The Entombment of Christ by Jean de Rouen, a mysterious work and a case of formal transmigration

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Abstract

In the early forties, Jean de Rouen sculpted a spectacular *Depositio* in the city of Coimbra. Even if the recent historiography claims to integrate this artwork in the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre from the monastic church of Santa Cruz (currently in the Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro — MNMC, no E 109), the historical testimonies neglect this presence. In fact, since 1540, until the last years of the 19th century, there are no references to the monumental Entombment in Santa Cruz. These gaps have provoked my concern, and made me attempt to find more information about the historical fortune of this artwork.

My goal is to compare the monumental group from Coimbra with some similar works built in French territory between the end of the 15th century and the first half of the 16th, and confront it with other sources of visual influence, as the *tableaux vivant* created in the (liturgical) theatres of the mysteries (common in Normandy at that time), and verify the historical fortune of this particular sculptural group.

Key-words: João de Ruão, The Entombment of Christ, sculpture, Machado de Castro National Museum

Resumo

No início dos anos 40, João de Ruão esculpiu, em Coimbra, uma espectacular *Deposição no Túmulo*. A historiografia artística tem vindo a integrar esta obra na Capela do Santo Sepulcro da igreja monástica de Santa Cruz (atualmente no Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro — MNMC, n.º E 109), mas os testemunhos históricos omitem esta presença. Entre 1540 e os últimos anos do século XIX, não existem referências à monumental Deposição em Santa Cruz, facto que instigou a aprofundar a pesquisa sobre a fortuna histórica desta obra de arte.

O objectivo deste artigo é confrontar este conjunto escultórico monumental de Coimbra com outras fontes de influência visual, como os *tableaux vivant* criados nos teatros (litúrgicos) dos mistérios (comuns na Normandia naquela época), compará-lo com algumas obras semelhantes construídas em território francês entre finais do século XV e primeira metade do século XVI, e verificar a sua fortuna histórica.

Palavras-chave: João de Ruão, Deposição no Túmulo, escultura, Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro

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A short-lived devotion

In Portugal, there were no abundant monumental (or real-size) entombments made in stone. It was in France, particularly from the second quarter of the 15th century — the *inaugural* entombment in France (Langres Chathedral) dates from 1420 (Karsallah, 2006: 2016) —, that these representations flourished (Karsallah informs that in France there were nearly 460 specimens), showing the tragedy of Christ's death and his burial, when his sacred body was enclosed in the (holy) tomb.

Still, the large-scale sculptural representations of the Entombment were not long-lasting, even in France, where they began to disappear at the end of the 16th century, because, supposedly, they went out of fashion.

Fig. 1 - Jean Fouquet, «La Mise au Tombeau», *Livre d'Heures d'Etienne Chevalier*, c. 1452-1456, Ms. 71, fl. 88. Musée Condé. Chantilly. ©Public Domain. Note: In this illumination, we can see groups of citizens that can be the representation of a liturgical theater.

If the French sensibility was quite brief (despite the impact of these works), its length in Portugal was even briefer. The reasons that lie behind the ephemerality of such an emotive, lively and powerful stone picture are still to be clarified, in the context of liturgical or devotional alterations. We can still imagine other explanatory hypotheses for this circumstance, tied to the relationship between the sculptural Entombments and other sources of visual influence, as the *tableaux vivant* created in the *theatres of mysteries* (Fig. 1). In fact, these theatres began to weaken in the late 16th century, more or less at the same time as the sculptural representations of the *Depositios* lost strength.

The late medieval sculptural representation of the *Depositio Christi,* which stimulated devotion

Fig. 2 - Jean Fouquet, «Martyre de Sainte Apolline», *Livre d'Heures d'Etienne Chevalier*, c. 1452-1456, Ms. 71. Musée Condé. Chantilly. ©Public Domain. Note: This illumination shows groups of people watching the scene. It can be the representation of a theater.

and empathy in the devotees, goes hand in hand with the representations of the *Passion* in the religious theatres, specifically inscribed in the medieval "Théâtre des Mystères", with an undeniable success in regard to the perceptive and emotional responses of the spectators (Fig. 2).

Fig. 3 - Unknown artist, Panel painting with scenes of Passion of the Christ, St. James Church, Toruń (Poland), c. 1480-90. ©Public Domain. Note: organization of scenic space scenic: Théâtre Rond.

Fig. 4 - La Passion et Résurrection de nostre saulveur et redempteur Jhesu Crist, ainsi qu'elle fut juée en Valenchiennes, en le an 1547, par grace demaistre Nicaise Chamart, seigneur de Alsembergue, alors prevost de la ville... . Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Français 12536, fl. 239v-240r. © https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b550059570q

The first great (and luxurious) show of the *Mystery of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ* in Rouen in the 16th century dates from 1502. A series of vicissitudes did not allow the presentation of the previously projected theatrical

pieces dedicated to the *Passion* (except the *Mystère* played in the *Dominican cemetery* in 1452), although others occurred, under further invocations, during the 15th century. As part of Francis I solemn entrance to Rouen, in 1517, the *Mysteries* were represented in the cathedral square — like in 1508, when the entrance of Louis XII — and despite the works that were taking place in the church portal (Gosselin, 1868).

