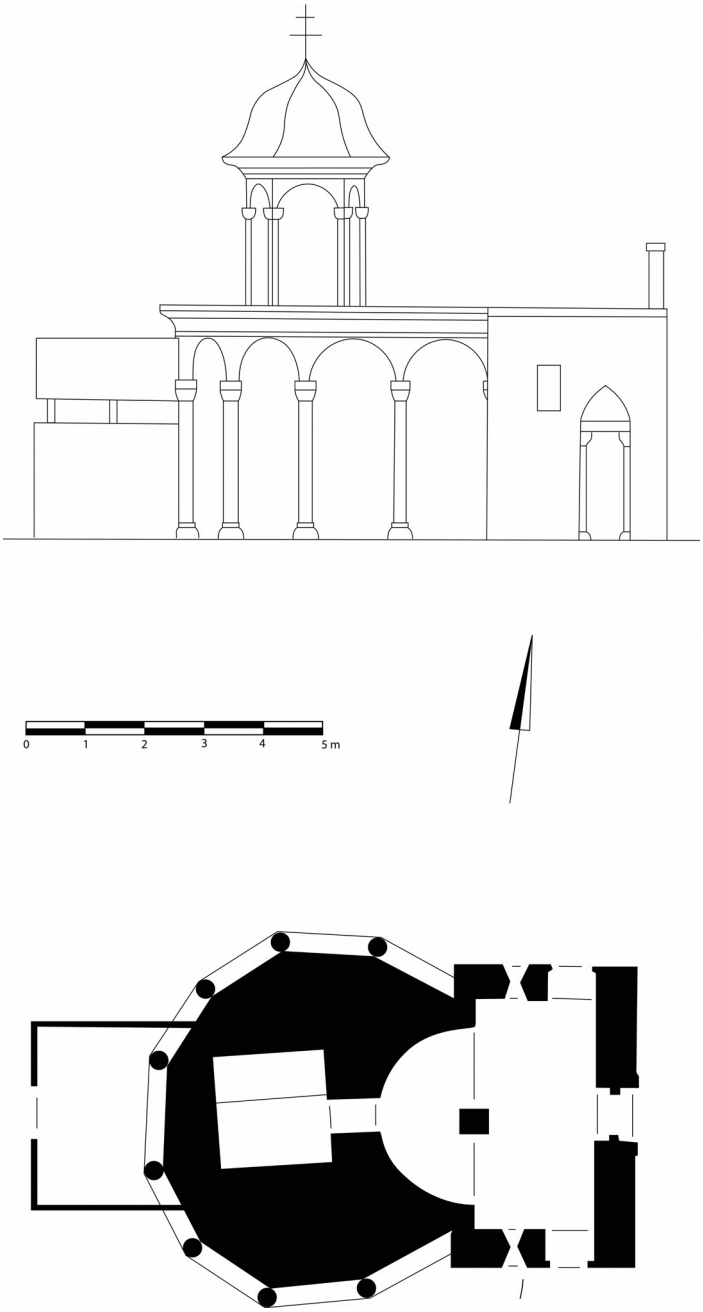

Fig. 2: Plans of the twelfth-century aedicule with the vestibule entrance, the sepulchral chamber, the altar at the chevet and the cupola or ciborium above.

The aedicule encloses two compartments: the burial chamber with the empty rock tomb; and a vestibule entry with three doors. At the west end there is the parochial altar, and over the burial chamber a cupola or ciborium on pillars with a roof made

of plates of gilt copper (Theodoric) or silvered copper (John of Würzburg). In the first decades of the twelfth century, the Franks gave it a new covering of marble, including the sepulchre itself, and introduced mosaics to decorate the vestibule entry. It is probably in this same period that it was adorned with inscriptions.

According to the two authors, the epigraphic texts were inscribed on each part of the aedicule, outside and inside. The structure was therefore surrounded by writing: outside, around the lower arches and on the ledge just above, and also around the ironwork wall; and inside, over the opening of the burial chamber and in the mosaic picture. The integration of these inscriptions in the pilgrims' narratives, the precision of their descriptions and their locations show that they were perceived as an integral part of the building.

2.2 Testifying Christ's Death and Resurrection, and Making Him Present

One of the reasons why the inscriptions– mainly in verse – have been carefully transcribed in these pilgrims' narratives is that they attest to and offer an exegesis of the events of death, resurrection and redemption that took place here. In other words, in the face of silence, these inscriptions become the voice of the aedicule. Biblical, liturgical and theological words fill the place of absence in a permanent way and reveal its meaning like a testament.

At the entrance to the burial chamber, a first couplet of leonine hexameters listed the evidence of the resurrection:

> *Christo surgenti locus et custos monumenti / Angelus et vestis fuit estque redemptio testis.*
>
> (The place, the guardian of the tomb, the angel, the clothes and redemption bear witness then as now to Christ's Redemption.)[13]

As part of the monument, the inscription also plays the role of a *testis*, a present proof and witness.

