

# **The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Text and Archaeology**

A survey and analysis of past excavations  
and recent archaeological research with a  
collection of principal historical sources

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# Abbreviations

## Reference Works

- BAGD Bauer, Walter, William Arndt, Felix Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker. *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- BDB Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1906. Repr., Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003.
- Jastrow Jastrow, Marcus. *A Dictionary of the Talmudim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. London: Luzac and Co.; New York: G.P. Puttman's Sons, 1903.
- NEAEHL Stern, Ephraim, ed. *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. 5 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Carta, 1993 and 2008.

## Collections of Ancient Texts

- CSCO *Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium*. 646 vols. Paris: Carolus Poussielgue; Leuven: Peeters, 1903–.
- CSEL *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum*. 99 vols. Vindobonae: F. Tempsky; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1866–.
- CSHB Niebuhr, Barthold G., ed. *Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae*. 50 Vols. Bonn: Impensis ed. Weberi, 1828–1897.
- LCL Henderson, J. (ed). *Loeb Classical Library*. 532 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1911–2016.
- NPNF Schaff, Philip and Henry Wace, eds. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*. 14 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994. Repr. New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1890.
- PG Migne, Jacques-P., ed. *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca*. 161 vols. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1857–1886.
- PL Migne, Jacques-P., ed. *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina*. 221 vols. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1844–1855.
- PO *Patrologia orientalis*. 49 Vols. Paris: Firmin-Didot; Belgium: Brepols, 1904–2004.
- PPTS *Library of the Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society*. 13 vols. London: PPTS, 1896–1897.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the volumes are divided into sections demarcated by letters of the Greek alphabet; for the sake of convenience these have been changed in this volume to Latin characters.

## Ancient Sources

An.	Tacitus, Zonaras. <i>Annales (Annals)</i> .
Anacr.	Sophronius. <i>Anacreontica</i> .
Ant.	Josephus. <i>Antiquities of the Jews (Antiquitates judaicae)</i> .
b. 'Erub	Babylonian Talmud 'Erubin.
b. Mo'ed Qat	Babylonian Talmud Mo'ed Qatan.
Catech.	Cyril of Jerusalem. <i>Catecheses (Catechetical Lectures)</i> .
Chron.	Sulpicius Severus. <i>Chronicon libri duo (Chronicle in Two Books) or Historia Sacra (Sacred History)</i> .
Chron. Aquit. Franc.	Adémar of Chebannes. <i>Chronicon Aquitanicum et Francicum (Chronicle of Aquitaine and France)</i> .
Chron. Pasch.	<i>Chronicon Paschale (Paschal Chronicle)</i> .
Comm. in Is.	Jerome. <i>Commentaria in Isaiam prophetam (Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah)</i> .
Comm. in Matt.	Jerome, Origen. <i>Commentaria in Evangelium Matthaei (Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew)</i> .
De invent.	Alexander Monachus. <i>De inventione sanctae crucis (The Finding of the Holy Cross)</i> .
Epist.	Jerome, Paulinus of Nola. <i>Epistulae (Letters)</i> .
Epist. Const.	Cyril of Jerusalem. <i>Epistola ad Constantium imperatorum (Letter to the Emperor Constantine)</i> .
Fab. heret.	Theodoret, <i>De fabulis hareticorum (Of Heretical Fables)</i> .
fragm.	fragment.
Haer.	Irenaeus. <i>Adversus haereses (Against Heresies)</i> .
Hist.	Rodulfus Glaber. <i>Historiarum libri quinque ab anno incarnationis DCCCC usque ad annum MXLIV (History in Five Books from A.D. 900 to 1044)</i> .
Hist. eccl.	Eusebius, Rufinus, Theodoret, Socrates, Sozomen. <i>Historia ecclesiastica (Ecclesiastical History)</i> .
Hist. eccl. gent. angl.	Bede. <i>Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum (Ecclesiastical History of the English People)</i> .
Hist. Nov.	Zosimus. <i>Historia Nova (New History)</i> .
Hist. rom.	Cassius Dio. <i>Historia romana (Roman History)</i> .
Itin.	Bordeaux Pilgrim, Egeria. <i>Itinerarium (Itinerary)</i> .
Loc. sanct.	Adomnan. <i>De locis sanctis (Concerning Sacred Places)</i> .
m. B. Bat.	Mishnah Baba Batra.
m. Bekhoroth	Mishnah Bekhoroth.
m. 'Erub	Mishnah 'Erubin.
m. Mo'ed Qat	Mishnah Mo'ed Qatan.

