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## THE ARGUMENT FOR THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

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### SUMMARY

Jerusalem Christians knew where Christ had been buried. They venerated the tomb until it became inaccessible in AD 135. Then bitterness enhanced the uninterrupted collective memory, which moreover was stimulated by the questions of visitors. When Macarius petitioned Constantine for the Holy Sepulchre he knew precisely where to excavate, and had finished by the time Helena arrived. Recent archaeological work defines the lines of the first and second walls more precisely, and a survey of the necropolis of Jerusalem contributes to a better understanding of what remains of the tomb of Christ.

### SOMMAIRE

Les chrétiens de Jérusalem savaient où le Christ avait été inhumé. Ils vénèrent la tombe jusqu'à ce qu'elle devienne inaccessible en 135 de notre ère. Ensuite, l'amertume renforça la mémoire collective ininterrompue, qui par ailleurs était stimulée par les questions posées par les visiteurs. Quand Macaire sollicita Constantin pour l'édification du Saint Sépulcre, il savait précisément où faire creuser, et avait terminé quand Hélène arriva. De récents travaux archéologiques précisent le tracé des premiers et deuxièmes murs, et une étude des nécropoles de Jérusalem aide à mieux comprendre ce qui demeure de la tombe du Christ.



By his victory over Licinius at Chrysopolis on 18 September 324 Constantine the Great unified the Roman empire.<sup>1</sup> East and West were no longer separated. Another great division, however, threatened the unity of his world. Christians, the rising force in his new empire, were divided on the nature of Christ. All believed that he was God. For the majority, however, Christ was divine by nature, i.e. coeternal and consubstantial, whereas for Arius and his many followers he was a creature whom the Father had gifted with divinity. In the East the situation was worsened by a difference regarding the date of Easter.

Constantine perceived the threat to be so severe that early in 325 he decided on a general council at Nicaea in Bithynia to which he summoned all the bishops.<sup>2</sup> Given the scope for protracted debate that the two disputed issues offered, it is surprising that the council lasted only a month.<sup>3</sup> Within that brief time, however, unanimity was achieved, and the bishops even had the energy to enact twenty canons concerning the organization of the church. As one might expect, these dealt with frequently recurring problems and set forth principles of wide application. The seventh canon stands out, however, not so much by its brevity (others are just as short) but by reason of its particularity:

Since custom and ancient tradition has held good that the bishop of Aelia should be honoured, let him have his proper honour, saving to the metropolitan the honour peculiar to it.

One does not have to be an expert in reading between the lines to discern a dispute between Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem/Aelia Capitolina (c. 313-334), and his metropolitan Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea (c. 313-340), from which the former emerged victorious, no doubt as the result of intense lobbying. The conciliar fathers had far more important things to worry about than a procedural dispute between two bishops.

Macarius had always been firmly opposed to Arius, whereas at Nicaea Eusebius laboured under the disadvantage of provisional excommunication for refusing to sign the condemnation of Arianism at

<sup>1</sup> This is the annotated version of a talk given to the Advanced Course on Christianity for Israeli Guides held at the Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem, on 8 February 2009. I am most grateful to Jean-Michel de Tarragon, OP, for scanning the illustrations, and to Rosemary Le Bohec for redrawing fig. 5 and inserting the lettering in all.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* [= VC] 3.4-6. Translations from this work are taken from *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series (reprinted Edinburgh: Clark/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), vol. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Early June to early July 325; see C. M. ODAHL, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2004) 196, 201.





Antioch in January 325.<sup>4</sup> For anyone of the time and temper of Macarius the promotion of Jerusalem in the Christian world would have demanded, not only the verbal recognition provided by the canon, but more importantly an adequate symbol of the city's importance. As the place of the death and resurrection of Christ, Jerusalem had to have an imposing shrine commemorating these key salvific events.

The site dictated by the tradition of the Jerusalem church, however, lay beneath the Capitoline Temple.<sup>5</sup> This meant that Macarius' lobbying effort had to include the emperor. This edifice was not just any pagan temple. It was the preeminent symbol of the imperial origin of Aelia Capitolina. To tear it down demanded the approval of the successor of the emperor Hadrian who had erected it after the Jewish revolt of 132-135.

#### MACARIUS AUTHORIZED TO BUILD THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

Macarius profited by the accessibility of the emperor at Nicaea and his obvious pleasure<sup>6</sup> that the assembly was moving steadily in the desired direction to petition Constantine for the construction of a church commemorating the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>7</sup> It would be the triumphant affirmation that Jerusalem was no longer inferior to Caesarea. The request would have struck a chord in Constantine. He had postponed a visit to the East in order to organize the council of Nicaea,<sup>8</sup> and it has been plausibly suggested that he was motivated to go there at least in part by a desire to see the places of the gospels.<sup>9</sup>

Once approval in principle was granted, Macarius was shrewd enough to strike while the iron was hot, and to ask for the men and ma-

<sup>4</sup> H. CHADWICK, "Faith and Order at the Council of Nicaea" *HTR* 53 (1960) 171-95, here 173-74.

<sup>5</sup> So rightly Jerome, "From the days of Hadrian until the reign of Constantine, roughly 180 years, the pagans worshipped a likeness of Jupiter set up in the place of the resurrection and a marble statue of Venus on the rock of the cross" (*Epistle* 58.3) against Dio Cassius, "At Jerusalem Hadrian founded a city in place of the one which had been razed to the ground, naming it Aelia Capitolina, and on the site of the temple of the god he raised a new temple to Jupiter" (*Roman History* 69:12.1), which in fact comes from an eleventh century summary. For details see my "The Location of the Capitol in Aelia Capitolina" *RB* 101 (1994) 407-15.

<sup>6</sup> Constantine's radiant goodwill is emphasized by Eusebius, *VC* 3.15.

<sup>7</sup> C. COÛASNON, *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem* (Schweich Lecture of the British Academy 1972; London: OUP, 1974) 12; P. W. L. WALKER, *Holy City, Holy Places? Christian Attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the Fourth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 94, 275.

<sup>8</sup> Eusebius, *VC*, 2.72.

<sup>9</sup> Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?* 276.





terials to fulfil his dream. Once again the emperor would have been predisposed to agree, because during the winter of 324-325<sup>10</sup> he had written to bishops and governors to collaborate in the erection of new churches.<sup>11</sup> Eusebius proudly records the one that he personally received. It reads in part:

With respect, therefore, to the churches over which you yourself preside, as well as the bishops, presbyters, and deacons of other churches with whom you are acquainted, do you admonish all to be zealous in their attention to the buildings of the churches, and either to repair or enlarge those which at present exist, or, in cases of necessity, to erect new ones (*VC* 2.46).

The last words would have cut the ground from under Eusebius, had he thought of contradicting his suffragan.

Given the bad feeling between Macarius and Eusebius,<sup>12</sup> it is not surprising that the latter should fail to credit the former with the idea of constructing the Holy Sepulchre. All the honour goes to the emperor, who acted “not on the impulse of his own mind, but being moved by the Saviour himself” (*VC* 2.25). Eusebius could not, however, suppress the letter that Constantine wrote directly to Macarius, because in it the emperor detailed what sort of church he wanted.<sup>13</sup>

Helena has no part in this reconstruction of events. This is confirmed by Eusebius, who gives her credit for only two churches, “one at the grotto which had been the scene of the Saviour’s birth, the other on the Mount of his Ascension” (*VC* 3.43).<sup>14</sup> A very different picture is provided by Socrates Scholasticus (c. 380-450):

Helena, the emperor’s mother, ... being divinely directed by dreams went to Jerusalem.... She sought carefully the sepulchre of Christ, from which he arose after his burial; and after much difficulty, by God’s help she discovered it (*Church History*, 1.17).

This is the version that has imprinted itself on the popular mind, and from it derives the scepticism that colours the approach of many visitors to the Holy Sepulchre. We are not told how Helena made her discovery. There is a strong hint that her dreams might have played a role.<sup>15</sup> The stress on difficulty enhances the possibility of error. Cynicism might

<sup>10</sup> Odahl, *Constantine*, 186.

<sup>11</sup> Eusebius, *VC* 2.45.

<sup>12</sup> Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?* 55.

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius, *VC* 3.30-32.

<sup>14</sup> Similarly Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.2.

<sup>15</sup> This is taken seriously by J. E. TAYLOR, *Christians and the Holy Places. The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 138.





suggest that an old lady, whose piety made her credulous, believed what she was told by whatever religious conman managed to win her favour.

It is much more probable, however, that work on the Holy Sepulchre was well under way by the time Helena arrived in Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup> Macarius would have arrived back in Jerusalem by September 325 at the latest, and his pride guarantees that he would have started work demolishing the Capitoline Temple immediately.<sup>17</sup> There might have been a temptation to economize by reusing the well-cut stones from the temple in the new church, but this was explicitly excluded by Constantine.<sup>18</sup>

Naturally Macarius kept in favour by sending Constantine progress reports, which the emperor evoked in passing in a letter to the bishop, in which he mentions that the site 'daily' produced 'fresh wonders'.<sup>19</sup> Now, the emperor continued, the site had delivered an even greater wonder, *gnôrisma tou hagiôpatou ekeinou pathous* 'the sign of his most holy passion'.<sup>20</sup> In all probability this is a discreet allusion, the most that Eusebius would permit himself, to the discovery of the wood of the cross.<sup>21</sup> Eusebius' silences clearly betray his preference for the entirely spiritual event of the resurrection.<sup>22</sup> The most likely time for the True Cross to be discovered was during the clearing of the ground and the digging of the foundations for the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>23</sup>

It is thought that Helena landed in Caesarea Maritima by ship from Rome in the summer of 326, went straight to Galilee,<sup>24</sup> and finally reached Jerusalem early in 327, presumably in the company of Eusebius, who would have been her guide.<sup>25</sup> This meant that Macarius had been at work for the best part of eighteen months by the time she arrived. His

<sup>16</sup> Odahl, *Constantine*, 212.

<sup>17</sup> Typically, Eusebius gives the credit for speed to Constantine (*VC* 3.29).

<sup>18</sup> Eusebius, *VC* 3.27.

<sup>19</sup> Eusebius, *VC* 3.30.

<sup>20</sup> Eusebius, *VC* 3.30

<sup>21</sup> See Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?* 128

<sup>22</sup> See the contrast between Eusebius and Cyril of Jerusalem in Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?* 122-30.

<sup>23</sup> Taylor notes, "Though late, the letter purportedly written by the emperor Leo [III? 717-41] to Omar, king of the Saracens, may preserve accurately the imperial records on the matter, when it stated that the three crosses were found in a trench where Constantine's workmen were digging (*PG* 107.315)" (*Christians and the Holy Places*, 138).

<sup>24</sup> The only evidence that I can see for this is Eusebius' remark "she rendered due reverence to the ground which the Saviour's feet had trodden" (*VC* 3.42).

<sup>25</sup> Odahl, *Constantine*, 211-12. Eusebius' *Onomasticon* would have made him admirably qualified.





team could well have been approaching bedrock, if they had not reached it already. The vividness with which Eusebius speaks of the recovery of the tomb betrays the experience of an eye-witness:

As soon as the original surface of the ground, beneath the covering of earth, appeared, immediately, and contrary to all expectation (*par' elpida pasan*), the venerable and hallowed monument of our Saviour's resurrection was discovered. Then indeed did this most holy cave (*antron*) present a faithful similitude of his return to life, in that, after lying buried in darkness, it again emerged to light (VC 3.28).

