

**Architecture as Theater?
Mimesis and Place at the Sacro Monte of Varallo Sesia**

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Fig. 1. View of the Sacro Monte from the southwest (Piazza G. Ferrari); the building on the left is the former Franciscan convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie. The pedestrian path to the Sacro Monte begins a few paces away from the lower funicular station, almost directly across from the convent.

“Theatrical”: such is the characterization that appears most frequently in the scholarly literature on the Sacro Monte, an ensemble of devotional chapels built starting at the end of the fifteenth century on a promontory above the town of Varallo in Valsesia, which was at that time the western-most valley of the duchy of Lombardy (fig. 1).¹ Founded in 1486 as a replica of Jerusalem, a destination which the fall of Constantinople had rendered almost inaccessible to the layman, the Sacro Monte was considerably developed over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, eventually including dozens of chapels, each housing life-size sculptural groups and frescoes representing an episode of the life of Christ and His Passion. These *tableaux vivants* have led some historians to the conclusion that Varallo offers a “spectacle” akin to both medieval miracle plays and the “Baroque” scenography of the Counter-Reformation.²

While the notion of “theatricality” tends to overemphasize the perspectival aspects of Varallo’s later art and to leave aside the participatory nature of its architecture, the drama metaphor does obliquely point out that the concept of *mimesis* is central to the Sacro Monte. As I will argue based on the analysis of its foundational stage, Varallo translated into built form the idea of “imitation of Christ.” This is another facet of *mimesis* than the one usually examined in relation to Renaissance architecture: what is at play is not the imitation of the Ancients and the imitation of nature that were, as is well known, central concerns of the arts, but another idea of imitation, also derived from Antiquity but transformed through the Christian tradition: *mimesis* as reform.³ This idea does not center on how architecture comes to be or how it looks, but on what it *does*: not

on the art of the designer, but on the potential of the built work to orient the life of the person moving through it.

Imitating “Jerusalem”



Fig. 2. View of the Sacro Monte as depicted in the first “history” of the site, almost two centuries after its creation. Giovanni Battista Fassola, *La nuova Gierusalme o sia il Santo Sepolcro di Varallo...* (Milano: Agnelli, 1671).

In its present configuration the Sacro Monte of Varallo offers to the visitor a *percorso devozionale* composed of over forty-five chapels and culminating in a basilica, an aspect it has had since the late seventeenth century (fig. 2). Yet this relative opulence contrasts with rather modest beginnings. Early histories of the Sacro Monte describe how Observant friar Bernardino Caimi, upon his return to Italy from Jerusalem where he has been interim Custodian of the Holy Places, decided to create replicas of the Palestinian sites on the promontory above Varallo.⁴ He built the first of these, a copy of the Holy Sepulcher, and an adjoining hermitage, in 1491. Until very recently the only means of access from the valley to this hilltop retreat was the steep wooded path starting directly across from Santa Maria delle Grazie, a monastery situated just outside the town limits and also founded by Caimi.

The Sacro Monte was a destination: as the inscription above the entrance commemorates, Caimi built the replica, with the financial support of a prominent local citizen, in order that those “who cannot go on pilgrimage may see Jerusalem here.”⁵ In so doing, Caimi seems merely to have continued the long tradition of taking the holiest Christian site in Jerusalem as a point of departure for sacred building: copies abound in medieval architecture, many of which were built as encouragements to or memorials for pilgrimage, or even substitutes for it.⁶ Like some of his predecessors, Caimi built mementos not only of the *sanctum sepulcrum* but also of the rock of Calvary, the nearby site of the Crucifixion. In addition, he took pains to situate them in relation to each other just as they are in Jerusalem, notably by preserving their relative orientation and the distance between them, features which evidently had also had great import for the builders of the twelfth-century complex of Santo Stefano in Bologna, for instance.⁷ At

Varallo as in many other sites, a “blessing” or secondary relic in the form of a piece of rock from the “holy sepulcher of our lord Jesus Christ” confirms the spiritual value of the copy and its “mystical bond” with the original.⁸

Yet several aspects of Caimi’s enterprise distinguish it from prior evocations of Jerusalem. First, the Sacro Monte is not a church, nor part of a church; in particular, the Varallese buildings imitate the tomb aedicula and Golgotha, but not the Anastasis Rotunda, basilica, and courtyard that Constantine had built to enshrine them.⁹ Second, contrary to earlier practice Caimi aimed at a *faithful* reproduction, not a symbolic evocation.¹⁰ Whereas medieval copies chose a few elements of their prototypes and reinterpreted them symbolically, the Varallese replicas do not have any other goal than to be “in every way similar” to their referents, as several inscriptions attest.¹¹ Third, while in medieval precedents the copies were placed within the urban settlement with the aim of turning the *city* into “Jerusalem,” Caimi established his complex resolutely *outside* the town, from which it is topographically distinct. Fourth, although its relative isolation evokes another medieval type, the monastery, where, away from the temptations of the world, the monk might hope to lead the most perfect form of Christian life in the best possible approximation of the “celestial Jerusalem,” the Sacro Monte is neither a place of permanent abode nor anything other than an evocation of the *earthly* Jerusalem.¹²