These public performative representations (first within the churches and then on the street) were experienced by the common people who joined the mysteries through the perception and with their own bodies. The public took part in these theatres, performances or games (*ludus*), sharing the stage, and surrendering themselves, with their physiques and souls, to the mystery that, therefore, is humanized and materialized. These performances promote empathic responses (*I am here*) and made possible the sharing of knowledge through sensations, emotions and feelings, in a time of marked illiteracy.

The *Theatres of Mysteries*, of *Miracles*, *Lauds*, and other performative representations, functioned as a sort of *tableaux vivant*, (Fig. 3) and acted as visual mnemonics that, in space, through the actions and the actors, ensured the stabilization and memorization of the contents, as well as the incorporation of commotion and, therefore, the expanding of the dramatic effects of the players.

The late medieval theatres (Fig. 4) were very expressive in France, particularly between the early 15th and the mid-16th centuries (the Parisian parliament banned liturgical theatres in 1548,

although this determination did not have the required effects). These theatres also took place in Portugal, as Rebello describes, referring a dialogued text of a *Depositio Christi* that appears in a missal from Braga, dating from 1558. The author says that:

> what is certain is that such a ceremony has been known for over a century, as can be seen from a reference that King D. Duarte makes to it in the *Leal Conselheiro* (chapter 97) and is confirmed at the end of *Auto da Alma*, the play from Gil Vicente that was performed at Paços da Ribeira, in Lisbon, on Maundy Thursday Eve in 1518. And we also have to go back to the first half of the 15th century to find direct traces of one of the most frequent dramatic compositions in medieval liturgy: the *Planctus*, or Our Lady's Tears, which in the beginning was autonomous, but later became part of the 'mysteries' on the Passion of Christ[3].
> (Rebello, 1977: 35)

In fact, these performances helped to install and improve a visual culture that was required by the populations, hungry for images and attracted by the spectacle. At the same time, these staged representations produced living pictures, which educated and help to create visual and iconographical references that could be used by

other artists who needed to materialize them [Figs. 5 a); 5 b)].

According to Laura Weigert, these theatres cross with visual or plastic arts. If the visual arts influenced the theatres, the theatres also influenced visual arts, increasing the difficulty to separate their creative practices from the spectacle and psychological responses (Mâle, 1915; Kemodle, 1944; Weigert, 2015). So, designers, painters, illuminators and sculptors assumed the images created by theatre makers in their performances, and the acting directors also appropriated the visual sources produced by those visual artists [Figs. 6 a); 6 b)].

Fig. 5a - La Passion de Valenchiennes, 1547.

Fig. 5b - João de Ruão, main altarpiece from Guarda Cathedral (detail), Portugal, c. 1552. © Public Domain

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[3] Original in Portuguese: 'certo é que tal cerimónia há mais de um século era conhecida entre nós, como se depreende de uma alusão que o rei D. Duarte lhe faz no *Leal Conselheiro* (capítulo 97) e permite confirmá-lo o remate do *Auto da Alma* vicentino, representado nos Paços da Ribeira, em Lisboa, na noite de endoenças do ano de 1518. E haverá também que retroceder à primeira metade do século XV para encontrar vestígios directos de uma das composições dramáticas mais frequentes na liturgia medieval: o *Planctus*, ou Pranto de Nossa Senhora, que, dotado inicialmente de autonomia, passou mais tarde a integrar-se nos "mistérios" sobre a Paixão de Cristo'.
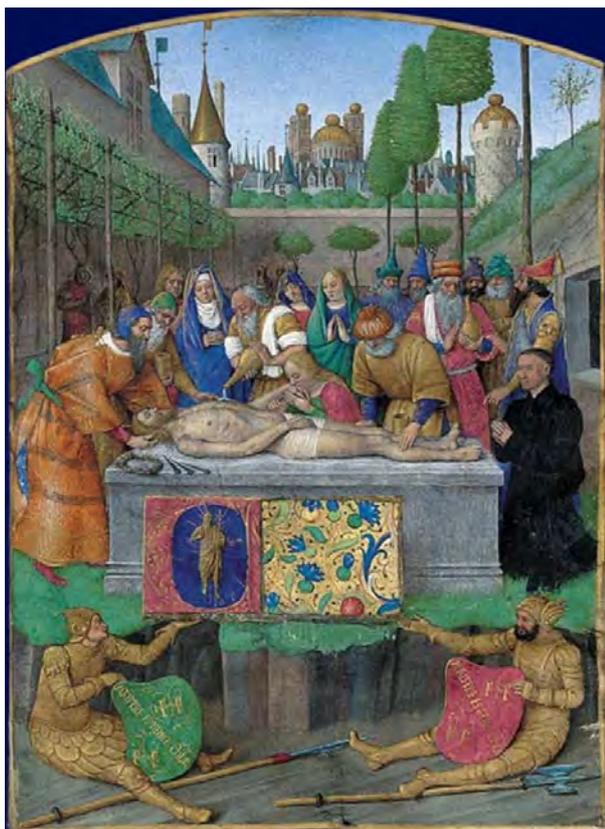
Fig. 6a - Jean Fouquet, «La Mise au Tombeau», *Livre d'Heures d'Etienne Chevalier*, c. 1452-1456, Ms. 71, fl. 88. Musée Condé, Chantilly. ©Public Domain.

Fig. 6b - Michel Colombe (?), *The Entombment of Christ*, Abbey church of Saint-Pierre de Solesmes (Sarthe), after 1496. ©Public Domain

This way, I believe that both arts can construct a whole*: les performance des images.* Therefore, theatre, sculpture, painting (and so on) were so inextricably intertwined that one has to envisage it in order to comprehend the whole visual and cultural atmosphere.