Outside, the inscription at the head of the aedicule had the same aim, underlined by the verb *doceo* in the fourth verse. The full poem was:

> *Mors hic deletur et nobis vita medetur. / Hostia grata datur, cadit hostis, culpa lavatur. / Coelum laetatur, flent tartari, lex renovatur. / Ista docent, Christe, quia sanctus sit locus iste.*
>
> (Here death is destroyed and life is restored to us. An acceptable sacrifice is given, the enemy falls, and sin is washed away. Heaven rejoices, the infernal regions shed tears, and the law is renewed. These things teach us, O Christ, how holy is this place.)[14]

13 John of Würzburg, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 141; Theodoric, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 148 l. 162–163.
14 Theodoric, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 149 l. 213–216.

The most interesting poem from our perspective was in the arches:

> *Venit in hunc loculum qui condidit antea seclum / Ejus adis tumulum: cito fac ut sis michi templum. / Cernere gratum quem cupit Agnum concio patrum / Effrata natum, Golgotha passum, petra sepultum. / Hic protoplastum vexit ad astrum, demonis astum / Vicit et ipsum surgere lapsum dans ait: assum.*
>
> (He came into this tomb who formerly made the world. / You can approach his tomb, act quickly that you may be temple to me. / It is pleasing to observe the lamb that the writings of the fathers longed for, / born in Effrata, suffered at Golgotha, buried in a rock. / He bore the first man to heaven. He overcame the cunning of the Devil, / and allowed fallen man to rise, saying "I am here".)[15]

This monumental poem of six leonine hexameters with many internal rhymes establishes a dialogue between God, Christ and believers. The second verse allows the voice of God to be heard and challenges the pilgrim: "You who approach his tomb, act quickly that you may be a temple to me." It is a quotation from Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 3, 16).[16] Man must ultimately be like the monument in which he finds himself, making himself a place of welcome and a manifestation of the divine presence. The poem closes with a powerful reminder of the presence of Christ, saying "*assum*" in the first person. Composed of the preposition *ad-* followed by the verb to be, this verb must be understood in the strong sense of 'to be there,' 'to be present' (it can also mean 'to be near someone,' hence 'to come to one's aid' in the liturgical formula *adesto Domine*). This verb echoes the response of the angel to the arrival of the holy women at the tomb, saying that he was absent, a mosaic representation of which was at the entrance to the burial chamber: *Surrexit, non est hic* (he is risen, he is not here; Mark 16, 6).

The message, the deictic words revealing the tangible character of Christian revelation in this place and land and the beauty of this epigraphic poetry aim to introduce the understanding of the hidden meaning of the building and also to produce through discourse and its materialisation the absent presence. In a certain sense and through the liturgy (as we shall see later), the three types of presence defined by Gumbrecht are here brought together: epiphany, presentification, deixis.[17] But what indications of an iconic perception of the writing are there in our two pilgrims' accounts?

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15 Theodoric, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 149 l. 204–209.

16 1 Co 3, 16: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" It should be added that the tomb of Christ was also interpreted as a recreation of the tabernacle of the Temple of Jerusalem in the Byzantine period. Moore 2017, 28.

17 Gumbrecht 2004, chapter entitled 'Epiphany/Presentification/Deixis: Futures for the Humanities and Arts.'

2.3 The Brightness of the Script and the General Anagogical Process

Almost all twelfth century pilgrim narratives on the Holy Land reported that the Holy Sepulchre aedicule was beautifully decorated in a topical or real way. According to John of Würzburg and Theodoric, the inscriptions on the aedicule were all in the most precious materials, the most suitable to make the divine present:[18] gold, silver, marble. They were salient in their rich decoration of their alphabetical characters. A parallel can be drawn with the salience letters have in narratives and manuscripts, which are in prose, whereas they are in verse and of a different style. The most striking material and sensory aspect was their brilliance. Theodoric uses the verb *fulgeo* to describe the decoration[19] and the adjective *mirificus*, which is linked to sight *(miror)*.[20] On the other hand, when this is not the case he points it out. For instance, he writes that around the lower arches two verses were written on each arch, but in some cases he was quite unable to read them because of the decay of the colours (*quos nequaquam propter colorum in quibusdam abolitionem legere potuimus*[21]). This radiant brilliance is not specific to the Middle Ages, since Eusebius of Caesarea reports that the emperor Constantine had already adorned the sacred grotto itself, making it radiant with all sorts of ornaments.[22]

This description must be understood in the atmosphere of the Holy Sepulchre. Despite the opening of the vault, the light entering through the bays of the rotunda[23] was very high up and the church remained dark, which contrasted with the strong luminosity of the east. Both authors describe the lights with great attention: between each pair of colonnettes in the ciborium above the lower arches a single lamp hung. Similarly, between the lower columns two lamps hung all around.[24] In 1106–1108, Russian abbot Daniel described that great lamps were hung in the sepulchre and that they burned constantly night and day.[25] This was an important element in the physical experience, in particular during nocturnal visits by pilgrims. We can imagine how these lights, which symbolised the presence of God (John 8,12), played a role by showing the inscriptions and making them shine. A comparison with the mosaics in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, which dates from the 1160s, is interesting. Recent restoration work has shown that in some places such as backgrounds