Stripped of any symbolic function, the Varallese “holy places” seem to lack the wealth of meaning that prevented earlier examples from being “mere” copies¹³; what was gained in exchange for this relative semantic impoverishment, it would appear, is increased conformity to the models. Caimi insisted on the faithful character of his copies, each of which sports a label to that effect, yet his version of the earthly Jerusalem is clearly an abstraction: not only does it lack what would have been at the time the most readily identifiable Christian feature of the city, the Anastasis, but in addition it presents a series of seemingly isolated locations, including distant Nazareth and Bethlehem as well as Jerusalem. How “faithful” is Caimi’s enterprise, then? Although they would seem to vouch for the accuracy of the Varallese replicas, the inscriptions, insistingly repeating “simile,” “in tutto simile,” forcefully remind the viewer that she is looking at copies, which are similar to, yet necessarily *other* than, the real thing. Both like and unlike the originals, same and other, they are *images* of them, in the Platonic sense.¹⁴ What these labels make clear, therefore, is that the Sacro Monte is a certain image of Jerusalem: the “Jerusalem” of the pilgrims, for whom the city, and indeed all of Palestine, is made up of individual holy places, the actual destinations of their journey.

Caimi’s omission of the Constantinian monuments further suggests that he sought to reproduce a Jerusalem free of the associations that had become bound with it, first during the Carolingian period, then at the time of the Crusades.¹⁵ When copying at Varallo the Palestinian sites that he knew so well, Caimi chose to reproduce only those “authentic” features that the earliest pilgrims saw, which they had been able to identify thanks to their correspondence with the descriptions in the Scriptures.¹⁶ Thus, for instance, the replica of the Holy Sepulcher imitates the cave-like interior of its Jerusalem model, because it corresponds to the rock-cut tomb described in the Gospels, but not its exterior, that is to say the aedicula built around the tomb after its excavation, which for obvious reasons does not appear in the texts.¹⁷

“Seeing” Jerusalem

It is through this image, the Jerusalem of the Gospels, that the early Sacro Monte fulfilled its promise to offer the experience of pilgrimage, which in its most essential form had been understood as a commemoration of Biblical events. While throughout the Middle Ages pilgrims undertook the journey to the Holy Land partly in order to bring home relics and other “souvenirs” apt to transfer to their owners some of the power ascribed to the holy sites, for early Christians seeing and touching the sites was not an end in itself, but a means to “access” the events recounted in the Bible, in the very places where they happened.¹⁸ Early accounts make clear that pilgrims *visualized* those events, were witnesses to them, as it were: thus in the fourth century Saint Jerome, writing to Marcella in order to encourage her to come to Palestine, emphasized that “every time we enter [Christ’s tomb] we see the Lord lying on the shroud; if we linger there for a moment, we also see the angel sitting at his feet...”¹⁹

Clearly, a pilgrim’s vision was possible only because of his prior knowledge of the Biblical narrative, which closely connects the events of Christ’s life with the places in which they occurred; entering each site would spontaneously bring up a memory of the event in the pilgrim’s mind.²⁰ However, memory alone, while necessary to initiate the process, was not sufficient to bring about the desired visualization: in order to foster it, pilgrims would read or have read to them the relevant passages from Scripture at each of the sites, and say appropriate prayers.²¹ In later centuries, the addition of suitable iconography in the holy places helped support such a vision.²² As late medieval accounts suggest, this understanding of pilgrimage as the “visualizing” of Biblical events is the one that the Franciscans revived when they became the Custodians of the Holy Places in the mid-thirteenth century; it is the one that Caimi, the former Custodian, fostered at Varallo.²³