The theatres of passion, like the sculpture, are inscribed in a close multi-sensorial and appealing environment that blends the visible with the invisible and, fundamentally, appeals to the physical presence and humanity of the invisibility. The theatres overflowed (Fig. 7), enlaced with other visual arts in an interrelation of continuous contagion. Revealing themselves through the art of illumination, tapestry, painting, and sculpture, those theatres, like other visual arts, were spectacular events that fulfilled the human needs of contact with the invisible and symbolic world.

Fig. 7 - Unknown artist, *The Entombment of Christ*, Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Chaumont Church (Chaumont, Haute-Marne), 15th century. ©Public Domain

Through this way of thinking, the sources used by the plastic artists transcend the drawings, the engravings, the contagions between artists and visual arts to cover other cultural and perceptive events that created fascinations and answers, translated in the *impetus* of recreation.

The large sculptures representing the burial of Christ have this performative tone, setting a devotional step in the (real sized) stone that opened to the most diverse and personal sensations and emotions. In fact, these burials

could promote a spiritual (or interior) pilgrimage to Jerusalem, like Karsallah (2016: 418) considers.

Facing Christ's death, through monumental sculpture or theatre, makes viewers feel, with the entire body, that, if Jesus died, no man can survive. In the presence of the dramatic scenes of the Passion, the devotees imagine their own death and experience several strong emotions ranging from pain, commiseration and terror. Still, after all the pain, the glorious resurrection will come. The burial of Christ holds a commemorative (redemptive) and collective value.

Fig. 8 - João de Ruão, *The Entombment of Christ*, Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro, nº E 109, c. 1540-1545. ©Manuel V. Botelho (Public Domain)

From the mid-16th century, especially at the end, the *Théâtre des Mystères* declines. The primeval (medieval) pedagogical and moral intents of those happenings where gradually disrupted with the introduction of satirical and licentious elements that radically transform the character of

the performances into profane scenes. It is interesting to verify that this alteration occurred at the same time as the gradual decrease of the sculptural production devoted to the *Depositio*.

The Entombment of Christ by Jean de Rouen

The sculpture room of the Machado de Castro National Museum in Coimbra exhibits the sculptural group of the *Depositio* (nº E 109), made of limestone, with residual polychromies in some less exposed areas (Fig. 8). The group measures 222 cm by 225,5 cm.

The work is attributed to Jean de Rouen and there is no doubt about it since the composition, the anatomy of the figures, the details, the way of sculpting the stone, among other elements, corroborate the attribution (Figs. 9a); 9b). The comparison with similar French works of the early 16th century also allows determining that this *Entombment* was done by an artist who knew those works at close range and was influenced by them.

This *Entombment* reveals seven characters. From left to right, we can see the figure of Joseph of Arimathea holding the shroud and St. John and the Virgin at the head of Christ, two Holy Women (Mary Cleopas and Mary Salome), Magdalene and Nicodemus at the feet of Christ.

Included in this set is an embossed panel with two theatrical angels holding the empty shroud at the top bottom.

Fig. 9a - João de Ruão, *The Entombment of Christ* (details), Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro, nº E 109, c. 1540-1545.©Carla Alexandra Gonçalves

The disposition of the characters, with John holding the Virgin at the head of Christ, followed by the holy women and Magdalene at his feet, corresponds to a particular order of the monumental entombments held in France in the early 16ᵗʰ century, like the (Normand) *Mise au Tombeau* from Notre-Dame of Louviers (Eure, Normandie), dated from 1500–1506. Until then, and mostly, the Virgin could be found at the centre of the group, standing out as a *centripetal persona*, supported by Saint John and reclined, or not, in the way of the deposed Son. In these cases, the role of the Virgin is always very relevant and tends to be the principal visual focus, as happens in the Entombments of the Old Convent of the Annonciade (Bordeaux, 15ᵗʰ
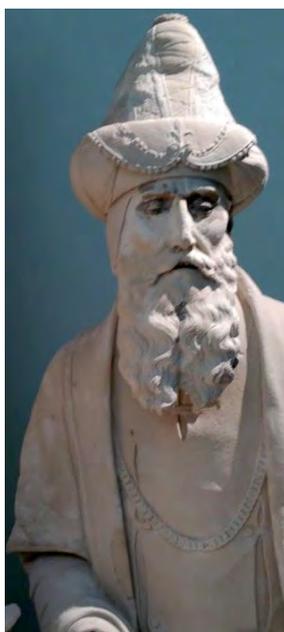
Fig. 9b - João de Ruão, *The Entombment of Christ* (details), Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro, nº E 109, c. 1540-1545.©Carla Alexandra Gonçalves

century), of Saint Martin Church (Lorraine, Pont à Mousson, c. 1415–1430), of the Saint-Matthieu de Salers Church (Cantal, mid-15ᵗʰ century, Fig. 10), from the Crypt of the Cathedral of Saint-Cyr-et-Sainte-Julitte de Nevers (Nièvre, Bourgogne, late 15ᵗʰ century, Fig. 11), of Notre-Dame of l'Épine (Marne, 15ᵗʰ–16ᵗʰ), of Rodez (c. 1523, Fig. 12) — or even in the Entombment in Braga (Fig. 13), in Portugal (in a Chapel known by the name *Capela dos Coimbra*, dating from the first quarter of the 15ᵗʰ century and made by an unknown artist) —, to cite a few examples.

