



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Reflections on Western replicas of the Holy Sepulchre Aedicule



Replicas of the Holy Sepulchre Aedicule differ greatly according to their geographical location, the places and the inspiration of the pilgrims. These devotional monuments – often intended for liturgical prayer – have played an important role in strengthening the faith, allowing pilgrim believers to turn their inner gaze to Jerusalem.

“Copying the Aedicule of the Holy Sepulchre: when religious practices and architecture intertwine”: this was the subject of a conference held a few months ago at the École biblique et archéologique française in Jerusalem by Charles-Édouard Guilbert-Roed.

The PhD student in architectural history has researched and cataloged replicas of the aedicule, the term that designates the structure built by the Greek- Orthodox in the early 1800s over Christ’s tomb, within the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre itself built on the orders of St. Helena, after the edict of Milan that liberalized Christian worship throughout the Roman Empire.

“As a child I discovered a copy of the Aedicule of the Holy Sepulchre in the Shrine of Notre-Dame du Chêne (Our Lady of the Oak) in Vion, in the Sarthe region, where I spent part of my childhood. But it was only several years later that I understood the wealth of this place,” says the lecturer during an interview given to the Communication Service of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Notre-Dame du Chêne – which left an indelible mark on the young researcher – is a Marian shrine that became known after Virgin Mary appeared there in the 15th century. In 1896, the bishop of Le Mans decided to build a faithful reproduction of the Aedicule of the Holy Sepulchre, thanks to the offerings of the faithful.

Charles-Edouard Guilbert-Roed went on to study the history of art and architecture at the Sorbonne University in Paris. He has always been sensitive to artistic heritage, especially in its religious aspects. "I was entrusted with the organization of spiritual retreats with the young people of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. It seemed natural to me to hold these events at the tomb of Notre-Dame du Chêne, which I knew well. Then, after three months of work at the École biblique et archéologique française in Jerusalem in 2014 and after better understanding the reality of the Jerusalem tomb, I decided to research the replicas," he explains.

Currently a doctoral student in architectural history, he has chosen to carry out a cross examination of other replicas across the world, identifying more than a hundred: these structures are often frequented for Holy Week, from Friday to Easter Sunday, reviving in the hearts of pilgrims the exclamation "Domine ivimus", "Lord we will come!", characteristic of the fervor of the Christians of every age, eager to go to Jerusalem.

There have been four versions of the Aedicule across 1700 years: Firstly, a Byzantine edition dating to 324, a second Romanesque edition dating to 1012, a third version dating to 1555 and finally the Aedicule in Ottoman baroque style that we know today, dating to 1810.

The first three forms have physically disappeared, but thanks to their copies, it is possible to find them replicated in full. For example, the Byzantine version can be viewed in Italy, in the autonomous region Friuli-Venezia Giulia, in Aquileia, while the Romanesque form can be seen today in Görlitz, Germany.

"The replicas represent a real treasure to see the extent of devotion to the tomb of Christ, but also to understand it better", observes Charles-Edouard. The reproductions of the sepulchral chamber of Jesus reveal evolutions in style, which have also been influenced by the place of construction. The common point is the series of columns that surround the building, which are always reproduced.

The Franciscans created many copies especially in the Sacred Mountains of Piedmont and Lombardy, religious places destined to revive the Christian faith and located in natural environments, at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, as an alternative to Jerusalem and Palestine, which were becoming increasingly difficult to access for pilgrims. A number of Franciscan convents have at least one Aedicule inside, such as the Convent of the Custody in Washington, which also preserves a copy of the Virgin's tomb, the Dormition of Mary, and the Nativity grotto. In addition to the initiative of religious communities – mainly Capuchins and Jesuits – former pilgrims, bishops and private citizens would often commission the construction of a replica.

"One of my main discoveries during the compilation of this corpus is that most of the copies of the Aedicule were built during the Counter-Reformation in the ancient kingdoms of Bohemia, Austria and those in the possession of the Habsburg family. Today, these copies are found in the current Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Other copies have been located in France, Belgium, Italy, Russia, Ukraine, Canada, the United States of America, Georgia and in Jerusalem itself!" states the PhD student, who also notes the building of new replicas, for example at the Notre-Dame sanctuary Dame du Cap, in Trois-Rivières, Canada.

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(April 2019)