

Seeking Jerusalem: Pilgrimage and Embodiment in the Anastasis Rotunda Mosaic from Bordeaux and its Inspirations

In 1971, archaeological excavation at the *Allées de Tourny* in Bordeaux uncovered a fifth-century mosaic which depicts the Anastasis Rotunda and Aedicula of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem simultaneously in plan and section. (Doulin and Charpentier 2013, 285-286.) Despite the extreme technical simplicity of the mosaic, the representation of the Rotunda is surprisingly full. For example, the section view incorporates an abstraction of exterior columns with the domed central space that shelters the octagonal stone of the Sepulcher itself, all framed by the piers of the ambulatory and an apsidal space beyond. Setting these two perspectives together provides an experience for the viewer not unlike opening a jewel box, creating a simultaneous sense of the building in multiple dimensions, and giving the viewer an immediate sense of the most potent pilgrimage destination in the Holy Land.

There are significant connections between southern Aquitaine and northern Iberia and Jerusalem in Late Antiquity. For example, the authors of two of the earliest first-hand accounts of Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* and the *Itinerarium Egeriae* seem to come from the Atlantic arch between Bordeaux and northern Iberia. Egeria's descriptions of liturgy in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher are some of the earliest records of the existence of the Aedicula (*Itin.Egr.* 24.1-9; 25.2; 47.2). These connections were material as well as textual.

In a 2004 article, C. Balmelle and H. Boise (Balmelle and Boise 2004) argued that the Bordeaux mosaic was inspired by the shape and iconography of pilgrim ampullae like ones found at Monza and Bobbio. Although I agree with their essential point about the importance of pilgrimage as a vehicle for the circulation of Christian iconography in Late Antiquity, there is an

additional inspiration for the Bordeaux mosaic that demands further examination. This is a fifth-century reliquary from Narbonne, carved from a ton of Pyrenean marble as a replica of the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulcher. Unlike the actual Aedicula, the Narbonne reliquary omits a large section of the wall of the octagonal tomb chamber, creating a simultaneous view of the plan and section. The origin of the Narbonne reliquary's marble in southern Gaul proves that it was not imported from the Holy Land but instead sculpted in Gaul from a detailed description or a portable wooden model. (Griffith-Jones 2018, 310. Bonnery 1991, 31.) Although the difference between the two-dimensional mosaic and the three-dimensional reliquary is significant, the reliquary provides an important precedent for the simultaneous plan and elevation ("jewel box") perspective in the mosaic in Bordeaux, and unlike the tiny ampullae, does so at a scale that requires full-body engagement.

Works Cited

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