Fig. 10 - Unknown artist, *The Entombment of Christ*. Saint-Matthieu de Salers Church (Cantal, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes), mid-15ᵗʰ century. ©Christophe Finot (Public Domain)

Fig. 11 - *The Entombment of Christ*, Crypt of the Cathedral of Saint-Cyr-et-Sainte-Julitte de Nevers (Nièvre, Bourgogne), late 15ᵗʰ century. ©Daniel Jolivet (Public Domain)
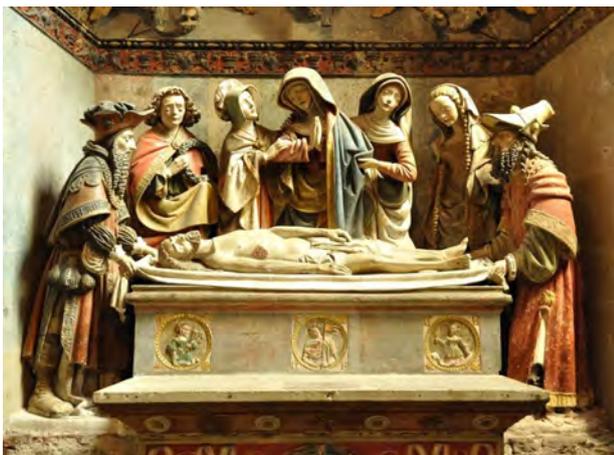
Fig. 12 - *The Entombment of Christ*, Cathedral of Rodez (Rodez, Aveyron), c. 1523. ©Gentil Hibou (Public Domain)
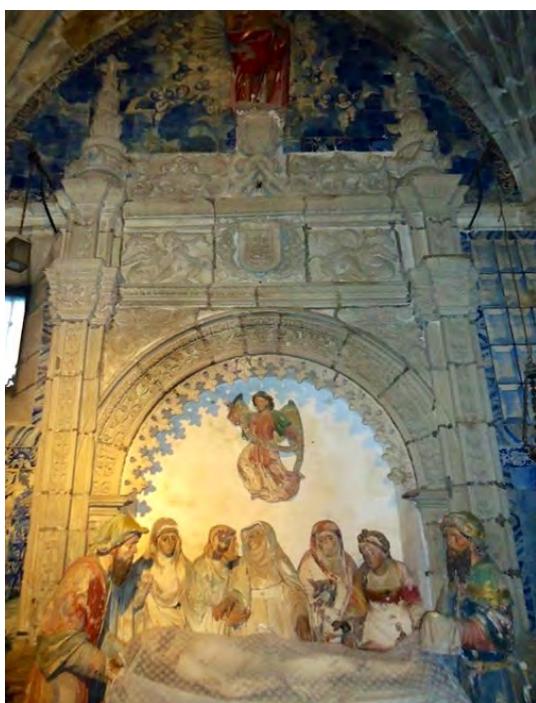
Fig. 13 - *The Entombment of Christ*, Capela dos Coimbra, Braga (Portugal), first quarter of the 15th century. ©Carla Alexandra Gonçalves

Fig. 14 - *The Entombment of Christ*, Sainte-Madeleine Church, Verneuil sur Avre (Eure, Normandy), c. 1506. ©https://www.communes.com/

Much of the French Entombments (a great part of them), made between the 15th and 16th centuries, present a holy woman immediately after Arimathea, followed by St. John, the Virgin, the other women and Magdalene. This is a very frequent model, as it happens in the *Depositio* in Carennac (last years of the 15th century), in Sainte-Madeleine Church, Verneuil sur Avre (Eure, Normandy, c. 1506, Fig. 14), in Montel de Gelat (Chaourse master school, 1515), in the Crypt of Bourges Cathedral (c. 1543), in the Roman College of Saint-Denis (Ville d'Amboise, 16th century), in Saint-Nizier Church (Troyes), etc. In this visual configuration, the Virgin and St. John's stand out, as a compact group to which the spectator's eye is directed.

We can find the same arrangement of the figures used in Coimbra, for instance, in the French entombments of Notre-Dame de Louviers (Normandie, c. 1500-1506, Fig. 15), of Saint-Germain Church (Amiens, 1506), of the Cathedral of Auch (Gers, early 16th century, Fig. 16), and especially in the entombment that stands in the crypt of Saint-Jean-Baptiste Church in Chaource (Aube, Great East of France, 1500 – 1515, Fig. 17).

In the Entombment of Coimbra (Fig. 8), Jesus appears with his head to the left side of the viewer, fitting into the great majority of the French compositions from the 15th until the 16th centuries. This presentation, although it may appear inverted (generally, Christ is facing the main chapel), takes up the more traditional formal scheme, which goes back to the *Epitaphios* and Byzantine *lamentations*. But if Byzantine representations show the suffering of those who share the moment of Christ's burial, the French
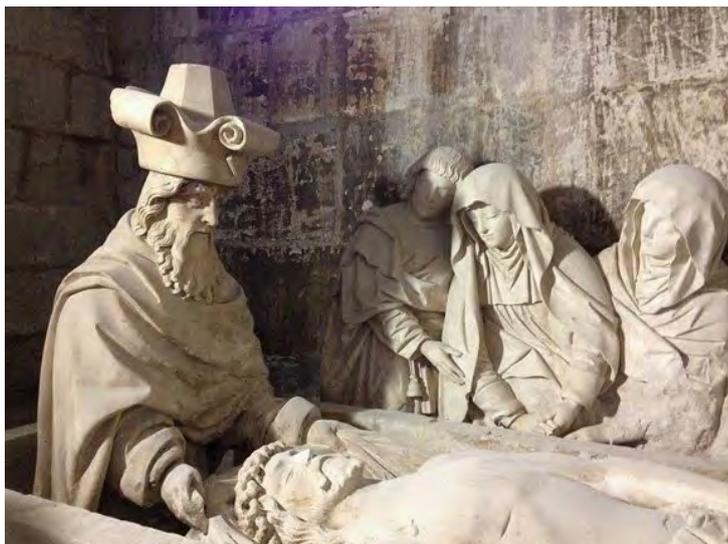
Fig. 15 - *The Entombent of Christ*, Cathedral of Louviers (Eure, Normandie), 1500-1506. ©Public Domain