- m. Naz.* Mishnah Nazir.
- m. Ohol.* Mishnah Oholoth.
- m. Toh* Mishnah Tohorot.
- Nuhzat* Muhammad al-Idrisi. *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq Fi'khtirāq al-Afaq*, (*Book of Pleasant Journeys into Far Away Lands*).
- Ob. Theod.* Ambrose of Milan. *De obitu Theodosii oratio* (*Oration on the Death of Theodosius*).
- Onom.* Eusebius. *Onomasticon*.
- Quaest. 107.* Photius. *Epistulae ad Amphilochia, quaestio CVII* (*Letters to Amphilochius, Question 107*).
- Relatio* Saewulf, *Relatio de peregrinatione Saewulf ad Hierosolimam et terram sanctam* (*Pilgrimage of Saewulf to Jerusalem and the Holy Land*).
- Theo.* Eusebius. *Theophania* (*On Divine Manifestation*).
- Vir. ill.* Jerome. *De viris illustribus* (*On Illustrious Men*).
- Vit. Const.* Eusebius. *Vita Constantini* (*Life of Constantine*).
- Vit. Will.* Hugerbert. *Vita Willibaldi episcopi Eischstetensis* (*Life of Willibald Bishop of Eichstätt*).
- War* Josephus. *Jewish War* (*Bellum judaicum*).
- Zhytye* Abbot Daniel. *Zhytye I khodinnya Danyla, Ruskoyi zemli ihumena* (*Life and Pilgrimage of the Russian Abbot Daniel*).

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## Preface

This study of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre began initially as a short section of a research paper on the various locations in Jerusalem purported to be the burial place of Jesus of Nazareth following his crucifixion in the early part of the 1st century AD. This paper was submitted for the partial fulfillment of a course on the history of Palestine in the Persian through the Early Roman periods in my first year of graduate studies at Jerusalem University College (JUC, or the Institute of Holy Land Studies). One year later, during my second year at JUC, I found myself studying the Church of the Holy Sepulchre again as the subject of a term paper for a survey course on the archaeology of Jerusalem. My goal for this paper was to acquire a better personal understanding of the complicated early history and archaeology of the church. In the end, the paper became an engrossing study of the literary, historical, and archaeological data pertaining to the early history of the church, of which there is a vast and scattered corpus. This volume has at its core this earlier paper, and represents, to some degree, a reexamination of earlier research with numerous expansions and updates.

Architect, archaeologist, and priest, Charles Coüasnon, brought his 1972 lecture series at the British Academy on the history and archaeology of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to a close with these words:

‘The Holy Sepulchre is, for those who love it, like a book in which many pages of the history of Jerusalem are written. Certain passages are transcribed *en clair*, in plain language; for example, everything said by the Rotunda is easy to read; other pages are almost obliterated, but one can still divine their meaning. One can see, for example, the size of Constantine’s nave in that of St. Helena’s crypt, as also the plan of the Basilica in that of the cloister, since its southern wall is the wall of the Canons’ Refectory, while its northern wall is that of the dormitory. Because ancient foundations have been reused right up to our own time, all this is still outlined in the area...But what the Holy Sepulchre can still most movingly tell us, is of the fervour of all Christian peoples for the Tomb of their Saviour. This fervour shines before our eyes, and becomes evident when one discovers, overlapping one into the other, all these monuments which have been raised by men to the glory of the Resurrected One’ (Coüasnon 1974: 61–62).