We may better understand now the original function of the Sacro Monte: as the inscription above the Holy Sepulcher replica spells out, it was built for the benefit of those who cannot go on pilgrimage, not so that they “may see *Jerusalem*” but in order that they “may *see Jerusalem here*.” Fifteenth-century visitors to the Sacro Monte, literate or not, were acquainted with the Gospel narratives, for example through the preachings of mendicant friars, and therefore knew both the events of Christ’s life and the places where they occurred. They came to Varallo not in order to learn but to “witness” each event come to life *in situ*. Like their counterparts in the Holy Land, the pilgrims at Varallo had the benefit of a “running commentary” by the friar who accompanied them on their visit.²⁴ Alternatively, they could refer to devotional “guidebooks” serving much the same purpose: the earliest extant such text, published only a few decades after the foundation of the Sacro Monte, addresses the reader directly, not only directing her visit from chapel to chapel but also inviting her to dwell on each of the episodes.²⁵

That the formation of mental images was deemed desirable, and that it was the product of a reflection on the Biblical narrative is confirmed by the meditation manuals that were much in use during the late medieval period and may have served as models for the guidebooks used in Jerusalem and at Varallo.²⁶ Here is, for example, how one of the most widely circulated of those texts, the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, invites readers to picture for themselves the scenes of the Last Supper:

On Thursday, late in the day, the lord Jesus and the other disciples entered the city of Jerusalem. See Him, therefore, as He remains in some part of the house, saying salutary and good things to the disciples while some of the seventy prepared the dining room for the disciples. ...When everything was ready in the dining room, the most beloved John, who went solicitously to see and help with the arrangements, went to the Lord Jesus when all was ready and said, “Lord, you can have supper when you please, for everything is prepared.” Now meditate with discretion on everything that is said and done, for all should be deeply impressed on you, and not abbreviated but prolonged, like all other things concerning the Lord Jesus.²⁷

Going back and forth between past and present tense, between the recounting of the story and instructions to the readers, the text induces them to imagine themselves present at the scene; it further encourages them to enrich the Gospel narrative with whatever details are necessary for the episode to become vivid in their minds, as if they were present at the moment of its occurring: precisely the goal of pilgrimage, as we have seen.

This is where the pictorial content of the early Varallese chapels comes in: it supplies details that help sustain this mental vision, just as the iconography added to the Palestinian Holy Sites sought to do. They are “peopled” with life-size sculptural groups, each representing the scene corresponding to the place: in the “Bethlehem grotto,” the Nativity; on “Calvary,” the Crucifixion; in the “Sepulcher,” the dead Christ, etc. The striking appearance of these sculptures, clothed in contemporary dress and sporting real-looking hair, has led some to conclude that the site targeted an unsophisticated, “popular” audience. However, the record of distinguished visitors to Varallo—celebrated poets, statesmen, as well as ecclesiastical authorities, some of whom left written testimonies of their appreciation—invalidates the “populist” explanation.²⁸ In addition, the “hyper-realism” of the Varallese *tableaux* is not characteristic of “low art” but in line with much of the religious production of the time, stimulated since the fourteenth century by a particular kind of affective piety centered on the humanity of Christ.²⁹ This found its expression in local churches, in emotion-laden crucifixes and in life-size representations of the entombment of Christ and of the Pietà, as well as in domestic settings of various degrees of affluence, in the form of devotional diptychs painted at a scale and in a manner designed to make the viewer “interact” with the figures represented.³⁰ Far from being a “Bible for illiterates,” the religious art of that period aimed to provoke a mimetic response in all beholders, educated and uneducated alike.³¹

Seeing and Knowing

In the fifteenth century, therefore, neither in Jerusalem nor in Varallo did the iconography of “holy sites” *create* a visualization process that was in reality induced by meditation on the Biblical texts; rather, it was one of the means to help sustain and focus it. The buildings and the sculptures at Varallo were not illusionistic contrivances, not educational aids, but simply and emphatically *images*, that is to say prompts for the imagined actualization of remembered events, devices that helped the faithful *see* what

they already knew.³² Such emphasis on “vision” is in keeping with the general tendency toward mysticism in the late medieval period, especially among Franciscan Observant friars such as Caimi who, in their desire to return to the ascetism of the early days of the order, devoted part of their lives to a pursuit of solitary contemplation. In this they were following the teachings of St. Bonaventure, the “Seraphic Doctor” to whom the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* quoted above were long attributed.³³

Incorporating many elements from the Augustinian synthesis of Christian and Platonic thought, Bonaventure’s writings aim to provide a method toward achieving the greatest possible goal of Christian life: happiness, that is to say mystical union with God. Before the Fall the human spirit, originally created in the “image” and “likeness” of God (Gen. 1, 26), was in a state of beatitude by virtue of being able to know its creator immediately, through three modes of vision: carnal vision, used to see the things of the world; mental vision, to see the soul and its workings; and contemplative vision, to see God and the realities in God. The original sin, having obscured this last mode of vision, has made it impossible for the human soul to perceive divine wisdom directly. Man is still an image of God because it is a soul, but it is no longer His likeness because, being unable to *see* God, it does not “express,” or “represent,” Him by constantly striving towards Him. While in the state of innocence man was able to contemplate God directly through His creatures by “reading the book of nature,” after the Fall he needs both Scripture, which is the Word of God revealed in the language of man, and Christ, who as the Word Incarnate shows the meaning of Scripture by appearing in a form that man can comprehend, love, and follow.³⁴