The translation given here of *par' elpida pasan*, I imagine, rather accurately expresses Eusebius' feeling. As a sceptical scholar, who knew the wide variety of events that might have occurred in 300 years, he was quite prepared to find nothing at the bottom of the hole that Macarius was digging. He would not have been overjoyed, however, had this proved to be the case, because the disappointment of Helena would certainly be transmuted into the imperial displeasure of her son. Eusebius, after all, claimed authority over Jerusalem.

The phrase can also be rendered 'beyond all our hopes',<sup>26</sup> which perhaps better reflects the sentiments of Macarius. He was confident of the tradition of his church, but to actually reach the goal of his hopes and dreams added to that certitude the complacent glow of satisfaction. He had taken a colossal gamble, and it had come off.

#### THE QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

As regards the authenticity of the Holy Sepulchre, this brings us to the nub of the problem. Serious questions have to be asked of the two personalities with whom we have been concerned. Clearly Macarius would have been willing to identify as belonging to Christ anything remotely resembling a tomb that he found at the bottom of his trench. The question for him, therefore, is: how could he have been so confident of the traditional site identification of his community?

Eusebius, on the other hand, had been trained as a historian, and was constitutionally sceptical regarding relics and holy places.<sup>27</sup> In principle

<sup>26</sup> So J. WILKINSON, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land* (3rd. ed.; Jerusalem: Ariel/Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1981) 17.

<sup>27</sup> "Eusebius comes across as a man not easily given to simple credulity. Rather with his historical mind, he is revealed as one for whom authenticity was a real issue; he seems to have had real doubts about the 'wood of the cross' and also of the 'stone' rolled away from the mouth of the tomb" (Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?* 241).





he would have accorded little confidence to the Jerusalem tradition. Thus the question for him is: what convinced him, rather against his will, that the cave brought to light by Macarius was in fact the tomb in which Christ had been laid?

In order to answer these questions, responses to a further series of questions must be found. Did first century Christians in Jerusalem know exactly where Jesus died and was buried? Did they have an interest in passing that knowledge on to subsequent generations? Were there any factors that intensified this interest? Were there any impediments to that transmission, e.g. breaks in the history of the community?

#### THE BEGINNING OF THE JERUSALEM TRADITION

##### The Data of the Gospels

Because of its obvious importance for the resurrection, the descent of the body of Jesus from the cross and its placement in a tomb is narrated by all four evangelists.<sup>28</sup> Each one attributes the burial to Joseph of Arimathea, who in John alone is accompanied by Nicodemus. This latter figure can be left out of consideration, because he is unique to the Fourth Gospel, in which he figures three times connected by explicit cross-references (3:1-12; 7:51-52; and 19:39). Nicodemus appears less as a real person than as the paradigm of a disciple moving hesitantly from darkness to light. His historicity is questionable.

Questions must also be raised concerning Joseph of Arimathea, because there is no agreement among the evangelists as to who he was. In Mark and Luke he is not a disciple of Jesus, whereas he is for Matthew and John, but 'secretly' in the case of the latter. In Jn 19:38 the plural reading *êlthon oun kai êran to sôma autou* 'they came and took his body' is certainly to be preferred to the singular adopted by Nestle-Aland.<sup>29</sup> This strongly suggests that Joseph of Arimathea was an addition to a more primitive text, which spoke of the burial of Jesus by unnamed disciples.<sup>30</sup> Tradition, however, abhors this sort of vacuum, and I suspect that it was filled by the name of Joseph of Arimathea, simply because the tomb borrowed by the disciples in fact belonged to him

<sup>28</sup> Mt 27:57-61; Mk 15:42-47; Lk 23:50-56; Jn 19:31-42.

<sup>29</sup> So rightly R. BULTMANN, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (MeyerK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962) 527 note 1; M.-É. BOISMARD & A. LAMOUILLE, *Synopsis Graeca Quattuor Evangeliorum* (Leuven/Paris, Peeters, 1986) 393.

<sup>30</sup> For a brief summary of the arguments supporting this position, and a reconstruction of the text, see my review in *RB* 115 (2008) 451-54.





(cf. Mt 27:60). This would appear to be the only possible explanation of why credit for the burial of Jesus is given to an individual who, not only was not a member of the first-generation of disciples, but who was not really known to them.

The gospel burial texts furnish only meagre data regarding the type and location of the tomb. John's source specifies only the relationship between the place of crucifixion and the place of burial, "In the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden an empty tomb. Because the tomb was *close* they put Jesus there" (Jn 19:41-42). Mark is much more specific. The place of crucifixion is identified as "Golgotha, which means Skull Place" (Mk 15:22), and it was located outside the city (Mk 15:20). This could also be inferred from the proximity of a tomb because "Carcases, *graves* and tanneries may not remain with a space of 50 cubits from the town" (*m. Baba Bathra* 2.9).

Mark also specifies the type of tomb, "They laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb" (Mk 15:46). The impression is given that the tomb was cut into a vertical wall, and that the entrance was about one-third the size of a normal house door. Scavenging wild dogs and vicious crows made it imperative to block the entrance. The evangelists use *proskyliô* 'to roll up' (Mk 15:46; Mt 27:60) and *apolanakyliô* 'to roll away' (Mk 16:3-4; Mt 28:2; Lk 24:2), so it is theoretically possible that the stone in question was the large circular stone beloved of illustrations and models. Such stones, however, are very rare in the Jerusalem area (so far only 4 are known), and they are dated to the middle of the first century AD.<sup>31</sup> John 20:1, however, uses *a(e)irô* 'to take up, remove', which suggests only a convenient 'moveable' stone large enough to do the job. In a number of instances of tombs in the Jerusalem area the closing stone was shaped like a stopper that exactly fitted the entrance.<sup>32</sup>

### Visits to the Tomb

The most detailed and thorough literary analysis of Mk 16:1-8 remains that of Ludger Schenke.<sup>33</sup> He concludes that the *Vorlage* ran as follows:

<sup>31</sup> Amos KLONER and Boaz ZISSU *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period* (Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 8; Leuven/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007) 55.

<sup>32</sup> For example, A. KLONER, "Did a Rolling Stone Close Jesus' Tomb?" *BAR* 25/5 (Sept.-Oct. 1999) 25.

<sup>33</sup> *Auferstehungsverkündigung und leeres Grab. Eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung von Mk 16, 1-8* (SBS 33; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968).





<sup>2</sup>Very early on the first day of the week they (Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome) went to the tomb when the sun had risen. <sup>5</sup> Entering they saw a young man sitting on the right side dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. <sup>6</sup> And he said to them, “Do not be amazed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him.” <sup>8a</sup> And going out they fled from the tomb because trembling and astonishment had come upon them.

I would make two minor modifications to this reconstruction of Mark’s source. Mark did not add the whole of vv. 3-4. It is much more probable that “Looking up they saw that the stone had been rolled back” (v. 4) belonged to his source. That text, however, lacked “sitting on the right side” (v. 5). Not only does this introduce a developed Christological dimension (cf. Ps 110:1; Mt 26:64; Acts 2:33-34), but an interpreting angel is usually standing. Neither of these points, however, contradicts Schenke’s classification of the narrative as an etiological cult legend. It is a ‘legend’ in the technical sense of form-criticism because the story contains a supernatural being, the angel. It is ‘etiological’ in that it explains why this particular tomb was venerated. And it is ‘cultic’ because it formed part of a liturgical ceremony in the tomb. “See the place where they laid him” (v. 6) acquires its plenitude of meaning only when spoken in the empty tomb with an appropriate gesture as part of a commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus.

The *Sitz im Leben* of the source of Mk 16:1-8 offers a hint that the death and resurrection of Jesus were celebrated at the tomb in which he had been laid. Would such a practice have fitted into the religions tradition of contemporary Jews? Should the answer be negative, then my understanding of the hint in Mk 16:6 must be reconsidered. On the contrary, however, should the answer be affirmative, then we have the beginning of a tradition of devotion to the tomb of Jesus, which has important consequence for all that happened subsequently.

A Jewish work called *The Lives of the Prophets* is dated to the first century AD.<sup>34</sup> The opening words describe its contents, “The names of the prophets, and whence they were, where they died and how, and where they were buried”.<sup>35</sup> The prophets are presented as wonder-workers and intercessors, and the attention paid to the location of the grave suggests that those who wished to benefit from either of these qualities should be able to go there to pray.<sup>36</sup> This aspect is made explicit only in the case of Jeremiah:

<sup>34</sup> See D. R. HARE, “Prophets, Lives of” in *ABD* 5.502-3.

<sup>35</sup> C. C. TORREY, *The Lives of the Prophets. Greek Text and Translation* (JBLMS 1; Philadelphia: SBL, 1946) 33.

<sup>36</sup> See in particular Joachim JEREMIAS, *Heiligengräbern in Jesu Umwelt* (Mt 23,29;





Jeremiah was of Anathoth, and he died at Taphnes in Egypt, stoned to death by the Jews. He is buried in the place where Pharaoh's palace stood.... and even at the present day the faithful servants of God *pray on that spot*, and taking of the dust of that place they heal the bites of serpents (lines 1-4).

Torrey tends to play down the pilgrimage aspect claiming that the localities are named in a way that suggests "literary routine rather than the attempt to give useful information".<sup>37</sup> The mention of 'literary routine' is sheer bluff, and in certain cases the information about the grave is rather precise, e.g. Isaiah: "below the fountain of Rogel" (34); Ezekiel: "in the field of Nahor, in the tomb of Shem and Arphaxad. The tomb is a double cave" (37); Obadiah: "he was buried with his fathers" (41); Jonah: "having settled in the land of Seir, he died there and was buried in the tomb of the Kenizzite" (42); Haggai: "he was buried near the tomb of the priests" (44); Zechariah: "he was buried beside Haggai" (45); Ahijah: "he was buried beside the oak of Shiloh" (46). It should also be kept in mind that in ancient guidebooks, one was directed to a certain area with the confident hope that someone there would provide highly specific local information, so for example, Pausanias in his *Description of Greece*.

The importance of tombs in the religious life of first-century AD Jews is underlined by the words of Jesus, "you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous" (Mt 23:29; Lk 11:47). The practice is well documented by Josephus.<sup>38</sup> There would be little point in such investment, if the tombs were subsequently ignored. Hence, it would have been entirely in keeping with first century religious practice for disciples of Jesus to have gone to pray at the tomb where his body had reposed for three days.<sup>39</sup>

Visits to the tomb continued for over a century, i.e. up to the foundation of Aelia Capitolina in 135. A feature of the veneration of pilgrimage sites in Palestine is the accumulation of graffiti. This is documented in Jerusalem for the synagogue/church on Mount Sion (beneath the

*Lk 11,47). Eine Untersuchung zur Volksreligion der Zeit Jesu* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958) 126-43.

<sup>37</sup> *Lives of the Prophets*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> *AJ* 7.390-92; 13.249; 18.108; 20.95; *BJ* 4.531-32; 5.506. See also 1 Macc 13:27-30.

<sup>39</sup> Today in Palestine ultra-orthodox Jews go on pilgrimage to the tombs of David and of the High Priest Simon in Jerusalem, to the tomb of Rachel near Bethlehem, and to the tombs of the Patriarchs and their wives in Hebron.