18 See Pongrantz-Leisten/Sonik 2015.
19 Theodoric, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 147, l. 139 *mirifico opera fulgens*.
20 Theodoric, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 147, l. 164–165 *hec omnia musivo opera preciosissimo*, 148 l. 172–173 *quod pario marmore, auro et lapidibus preciosis mirifice decoratum*, 150 l. 250 *opere mirifico*.
21 Theodoric, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 149, l. 200–201.
22 Eusèbe de Césarée, *Vie de Constantin*, ed. by Winkelmann/Pietri/Rondeau, 3.34.
23 On this architecture, see Kenaan-Kedar 1986.
24 Theodoric, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 149, l. 196–199; John of Würzburg, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 122, l. 1063 evokes several lamps without describing them precisely.
25 *Pèlerinage en Terre Sainte de l'Igoumène russe Daniel*, ed. by Noroff, 20.

behind the angels the tesserae are set at a 45° angle to reflect more light when seen from below.[26] This exploitation of brightness and luminosity was therefore an element sought by medieval artists.[27]

Even though Theodoric and John of Würzburg do not give spiritual explanations of the iconic value of the inscriptions, we can go further. There is a symbiosis and synergy between the physical aspects of the inscriptions and their contents. Like the building itself, the inscriptions were not only fitting and proper to celebrate God's glory, but that beauty by its very nature could transport the souls of men to contemplation of the divine. This is exactly what was suggested by Suger, abbot of Saint-Denis in France, in the first half of the twelfth century in his *De Administratione*. He saw luxury as exaltation of the glory of God and an instrument in the anagogical process by which the spirit can reach the *immateriala*, the invisible.[28] Suger did not specify the role of inscriptions in this anagogical process but left the action to the materials alone. Nevertheless, one cannot help but associate what was engraved or part of this material, the texts and images, with the path to the immaterial.[29] In Jerusalem, this elevation occurs through the combination of architecture, epigraphy and liturgy.

3 The Staging of the Inscriptions and the Interaction with the Liturgy of the Holy Sepulchre

What is the specificity of this writing in the liturgical space? During the period of Frankish rule, an original Latin liturgy with a distinct ritual was developed in Jerusalem.[30] The liturgical year began differently to that in Europe. They commemorated the feast of Easter at the coming of the Advent of Christ.[31] Above all, there was the miracle of the Holy Fire. According to Eastern Orthodox belief, every Easter Saturday the Fire descends upon the aedicule.[32] How did the inscriptions serve the performance of the liturgy and participate in this physical and spiritual motion?

26 Alessandri 2020, 174.
27 Light, luminaries and their effects in the Christian world are the subject of recent studies: Parani 2008; Pentcheva 2010 and 2017. For other reflections on brilliance, see Thunø 2011.
28 A bibliographic synthesis on Suger is proposed in Virdis 2021, 79 note 1. Beyond Suger, on art as a means of showing the invisible, see Kessler 2000.
29 I thank Vincent Debiais for this remark.
30 Salvadó 2011.
31 Salvadó 2011, 36 and 142.
32 See the bibliography in Lidov 2014, 241, note 1.

3.1 From the Circumambulation Around the Tomb to the Aspiration Towards the Anastasis Rotunda

The architecture of the Holy Sepulchre leads to a combination of two movements. The first is circumambulation, a collective, normalised and solemn movement around the tomb. Especially during Holy Week many processions were organised in the Holy Land and there was even an "endless encircling of Christ's tomb" by these assemblies on their way to meet God.[33] Nevertheless, this circumambulation was not possible during the first half of the year; it would only start again during the Holy Saturday ceremony of the miracle of the Holy Fire rite. The staging of the inscriptions encircling the aedicule accompanied the bodily experience of the worshippers and pilgrims during this circumambulation and helped elevate their spirits. Indeed, the circular and horizontal movement was associated with verticality. It was in fact an ascending spiral that was an evocation of the movement of resurrection and redemption. The poem itself alludes to this elevation in both its vocabulary and its scenography. Verticality is recalled by the evocation of the sky and the abyss as two opposites – the sky rejoices; the abyss weeps *(coelum laetatur, flent Tartari)*, dynamically by the elevation of the first man to heaven and victory over the devil *(Hic protoplastum vexit ad astrum, demonis astum)*, and finally by the opening of paradise to man through the funeral of Christ *(Sub tumulo lapidis, dum sic Christus tumulatur / Ejus ad exequias homini coelum reseratur)*. The architecture of the building was designed with this in mind, with the open rotunda as an aspiration.