Only through divine grace, faith in Christ and understanding of Scripture can the human soul use the other two modes of vision in order to achieve contemplation, or mystical union with God, which allows it to re-form itself to its original likeness to Him: this is what Bonaventure calls the “journey of the mind to God” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*). Building upon Augustine’s cognitive theory, itself based on principles of intromission and extramission also used by Plato, Bonaventure considers that seeing is not a passive activity but the result of an active intervention of the soul. Objects emit sensible “species” that the sense organ of sight apprehends; the soul, aware that its body is sensing, transforms these sensible species into intelligible species, producing visual sensation, or the mental image of the object seen. Imagination is thus an action of the soul based upon the passive sensing of the body, but the transformation of species which turns seeing into knowing is only possible thanks to divine “illumination.” Intellectual *speculation* is the second stage towards reaching contemplation, and because we are carnal beings only Jesus, the Word *Incarnate*, allows us to understand Scripture. In the *Itinerarium* Bonaventure further goes on to describe the stages of “intermediary contemplation” that compose the inner journey of the soul towards divine likeness, which may only be achieved thanks to the example of Christ, who is the Image of God.

Imitating and Following

Bonaventure’s emphasis on contemplation, which he partly inherited from Augustine and St. Bernard of Clairvaux, should not lead us to suppose that he simply reformulated the monastic ideal. As the biographer of the founder of the Franciscan

order, Bonaventure was aware of the twin necessities of action and contemplation, a characteristic emphasis of the mendicants. The example of the stigmatized St. Francis shows that walking in the footsteps of the Savior and becoming Christ-like are inextricably linked; Bonaventure thus reconciles the Gospel injunction to *follow* Christ and Saint Paul's interpretation of it as *imitating*, i.e. becoming like, Christ.³⁵

Varallo enables the Christian to initiate the "journey of the soul" that Bonaventure described as the ultimate goal of human existence, in these two interlinked modes. By offering the physical experience of pilgrimage, the Sacro Monte induces the Christian to "follow" Jesus, and by allowing a visualization of Gospel events and fostering an affective participation in them, it encourages the pilgrim to "imitate" Christ. It is important to note, however, that although the Varallo pilgrim, like his counterpart in Jerusalem, was thus able to "relive" the events of the life of Christ, in the fifteenth century neither necessarily viewed the holy sites according to a sequence corresponding to the order in which those events occurred. In particular, the visit of the places corresponding to the last moments of Christ's life usually proceeded in reverse chronological order, from the Holy Sepulcher to the House of Pilate.³⁶ The chronological emphasis, allowing a reenactment in "real time," is a slightly later, logical expansion of these ideas, leading to the development of the *via crucis* in Jerusalem, a practice eventually codified as the Way or Stations of the Cross—an essentialized form of substitute pilgrimage with an exclusive focus on the episodes of the Passion of Christ rather than His entire life.³⁷

In contrast, not only did Varallo in its early days focus as much on the Incarnation as on the Passion, but it also sought to reproduce the entire experience of pilgrimage, including travel to the sites. Insofar as the Sacro Monte offered to the Christian the opportunity to undertake a journey whose objectives were to *see* and undergo a mimetic transformation as a result of this seeing, it was much more than theater: it was analogous to the ancient Greek practice of *theoria*, out of which theater developed.³⁸ In its traditional form in the classical period, *theoria* involves a journey abroad that the individual, the *theoros*, undertakes in order to visit an oracular center or attend a religious festival. Once there, the *theoros* views spectacles and events; through this activity of *seeing* in a foreign setting he acquires knowledge that transforms him and that he is ready to apply upon his return to his native city. The process of *theoria*, therefore, has a potentially social or political element to it, which is one of the reasons why Plato used it as a metaphor for the activity of the philosopher in some of his dialogues.³⁹ *Theoria* later acquired the restrictive meaning of "contemplation," which the Byzantine church adopted in its own usage of the word.⁴⁰ For our purposes, however, the element of traveling is capital, and the analogy to the classical Greek form of *theoria* underscores the circular nature of pilgrimage: the journey does not end with contemplation at the holy sites, but with the return to the pilgrim's place of origin.⁴¹