Tomb of David) excavated by J. Pinkerfeld,<sup>40</sup> and for the cave on eastern side of the Mount of Olives studied by P. Benoit and M.-É. Boismard,<sup>41</sup> and which Joan E. Taylor identified as the *Hospitium* of Martha and Mary.<sup>42</sup> In Galilee the room in which Jesus stayed in the House of Peter at Capernaum is noteworthy.<sup>43</sup> Graffiti were the basis for the earliest identification of the tomb of St Peter on the Vatican Hill in Rome.<sup>44</sup> Were such graffiti to have been painted or scratched in the tomb of Christ, Eusebius' whole-hearted adoption of the cave discovered by Macarius immediately becomes intelligible.<sup>45</sup>

#### AELIA CAPITOLINA

No visits to the tomb were possible after 135. The engineers brought in by Hadrian to plan and build Aelia Capitolina decided to site the Capitoline Temple on a little hill that dominated the north-south line of the *Cardo Maximus* (see fig. 1).<sup>46</sup> The only problem was that it had been defaced by a quarry.<sup>47</sup> The only option was to fill and level, and that was exactly what they did, according to Eusebius,<sup>48</sup>

<sup>40</sup> "David's Tomb. Notes on the History of the Building. Preliminary Report" in *Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund for the Exploration of Ancient Synagogues. Bulletin III* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University/Department of Antiquities, 1960) 41-43. For the graffiti, see Émile PUECH, "La synagogue judéo-chrétienne du Mont Sion" *Le Monde de la Bible* n. 57 (1989) 19.

<sup>41</sup> "Un ancien sanctuaire chrétien à Béthanie" *RB* 58 (1951) 200-51

<sup>42</sup> "The Bethany Cave: A Jewish-Christian Cult Site?" *RB* 97 (1990) 453-65.

<sup>43</sup> E. TESTA, *Cafarnaon. IV. I graffiti della casa di S. Pietro* (Jerusalem: OFM Press, 1972).

<sup>44</sup> J. TOYNBEE & J. WARD-PERKINS, *The Shrine of Saint Peter and the Vatican Excavations* (London, 1956) 14, 165-66, 171-72, 181-82.

<sup>45</sup> This highly plausible hypothesis was first put forward by M. BIDDLE, *The Tomb of Christ* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999) 66. Even though Eusebius mentions only one tomb, there were several others in the immediate vicinity; see the convenient summary in S. GIBSON & J. E. TAYLOR, *Beneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The Archaeology and Early History of Traditional Golgotha* (PEF Monograph Series Maior; London: PEF, 1994) 63.

<sup>46</sup> Source of fig. 1: N. AVIGAD, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Nashville: Nelson, 1980) 25. The contour lines are highlighted in Coüasnon, *Holy Sepulchre*, plate 5.

<sup>47</sup> For a neat visual summary of the extent of this quarry relative to the hilltop, see Gibson & Taylor, *Beneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre*, 54, fig. 37.

<sup>48</sup> A section of the eastern *temenos* wall is visible in the Alexander Hospice and shop of Zelatimos, see L.-H. VINCENT & F.-M. ABEL, *Jérusalem nouvelle* (Gabalda: Paris, 1914) 70-88. Part of the south wall lies beneath the present façade of the Holy Sepulchre and was reused as the north wall of the great Constantinian cistern beneath the Parvis, see V. CORBO, *Il Santo Sepolcro di Gerusalemme. Aspetti archeologici dalle origini al periodo crociato* (Jerusalem: OFM Press, 1982) plates 52, 54, 68.

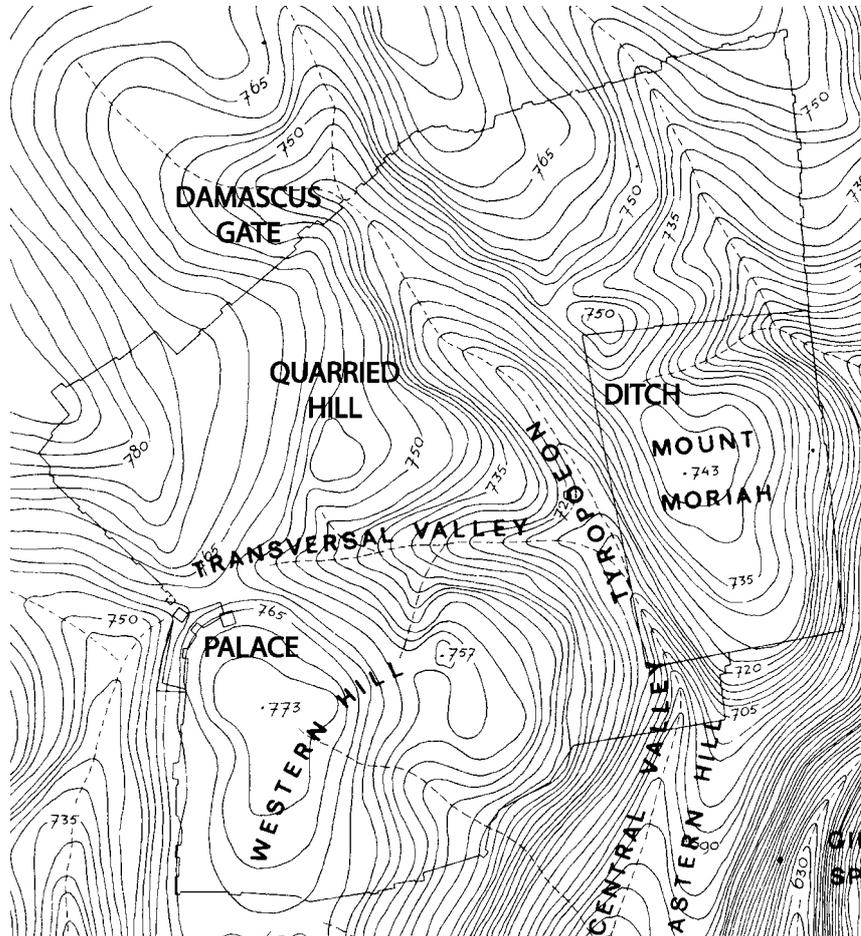


Fig. 1: Contour map of the Old City explaining the site of the Capitoline Temple.

With much labour they brought in soil from elsewhere and covered the whole site, and by raising the level and laying a stone pavement they concealed the divine cave under a heap of earth. And as though this were not enough they built above ground a tomb of souls, a gloomy shrine of lifeless idols dedicated to the impure demon Aphrodite, where they poured foul libations on profane and accursed altars (VC 3.26).

The plurals ‘lifeless idols’ and ‘accursed altar’ confirm Jerome’s assertion (see note 5 above) that Jupiter was venerated there, and so by implication Juno and Minerva the other members of the Capitoline triad.





The effort and expense of the great amount of preparatory work necessary to provide a platform for buildings points to the central sanctuary of the city, rather than to the shrine of Venus/Aphrodite, important as she may have been to the imperial family.

The Christians in Jerusalem interpreted this activity as a form of persecution. Again, according to Eusebius, “Godless people had gone to great pains to cover up this divine memorial of immortality so that it should be forgotten” (*VC* 3.26). In fact it produced the opposite. Memory of the tomb was reinforced by bitterness. Its inaccessibility caused it to be remembered all the more vividly.

But did the Christian community in Jerusalem have the continuity to guarantee the accuracy of the memory of the place of Christ’s tomb? Two events would appear to argue for a negative answer, the flight to Pella during the first revolt, and Hadrian’s expulsion of Jews after the second revolt. Neither, I believe, is a conclusive objection<sup>49</sup>

### The Flight to Pella

According to Eusebius,

The members of the Jerusalem church, by means of an oracle given by revelation to acceptable persons there before the war, were ordered to leave the City and settle in a town in Peraea called Pella. To Pella those who believed in Christ migrated from Jerusalem (*History*, 3.5.3).<sup>50</sup>

While nothing is more probable than an attempt to escape grave danger, Pella would have been a most unlikely place of refuge for Christians of Jewish origin.<sup>51</sup> Just a year or so earlier the city had been laid waste by Jews in reprisal for the slaughter of 20,000 Jews in Caesarea, a crime for which Pella was in no way responsible.<sup>52</sup> Why should it now receive them with open arms? Partisans of the historicity of the flight to Pella have to gratuitously suppose that there were previous familial or religious connections between Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Pella.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Against C. H. TURNER, “The Early Episcopal Lists: The Lists of Jerusalem” *JTS* 1 (1900) 529-53.

<sup>50</sup> There is some uncertainty as to whether ‘before the war’ should be taken with what precedes (as in this translation) or with what follows (‘were ordered to leave the City before the war’), but the latter is the less realistic of the two possibilities.

<sup>51</sup> The Pella in question is the modern Tabaqat Fahl on the east bank of the Jordan river some 125 km north of Amman.

<sup>52</sup> Josephus, *BJ* 2.458.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. V. BALABANSKI, *Eschatology in the Making. Mark, Matthew and the Didache* (SNTSMS 97; Cambridge, CUP, 1997) 119.



Furthermore, Eusebius' probable source was Aristo of Pella, whom he quotes apropos of the expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem under Hadrian.<sup>54</sup> This lone, late voice is naturally suspect of self-interest and special pleading.

A flight to Pella is mentioned three times by Epiphanius (c. 315-403).<sup>55</sup> Once he reports it as a simple fact (*De Mensuris*, 15), in which he might be dependent on Eusebius. In the others Pella appears as the base of two heretical groups, the Ebionites (*Panarion*, 29.7.7-9) and the Nazaoraeans (*Panarion*, 30.2.7). Here again there is difficulty about accepting his witness at face value. It is entirely possible that the Ebionites and/or Nazoraeans used a vague legend regarding the escape of Christians from Jerusalem to the profit of their base at Pella. With the mantle of the mother church they would inherit its authority.

Eusebius says nothing about a return from Pella, but in his *Proof of the Gospel*, he implies a continuous Jewish Christian presence in Jerusalem, "Until the time of the siege by Hadrian there was an extremely significant church of Christ at Jerusalem, which consisted of Jews" (3.5.108). This forces us to envisage the possibility of an escape from Jerusalem which did not involve a journey to distant Pella.

Individuals began slipping away from Jerusalem in late 67 when civil war broke out in the city. The trickle became a stronger flow as the terror of the Zealots increased in 68. Eventually the latter realized that their resources were slipping away, and permitted to escape only those who could buy their way out of the city.<sup>56</sup> Undoubtedly there were far-sighted Christians who made their preparations to leave early, just as there were those who refused to take the danger seriously. We must suppose a period of anxious debate. Those who were convinced that departure was imperative certainly gave prominence to the warning oracle reported by Eusebius.

Just such an oracle appears as one of the sources of Mark 13. As reconstructed by Balabanski,<sup>57</sup> it reads:

When you see the abomination of desolation standing where he should not be — let the reader understand — flee to the mountains.... But pray that it does not happen in winter (Mk 13:14-18).

<sup>54</sup> *History*, 4.6.

<sup>55</sup> These texts in Greek and English are conveniently presented in Balabanski, *Eschatology*, 109-10.

<sup>56</sup> Josephus, *BJ* 4.377-79.

<sup>57</sup> *Eschatology*, 88-92.