Moreover, accounts by fourteenth century pilgrims mentioned inscriptions also on the ciborium.[34] There was therefore a real elevation of the spectator's gaze. Finally, one of the poems outside mentions the *concio partum*, the assembly of fathers, which was perhaps an allusion to the prophets represented on the rotunda. Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, with scrolls announcing the Resurrection, accompanied by the twelve apostles and Helena and Constantine, participated in turning the eyes of the faithful towards the heights.[35]

The inscriptions are also echoes of liturgical texts. In medieval times, the bodily experience would have been further enhanced through vocal recitation; as such metrical inscriptions were probably read out loud.[36] While it is difficult to say how this oral performance and the iconic presence could be linked, as they are not explicitly mentioned in either account, John of Würzburg makes the connection clearly. He explains that the space was suitable for the procession *(spacium … processioni idoneum)* that took place at vespers every Sunday evening from Easter to Advent, with the antiphon

33 Salvadó 2011, 254. Chapter 6 on processions in the Holy Sepulchre.
34 See Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Libro d'Oltramare*, ed. by Bagatti, 16.
35 See the descriptions by John of Würzburg, Theodoric, and above all the drawings by Quaresmius in the seventeenth century: Quaresmio 1639, vol. 2, 369.
36 Rhoby 2020, 111.

Fig. 3: The aedicule and the rotunda in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Christus resurgens. This antiphon was also inscribed in the upper margin on the exterior side of the tomb in silver letters in relief *(cujus etiam antiphonae textus extra in extreme margine monumenti litteris in argento elevates continetur)*.[37] The antiphon, inspired by Paul's epistle to the Romans (6,9–10), "Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him, since he lives he lives for God" *(Christus resurgens ex mortuis jam non moritur. Mors illi ultra non dominabitur, quod enim vivit, vivit Deo)*, formed a band around the structure above the columns and arches.[38] Other texts were inspired by the liturgy: the couplet located above the

37 John of Würzburg, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 122, l. 1077–1084.
38 Theodoric, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 148, l. 184–186.

entrance to the sepulchre was a paraphrase of the sequence *Victime paschali laudes*, which was sung during the Easter liturgy after the Alleluia and before the reading of the Gospel, and also during the vespers processions from Easter Sunday until the following Thursday:[39] *Angelicos testes, sudarium et vestes* (the angelic witnesses, the shroud and the clothes). The biblical quotation included in the mosaic of the Entombment and the *Visitatio sepulchri* was amplified by the liturgical drama, the *Visitatio sepulchri*, performed at dawn on Easter Day in the Holy Sepulchre.[40] Therefore, the liturgical inspiration is obvious in the aedicule's inscribed texts yet the ways in which the epigraphic writing interacted with the liturgy that was taking place are difficult to establish. They must be considered flexibly in terms of networks, resonance and "rebounding."[41]

3.2 A Sacramental Presence?

Can we speak of a sacramental presence of scripts? It is not a question of classifying epigraphic writing as such among the 'sacramentals', in other words realities or acts such as the sign of the cross, certain blessings and consecrations which prepare and dispose one to receive grace.[42] Nevertheless, the adjectival use of sacramental here is possible to qualify writing, following the very broad definition of the principle of sacramentality by David Brown (an Anglican priest and British scholar of philosophy and theology) in his book *God and enchantment of place: reclaiming human experience*. Sacramentality is "the symbolic mediation of the divine in and through the material, whether that material be naturally occurring or humanly constructed."[43] His aim is to create a renewed awareness of the possibility of God's revelatory presence in and engagement with all aspects of the experience. This very large definition is probably very close to the medieval mentality since the Carolingian period,[44] and as we have seen with Saint Francis. However, it was particularly relevant in the twelfth century when the Church was formalising its thoughts on sacraments with Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141) and Peter Lombard (c. 1100–1160) in particular. Therefore, in line with Suger's thought that the material leads to the spiritual, the effect produced by the meeting of alphabetical signs and these materials within the sacred space and liturgical time is of a sacramental nature. These inscriptions were both signs and agents of divinity.

39 Salvadó 2019, 53.
40 Shagrir 2010.
41 I would like to thank Vincent Debiais for suggesting this metaphor.
42 One of the differences between sacraments and sacramentals is that the former act *ex opera operato* (i. e. by the sole fact that the sacramental act is performed correctly), while the latter involves the action of the Church: *ex opera operantis Ecclesiae* (i. e. because of the action and prayer of the Church). See Le Gall 1997.
43 Brown 2004, 30.
44 Treffort 2013.

3.3 From One Work to Another: For Another Kind of 'Presence'

By the inscriptions being transposed into manuscripts the epigraphic writings found another place of reception and presence. Although it is no longer a liturgical space, we can nevertheless ask whether – and in what way – the iconic or above all the sacramental presence of these inscriptions irrigates the narrative in which they are inserted. They recreate the experience of pilgrimage, but to what extent? Copying these monumental writings can be compared to architectural transpositions, the replicas of the tomb in many Western churches, especially after the destruction of 1009.[45] Paolo Lino Zovatto even speaks of a "Holy Sepulchre mania"[46] in Neuvy-Saint-Sépulcre, Villeneuve and Cambrai in France, Constance, Eichstätt and Gernrode in Germany and Fruttuaria, Aquileia and Bologna in Italy, to name but a few.