In its very configuration, Caimi's Sacro Monte evoked this dimension of pilgrimage. That the relationship to the town is a key aspect of this "Jerusalem" is confirmed by its topographical situation: the site's *relative* isolation, physically distinct from the urban settlement, yet in clear view of it, suggests they exist essentially in relation to each other. Caimi's epistolary practice confirms this impression: he dated his letters, written from his hilltop hermitage, "ex loco sancti sepulchri *apud* Varallum."⁴² His characterization summarizes neatly his endeavor: as the site of the Holy Sepulcher

near Varallo, the Sacro Monte participates of both Palestine and Lombardy while being removed from both. It not only offers the pilgrims a certain image of Jerusalem, but also a certain image of their town.



Fig. 3. "Ritratto del monte di Varallo." Woodcut from the devotional "guidebook" *Breve descrizione del Sacro Monte di Varallo di Valsesia* (Novara: Sessalli, 1566); on the left side, the path linking the town, the monastery, and the hill is clearly indicated.

As the illustrations that appeared in some of the earliest guidebooks suggest, the Sacro Monte does not consist of the hilltop only but also comprises the ascending path that links it to the valley (fig. 3). In the early period the journey up the hill began by relinquishing the town, yet at the term of the ascent what the pilgrims found was, at first sight, in no way dissimilar to what they had left behind, because Caimi housed his perfect replicas in simple vernacular structures. The "Bethlehem" chapel, for example, faithfully reproduces some of the inner elements of its Palestinian model, but its outward appearance does not distinguish it from the numerous churches that dot the Sesia valley (fig. 4-5).



Fig. 4-5. Above: inside view of the “Nativity grotto” at the Sacro Monte of Varallo, replicating some of the aspects of its counterpart in Bethlehem. Below: outside view of the same chapel, exhibiting typical features of Valsesian churches.



Looking like Varallo on the outside, but like “Jerusalem” within, the endpoint of the journey up Caimi’s Sacro Monte metaphorically suggested that a transformation had taken place in the town itself: the mimetic reform sought for in pilgrimage found its ultimate expression in the life of the community to which the pilgrim returned, imitating Christ by “living” the Gospels.

Notes

¹ Scholarship on Varallo is extensive, and the topic has undergone in recent decades a “real historiographical revolution,” in the words of one of the most diligent historians of the site, Pier Giorgio Longo. Most of the publications are in Italian; for a recent bibliography listing the main sources on Varallo and later Sacri Monti, see *I Sacri Monti nella cultura religiosa e artistica del Nord Italia*, ed. by Dorino Tuniz (Genoa: San Paolo, 2005).

² Rudolf Wittkower, “‘Sacri Monti’ in the Italian Alps” in *Idea and Image. Studies in the Italian Renaissance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 175-83, and *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1750*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 101; Paola Ventrone, “I Sacri Monti: un esempio di teatro ‘pietrificato’?” in *La “Gerusalemme” di San Vivaldo e i sacri monti in Europa: Firenze-San Vivaldo, 11-13 settembre 1986*, ed. by Sergio Gensini (Montaione: Pacini, 1989), 145-62; Pierluigi De Vecchi, “Annotazioni sul Calvario del Sacro Monte di Varallo” in *Fra Rinascimento, manierismo e realtà: scritti di storia dell’arte in memoria di Anna Maria Brizio*, ed. by Pietro C. Marani ([Florence]: Giunti Barbèra, [1984]), 109-18.

³ The secondary literature on imitation in the arts is immense. Classic accounts include Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis. The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967) and Jan Bialostocki, “The Renaissance Concept of Nature and Antiquity” in *The Renaissance and Mannerism*, Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 19-30. For a recent assessment of the question of imitation of the Ancients in architecture see James Ackerman, “Imitation” in *Antiquity and Its Interpreters*, ed. by Alina Payne et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9-16. For the notion of imitation in Christian thought, see Gerhart Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and the Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959) and Karl Morrison, *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

⁴ Some of the details supplied in the early histories of Varallo, whose accounts differ, tell us more about the period in which they were written and the allegiances of each writer than about Caimi’s time. Giovanni Battista Fassola, *La nuova Gierusalme o sia il Santo Sepolcro di Varallo...* (Milano: Agnelli, 1671), and Francesco Torrotti, *Historia della nuova Gierusalemme. Il Sacro Monte di Varallo* (Varallo, 1686).