The cryptic reference to *to bdelygma tês erêmôseôs* ‘the abomination of desolation’, which is neuter, is followed by the perfect masculine participle *estêkota* ‘standing’. This clearly indicates that it is question, not of a statue or an altar, but of a male individual, whose presence, in the light of 1 Macc 1:54, 59; 6:7, was seen as a profanation of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Balabanski astutely draws attention to a passage of Josephus, which is not always given the importance it deserves.<sup>58</sup> By breaking the laws of right and wrong,

the Zealots caused the prophecies against their country to be fulfilled. For there was an age-old saying of inspired men that the City would be taken and the most Holy Temple burnt to the ground by right of war, if ever the citizens strove with each other and *Jewish hands were the first to pollute the house of God*.<sup>59</sup>

From this perspective the ‘abomination of desolation’ was the Zealot deposition of the high priest and the selection of his successor by lot. Josephus takes up the story,

The luck of the draw furnished the clearest proof of the depths to which they had sunk. The office fell to Phanas, son of Samuel, of the village of Aphtha, a man not only not descended from high priests but too boorish to have any clear notion of what the high priesthood might be. Anyway they dragged him willy-nilly from his holding and disguised him from head to foot as an actor on the stage, robing him in the sacred vestments and teaching him his cues. To the perpetrators this shocking sacrilege (*to têlikouton asebêma*) was the occasion for ribald mirth.<sup>60</sup>

According to Balabanski, this was the turning-point. The Zealots had wrested power from the high-priestly families, and there could be no further restraint on their extremism.<sup>61</sup> It was in the winter months at the end of AD 67.<sup>62</sup> Moderates would be purged (cf. BJ 4.363-64), and then the Romans would sweep everyone away. Even though the Jerusalem Christians had their backs to the wall they could still see the writing on it. It was time to get out.

The Christians did not have to go far to be safe. It was certain that the Romans would encircle Jerusalem and that their energies would be con-

<sup>58</sup> *Eschatology*, 122-34.

<sup>59</sup> BJ 4.387-88. Translations from this work are by G. A. WILLIAMSON, *Josephus. The Jewish War* (London: Penguin, 1977). My emphasis.

<sup>60</sup> BJ 4.155-57.

<sup>61</sup> *Eschatology*, 129-30.

<sup>62</sup> Balabanski, *Eschatology*, 131.





centrated on the subjection of the city. Anywhere 10 or 20 kms outside that embrace, and away from the Roman supply routes, offered a security that would be menaced only by futile hostile action. Apart from the Zealots holed up in Herodion (*BJ* 7.163), there were no roving bands of guerillas in the vicinity of the city. All the extremists were at each others throats inside the city. The Ramallah region is appreciably higher than Jerusalem. Were these the 'mountains' envisaged by the oracle?

The whole city was firmly in Roman hands by early September 70. Once the reprisals had been completed, and Titus had left for Caesarea Maritima, the Tenth Legion, which was left in camp in what is now the Armenian Quarter, would have felt a growing need for the services provided by camp followers. There would have been no objection to peaceful, unarmed Jews straggling back to occupy the ruins north of the legion camp. Christians would have wanted to be back in Jerusalem before the winter rains of 71, and there is no reason why they should not have returned. An absence of some three years is unlikely to have perturbed their memories of places which they would have been able to identify quite easily.

### Hadrian's Expulsion of Jews

In his report to the Senate on his successful repression of the second Jewish revolt in 135 Hadrian omitted the conventional opening formula that he and the army were well.<sup>63</sup> The campaign had been a very close run thing, and the emperor was determined that Jews should never again have the opportunity to push Rome to the pin of its collar. According to Eusebius,

From that time on, the entire race has been forbidden to set foot anywhere in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, under the terms and ordinances of a law of Hadrian which ensured that not even from a distance might Jews have a view of their ancestral soil. Aristo of Pella tells the whole story. When in this way the city was closed to the Jewish race and suffered the total destruction of its former inhabitants, it was colonized by an alien race, and the Roman city which subsequently arose changed its name, so that now, in honour of the emperor then reigning, Aelius Hadrianus, it is known as Aelia. Furthermore the church in the city was now composed of Gentiles.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 49.14.3.

<sup>64</sup> *History*, 4.6; cf. 5.12. Similarly Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 49.12.2. The decree has been reconstructed by M. AVI-YONAH, "It is forbidden for all circumcized persons to enter or stay within the territory of Aelia Capitolina; any person contravening this prohibition will be put to death" (*The Jews of Palestine. A Political History from the Bar Kokba War to the Arab Conquest* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1976] 50-51).





Did the ban exclude Christian Jews from living in Jerusalem or its environs? I think not. The leader of the revolt was called Simon Bar Kosiba, but in both Christian and Jewish circles his memory is preserved under nicknames. To the rabbis he was Bar Koziba ‘Son of the Lie’, whereas Christian sources refer to him as Bar Kokhba ‘Son of the Star’.<sup>65</sup> The latter name was given to him by Rabbi Akiba, who thereby professed his faith that Simon was the King Messiah, who fulfilled the star prophecy of Num 24:17.<sup>66</sup> Eusebius suggests that Simon accepted and internalized the accolade,

The Jews at that time were under the command of a man called Bar Kokhba, which means a star — a bloodthirsty bandit who on the strength of his name, as if he had slaves to deal with, paraded himself as a luminary come down from heaven to shine upon their misery (*History*, 4.6.2).

Having committed themselves to Jesus as the Messiah, no Christian could accept that Bar Kokhba was the Messiah. They used the name, however, because it was under that name that they had suffered. Eusebius quotes the Palestinian Justin Martyr (c. 100-65) in his *Apologia*, 1.31 to the effect that,

In the recent Jewish war, Bar Kokhba, leader of the Jewish insurrection, ordered the Christians alone to be sentenced to terrible punishments if they did not deny Jesus Christ and blaspheme him (*History*, 4.8).<sup>67</sup>

Such persecution demonstrated the falsity of Hadrian’s assumption that all Jews had allied themselves with Simon. In itself it justified a petition to be exempted from Hadrian’s expulsion order. Moreover, it was not in Hadrian’s interest to depopulate Jerusalem completely. The Crusaders had done so in the massacre that followed their taking of the city on 15 July 1099, and their first concern after the defeat of the Fatimid army at Ascalon on 12 August 1099 had to be to bring in settlers from Syria. The vast majority of the first crusade had no intention of settling permanently in the East.

Joan Taylor points out that that there is no legend of a flight from Jerusalem relative to the second revolt comparable to the flight to Pella during the first revolt, and continues, “It would have been natural if

<sup>65</sup> E. SCHÜRER, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 BC-AD 135)* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973) 1.542.

<sup>66</sup> *y. Taanith* 68d.

<sup>67</sup> For a contemporary hint of this persecution in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, see R. BAUCKHAM, “The Two Figtree Parables in the *Apocalypse of Peter*” *JBL* 104 (1985) 285-86.





members of the church began to think of themselves as quite separate from other Jews, having more in common with the universal church, which had largely abandoned Judaism.”<sup>68</sup> Christians could easily show that they were different from other Jews by inviting them to confess that the Messiah had already arrived. In consequence, they could plausibly demonstrate their non-Jewishness in a sense with which the majority of Jews would have agreed.

Eusebius obviously oversimplifies in claiming that the church of Aelia became exclusively Gentile after the second revolt.<sup>69</sup> He affirms the conclusion at the expense of the process, which was not especially complex. Pre-Hadrianic believers of Jewish origins, who were permitted to remain in the city, had cut themselves off from their Jewish roots, and Jewish culture and customs had disappeared. The exclusion of Jews meant that new converts were necessarily Gentiles, whose increasing preponderance gradually changed the character of the church.

Within a generation or so Jerusalem was a Gentile church, but one whose roots went back without interruption to the period of the ministry of Jesus. The continuity of memory focused on the place of his death and resurrection was strengthened, rather than obliterated, by the erection of the Capitoline Temple over the quarry in which Golgotha and the tomb of Jesus had been located.

#### PRE-CONSTANTINIAN INTEREST IN HOLY PLACES

Another factor contributed to keeping the memory of holy places alive. It was regularly stimulated by questions from visitors from outside the city.

#### Eusebius

Even though he was not particularly interested in Holy Places, Eusebius had to deal with ‘Golgotha’ in his *Onomasticon*, his great study of the place-names in the Scriptures.

Golgotha, ‘place of a skull’, where the Christ was crucified, which is pointed out (*deiknantai*) in Aelia to the north of Mount Sion (74.19-21).

Three things can be deduced from this simple statement. (1) There was something of Golgotha to be seen. (2) It was within the city limits,

<sup>68</sup> *Christians and the Holy Places*, 43.

<sup>69</sup> See the text quoted in note 63 above.





not 'outside' as the gospels claimed. (3) The locals were used to showing it to visitors. *Deiknytai* belongs to the language of tourism, which depends on a flow of visitors.<sup>70</sup>

The *Onomasticon* is sometimes thought to be one of Eusebius latest works, but Barnes has argued convincingly that internal factors point rather to a date in the 290s. The fluctuating borders of that period are reflected in the classification of Petra as belonging both to 'Arabia' and 'Palestine', and nowhere is there any reference to Constantine's buildings.<sup>71</sup> How natural this would be is demonstrated by Jerome's addition of 'a church has now been built there' to the entries on Bethany, Bethel, Sychar and Gethsemane in his Latin translation of the *Onomasticon*.<sup>72</sup>

What might have been seen of Golgotha is anyone's guess. According to Coüason's measurements, the rock of Golgotha projects some 5 m above the floor of the Holy Sepulchre, which is itself 5 m above the bed of the quarry.<sup>73</sup> Thus it is entirely possible that part of the rock projected above a floor-level of the Capitoline complex and served as the base of a statue of Aphrodite, as Jerome claims (see note 5 above).

The importance of this statement by Eusebius must be stressed. From Jn 19:31-42 the Christians of Aelia knew that the tomb of Christ was 'close' to the place of crucifixion. Then the question to be answered in any quest for the tomb was: on which side of Golgotha was it located? They may not have been able to answer, but the difficulty was easily solved. They just dug all the way round.

Unfortunately Eusebius' 'to the north of Mount Sion' is too vague to permit any precise location. It just means 'in the northern part of the city', i.e. the area open to the general public north of the modern David Street, which marks the approximate northern limit of the camp of the Tenth Legion.<sup>74</sup> He did not have to be more specific, because all his Jerusalem readers would have known exactly what he was talking about.

<sup>70</sup> On its frequent use by Eusebius see J. WILKINSON, "L'apport de saint Jérôme à la topographie" *RB* 81 (1974) 251-52.

<sup>71</sup> T. D. BARNES, "The Composition of Eusebius' *Onomasticon*" *JTS* 26 (1975) 412-15; idem., *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) 110-11.

<sup>72</sup> Wilkinson, "L'apport de saint Jérôme à la topographie," 247.

<sup>73</sup> *Church of the Holy Sepulchre*, 39.

<sup>74</sup> With Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ*, 64, against Joan E. TAYLOR, "Golgotha: a Re-consideration of the Evidence for the Sites of Jesus' Crucifixion and Burial" *NTS* 44 (1998) 180-203.