Fig. 16 - *The Entombent of Christ*, Notre-Dame d'Auch (Gers), attributed to Arnaud de Moles, (painter and glassmaker), begining of the 16th century. © Public Domain
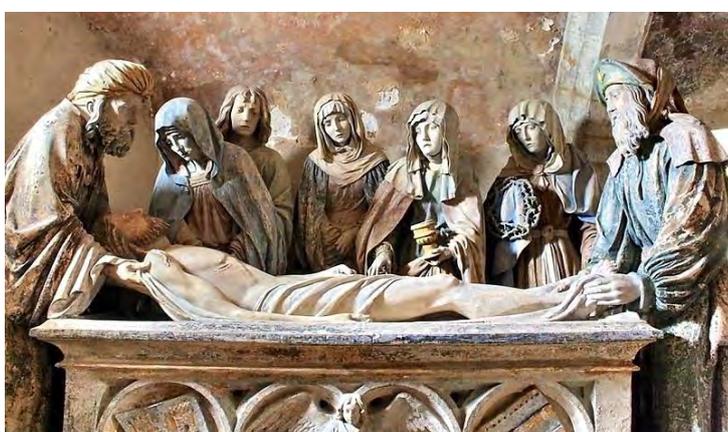
Fig. 17 - *The Entombent of Christ*, crypt of Saint-Jean-Baptiste Church, Chaource (Aube), attributed to *Maître de Chaource*, c. 1500- 1515. ©Public Domain

entombments from the 15th to the mid-16th centuries express an unusual tranquillity, like the contemporary *Pietà* (Forsyth, 1970). The drama, if it exists, is very covertly felt by Mary, who needs protection, and sometimes by the haunted figure of Magdalene, who allows herself to be thrilled. On the other hand, if Byzantine *lamentations* represent Christ lying on the sepulchral stone, flanked by the pots and jars of ointment, in the West Christ is deposed on the sarcophagus, giving rise to the framework of the *depositio* that diverges from the Eastern *lamentation*.

Coimbra's sculptural group shows the serenity which was common in the French entombments until the first quarter of the 16th century (Fig. 18), when the dramatic Italian representations of the *Lamentation* came up and brought their tragedy and scenography painfulness to the characters and to the general setting.

For all these reasons, the artist who conceived this Coimbra's piece of art knew very well the monumental and peaceful French *Depositios* of this period, which are reflected in the set, in the position of the characters, in their poses and clothes, although in France stands out a greater diversity and fantasy in the turbans, hats and fashionable and *theatrical* accessories (which can be seen in Arimathea, Nicodemus and Magdalene), which in Coimbra are reduced to the essential.

Finally, the visual and emotional impact of this life-size sculpture group is overwhelming, so it should have left traces of fortune across the years.

The Historical fortune of the Entombment of Christ held in Coimbra

In the second Book of the *Inventory of Species belonging to the State and existing in the Machado de Castro Museum of Coimbra* (years 1915, 1916 and 1918), fl. 187, is recorded:

> 'Deposition in the Tomb, constituted by a back with Angels. Holy Women and St. John. Christ and two old men. From the workshop of João de Ruão. […] Provenance — Monastery of Santa Cruz […]'.

In the bottom of the same page, there is a note that states the date of the deposit: '23/December/917'. The inventory number attributed is E 109. In the margin, written in pencil, it is inscribed: 'Deposit of the Old Cathedral […]'. Following this is a note, at the bottom of the page, with the number 4085, which announces: 'Deposition in the Tomb. It is deposit no. 211 — Santa Cruz, on 12/23/917. Acted for the New Gallery of the fourteenth century'. Thus, the Entombment arrived at the Machado de Castro Museum on December 23, 1917.

In 1941, Virgílio Correia wrote, in the *Catalogue of the Museum*, about this Entombment: 'Great composition of the French Renaissance in Coimbra. […] From Santa Cruz […]' (Correia, 1941: 44). The administrative file of the group, dated from 1994 and made by Maria João


Fig. 18 [1] - João de Ruão, *The Entombment of Christ* (details), Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro, nº E 109, c. 1540-1550. © Carla Alexandra Gonçalves

Fig. 18 [2] - João de Ruão, *The Entombment of Christ* (details), Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro, nº E 109, c. 1540-1550. © Carla Alexandra Gonçalves

Fig. 18 [3] - João de Ruão, *The Entombment of Christ* (details), Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro, nº E 109, c. 1540-1550. © Carla Alexandra Gonçalves

Vilhena de Carvalho and Sandra Vaz Costa, notifies that, in 1917, the Board of the Parish of Santa Cruz deposited in the Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro the sculptural group of the Entombment from Santa Cruz Church.