⁵ The inscription reads, in abbreviated Latin, “MAGNIFICUS DNS MILANUS SCARROGNINUS HOC SEPLCHR CU FABRICA SIBI CONTIGUA CHRISTO POSUIT MCCCCLXXXI DIE SEPTIMO OCTOBRIS R P FRATER BERNARDINUS CAYM DE MIO OR MI DE OBS SACRA HUI MOTIS EXCOGITAVIT LOCA UT HIC HIRLM VIDEAT QUI PAGRARE NEQT.” The adjoining hermitage was transformed into an oratory in the 18th c, and decorated accordingly.

⁶ Richard Krautheimer, “Introduction to an ‘Iconography of Medieval architecture’,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* vol. 5 (1942), 1-33; Maria-Luisa Gatti Perer, ed., ‘*La dimora di Dio con gli uomini.*’ *Immagini della Gerusalemme celeste dal III al XIV secolo* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1983); Carol Heitz, *Recherche sur les rapports entre architecture et liturgie à l’époque carolingienne* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1963); Robert Ousterhout, “Loca Sancta and the Architectural Response to Pilgrimage” in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. by Robert Ousterhout (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 114-9.

⁷ On Santo Stefano, see in particular Robert G. Ousterhout, “The Church of Santo Stefano: A ‘Jerusalem’ in Bologna,” *Gesta* vol. 20 no. 2 (1981), 311-21. As Ousterhout notes, the distance between the tomb of Christ and the Calvary rock in Jerusalem is 28 dexteri, or 41.6 m, while at Bologna it is 42 m. At Varallo, it is about 41 m. On the symbolic importance of measurements in medieval recreations of the Holy Sepulcher, see Ousterhout, “Loca Sancta,” 113.

⁸ Robert Ousterhout, “Flexible Geography and Transportable Topography” in *The Real and the Ideal in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art* ed. by Bianca Kühnel (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Art of the Hebrew University, 1998), 394. See also Ousterhout, “Loca Sancta,” 113. The rock is enshrined to the right of the entrance; the inscription reads: “LAPIS SANCTI SEPULCRI DOMINI NOSTRI JESU CHRISTI QUOD YEROSOLIMIS EST, INDE TRANSLATUS ET ERECTUS HIC IN TITULUM.”

⁹ Santo Stefano in Bologna is only the most complete example of a widespread practice. See Ousterhout, “The Church of Santo Stefano,” passim; Krautheimer, passim; Colin Morris, *The Sepulchre of Christ and the Medieval West, From the Beginning to 1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 230 ff; Justin E.

A. Kroesen, *The Sepulchrum Domini Through the Ages. Its form and Function* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 12-44.

¹⁰ “From Early Christian times and throughout the Middle Ages descriptions, depictions or architectural copies were nothing but a *vilis figuratio*, limited to a selected number of outstanding elements; their selection was determined by and their visual aspect subordinated to the hierarchic order of their religious importance.” Krautheimer, 20. See also Günther Bandmann, *Early Medieval Architecture as Bearer of Meaning*, transl. by Kendall Wallis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 49-51.

¹¹ On the medieval practice of transforming symbolically the local town into “Jerusalem” through a Holy Sepulcher replica see Ousterhout, “Flexible Geography,” 394. Other fifteenth-century “true copies” of the tomb aedicula include the one built in San Pancrazio, Florence, by Leon Battista Alberti for Giovanni Rucellai in 1467. See Ludwig H. Heydenreich, “Die Capella Rucellai von San Pancrazio in Florenz,” in *De artibus opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky* ed. by M. Meiss (New York, 1961), 219-29; Franco Borsi, *Leon Battista Alberti. The Complete Works* (New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1989), 50-1 and 75-90; Gastone Petrini, “La cappella del Santo Sepolcro nella ex chiesa di S. Pancrazio in Firenze” in *Toscana e Terrasanta nel Medioevo*, ed. by Franco Cardini (Firenze: Alinea, 1982), 339-43. For the replica built at Görlitz, completed c. 1500, see Morris, 354-6. For sixteenth- and seventeenth-century examples, particularly in the Habsburg empire, see Michael Rüdiger, *Nachbauten des Heiligen Grabes in Jerusalem in der Zeit von Gegenreformation und Barock. Ein Beitrag zur Kultgeschichte architektonischer Devotionalkopien* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2003).

¹² On monasticism as the “exemplary Christian way of life” see Ladner, *Idea of Reform*, 319-40; on monasteries as heavenly Jerusalems see Marco Rossi and Alessandro Rovetta, “Indagini sullo spazio ecclesiale immagine della Gerusalemme celeste” in *La dimora di Dio*, 97-8.

¹³ Medievalists in particular tend to express dismay at the “blatant” character of the Varallese copies. See for instance Ousterhout, “Flexible Geographies,” 402.