### Melito of Sardis

Melito of Sardis is considered by many to have made a journey to Jerusalem in preparation for his sermon *Peri Pascha*, which was composed between AD 160 and 170, because Eusebius quotes a letter of Melito, which contains the words, “I visited the east and arrived at the place where it all happened and the truth was proclaimed” (*History*, 4.26.13-14). The context of this remark, however, does not concern holy places, but the books of the OT and the prophecies that they contain. In consequence, Biddle’s observations are very much to the point, “We do not know whether the sermon was written before or after this journey, nor if he visited Jerusalem, and so we cannot be sure whether he obtained his information on the spot or at second hand”.<sup>75</sup> My point, remember, is that such information was available.

Three times in the *Peri Pascha* Melito affirms that the crucifixion took place ‘in the middle of the city’. This certainly derives from a Jerusalem tradition because Melito knew that the gospels placed the execution and burial of Jesus outside the city (see above). The fourth allusion is slightly different, “But now in the middle of the street and in the middle of the city (*nyn de epi mesês plateias kai en mesô poleôs*), at the middle of the day for all to see, has occurred a just man’s unjust murder” (line 704). ‘In the middle of the city’ is apparently given greater precision by ‘in the middle of the street’. In this translation *plateia* is taken as the feminine adjective of *platys* ‘broad, wide’, with which *hodos* ‘road’ is normally supplied or understood.<sup>76</sup> The rendering, however, makes no sense in terms of the topography of Jerusalem. Thus, it is preferable to take *plateia* in another well attested sense, namely, ‘plaza, square’, and to think of the open space within the *temenos* of the Capitoline Temple.<sup>77</sup> This would be very close to the rock of Golgotha, which was visible to Eusebius, and which may have supported the statue of Aphrodite.

Even though the tomb of Christ had been inaccessible since the construction of the Capitoline Temple in AD 135, it is highly significant that the devotion of Christians was never transferred to an alternative site.<sup>78</sup> Even though there were some 900 tombs just outside the city lim-

<sup>75</sup> *The Tomb of Christ*, 61.

<sup>76</sup> See LSJ and BAGD s.v. *platys*.

<sup>77</sup> So rightly Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ*, 62.

<sup>78</sup> Note the parallel phenomenon in Bethlehem. Even though the cave venerated as the birthplace of Jesus had been made inaccessible by the construction of a temple of Thammuz (Jerome, *Epistle* 58) no alternative site was ever contemplated.





its, knowing the truth was more important than the emotional satisfaction of a pilgrimage. The decisive argument against the Garden Tomb is that it appeared as an alternative to the Holy Sepulchre only in 1883 when it was proclaimed by General Charles Gordon on wonderfully weird grounds.<sup>79</sup>

### Alexander of Cappadocia

In AD 212 according to Eusebius,

When he [Narcissus] had reached such an advanced age that he could no longer carry out his duties, the Alexander already mentioned, then holder of another bishopric, by the providence of God was summoned to share the duties with Narcissus, by means of a revelation given to him at night in a vision. Thereupon, as if in accordance with an oracle, he journeyed from Cappadocia, his original see, to Jerusalem in order to worship there and to examine the historic sites (*euchês kai tôn topôn historias heneken*). The Christian community welcomed him most warmly and would not let him return home again (*History*, 6.11).

This is the first recorded instance of the transfer of a bishop from one see to another and the appointment of a coadjutor.<sup>80</sup> The experienced Eusebius was shrewd enough to see the dangers of such episcopal movement,<sup>81</sup> but in this case it worked out well. Alexander had not ambitioned the post and proved to be an excellent bishop, who ruled Jerusalem for 39 years before dying for the faith in the persecution of the emperor Decius (249-51).<sup>82</sup> Lest it become a dangerous precedent, however, Eusebius, felt it incumbent on him to suggest that this transfer had had divine sanction. This justifies our setting aside the supernatural dimension. We must assume, in consequence, that Alexander came on pilgrimage to Jerusalem,<sup>83</sup> quickly demonstrated the qualities that the

<sup>79</sup> L.-H. VINCENT outlines its history with mordant Gallic humour in "Garden Tomb. Histoire d'un mythe" *RB* 34 (1925) 401-31. An unreasonably benign approach is taken by P. W. L. WALKER, *The Weekend that Changed the World. The Mystery of Jerusalem's Empty Tomb* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1999), Part 2. On the abuse of evidence designed to give the site credibility see my "The Garden Tomb and the Misfortunes of an Inscription" *BAR* 12/2 (1986) 54-55.

<sup>80</sup> A. LOUTH in G. A. Williamson, *Eusebius. The History of the Church* (London: Penguin, 1989) 342.

<sup>81</sup> Canon 15 of the Council of Nicaea laid down that "On account of the great disturbance and discords that occur, it is decreed that... neither bishop, presbyter nor deacon shall pass from city to city".

<sup>82</sup> Eusebius, *History*, 6.39.

<sup>83</sup> Was this a Cappadocian tradition? According to Jerome, Firmilian, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (232-72) came to Judaea "for the sake of the holy places"





members of the church there wanted in a bishop, and was persuaded to stay permanently.

One of the things that Alexander did during his long episcopate was to found the public library of Aelia, which served Eusebius in his researches (*History*, 6.20). Such a gesture betrays an open and inquiring personality. It is not surprising, therefore, that in addition to prayer which is the goal of pilgrimage, Eusebius should emphasize an element of intellectual curiosity. Alexander came to Jerusalem 'to examine the historic places'. The two aspects cannot really be divorced. In Christian tradition a place acquires holiness through association with a holy person (the historical dimension), and that holiness is considered to facilitate prayer (the spiritual dimension). To emphasize the former does not diminish the latter. I am sure that more pilgrims than we imagine shared the exuberant curiosity of Felix Fabri, the fourteenth century German Dominican, who was also extremely pious.

All this to underline that the questions of Alexander undoubtedly stimulated the memories of the members of his church.

### Origen

Origen (c.185-c.254) apparently visited Jerusalem for the first time in AD 215 at the invitation of bishop Alexander.<sup>84</sup> At that point he was still only a layman, and must have been flattered at being invited to preach in such a prestigious community. It would have been rather unusual if Alexander had not encouraged him 'to examine the historic sites' as he himself had done, and was perhaps still doing. Certainly there are enough traces in the works of Origen to make it clear that he had an interest in checking out the places mentioned in the Scriptures that he found particularly interesting. If he did not always visit, he certainly consulted, which is the point that I am making regarding the stimulation of local memory.

His treatment of the place of the baptism is most instructive:

We are fully aware that almost all the manuscripts read "This took place at Bethany". It appears that this reading is very ancient, and we have also read 'Bethany' in Heracleon. Nonetheless, having retraced the steps of Jesus, his disciples and the prophets, we are convinced that 'Bethabara' should be read rather than 'Bethany'. The same evangelist informs us that Bethany, the

(*Famous Men*, 54). Eusebius, on the contrary, says only that Firmilian came to study with Origen (*History*, 6.27).

<sup>84</sup> Eusebius, *History*, 6.19.16-19.



home town of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, is 15 stadia from Jerusalem. The Jordan is much further away, about 180 stadia, and nothing resembling Bethany can be found in the area around the Jordan. However, people are shown (*deiknysthai*), it appears, on the bank of the Jordan 'Bethabara', where, we are told (*historousin*), John baptized (*Commentary on John 1:28*)

'People are shown' and 'we are told' betray Origen's reliance on local knowledge (again the language of tourism), but 'nothing resembling Bethany can be found in the area around the Jordan' is most naturally interpreted as an unsuccessful personal effort to find the mysterious town of 'Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan' (Jn 1:28). This is confirmed by his claim to have 'retraced the steps of Jesus and his disciples'.<sup>85</sup>

In Jerusalem Origen went to see the site of the miracle in Jn 5:1-9. It took place beside "a pool called in Hebrew Bethzatha having five porticos". One would have expected the figure four. It can only have been the double pool in the grounds of St Anne's Church that inspired Origen to postulate "four around the edges and another across the middle" (*Commentary on John 5:2*). It is extremely doubtful that he saw anything. It is most improbable that these pools were ever surrounded by porticos because not a single remnant of any of the hundreds of postulated columns has ever been found. Any porticos would have belonged to the pagan healing temple to the east of the pools.<sup>86</sup>

Origen's researches also extended to Bethlehem:

The cave in Bethlehem is shown where he was born and the manger in the cave where he was wrapped in swaddling clothes. What is shown there is famous in these parts even among people alien to the faith, because it was in this cave that the Jesus who is worshipped and admired by Christians was born.<sup>87</sup>

This text is intriguing on a number of counts. Note again the language of tourism, 'it is shown'. Origen accepts without question the local belief that Jesus was born in a *cave*, even though this is never mentioned in the gospels. Moreover, he clearly implies that the cave is accessible, and that the manger is visible, and perhaps that he visited there. This is often set aside as impossible on the grounds that Tammuz-Adonis was venerated in the cave since the time of Hadrian,<sup>88</sup> and that Christians would not have been permitted to carry out any rituals of their own in the cave.

<sup>85</sup> Jerome confirms that Origen "went to see the holy places" (*Famous Men*, 54).

<sup>86</sup> See A. DUPREZ, *Jésus et les dieux guérisseurs* (CahRB 12; Paris: Gabalda, 1970).

<sup>87</sup> *Contra Celsum* 1.51; translation H. CHADWICK, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: CUP, 1953) 47-48.

<sup>88</sup> Jerome, *Epistle* 58.3





A careful reading of Jerome's *Epistle 58*, however, shows that the reference to Bethlehem is simply juxtaposed to that regarding the Holy Sepulchre. The common denominator is that pagan worship rendered both unusable by Christians, but there is no hint that Jerome intended the time span of the Capitoline Temple to apply also to the worship of Thammuz-Adonis in Bethlehem. It is entirely possible, therefore, that sometime between the writing of Origen's *Contra Celsum* around 248 and Jerome's *Epistle 58* in 395 local pagans decided to take over what was known to be a place holy to Bethlehem Christians. According to Origen, they were well aware of it. The expropriation of Christian property during the persecutions of the emperors Diocletian (284-305) and Licinius (308-24) is well documented.<sup>89</sup>

Joan Taylor recognizes that

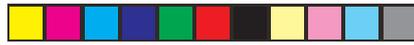
Origen calls his movements around Palestine an *historia*, an investigation, a technical term which implies that he knew that he stood in a fine old tradition. An *historia* was a sort of learned tourism, a grand 'study tour'; the word crops up frequently in the writings of Eusebius when he mentions Christian visitors prior to the Constantinian developments (e.g. to Eleona: *Dem. Evang.* 6.18; to Bethlehem: 7.2.14)... An *historia* was not a pilgrimage. Jerome elucidates the motives for such a trip thus: "In the same way that they who have seen Athens understand the Greek histories better, and they who have sailed from Troy through Leucaten, and from Acroceraunia to Sicily, and from there to the mouth of the Tiber understand the third book of Virgil, so he who has contemplated Judaea with his own eyes and knows the sites of the ancient cities, and knows the names of the places, whether the same or changed, will regard Scripture more lucidly" (*Pref. in Lib. Paralip.*).<sup>90</sup>

This observation serves as the groundwork for an argument that pre-Constantinian visitors to the Holy Land were scholars, whose intellectual curiosity was not shared by the generality of Christians. From this she infers that such ordinary visitors were few and far between, which militates against my argument that there would have been a continuous flow of questions to keep alive the centuries-old memories of the Jerusalem church.