Transcription of the epigraphic texts helps to build an imaginary Holy Sepulchre for the readers and listeners who cannot make the journey, even if the precise audience of the two clerics is not known.[47] In his prologue, Theodoric proposes to be the eye and ear of these people so that they may know Christ better, remember him and love him. His narrative must therefore take a concrete and lively turn, physical and multisensory, in order to make them see what he is describing. This is the aim of the rhetorical figure of hypotyposis. However, in both Theodoric and John of Würzburg, this consideration of epigraphic material came at a turning point in the genre of travel and pilgrimage narratives, which until then had described holy places in order to recall the biblical events that had taken place there and to bring them to life for pilgrims. However, by the end of the twelfth century with the establishment of the Latin Kingdom more than seventy years earlier, places, buildings and landscapes had changed and pilgrims expected something else: more precise accounts, integrating contemporary realities and sensory factors. Authors became witnesses, giving precise, detailed and sometimes critical information from their own sources. The integration of the inscriptions in the two narratives served exactly this purpose.

However, the epigraphic presence cannot be limited to simple *realia*. The poems, which are veritable theological digests, have specific formatting in the manuscripts. While the two copies of Theodoric's are late (fifteenth century), one of the five manuscripts of the work of John of Würzburg, manuscript T from the abbey of Tegernsee in Bavaria, dates from the end of the twelfth or the thirteenth century.[48] John's text,

45 Biddle 1999, 20–40; Kroesen 2000.

46 Zovatto 1956, 27.

47 John of Würzburg begins his account with an address to a certain Dietrich, whose friend and disciple he claims to be *(Descriptio Terrae Sanctae, 79: Iohannes, Dei gratia in Wirziburgensi aecclesia id quod est, dilecto suo socio et domestico Dietrico salutem et supernae Iherusalem, cujus participatio in idipsum, contemplationem)*.

48 For a description of the manuscripts, see Huygens 1994, 13–21. The reference to manuscript T is Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Clm 19418. It has 83 folios, with 16 lines in each leaf.