It was António Nogueira Gonçalves who wrote that this Entombment belonged to the chapel of the Holy's Sepulchre, located in the small space behind the pulpit of Santa Cruz. The same author wrote that the chapel preserves the altarpiece frame that housed the marvellous *Deposition* that is now in exhibition in the Machado de Castro Museum, dating the structure from the decade of 30-40 of the 16th century (Gonçalves, 1947: 47).

In fact, there is an altarpiece in the *assumed* Chapel. However, the decorative elements of the first floor belong to the fifties of the 16th century, with columns ornamented with crowns of flowers, Antwerp cards, masks, various fruits and other elements typical from that period. At the same time, the open space in the centre seems to be a little shy to receive the real sized Entombment and the embossed angels.

The sources voice

Back to the sources, the Latin *Descripçam e debuxo do Mosteyro de Santa Cruz de Coimbra* — made by D. Francisco Mendanha in 1540, translated into Portuguese by D. Veríssimo, and printed one year later (Mendanha, 1958 [1541]: 417–437) — omits the existence of the sculptural group of the Entombment. That lacuna might be related to the date of the work. Probably, during this description, the Entombment was not yet made.

D. Francisco was sensitive to the beauty of the sculptured stone that he described in other places of the monastery. For instance, it must be highlighted the constant allusions to the white, special and costly stone in which the Virgin of the portal of Santa Cruz was carved, *per natural*; the beautiful stone of the chapels inside the church, and the stone *touched with gold* in the altarpieces of the *Silence* Cloister. Francisco de Mendanha does not spare the acclaims when describing these altarpieces, saying that they were made by artists learned in the science of sculpture, painting and stonework[4] (Mendanha, 1958 [1541]: 417–437). After this appreciation, Francisco Mendanha shares the emotions he felt in the presence of the stone altarpieces of the Cloister (which, we know today, are works by Nicolau Chanterene):

> this altarpiece is so perfect and represents so well the reality of history that there is no Christian heart, however hard it may be, that by contemplating it won't break with pain, and that great pain and feeling makes rivers of tears flow to their contemplative [eyes] because it is the image of the Saviour surrounded by cruel knights and ministers and without the solace of a friend[5]. (Mendanha, 1958 [1541]: 417–437)

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[4] Original in Portuguese: 'todos em pedra mui singulares, & coisa assaz digna de ver & muito mais dos letrados em a sciência de escultura e pintura e inda dos canteiros'.

[5] Original in Portuguese: 'este retabolo tem tanto primor & representa assi a realidade da historia que não haa peito cristão, por duro que seja se o contemplar que se não quebrante com dor & por a grande dor e sentimento faz correr os rios vivos de lagrimas aos seus contemplativos porque he ele a imagem do Salvador cercado de cavaleiros e ministros cruéis e sem conssolaçam de algum amigo'.

So, it is hard to believe that Francisco Mendanha saw, in the Holy Sepulchre chapel, the enormous, unusual and alive representation of the Entombment without a note about its presence. In fact, the author mentioned only two chapels within the church: that of Santo António and that of the Cinco Mártires (Five Martyrs [of Morocco]), with *wooden altarpieces boiled in gold*.

It remains to be noted that the Santa Cruz inventory, carried out at the time of the extinction of religious orders in 1834, also omits the *Depositio* (A.U.C., *Inventário de Santa Cruz*, 1834). Had the omission of The Entombment been due to the darkness of the Santa Cruz chapel which disrupted his perception and register? It is hard to believe in this.

This *blindness* of the chronicler, concerning the holy burial, may be explained by the effective inexistence of the sculptural work. However, the notes of Frei Jerónimo Roman about Santa Cruz, dating to 1589, also *deleted* this wide Entombment (Correia, 1946: 209–247)! This fact causes a profound strangeness. Seeing this Entombment would provoke powerful reactions, for all the reasons related to its monumental form, beauty and symbolic contents, promote its consideration for future memory.

This *freakish* invisibility of the Entombment has made me search elsewhere, trying to find a note about its material reality within Santa Cruz church. After examining the city's various historical guides published in the 19th century (Simões de Castro, 1867: 36-67; Borges de Figueiredo, s. d. [c. 1886]; Simões, 1888; L. R. D., 1894; Haupt, 1890; Castro, 1918), is striking the omission of the work of art under consideration. One note to the words of Borges de Figueiredo (1886) who, after describing and praising the pulpit of Santa Cruz, states, regarding the side chapels of the church, that:

> 'The side chapels, those dark dens I have already mentioned, have nothing that grabs or, more accurately speaking, draws the visitor to it'[6] (Figueiredo, 1886: 56).

In the *Chronicle* of Frei Nicolau de Santa Maria, published in 1668, about the monastery and church of Santa Cruz (Santa Maria, 1668: 88 e ss.), remains the Entombment in its continued forgetfulness. This shortcoming may be due to the fact that Santa Maria uses, as an enunciation matrix, the text of the 1540 chronicler Francisco de Mendanha. However, when Nicolau de Santa Maria describes the chapels on the left hand of the church, he announced, for the first time, the Holy Burial chamber. It is important to underline this point.