I find here a rather anachronistic distinction between the sacred and the profane. Eusebius, Melito, Alexander and Origen were all distinguished scholars but they were also profoundly religious with great responsibilities within the church. Melito and Origen both use their

<sup>89</sup> What they had lost can be easily worked out from Constantine's 'Edict of Restitution' (Eusebius, *VC* 2.24-42); see Odahl, *Constantine*, 182-85.

<sup>90</sup> *Christians and the Holy Places*, 311.



research to comment on the gospels and the events described therein. There is even the suggestion that the purpose of their research was pastoral. In a word, they were scholars who learnt while on pilgrimage, and who prayed about what they studied. A distinction in their case between a grand tour and a pilgrimage is unwarranted.

To expect Eusebius or any other writer of antiquity to mention all and every pre-Constantinian visitor to the Holy Land is as absurd as imagining that today's newspapers mention all visitors to Israel. The important get their names in the paper, and it was ever so. We have no idea how many visitors the Holy Land received prior to the reforms of Constantine. I suspect, however, that the handful whose names have been accidentally recorded were just the tip of the iceberg. No doubt the scholars were more self-aware than lesser mortals, but very often relatively uneducated people experience a keen yearning to learn and experience. The instinct that animated the vast numbers of those who came to Jerusalem in the fourth and later centuries cannot be presumed to have been non-existent in the time of Aelia.

Finally, we should not underestimate the importance of the questions of long-time residents who wished to deepen their habitual knowledge. Jerome, in particular, often mentions those whom he consulted in the hope that they might be able to answer his queries.<sup>91</sup>

#### THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM

The Christians of Jerusalem knew where Jesus had been buried. Their memory was stimulated by bitterness and by the questions of visitors. Their presence in the city was continuous. Thus Macarius knew precisely where to dig. If the hypothesis of graffiti in the tomb is correct, the conviction of the sceptical Eusebius that they were in the right place is understandable. One final question remains: does the site of the Holy Sepulchre conform to the requirements of Roman and Jewish law regarding the place of a deterrent execution?

Nothing is known about any regular place of execution in Jerusalem.<sup>92</sup> The *Mishnah* explains in detail how the four forms of death penalty (burning, stoning, strangling, and beheading) were to be carried out,

<sup>91</sup> Wilkinson, "L'apport de saint Jérôme à la topographie," 253.

<sup>92</sup> There is absolutely no basis for Jerome's highly speculative suggestion (*Commentary on Mt 27:33*; *PL 26.209*) that Golgotha, 'the place of the skull' got its name from the fact the skulls of the beheaded were there scattered on the ground. Jewish law ensured burial of the condemned.





but does not specify any particular place (*m. Sanhedrin* 7.1-4). Hence the decision where to execute Jesus would have been left to the duty centurion operating under Pilate's orders. Since death by crucifixion was always intended as a deterrent, the centurion would have looked for a well-travelled road outside a city gate in order to provide the greatest publicity.

Pilate condemned Jesus in the palace of Herod the Great, which was located in the north-west corner of the walled city of the first century. It was the highest point in the city and so merited the name *Gabbatha* given to it by Jn 19:3. Philo called the palace 'the house of the procurators' because they took up residence there when they came up from Caesarea Maritima.<sup>93</sup> What Pilate did to Jesus was repeated by one of his successors in the same place, Gessius Florus (AD 64-66): "he took up his quarters at the palace, and the next day had his tribunal set before it and sat upon it..... The soldiers caught many of the quiet people, and brought them before Florus, whom he first scourged and then crucified" (*BJ* 2.301-8).

According to Josephus, the northern portion of the 'first wall' "began on the north at the tower called Hippicus, and extended as far as... the west portico of the Temple" (*BJ* 5.144). This line was dictated by the east-west transversal valley which protected the wall on the north (see fig. 1). Hippicus was one of the three towers of Herod's palace, and Josephus later tells us that they were built on and in 'the old wall' (*BJ* 5.172-73). This has been verified by excavations in the Citadel. One at least of the Herodian towers was built on a Hasmonean wall of the second century BC.<sup>94</sup> Excavations further east on the line suggested by Josephus brought to light other traces of the Hasmonean wall, which at two points is juxtaposed to an Israelite wall of the seventh century BC.<sup>95</sup>

The site of the Holy Sepulchre is well outside the 'first wall'. But there is a further problem. When Herod attacked Jerusalem from the north in July 37 BC, Josephus tells us that "the first wall was taken in 40 days and the second in 15 days more" (*AJ* 14.476).<sup>96</sup> Clearly there must have been an extension of the city to the north outside the 'first wall', which then had to be protected by a new wall. According to

<sup>93</sup> *Legatio ad Gaium*, 299, 306.

<sup>94</sup> H. GEVA, "Excavations in the Citadel of Jerusalem, 1979-80. Preliminary Report," *IEJ* 33 (1983) 55-71.

<sup>95</sup> See Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, 50-52.

<sup>96</sup> The numbers here refer to the order in which the walls were taken. They are the reverse of those used by Josephus in his description of the walls, and which I place in single quotation marks.





Josephus, “the ‘second wall’ took its beginning from that gate which is called Gennath, which belonged to the ‘first wall’, and reached as far as the tower Antonia” (*BJ* 5.146). In order to have any possibility of being authentic the Holy Sepulchre must also be outside this wall.

Josephus’ description is typical of his general sloppiness. When taken literally what he says is nonsense. The ‘second wall’ was in existence in 37 BC, as we have seen, but the Antonia fortress was Herod’s first major construction *after* he had taken possession of Jerusalem.<sup>97</sup> The solution is probably to be found in Josephus’ consistent confusion between the Baris, which protected the north-west corner of the Hasmonean temple, and the Antonia, which performed the same role at the same point of the much greater Herodian temple. He regularly insists that Herod rebuilt and renovated the Hasmonean Baris to create the Antonia fortress.<sup>98</sup> This, however, is impossible.

According to Strabo, in 63 BC Pompey had to cross a large artificial ditch in order to attack the Temple.<sup>99</sup> It has been identified just inside Bab en-Nazir.<sup>100</sup> Thus it served to link the Tyropoeon Valley with a tributary of the Kidron Valley (see fig. 1). Its purpose evidently was to protect the Baris for which there was plenty of room to the south before the temple platform.<sup>101</sup> The Antonia, however, adjoined the Strouthion Pool (*BJ* 5.467), which is well north of the ditch. The only way that I can think of reconciling Josephus and the facts on the ground is to suggest that the original ‘second wall’ ran north from the Gennath Gate and then turned east to the Baris, which was the situation when Herod took the city. Subsequently, there was a further expansion of the city, which took in a block of land north of the ‘second wall’, and was protected by a wall running from the ‘second wall’ to the Antonia (see fig. 2).<sup>102</sup>

Fortunately where and when the ‘second wall’ turned east is much less important than the line it took when it left the Gennath Gate. This gate has never been identified with certitude. In the present state of our

<sup>97</sup> See P. RICHARDSON, *Herod King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996) 197.

<sup>98</sup> *BJ* 1.401; *AJ* 15.292, 409.

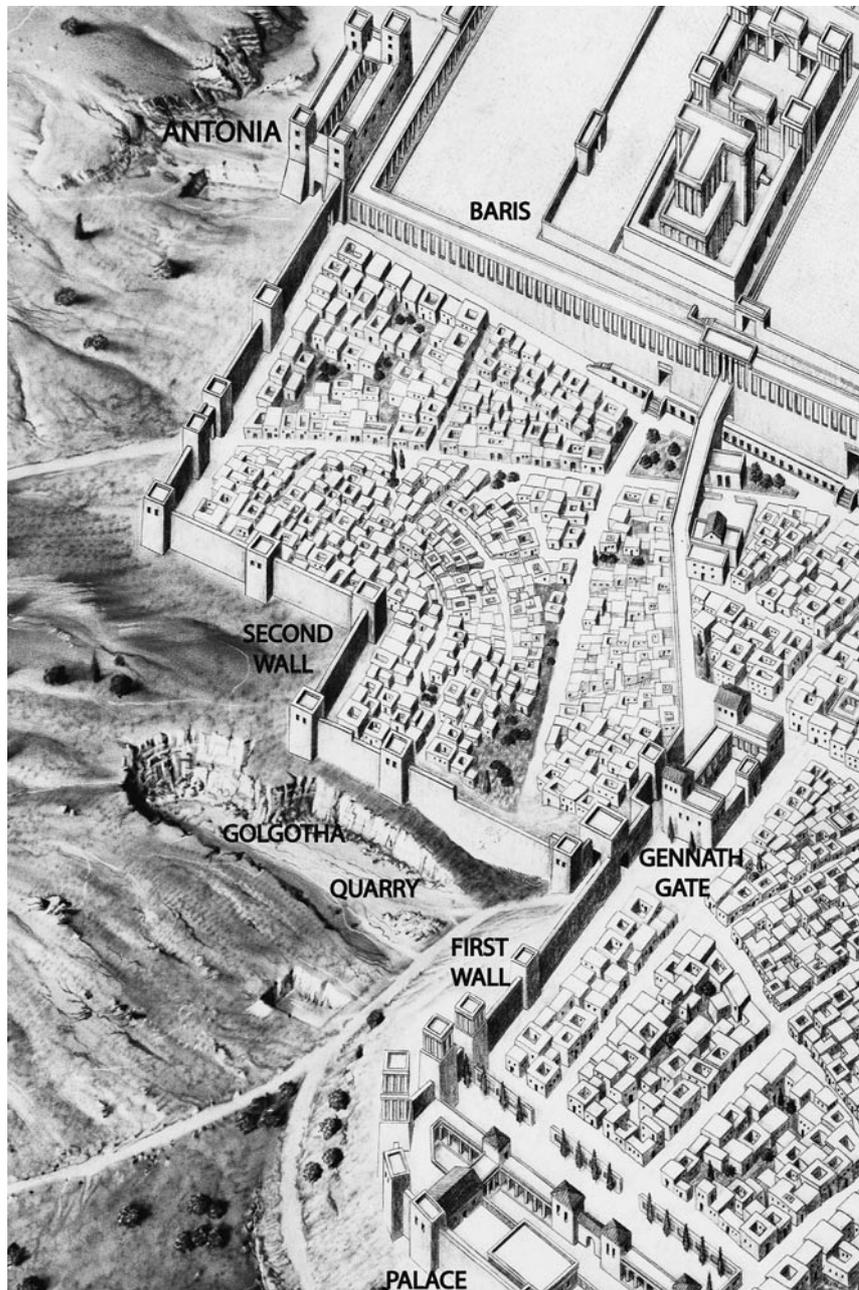
<sup>99</sup> *Geography*, 16.2.40.

<sup>100</sup> C. W. WARREN & C. R. CONDER, *The Survey of Western Palestine. IV. Jerusalem* (London: PEF, 1888), 215. Its position is illustrated in L. RITMEYER, “Locating the Original Temple Mount” *BAR* 18/2 (March-April 1992) 27, 34.

<sup>101</sup> See the first three reconstruction drawings in Ritmeyer, “Locating the Original Temple Mount”, 30-31.

<sup>102</sup> Source of fig. 2: This reconstruction drawing is the work of L. RITMEYER in *The Times Atlas of the Bible* (ed. J. B. Pritchard; London: Times Books, 1987) 166-67, which also gives a rough idea of the quarry with which the next paragraphs deal.