¹⁴ Gerhart B. Ladner, “The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy,” in *Images and Ideas in the Middle Ages* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1983), 91; Jean-Pierre Vernant, “The Birth of Images,” in *Mortals and Immortals*, ed. by Froma I Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 164-85.

¹⁵ On the idea of Jerusalem as capital of the Christian empire, and the triple association Charlemagne-Constantine-Christ the Savior during the Carolingian period, see Heitz, 149-52 and Krautheimer, “The Carolingian Revival of Early Christian Architecture,” *The Art Bulletin* vol. 24 no. 1 (March 1942), 1-38. On the idea of Jerusalem as “ideal city” during the Crusades, which also corresponded with the rise of new cities in the West, see Ousterhout, “Flexible Geography,” 394.

¹⁶ For the “invention” of the holy sites based on oral tradition and the Scriptures, see Maraval, 23-60.

¹⁷ On the rock-cut tomb and the aedicula see Martin Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 109-19.

¹⁸ Cynthia Hahn, “Loca Sancta Souvenirs: Sealing the Pilgrim’s Experience,” and Gary Vikan, “Pilgrims in Magi’s Clothing: The Impact of Mimesis on Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art,” in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, 85-96 and 97-107. See also Pierre Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d’Orient* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 135-51.

¹⁹ St. Jerome, Epistle 46, 5; cited in Maraval, 140 (my translation). For other early accounts of pilgrimage, see John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 2002).

²⁰ I am referring here to the naturally occurring, *spontaneous* phenomenon of associating one’s memory of an event with the site where it “took place.” This human tendency to associate a thing with the place in which it lies, or an event with its location is the basis for the ancient rhetorical art of memory, which consists in associating mentally a series of things that one wants to remember with the different rooms of an arbitrarily chosen building, as shown by Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966) and Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). The link between the art of memory and the later stages of development at Varallo has been explored by David Leatherbarrow in “The Image and Its Setting: A Study of the Sacro Monte at Varallo,” *Res: A Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics* 14 (1987), 107-22. See also Judith Wolin, “Mnemetopias: Revisiting Renaissance Sacri Monti,” *Modulus* 18 (1987), 45-6; Roberta Panzanelli, “Pilgrimage in Hyperreality: Images and Imagination in the Early Phase of the ‘New Jerusalem’ at Varallo,” Ph.D. Thesis, University of California in Los Angeles, 1999.

²¹ William Loerke, “ ‘Real Presence’ in Early Christian Art,” in *Monasticism and the Arts*, ed. by Timothy Verdon (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press), 34.

²² On the invention of Christian imagery as a consequence of pilgrimage, see Loerke, 34 ff. On the iconography of the Palestinian holy sites in early Christian times, see Maraval, 200-2.

²³ On fourteenth and fifteenth pilgrimages to the Holy Land, see Béatrice Dansette, “Les pèlerinages occidentaux en Terre Sainte : une pratique de la ‘Dévotion moderne’ ? Relation inédite d’un pèlerinage effectué en 1486.” *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* vol. 72 no. 1-2 (Jan.-June 1979), 118-21; Etienne Delaruelle, “Deux guides de Terre Sainte aux X^{IV}e et X^Ve siècles,” in *La piété populaire au moyen âge* (Turin: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1975), 7-13.

²⁴ On accompanied visits at Jerusalem see Dansette, 120-1. For Varallo see Jonathan Bober, “Varallo, Sacro Monte,” in *Grove Dictionary of Art* (1996), accessed on-line at www.groveart.com.

²⁵ The earliest known devotional “guidebook” to the Sacro Monte was published in 1514. See Stefania Stefani Perrone, ed, *Questi sono li Misteri che sono sopra el Monte de Varalle in una “Guida” poetica del 1514* (Borgosesia: Valsesia Editrice, 1987).

²⁶ On meditation literature see Richard Kieckhefer, “Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion,” in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. by Jill Rait (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 77-9; Robert Worth Frank, Jr., “*Meditationes Vitae Christi*: The Logistics of Access to Divinity,” in *Hermeneutics and Medieval Culture*, ed. by Patrick J. Gallacher & Helen Damico (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 39-50; Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 89-100.

²⁷ *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, translated by Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 310.