When Inácio de Vilhena Barbosa published, in the same year of 1886, the book dedicated to the Portugal Monuments, register the existence of the *Holy Sepulchre Chapel* in Santa Cruz of Coimbra, but he didn't speak about the Entombment. The author said, about the interior of Santa Cruz church, that:

> 'All these deep chapels of modern architecture don't deserve being recommended to the attention of the traveller due to a lack of artistic

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[6] Original in Portuguese: 'As capellas lateraes, esses antros escuros a que já alludi, não têm coisa que prenda, ou, para mais exactamente falar, que chame o visitante.'

worth in its stonework. The altars are decorated with gilded woodcarving'[7] (Barbosa, 1886: 408).

After these considerations, Inácio de Vilhena Barbosa celebrates the pulpit and the royal tombs, as well as other places of the monastery, without mentioning the Entombment.

The same forgetfulness revealed Albrecht Haupt, who does not remark the holy burial of Santa Cruz in his book dedicated to the architecture of the renaissance in Portugal (Haupt, 1924 [1890]).

In conclusion, the sculptured Entombment does not appear in the city's historical guides published during the 19th century that notice the importance of the portal, the royal tombs, the pulpit, the chapel of St. Theotonius and of St. Michael (with allusions to its stone altarpiece), the cloisters, sanctuary, library and sometimes dorms, churchyard and the fence with its gardens.

This is very disturbing. After all, to where this artwork was made? If it was carved for the Holy Sepulchre chapel, would it have been inscribed in the altarpiece we can see today in that space?

António Nogueira Gonçalves tells us that the *Depositio* did not reach the Museum directly from the Sepulcher Chapel. Nevertheless, the historian has failed to state the sources used for this declaration (Gonçalves, 1984 [1964]: 158).

Comparing images

In a crypto-historical effort, I was able to gather two photographs of the burial of Christ assembled in Santa Cruz in the 19th century. The first and best image was taken by José Sartoris, an Italian photographer who lived in Coimbra and travelled the country, photographing several national monuments that included in the work named *Portugal Artístico e Monumental* (1896–1898).

This photograph (Fig. 19) dates from 1896 and shows the Entombment group, with its background checked, armed on a chamber. From each side of the image, we can perceive what must be simple bookshelves with old and heavy volumes.

Fig. 19 - *The Entombment Altar*, Santa Cruz Monastery, Coimbra. Photography by José Sartoris. c. 1896. © Alexandre and António Ramires collection

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[7] Original in Portuguese: 'Todas estas capellas fundas, de architectura moderna, mas sem que se recommendem á attenção do viajante por merecimento algum artístico na pedra. Os altares são ornamentados de talha doirada.'

The second photograph must be from the same epoch[8]. Nevertheless, the walls were freed from the books that were present in the aforementioned picture, allowing to see an ashlar of tiles in half the wall. In fact, there are still, in the monastery of Santa Cruz, identical tiles to those that the photo records. They are the ashlars of the corridor of access to the upper gallery of the cloister, made in Coimbra from the beginning of the 18th century, and attributed to Agostinho Paiva (Fig. 20).

Fig. 20 - Detail of the ashlars in the corridor of access to the upper gallery of the cloister of the Santa Cruz Monastery. © Carla Alexandra Gonçalves

I can assume that these images were taken at the ephemeral *Museu Paroquial de Santa Cruz*, which was opened in 1890, in the upper gallery of the *Silence* Cloister. This *Museum* — also known as the 'muzeu parochial da freguezia de Santa Cruz e Santa Justa' (Pinho, 2010: 338) — exhibited some of the objects that the Parish intended to guard and preserve in so difficult times. The idea of the museum was to save the objects and artworks from the pillage to which they were exposed. The pieces on display — along with those of the Museu de Antiguidades do Instituto de Coimbra (1874–1912), the municipality's

Museu de Arte Industrial (1889–1891), and the Museu da Escola de Desenho Industrial Brotero (1891–1898) — would meet at the Museu Machado de Castro, opened in 1913 (Gouveia, 1980).

From the Parish museum to the National museum

The *Library and Digital Archive of the Ministry of Finance* (in the Fund of the Jurisdictional Commission for Cultural Goods) holds the request made by the Art and Archeologic Council of the 2nd Circumscription for the incorporation in the Museu Machado de Castro of artistic objects belonging to Santa Cruz, then held by the Santa Cruz Parish Board.

In the request, dated June 10, 1917, it says that the listing of goods made after the *Law of Separation of State and Church* (1911) constituted inventories 'made without special competence and precautions, as simple lists of abbreviated and ill-defined things, are useless documents'[9]. For this reason, and because in Santa Cruz stood several objects that were not used for devotion, and were being ruined after dismantling the Parish Museum, piling up in the Choir, vulnerable and subject to all depredations and robbery, and in a poor state of conservation, Teixeira de Carvalho asked to place them in the Museu Machado de Castro, where they would be

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[8] Picture present on "Sistema de Informação para o Património Arquitectónico, Forte de Sacavém". Available at: http://www.monumentos.gov.pt/Site/DATA_SYS/FONTES_DOC/IMAGES/00000045/00220704.JPG [last accessed in June 2019]