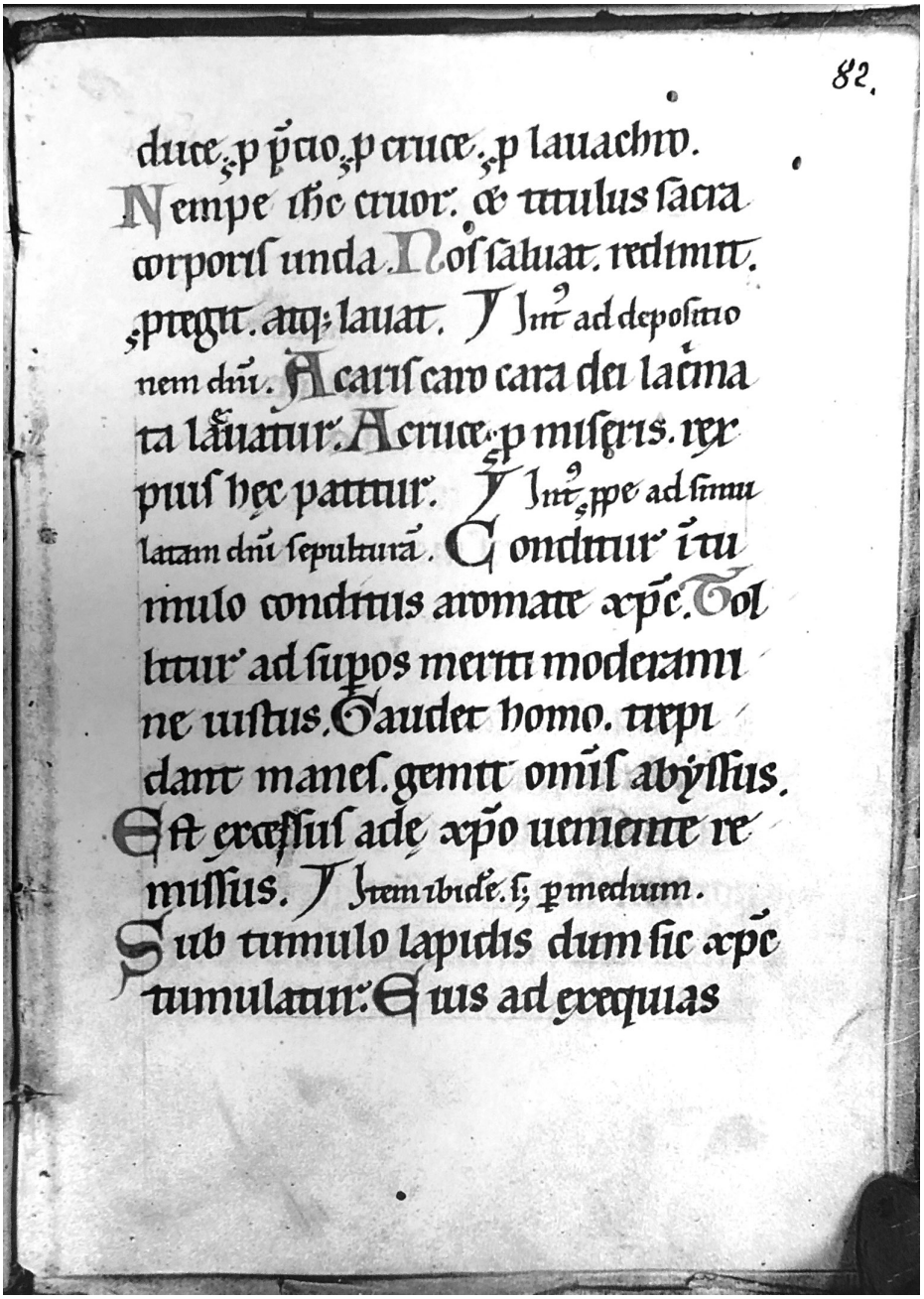


Fig. 4: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Clm 19418, fol. 165r.

which is structured according to the seven stages in Christ's life (nativity, baptism, passion, descent into hell, resurrection, ascension, judgement), contains forty-six inscriptions, seven of which are inserted not in the narrative but in an epigraphic appendix that parallels the liturgical appendix. Written in larger characters than the introductory sentences, each line of the small epigraphic poems begins with a rubricated initial (fol. 165–166).

With this graphic treatment and through the parallel with liturgical texts, the inscriptions are not only clearly differentiated from the narrative prose but they acquire in the eyes of the reader a special status, perhaps an iconic presence. Can we go so far as to call these replicas 'textual relics'? Although it is difficult to give a firm answer, the hypothesis is worth putting forward.

4 The Iconic Role of Scripts in a Multigraphic Space

Finally, I would like to address another aspect of the iconic presence of scripts, when they were in a place where different alphabets were used, such as holy places. John of Würzburg and Theoderic mention "multiple religious sects" – native Christians[49] – who worshiped regularly in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.[50] There were inscriptions in Greek, Arabic, Armenian and Syriac for example. What did each of these writings mean to those who could not understand them, but who identified the writing as the sign of a community, a culture, a power? Here is another aspect of the iconic role of scripts.

4.1 The Presence of Latin Scripts: The Rebirth of a Writing That Had Become Exogenous

Finding inscriptions using the Latin alphabet in the Holy Land in the twelfth century was something new. From the seventh century, the period of the beginning of the Arab conquests and the wave of Hellenisation following the death of Emperor Heraclius, Latin script – already a minority script in the Greek-speaking East – disappeared from the monumental graphic landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean. When the Crusaders arrived and put inscriptions on monuments and artefacts in their own languages using the Latin alphabet, it was exogenous. Through stone, painting, mosaic, glass and metal, they attempted to appropriate graphically, as well as spatially and symbolically, parts of the east, including the holy places of Christianity itself. Therefore, the appropriation of these places was not only achieved through the establish-

49 Shagrir 2015.
50 John of Würzburg, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 137–138, Theodoric, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 152.

ment of a new clergy which took power, and the transformation of architecture or the addition of decorations, but also through the application of Latin epigraphic writing, like a stamp.

In fact, the number of inscriptions was impressive. In 1543, a Benedictine monk of Saint-Mihiel abbey (Meuse), Dom Loupvent, described his voyage to Jerusalem and expressed his surprise. "At the so-called Holy Sepulchre you will find an astonishing number of inscriptions which deserve to be passed on to posterity, due to the piety of a great number of scholars. The fervour of the faith manifested here is so great that no one could ever tire of witnessing it, talking about it or hearing about it. It has produced so many inscriptions that several notebooks would not be enough to reproduce all of them."[51]