**Fig. 2:** L. Ritmeyer's reconstruction of the First and Second Walls together with the quarry over which the Holy Sepulchre is built.





knowledge there is only one candidate, the Hasmonean gate excavated by Avigad at the northern edge of the Jewish Quarter between Habad Street and Jewish Quarter Street.<sup>103</sup> It has one important argument in its favour. A line running north from this point in the 'first wall' passes east of the Iron Age quarry discovered at two points in the Mauristan, in St John's Garden<sup>104</sup> and beneath the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer.<sup>105</sup> It would be extraordinary if the builders of the 'second wall' did not avail themselves of the defensive advantage of this ready-made ditch. In other words, it is highly improbable that the 'second wall' lies west of the quarry.

The church of the Holy Sepulchre is built over the quarry, but further west than the two sites just mentioned. Traces of quarrying were found everywhere that soundings were made to bedrock. For those who like to see for themselves, typical cuttings are still visible in the Armenian chapel of St. Vartan,<sup>106</sup> and in the Latin chapel of the Finding of the Cross where the overburden is striking.<sup>107</sup> There can be no serious doubt that the Holy Sepulchre was also outside the 'second wall'.

#### THE TOMB OF CHRIST

What data do we have regarding the tomb discovered by Macarius? The reports of two eyewitnesses of its discovery are complemented by meagre archaeological data.

In speaking of the discovery of the tomb of Christ (see above) Eusebius says only that it was a 'cave', i.e. a cavity cut in the rock. In a later work he gives more details:

The cave itself was a cave which had recently been hewn out, a cave that had now been cut out in a rock and which had experienced the reception of no other body.... For it is astonishing to see even this rock, standing out erect and alone in a level land, and having only one cavern within it; lest, had there been many, the miracle of him who overcame death should have been obscured (*Theophany*, 3.61).

<sup>103</sup> *Discovering Jerusalem*, 50, 66, 69.

<sup>104</sup> See K. KENYON, "Excavations in Jerusalem 1961" *PEQ* 94 (1962) 72-89; idem, *Jerusalem. Excavating 3000 Years of History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967) 152-53.

<sup>105</sup> See K. VRIEZEN, *Die Ausgrabungen unter der Erlöserkirche im Muristan Jerusalem (1970-74)* (Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästinavereins 19; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994).

<sup>106</sup> M. BROSHI & G. BARKAY, "Excavations in the Chapel of St. Vartan in the Holy Sepulchre" *IEJ* 35 (1985) 108-28.

<sup>107</sup> V. Corbo, *Santo Sepolcro*, 112-13; note especially plates 57-58 and photos 103-9.





The first sentence is but a paraphrase of the gospels: “a tomb hewn out of the rock” (Mk 15:46) combined with “a new tomb where no one had ever been laid” (Jn 19:41). It cannot be considered to have any independent historical value. The second sentence is the earliest evidence we have that, in order to bring it within the Holy Sepulchre, what was judged to be the tomb chamber of Christ was isolated from the cliff behind, and that the surrounding rock surface was levelled.

That a significant amount of rock was cut away by Constantine’s engineers is confirmed by Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386):

For he calls ‘a cleft in the rock’ (Song of Songs 2:14) the hollow place originally in front of the sepulchre; this had been hewn out of the rock itself, a practice customary in front of sepulchres. It is not visible now, it is true, because the outer hollowed-out rock (*proskepasma*) was hewn away to make room for the present adornment. Before royal magnificence embellished the monument, there was a hollow place before the sepulchre.<sup>108</sup>

Unfortunately this text is not as unambiguous as one might wish. This could not be better illustrated than by Biddle’s commentary on *proskepasma*, “This hollowed-out place in front of the tomb was presumably an open and unroofed or partly unroofed forecourt or ante-chamber cut in the rock face”.<sup>109</sup> This is in fact a series of very different things. Clearly Biddle would prefer to think of a courtyard, which by definition is unroofed, but is constrained by the fact that ‘covering’ is the only meaning attested for *skepasma*.<sup>110</sup> A covered area in front of a burial chamber can only be a vestibule, however roughly it may have been shaped.<sup>111</sup> The destruction of such an antichamber is something quite different from broadening the perspective of an open courtyard by demolishing the side walls (see fig. 5). This makes the hint of Cyril’s displeasure, to which Walker has drawn attention,<sup>112</sup> all the more understandable. The vestibule was an integral part of the tomb structure, even though not used for burials.

The recent survey by Kloner and Zissu of all the known Second Temple tombs in the Jerusalem area has established a much more detailed historical context in which to assess the meagre data furnished by texts

<sup>108</sup> *Catecheses* 14.9; translation from *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem* (ed. L. McCauley & A. Stephenson; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1970) 2.37.

<sup>109</sup> *The Tomb of Christ*, 65. This ambiguity is maintained in the elevation of his reconstruction drawing (see fig. 4 A). Nothing like this, however, appears in the Jerusalem necropolis.

<sup>110</sup> LSJ, 1606b; BAGD, 753b.

<sup>111</sup> So rightly Abel in Vincent & Abel, *Jérusalem nouvelle*, 182a.

<sup>112</sup> *Holy City, Holy Places?* 273.





and archaeology on the tomb of Christ. It is entirely possible that an Iron Age tomb was pressed into use. It is most improbable, however, that an Iron Age tomb would have been hewn out in a working quarry that was abandoned only in the first century BC. Thus, in what follows, I assume that we have to do with a tomb typical of that period and later.

Once it is recognized that the Holy Sepulchre is built over an abandoned quarry, one would expect to find that it covers tombs. Kloner and Zissu report:

A significant portion of the quarries [found throughout the environs of Jerusalem] is clearly related to the burial caves and their rock-hewn façades and in particular the clusters of tombs located in *Meleke* bedrock. At several quarrying sites the caves were hewn after the extraction of building stones ceased. The stone cutters of the burial systems took advantage of the existing artificial cliffs and vertical rock faces and converted them into façades of burial complexes, cutting further into the bedrock burial chambers and halls with their networks of *kokhim* and burial installations.<sup>113</sup>

A *kokhim* tomb (the singular is *kokh*) is a rock-cut chamber having in one or more of its walls horizontal shafts sufficiently large to take a human body lying supine. “The *kokhim* must be 4 cubits long 7 hands-breaths high and 6 wide” (*m. Baba Bathra*, 6.8), i.e. roughly 2 m x 55 cm x 48 cm (see fig. 3).<sup>114</sup> Just such a tomb, popularly identified as



**Fig. 3:** Three *kokhim* surmounted by an *arcosolium*.

<sup>113</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 15-16.

<sup>114</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 62-63. Source of fig. 3: The illustration shows cave 25-14 at Sanhedriyya, Jerusalem which is fig. 26 in Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 524.





the 'Tomb of Joseph of Arimathea' is still visible in the Holy Sepulchre in the Chapel of the Syrian Orthodox.<sup>115</sup> Most of the original square chamber was destroyed in the construction of the Constantinian rotunda; "only a quarter of the burial chamber survived, with ledges, two intact *kokhim*, two or three openings of additional *kokhim*, an elongated *kokh* and a niche in the standing pit".<sup>116</sup>

One reason for the popularity of *kokhim* tombs, which were introduced into Jerusalem in the second century BC,<sup>117</sup> was that they solved the major problem of Iron Age tombs, namely, the fightful stench of decomposing bodies.<sup>118</sup> Each individual *kokh* could be closed with an airtight seal, which meant that the smell did not seep into the central chamber and so inhibit the use of other *kokhim*. The seal could be removed easily to check how far decomposition had progressed.<sup>119</sup> This determined when the bones were ready to be collected into an ossuary.

The original *kokhim* tombs had one fault. They made no provision for storage of bones. This was remedied in the late first century BC at the earliest.<sup>120</sup> *Kokhim* too short to take a human body (less than 1.2 m) were cut to contain ossuaries.<sup>121</sup> Ossuaries could also be arranged on shelves cut into the wall above the *kokhim* with a ceiling that could be curved (*arcosolium*) or flat (*quadrosolium*).<sup>122</sup> Contrary to a common assumption *arcosolia* were not used for the primary burial of dignitaries or anyone else. Not only do they post date the *kokhim*, and generally appear in the rearmost extension of the burial complex,<sup>123</sup> but to lay a body there would be to recreate the smell problem of Iron Age tombs.<sup>124</sup> In no Jerusalem tomb was a skeleton found supine in primary burial on an *arcosolium* shelf.<sup>125</sup>

In addition to the burial chamber a rock-roofed vestibule and/or an open-air courtyard are frequent occurrences in the Jerusalem necropo-

<sup>115</sup> For a plan of the quarry and associated tombs, see Gibson & Taylor, *Beneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre*, 52-53.

<sup>116</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 463.

<sup>117</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 71.

<sup>118</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 87-88.

<sup>119</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 70.

<sup>120</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 71.

<sup>121</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 68.

<sup>122</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 81. There is a striking illustration in fig. 26 on p. 524.

<sup>123</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 84-86.

<sup>124</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 84.

<sup>125</sup> *Arcosolia* with troughs for primary burial are another matter. They appear in the Herodian period, but only become popular in the second century AD, and are typical of the Byzantine period; see Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 83.





lis.<sup>126</sup> Both served the same functions. There the pallbearers and funeral procession halted and the mourning rites were performed (see fig. 5). Typically the entrance to the vestibule was tall and wide in order to facilitate easy passage, and was left open. It was not blocked in any way. The entrance to the burial chamber was usually cut in the back wall of the vestibule, but it could also be in either of the side walls or in the floor. This entrance was much smaller (the average is a square of 50 cm each side) and was closed by a stone.<sup>127</sup> The vestibule mentioned by Cyril of Jerusalem, therefore, should be accepted as a feature of the tomb of Jesus.

So much for the environs, what about the Edicule itself? The existing structure is the latest in a series of replicas dating from the effort of the Fatimid caliph of Egypt, al-Hakim (996-1021) to destroy the Holy Sepulchre in 1009. How much of the original tomb survives? Biddle provides the fullest answer possible in the light of the present data:

These three independent accounts, preserved independently by Yahya, Adémar and Glaber are consistent, whether they derive from Muslim officials, Christian Arab sources, or western clerics; the rock-cut tomb was not completely destroyed. Some part, perhaps much, survived.... As a comparison of the descriptions made before and after 1009 shows, the rock-cut roof and much, perhaps all, of the west and east walls were removed, but the south wall and the burial couch survived, and possibly part of the north wall, in so far as this did not form part of the north side of the burial couch itself.<sup>128</sup>

It is to be hoped that in the not too distant future this description will be complemented by precise observation of the rock sheltered by the Edicule. The structure is in imminent danger of collapse,<sup>129</sup> and should be removed as soon as possible.

A careful search of all the tomb plans published by Kloner and Zissu did not bring to light any example of a tomb cut in rock for a single individual.<sup>130</sup> This makes the claim of Eusebius in *Theophany*, 3.61 (see above) that there was space in the tomb of Jesus for only one body extremely suspect.<sup>131</sup> From what he says, it is clear that Eusebius did not

<sup>126</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 41 and 51. The forecourt is prescribed in *m. Baba Bathra* 6.8, but references to the vestibule in the *Mishnah* are unclear (52).

<sup>127</sup> Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 52.

<sup>128</sup> *The Tomb of Christ*, 72-73; cf. 103, 115-16.