[9] Original in Portuguese: 'elaborados sem competencia especial e precauções, como simples relações de cousas abreviadas e mal definidas, sam documentos inúteis'. Arquivo da Secretaria-Geral do Ministério das Finanças. Process CJBC/CMB/CMB/ADMIN/131. Reference code: PT/ACMF/CJBC/CMB/CMB/ADMIN/131. Title: 'Pedido de incorporação no Museu Machado de Castro de objectos da freguesia de Santa Cruz.' This list does not refer the objects inscribed in that inventory. Cf.: Arquivo da Secretaria-Geral do Ministério das Finanças. Processo CJBC/CMB/CMB/ARROL/018 Santa Cruz. Reference code: PT/ACMF/CJBC/CMB/CMB/ARROL/018. Title: 'Arrolamento dos bens cultuais da freguesia de Santa Cruz, distrito de Coimbra, concelho de Coimbra, constando de: Igreja de Santa Cruz; Capela do Arnado; Capela da Pedrulha; Igreja do Senhor dos Passos da Graça.' Available at: <http://purl.sgmf.pt/134352/1/134352_master/134352_PDF/134352.pdf> [last accessed in June 2019].

protected against the imminent dangers that everywhere were lurking.

The list of art objects held by the Parish Council of Santa Cruz that the *Art Council* required to be exhibited at the Museu Machado de Castro is dated from August 1917. Through that document we learn that the mentioned objects were kept in a collection with the 'ridiculous denomination of Museum'[10] or in 'an alleged Museum' (a clear reference to the precarious character of the *Parish Museum of Santa Cruz*). The list of requests opens with the 'Stone group representing the *Depositio*'[11].

This manuscript documentation must be read together with what we can recover from the old photographs, and with the information from the Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro, dating the entry of the Entombment on December 23, 1917. Therefore, we can testify the existence of the Entombment in Santa Cruz at least between 1896 and 1917.

Questions that remain unanswered:

1) Would the *Depositio* have left the Holy Sepulchre chapel at the time of the creation of the Parochial Museum? But if it existed in this chapel, why was the sculptural group completely forgotten for so many centuries?

2) Would have the altarpiece that remains in the cited chapel take part in the whole group of the *Depositio*?

Comparing the French entombments still in place, with that by Jean de Rouen, nothing justifies the presence of an altarpiece as a support of the monumental sculptural group. Apart from the entombments of the 15th century that could have architectural structures confused with the sculptural scene, the Entombments of the first quarter of the 16th century dispensed retabular frames, with the exception of the *arcosolium*, which housed all characters of the scene, offering the appearance of the holy cave of Jerusalem.

This is a great enigma that stimulates further investigation.

Finally

After having already written and published about this marvellous labour from Jean de Rouen, I am confronting myself with this set of worries that instigated me to review this artwork, which proves that art history needs to be continually renewed, as long as we do it without looking at the contents between quotation marks. This means that the revision of certain statements, the re-reading of the sources, starting from their first places, and the comparison with other visual

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[10] Arquivo da Secretaria-Geral Ministério das Finanças. Processo CJBC/CMB/CMB/ARROL/018 Santa Cruz CJBC/CMB/CMB/ADMIN/131. Código de referência: PT/ACMF/CJBC/CMB/CMB/ADMIN/131. Title: 'Pedido de incorporação no Museu Machado de Castro de objectos da freguesia de Santa Cruz.'

[11] Original in Portuguese: 'Grupo de pedra representando a Deposição no Túmulo.' With the Entombment, the request also included a wooden crucifix from the Chapel of the Sacrament; an old painted frontal; two large Persian rugs; a small Persian rug with animal decoration; a small group in clay = the worship of the Magi; an antique linen warp garment, and some unused objects that in the Museum have appropriate and fruitful place. In August 1926, the Council claimed that the Persian carpets had not yet passed to the Museu Machado de Castro, remained in the custody of the Parish Council in pauper condition. Cf. Arquivo da Secretaria-Geral Ministério das Finanças. Processo CJBC/CMB/CMB/ADMIN/131. Reference code: PT/ACMF/CJBC/CMB/CMB/ADMIN/131. Title: 'Pedido de incorporação no Museu Machado de Castro de objectos da freguesia de Santa Cruz.'

foundations (or influences), opens new sets of questions and new tracks of investigation that, sometimes, only bring new concerns and a large handful of doubts, rather than securities.

With this historical fortune of the Entombment, we enter in a kind of *fold in time*, full of absences and erasures, like a *black hole* in the biography of this artwork that the archives of memories do not allow to clarify. This hole placed the Entombment in the darkness, opening to light when joined the collection of the improvised Museu Paroquial de Santa Cruz, in 1890, and after that, in the Museu Nacional de Machado de Castro, who required it in 1917.

Even so, it is certain that if this ("French") work of Jean de Rouen was forgotten, or erased by the chroniclers, and then by the memorialists and historians from de 19th century, it did not pass unhurt to other looks, that received it almost immediately to the day in which it was born, extending it through other works that, after this, have settle other places.

To conclude this paper, it is necessary to remember another *Depositio* from Coimbra (Fig. 21), made during the fifties of the 16th century to the female Convent of Santa Ana, that (also) belonged to the Order of St. Augustine, and now held in the sacristy of the Carmel College church. This remarkable artwork (like the late ones near Coimbra, from Tentúgal, Montemor-o-Velho, Aveiro, Águeda, Buarcos, Oleiros...) shows that the Entombment of Christ by Jean de Rouen opened other sensible hearts and, inevitably, other commissions.

Fig. 21 - João de Ruão (?), *The Entombment of Christ*, Colégio do Carmo, Sacristy church, Coimbra, c. 1550. © Carla Alexandra Gonçalves

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