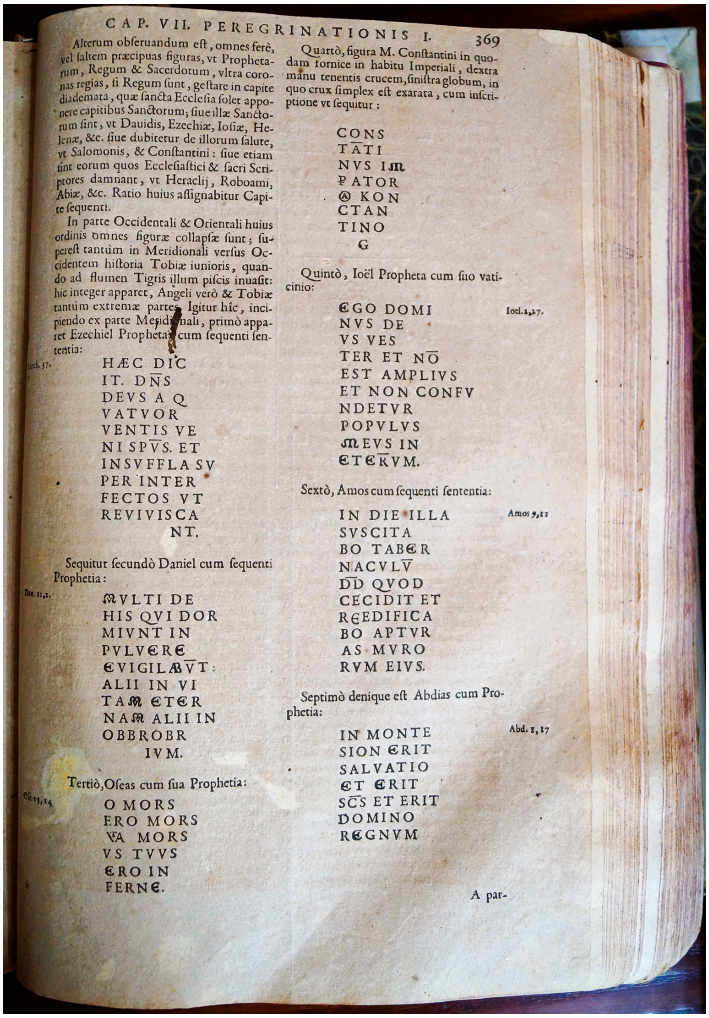
This perception of a great abundance of texts, not only on the tomb but on the whole building, shows how omnipresent and striking this writing was. Dom Loupvent's words are eloquent: he immediately identifies the authors of the inscriptions as "scholars", showing that he perceived the complexity and density of this exegetical poetry.

4.2 How Did the Latins Consider Greek Writing?

The graphic type that was particularly present was the Greek script, due to the Byzantine past and especially the reconstruction in the mid-eleventh century. How did the Latins view it? Theodoric reports the existence of Greek texts in the Holy Sepulchre and he writes that they were everywhere in the rotunda *(Grecis literis descriptum est per totum)*. He was therefore able to recognise them but did not have the skill to decipher and transcribe their contents. However, he explains that the *Ave Maria* was written in both Latin and Greek around the visual representation of Christ.[52] Thanks to Franciscus Quaresmius, a Franciscan Observant who transcribed and even drew inscriptions in his *Terrae sanctae elucidatio*, published in Antwerp in 1639, we also know that in the rotunda, Constantine and his mother Helena had their names written in Latin and Greek.[53]

Attitudes to Greek Orthodox Christians changed during the twelfth century. After their initial expulsion, they were re-admitted into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, had their own altars and held ceremonies and processions.[54] The reigns of King Amalric of Jerusalem (1163–1174) and Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180) were particularly favourable for this rapprochement. However, in the first half of the twelfth

51 Dom Loupvent, *Voyage d'un Lorrain en Terre sainte au XVIe siècle*, 53^v^ (the original manuscript is preserved at Saint-Mihiel in Meuse).
52 Theodoric, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, 150, l. 224 and l. 232–233: *hec salutatio tam latine quam grece circa ipsum dominum Christum descripta est*.
53 Quaresmio 1639, vol. 2, 369.
54 Kedar 1998 and Pahlitzsch/Baraz 2006.



CAP. VII. PEREGRINATIONIS I. 369

Alterum obseruandum est, omnes ferè, vel saltem præcipuas figuras, vt Prophetarum, Regum & Sacerdotum, vltra coronas regias, si Regum sunt, gestare in capite diademata, quæ sancta Ecclesia solet apponere capitibus Sanctorum; siue illæ Sanctorum sint, vt Dauidis, Ezechiæ, Iosiæ, Helenæ, &c. siue dubitetur de illorum salute, vt Salomonis, & Constantini: siue etiam sint eorum quos Ecclesiastici & sacri Scriptores damnant, vt Heraclij, Roboami, Abiæ, &c. Ratio huius assignabitur Capite sequenti.

In parte Occidentali & Orientali huius ordinis omnes figuræ collapsæ sunt; superest tantùm in Meridionali versus Occidentem historia Tobiæ iunioris, quando ad flumen Tigris illum piscis inuasit: hic integer apparet, Angeli verò & Tobiæ tantùm extremæ partes. Igitur hic, incipiendo ex parte Meridionali, primò apparet Ezechiel Propheta, cum sequenti sententia:

Ezech. 37.

HÆC DIC
IT. DNS
DEVS A Q
VATVOR
VENTIS VE
NI SPVS. ET
INSVFFLA SV
PER INTER
FECTOS VT
REVIVISCA
NT.

Sequitur secundò Daniel cum sequenti Prophetia:

Dan. 12, 2.

MVLTI DE
HIS QVI DOR
MIVNT IN
PVLVERE
EVIGILABVT:
ALII IN VI
TAM ETER
NAM ALII IN
OBBROBR
IVM.

Tertiò, Oseas cum sua Prophetia:

Os. 13, 14.

O MORS
ERO MORS
VA MORS
VS TVVS
ERO IN
FERNE.

Quartò, figura M. Constantini in quodam fornice in habitu Imperiali, dextra manu tenentis crucem, sinistra globum, in quo crux simplex est exarata, cum inscriptione vt sequitur:

CONS
TATI
NVS IM
PATOR
O KON
CTAN
TINO
G

Quintò, Ioël Propheta cum suo vaticinio:

Ioel. 2, 27.