<sup>129</sup> See the bulge in the east front in the photograph in Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ*, 107, fig. 74.

<sup>130</sup> Biddle also underlines the exceptional character of a one person tomb (*The Tomb of Christ*, 117).

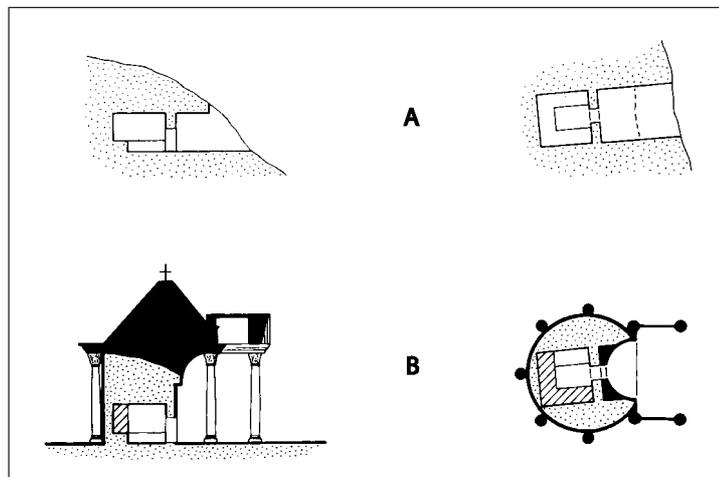
<sup>131</sup> Surprisingly this is the reconstruction opted for by M. KÜCHLER, *Jerusalem*.





want pious visitors to the tomb to be distracted by the sort of questions that could arise were there more than one place where the body could have lain. What he describes, therefore, is likely to be what he and/or Macarius decided should be left for veneration in the refurbished tomb.

This would appear to be the reasoning behind Biddle's restoration drawings of the original tomb and the Constantinian shrine (see fig. 4).<sup>132</sup>



**Fig. 4:** Biddle's reconstruction of (A) the original tomb and (B) the Constantinian shrine.

The first drawing (A) shows the standing pit surrounded by a ledge on three sides.<sup>133</sup> This is an Iron Age configuration, which was abandoned in the Second Temple period.<sup>134</sup> The drawing, however, is easily modified to make it more authentic by adding two or three *kokhim* in each wall (see fig. 5).<sup>135</sup>

*Ein Handbuch und Studienreiseführer zur Heiligen Stadt* (Orte und Landschaften der Bible IV/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007) 426, fig. 228.

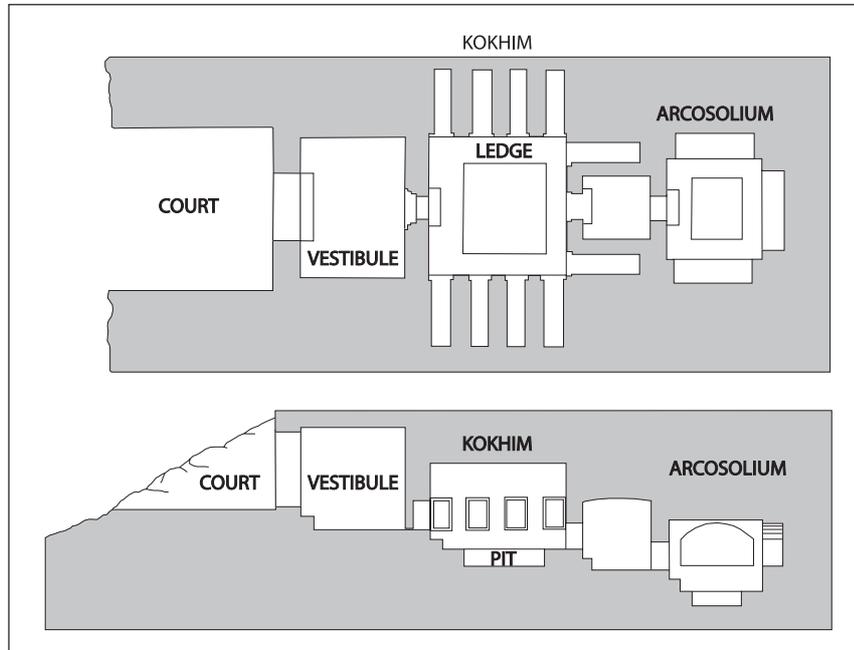
<sup>132</sup> *The Tomb of Christ*, 68, fig. 64, and 117, fig. 79.

<sup>133</sup> Curiously the same *Iron Age* tomb appears in Kloner, "Did a Rolling Stone Close Jesus' Tomb?" 25. It should, of course, look like his drawing on p. 29.

<sup>134</sup> See Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 87.

<sup>135</sup> Source of fig. 5: Kloner & Zissu, *Necropolis*, 608, fig. 117. As measured by Schick, the court is 16 feet wide and 15 feet deep. The entrance to the vestibule is 8 feet high and 7 feet wide. The width of the vestibule is 13 feet 4 inches, its depth is 10 feet and its height 10 feet. The burial chamber above the ledge is 13 feet square and the standing pit 8 feet square. The ledge, in consequence, is 2 feet 6 inches wide all round. The height in the pit is 10 feet. The *arcosolia* chamber is approximately 9 feet square. Each *arcosolium* is 7 feet 4 inches long, 2 feet wide, and 4 feet high at the apex of the curve.





**Fig. 5:** Plan and elevation of a *kokhim* tomb found near Bethany containing all the typical features of a first century tomb.

Then it would harmonize perfectly with hundreds of tombs in the Jerusalem area which date to the time of Jesus.

Even if *arcosolia* had been carved into the walls of the vestibule, it is most improbable that the disciples of Jesus would have laid his body in one of them. It would have left the body exposed to the ravages of jackals, feral dogs and vicious crows, because there was no way of closing the large vestibule entrance. The gospel report that the disciples blocked the entrance with a stone unambiguously indicates that they laid the body in the burial chamber, for which a stone would have been prepared. If the Jerusalem tradition incorporated the highly specific memory of a *rock-cut bench* as the key feature of the tomb of Christ (“Behold the place where they laid him” Mk 16:6), it may well be that the disciples who took Jesus from the cross laid his body on the ledge of the borrowed tomb rather than insert it into one of the *kokhim*. The shroud was already fouled with blood and faeces. Moreover, they were deeply shocked, almost paralyzed by fear, and in a great hurry because of the approaching Sabbath. Whatever they did was intended to be only a temporary measure.





Drawing B in fig. 4 shows the tomb as 'arranged' by Eusebius and/or Macarius. The ledge, according to Biddle, is cut away on two sides or built upon (diagonal strokes), leaving a single bench to the right of the door on entering. The basis for this is, of course, the rock-cut bench, which still survives in the Edicule (see above). I would add to the drawing the sealing of the entrances to the *kokhim* above the bench on that side.

According to Eusebius, Constantine "adorned [the cave] with choice columns and much ornament, sparing no art to make it beautiful" (*VC* 3.34). I originally took it for granted that the interior walls and the tomb bench would have been entirely sheathed in marble, both as decoration and also as a deterrent. Pilgrims would have wanted to chip away pieces of the rock as relics, and had to be stopped.<sup>136</sup> Adomnan, however, recorded that when Arculf saw the tomb sometime between 679 and 688 there was no decoration.<sup>137</sup>

To this day there is not the slightest trace of ornament in this small building forming the Lord's Tomb, and over its whole surface where it has been hollowed out you can see the marks of the tools which the masons and the stoneworkers used when they made it. But the rock of the Tomb and the Sepulchre is not plain, but a mixture of red and white, with both colours appearing in the same rock.<sup>138</sup>

Biddle rightly points out that Adomnan's formulation does not necessarily imply that the entire tomb chamber was rock-cut. There could have been masonry infilling in places.<sup>139</sup> The complete absence of any decoration, however, is so surprising that it cannot be accepted uncritically. Had the decoration of the interior been stripped by the Persians in 614? They certainly burnt the roof of the Rotunda, but there is no evidence of damage to the tomb or any mention of repairs.<sup>140</sup> The question, however, remains open.

<sup>136</sup> In 384 Egeria reported that deacons had to watch closely in order to stop pilgrims biting off pieces of the wood of the True Cross as they kissed it (37.2; Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 155). The Crusaders were forced to erect an iron grill around the rock in the Dome of the Rock in order to protect it from pilgrims.

<sup>137</sup> John WILKINSON, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* (Jerusalem: Ariel, 1977) 10.

<sup>138</sup> *The Holy Places*, 232.2; translation Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 96. Photius (sometime between 867 and 878) does not mention decoration, and speaks of the interior of the tomb in such a way as to imply that the chisel marks were visible (*Question 107 to Amphilochius*, 1.3-5; Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 146).

<sup>139</sup> *The Tomb of Christ*, 119.

<sup>140</sup> Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ*, 70.





If we move back a century to the visit of the Piacenza Pilgrim in 570, we get a very different picture:

The Tomb is hewn out of living rock, or rather in the rock itself... and in the place where the Lord's body was laid, at the head, has been placed a bronze lamp. It burns there day and night, and we took a blessing from it, and put it back. Earth is brought to the tomb and put inside, and those who go in take some for a blessing.<sup>141</sup>

Here the desire of the pilgrim to have a concrete souvenir is catered for in practical ways. A lamp is provided so that a little of the sanctified oil can be taken,<sup>142</sup> and earth is brought in order to be carried away. The provision of a stoney relic carries the clear implication that precautions had been taken to ensure that none of the original rock was accessible. The only way to do this was by covering it with immovable decorative material. Thus, I am strongly inclined to think that Eusebius and/or Macarius sheathed the interior of the tomb with marble, which would have obscured all traces of the *kokhim*.

The decoration that necessitated the destruction of the rock-cut vestibule is easily worked out from the astonishing number of artistic representations of the tomb of Christ prior to its destruction by Hakim.<sup>143</sup> Four pillars, from which gates hung on the east, were linked by low lattice grills on both sides, and supported a pitched roof (see fig. 4 B). This relatively open space could have served as the pulpit from which Cyril of Jerusalem preached his famous catechetical lectures. As time went on there was a tendency for the walls of this area to become more substantial, but it was only in the restoration by Boniface of Ragusa, OFM, in 1555 that it became an enclosed room.<sup>144</sup> It is one of the ironies of history that the original rock-cut vestibule of the tomb of Christ evolved over the centuries into an artificially constructed one.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>141</sup> *Travels*, 18; translation by Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 83.

<sup>142</sup> Perhaps it was carried away in one of the little embossed pilgrim-flasks showing the Constantinian tomb, which are preserved in the cathedrals at Bobbio and Monza and which were made about 600; see J. WILKINSON, "The Tomb of Christ: An Outline of its Structural History" *Levant* 4 (1972) 83-97.

<sup>143</sup> See the survey in Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ*, 20-28.

<sup>144</sup> See the drawing done by B. AMICO between 1591 and 1596 (*Plans of the Sacred Edifices of the Holy Land*, translated by T. Bellorini and E. Hoade; Jerusalem: OFM Press, 1953, 89, fig. 13). For sketches of the main stages of the evolution of the Edicule, see Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ*, 82, fig. 66.

<sup>145</sup> Today the so-called Chapel of the Angel is entirely of masonry, as Maximos Simaios recorded in 1809; see Vincent & Abel, *Jérusalem nouvelle*, 299-300; Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ*, 115.