²⁸ On the range of visitors to the Sacro Monte see Alessandro Nova, “ ‘Popular’ Art in Renaissance Italy: Early Response to the Holy Mountain at Varallo” in *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450-1650* ed. by Claire Farago (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 112-26; William Hood, “The *Sacro Monte* of Varallo. Renaissance Art and Popular Religion,” in *Monasticism and the Arts*, ed. by Timothy Gregory Verdon (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 291-311; Guido Gentile, “Sulle tracce degli antichi visitatori: percorsi e graffiti,” in *Gaudenzio Ferrari. La crocifissione del Sacro Monte di Varallo*, ed. by Elena de Filippis (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2006), 65-73; Casimiro Debiaggi, “Quando Matteo Bandello visitò il Sacro Monte di Varallo,” *Bollettino Storico per la Provincia di Novara* vol. 73 no. 2 (July-Dec. 1982), 235-9. There also exists a substantial bibliography on Carlo Borromeo, undoubtedly the most famous early visitor to the site; see in particular Angelo L. Stoppa, “I quattro pellegrinaggi di San Carlo al Sacro Monte di Varallo,” in *Da Carlo Borromeo a Carlo Bascapé* (Novara: Associazione di Storia della Chiesa Novarese, 1985), 57-82.

²⁹ See in particular R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-c.1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550. An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979); R. R. Post, *Modern Devotion. Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism* (Leiden: Brill, 1968).

³⁰ On devotional painting, see in particular Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative. The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1984); H. W. van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages* (New Rochelle: Caratzas, 1990). On the development of the new sculptural genres, see in particular Timothy Verdon, *The Art of Guido Mazzoni* (New York: Garland, 1978); William H. Forsyth, *The Entombment of Christ: French Sculptures of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970); Michel Martin, *La statuaire de la mise au tombeau du Christ des X^Ve et X^{VI}e siècles en Europe occidentale* (Paris: Picard, 1997); Joanna E. Ziegler, *Sculpture of Compassion: the Pietà and the Beguines in the southern Low Countries c.1300-c.1600* (Brussels: Institut historique belge de Rome, 1992).

³¹ On this issue, see Michael Camille, “Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy,” *Art History* 8 (1985), 26-49.

³² On this notion see Daniel Arasse, “Entre dévotion et culture: Fonctions de l’image religieuse au X^Ve siècle,” in *Faire Croire : Modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du X^{III}e au X^Ve siècle* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1981), 131-46.

³³ On Caimi's pursuit of contemplation see Pier Giorgio Longo, "Bernardino Caimi francescano osservante: tra 'eremitario' e città." *Novarien* 29 (2000), 9-25. On mysticism in the late medieval period see Bernard McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries," *Church History* vol. 56 no. 1 (March 1987), 7-24; Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 115-34; Ewert H Cousins, "Francis of Assisi: Christian Mysticism at the Crossroads," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 163-90.

³⁴ My account of Bonaventure's theory in this and the next paragraphs is indebted to the following: Alfonso Pompei, *Bonaventura da Bagnoregio: Il pensare francescano* (Rome: Miscellanea francescana, 1993), esp. 58-168 and 276-97; Ambroise Nguyen Van Si, *La théologie de l'imitation du Christ d'après Saint Bonaventure* (Rome: Edizioni Antonianum, 1991), esp. 67-77; Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), esp. 331-40; Michelle Karnes, "The 'School of Devotion': Imagination and Cognition in Medieval Meditations on Christ," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2004), 10-73. See also Ladner, "The Concept of the Image," 73-111.

³⁵ On "following" Christ vs. "imitating" Christ, see Hans Dieter Betz, *Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1967); Nguyen Van Si, 39-42.

³⁶ Dansette, 118-121.

³⁷ On the development of the *via crucis*, a Franciscan devotional practice elaborated from the 15th to the 17th c., see Amédée de Zedelgem, "Aperçu historique sur la dévotion au Chemin de la Croix," *Collectanea Franciscana* vol. 19 (Jan.-Oct. 1949), 45-142; G. Cyprian Alston, "Way of the Cross" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* vol. 15 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), accessed on-line through www.newadvent.org; Gianvittorio Signorotto, "Gli esordi della *via crucis* nel Milanese," in *Il Francescanesimo in Lombardia* (Milan: Silvana, 1983), 145-57. On the relationships between *via crucis* and *sacro monte* see in particular Guido Gentile, "Sacri Monti e viae crucis: storie intrecciate" in *Saggio Storico sulla Devotione alla via crucis di Amédée (Teetaert) da Zedelgem* (Casale Monferrato: Atlas, 2004), 31-42.

³⁸ On the origins of Ancient Greek theater see Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) and John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin, eds, *Nothing to do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

³⁹ Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in Its Cultural Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-7 and 40-71.

⁴⁰ Kallistos Ware, "Ways of Prayer and Contemplation: Eastern," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroads, 1985), 399-400.

⁴¹ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2 and 15.

⁴² P. Galloni, *Sacro Monte di Varallo* (Varallo: Camaschella & Zanfa, 1909), 71. My emphasis.