EGO DOMI
NVS DE
VS VES
TER ET NO
EST AMPLIVS
ET NON CONFV
NDETVR
POPVLVS
MEVS IN
ETERVM.

Sextò, Amos cum sequenti sententia:

Amos 9, 11

IN DIE ILLA
SVSCITA
BO TABER
NACVLV
DD QVOD
CECIDIT ET
REEDIFICA
BO APTVR
AS MVRO
RVM EIVS.

Septimò denique est Abdias cum Prophetia:

Abd. 1, 17

IN MONTE
SION ERIT
SALVATIO
ET ERIT
SCS ET ERIT
DOMINO
REGNVM

A par-

Fig. 5: Transcription of the Greek and Latin inscriptions in the rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre in the *Terrae sanctae elucidatio* written by Quaresmius.

century, which is the period of architectural changes to the church, the Latins deliberately concealed and omitted the Byzantine past of the holy places. As Megan Boomer clearly explains,

> Depictions of the building's capture ignored the fact that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had remained under the control of the Greek Jerusalem patriarch since its dedication; furthermore, the monument seen by the Crusaders in 1099 was, for all the antiquity of its precedent, largely a new one – constructed just fifty years prior with Byzantine imperial support after the destruction by the caliph al-Ḥākim. [...] The omission of the recent phase appears to be a conscious decision. Erasing more recent Christian memories and communities allowed the Latins to present their rule as a resurrection of a lost past.[55]

55 Boomer 2020.

The liberation of Jerusalem from the hands of the infidels was interpreted through the liturgical texts of the office of the Resurrection of Christ.[56]

In this context, the choice to keep Greek inscriptions, in particular the names of Helen and Constantine who erected the first basilica, was political and showed that the Latins were the direct heirs to this tradition and there was nothing in between. This re-use is the same thing as the reconstruction: the Crusader's reconstruction worked as a reliquary, embedding the older stones and stories.[57]

A final argument at the epigraphic level must be added. For the Latins, Greek language writing had a high status (as the Byzantine style was an aesthetic aspiration): the status of a sacred language, written on the titulus of the Cross, the original language of the New Testament, a language of liturgy and culture. The presence of Greek inscriptions embodies *auctoritas* and *antiquitas*.[58] We can see that in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and in the Hospitaller Church in Abu Ghosh, which is associated with Emmaus in the Gospel of Luke.[59] Greek therefore refers to an ancient past, even if for Orthodox Christians this language was not always used. The Arabic language replaced Greek in the ninth century but the eleventh century was a period of revival of Greek. I have just focused on Greek, and from a Latin point of view, but it would be interesting to go further and see things from Greek, Arabic and Armenian points of view.

5 Conclusion

The narratives of these two important twelfth-century travellers to the Holy Land clearly convey the tremendous impression that these visits to the scene of Christ's wanderings on earth produced on pilgrims, in particular the inscriptions. They correspond to a period of great artistic and cultural development of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, shortly before Saladin's victory in 1187. The *loca sancta*, in particular the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, offered a physical, sensory, and kinetic experience, and not only during the liturgy. In the burial of Christ, the inscriptions played a role in the sacramental polyphony of media. The inscriptions, through their alphabetical signs, their omnipresence, their brightness, their staging (with circular and vertical motion), participated in the theatralisation of the place, and led worshipers to the sacred. These short, poetic and theologically intense texts were conducive to devotion and spiritual experience, and in this sense had a sacramental action. This sensory apprehension, which varied according to the time of the liturgical year, had its climax at Easter.

56 Salvadó 2011, 35.
57 Ousterhout 2003, 5.
58 Ingrand-Varenne 2017, 333–343.
59 Ingrand-Varenne forthcoming.

Like everything else that was present in a holy place, *a fortiori* in the tomb of Christ himself, the inscriptions must have been perceived as sanctified, and all the more so since the holy city of Jerusalem symbolised both the earthly church and also prefigured the heavenly church described in the Book of Revelation (21,10, 18–22) inhabited by the new chosen people comprising all the nations redeemed by Christ, a message also conveyed through the epigraphic medium. When this monumental writing was transferred to the parchment of the manuscripts of John of Würzburg and Theodoric, it can be assumed that it did not lose its sacramental character, even if its intensity was diminished. Disconnected from the liturgical space and above all from the places of the incarnation, the imaginary pilgrimage created a space for devotion, allowing the anagogical journey proposed by epigraphic writing to be accomplished in thought.

The question of the iconic presence of writing was all the more important in the Holy Land, where various scripts coexisted, reflecting the different Christian communities present. There were therefore epigraphic scripts, not just using the Latin alphabet on which we have focused, and degrees of perception and understanding of these scripts in the Holy Sepulchre according to the spectators: canons, bishops, parishioners of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, pilgrims from the West, Christians from the East. These complex relationships and interactions between epigraphs deserve a separate study.

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