

Le Folgoët



Front cover:

Bottom: The outstanding monument that seduced Prosper Mérimée in 1835 ; South façade of the Basilica.

Top: Detail from the Coronation stained glass window (E. Hirsch, 1889) in the transept.

Back cover:

Bottom from left to right: A gargoyle, the medallion of the astonishing discovery (E. Hirsch, 1869), the « Black Virgin »

Top: The portal of the Apostles, southside.

TEXT: YVES-MARIE RUDEL
PROOFREADING: JEAN-MICHEL MENORET
PHOTOGRAPHS: LES AMIS DU FOLGOËT,
CLAUDE HERLEDAN AND DANIELLE ROPARS
TRADUCTION: CAROLINE CABON

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The origins

Le Folgoët – an innocent birth

One day in November 1358, the priest of Lesneven sent a messenger to his friend, the Abbot of Landévennec. He was told about a strange event that had happened in the neighbouring parish of Elestrec (now disappeared). “A true miracle by God” had upset the inhabitants.

Dom Jean de Langoueznou, the Abbot of Landévennec – a theologian and poet – was curious to know more and decided to go and visit the grave of a simple-minded boy from the village of Elestrec. He witnessed a miracle when he arrived there. Indeed, a lily in full bloom was coming out

of the small mound towards the skies and “Ave Maria” was written on its petals in golden letters. In a Latin text then translated into French, the Abbot of Landévennec wrote about that episode: “I, Jean de Langoueznou, Abbot of Landévennec, was present during the miracle previously mentioned. I saw it and put it in writing in honour of God and the Blessed Mary”.

This is how the legend of Salauin ar Foll – Salomon the Fool – was born. The cult of the Virgin Mary thus began in this land beaten by the wind.



Mary's emissary

There, on the “Côte des Légendes” (“Coast of Legends”), Salomon – the singing simple-minded boy living in the woods of Elestrec – is under the protection of a naive and pious people. Indeed, throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, Brittany had to face constant invasions and violent conquests. These hard times saw a spectacular rise of mysticism as if people wanted to get back at decades of difficulties. The more the people were witnessing earthly disasters, the more they would turn to God. Salomon was born during these mystical times and his legend grew.

He was born around 1310 in the hamlet of Kerbriant in the parish of Elestrec. He lost his parents at a very young age and had to beg for food to stay alive. The villagers adopted him. They nicknamed him the fool of the woods – that is “Fol ar Coat” in Breton. The legend says that he received some basic education in school and that the only thing he would remember was the Latin phrase “Ave Maria”.

“Coming out of the small mound, a lily in full bloom was rising towards the skies”. Legend of the foundation of the pilgrimage. XIX century painting, in the transept.



Left: Salomon begging for some bread. © Claude Herledan.



Right: Salomon at school. The only lesson he could remember was the prayer "Ave Maria". Details from the stained-glass window representing the legend of Salomon above the altar of the Cardinal de Coëtiy. © Claude Herledan.

He would sleep out in the open and would take refuge in the hollow trunk of an old oak-tree when it rained too heavily. He would drink from a spring and feed on wild berries and some leftover food that he would beg from farmers. He called

himself Mary's emissary – Itron Varia in Breton – relentlessly repeating: "Salaùn a zrèbfe bara", which means "Salomon would eat some bread". If the bread was stale, he would dunk it in the water from the spring.



To the left:
South wall of the nave: the
Mocking of Christ, probably
sculpted by Bastien and
Henry Prigent.
© Marc Déceneux.

To the right:
The Mocking of Christ by
Roland Doré.
© Marc Déceneux.

The outside statues

The statues which once adorned the outside walls of the basilica were destroyed and scattered in 1793. They were randomly replaced during the first restoration work and were thus mixed with other sculptures of various origins. Some of these statues are remarkable. For instance, you can notice a group of three statues which were separated and represent Saint Yves with a rich man and a poor man. Two statues figuring the Mocking of Christ are also noteworthy. One of them reminds us of the work of Bastien and Henry Prigent, two sculptors who made the calvaries of Plougonven (1554) and Pleyben (1555). We can recognize the style of Roland Doré, a major artist of the 1630s who sculpted the calvary of Senven-Léhart, on the second statue.

We can see other statues on the deanery among which a remarkable Christ. It was taken from a calvary long since disappeared and was probably made by the Prigent brothers in 1543, as the inscription on the statue seems to prove: "This cross was made in MV.XL.I.I.I."

statue of Saint Christopher, and then many other statues around. Then, when you walk past the corner of the transept, you can admire some coats of arms, which are unfortunately damaged, gargoyles and a foliated frieze.

At the back of the basilica, a basin collects the water from the fountain of Salomon. The source actually is inside the church, under the high altar. You can see a sculpted arch above the fountain and another statue of Our Lady. She is holding the Infânt Jesus on her lap. You can notice that she is bending her head towards the basin as if she was looking at her reflection in the water.

The tour of the basilica ends with its north side. It has not a great architectural interest apart from a quatrefoiled frieze and a series of gargoyles on the gallery. A door leads onto an alley.



Several very meaning gargoyles decorate the circumference of the basilica.



The famous rood screen, one of the basilica's masterpieces. © Danielle Ropars.

A rich interior decoration

As soon as you enter the basilica, the rood screen draws the attention. It is finely sculpted in Kersanton stone and divides the choir from the nave. It sits on four pillars. Its delicate framework

is made of three ogee arches and a gallery above them. The tracery of the gallery reminds us of the patterns of the rose window in the apse, behind the rood screen.



The choir enlightened by the high stained window.



Overview of the nave.



The new organ consecrated on Sunday august 30, 2009.

The deanery

It is hard to say exactly when the deanery was built as there are no documents we can refer to. However, this beautiful building is likely to have been built towards the end of the XVth century. Indeed we know that Duchess Anne of Brittany stayed there for a night during her trip around Brittany in 1505. The architectural quality of the deanery, which is now the presbytery, is worth noticing.



The manor house of the deanship- it was the house of the dean of the canons of Le Folgoët- today it is the presbytery.

The Great Pardon

Each year, on the first Sunday of September, the Great Pardon of Le Folgoët gathers thousands of pilgrims. The morning is devoted to religious services while the procession takes place in the afternoon. The crowd of believers is joined by onlookers in search of that authenticity which has lasted for centuries. They all follow the procession: pilgrims wearing suits carry seventy banners – the religious emblems of more than 20 parishes – to accompany the Virgin Mary in her blue cape. This colourful ceremony follows a specific protocol and is a true example of popular faith.



The procession of the black Virgin and Child. © Danielle Ropars.



The procession of the parishes' banners.