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is an immensely complicated and fascinating place. In the words of one scholar (Murphy-O’Connor 2008: 49), the church, with its complex history and the cultural diversity of the warring religious communities living within its walls, ‘epitomizes the human condition.’ Like the city of Jerusalem, in which it is situated, the church can continually offer something new and interesting to inspire the *meditatio divina* of the pilgrim and cleric, or fill volumes of detailed academic texts and journals. I am fully confident that for anyone who would care to work at unraveling the intricate history of the shrine to Jesus’ death and resurrection, regardless of their religious persuasion on these matters, there awaits a very intriguing study of history, text, tradition, architecture, archaeology, and, not least of all, faith. I count myself privileged to have had an opportunity to study such an important site and spend so much time on this journey. I,

therefore, humbly submit this volume in the hope that it will contribute, if only a little, to the knowledge of those who would endeavor to learn more about the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

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make use of selected plans and photographs from Virgilio C. Corbo's wonderful excavation report on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Many thanks to Felicity Cobbing, the Executive Secretary and Curator at the Palestine Exploration Fund, London, for kindly allowing me to reproduce selected images from Dr. Shimon Gibson and Dr. Joan E. Taylor's excellent 1994 publication on the Holy Sepulchre, and for putting me in touch with the authors, who also generously consented to my use of the images from their work. Professor Gibson's and Professor Taylor's monograph was a significant source of inspiration for this project, and a resource that I returned to often as I attempted to sort through the complex historical data for my own survey of the material. I would also like to thank Mr. Panagiotis Agrafiotis of the National Technical University of Athens for his prompt and helpful response to my inquiry regarding the use of images from an article published on the study of the Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre in collaboration with Kuriakos Lampropoulos, Andreas Georgopoulos, and Antonia Moropoulou. Many thanks also to Mr. Tom Powers for allowing me to use his photographs from the excavations at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. To these and the other scholars whose work I have cited throughout this study, many thanks for your time, effort, and attention to detail—your work is an inspiration.

To anyone else I might have neglected to mention here, I am very grateful.

### **Bibliography**

- Coüasnon, C. 1974. *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem* (The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1972). J.-P.B and C. Ross (trans). London: Oxford University Press.
- Murphy-O'Connor, J. 2008. *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide*. 5th ed. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.



# Introduction

**Every age has left its testimony written in stone...**

Charles Coüason, O.P.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is one of the most historically packed structures on the face of the earth. Encased within its walls are the remains of a small piece of ancient Jerusalem, which, according to Christian tradition, was the site that witnessed the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For nearly 1700 years its doors have been thronged by believers seeking these holy sites. In addition to attracting many Christian pilgrims, the abundant historical data within the building has been the subject of ongoing scholarly research since the mid-19th century. In 1960, archaeologists found themselves with the rare opportunity of being able to excavate within the edifice, and a number of important discoveries were made that shed much light on the history of both the church and the site on which it was built. More recent work has been done, but many questions remain due in part to the limitation of excavating within a living structure, but also to the difficulty of making sense of the historical sources and scattered archaeological data that is available.

Much has been written on the archaeology and history of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre since the mid-19th century (see Chapter 2 for additional discussion). Some of the most important works on the subject were produced following the archaeological investigation in the church in the mid-20th century. These include the studies of Charles Coüason (1972), Virgilio C. Corbo (1981–1982), Shimon Gibson and Joan E. Taylor (1994), and Martin Biddle (1999). Since that time several shorter works have appeared, mostly as articles and chapters in scholarly journals and monographs, in which the authors both summarized the earlier material, and presented new interpretations of the data (see for example Patrich 1993 and 2016).

With such a large corpus of material written on the subject, one might wonder why another work surveying the archaeology and history of the church is necessary. Indeed, this is a fair question. In response, I would put forth two answers. First, archaeological research in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has continued since the restoration of the church was completed in the 1980s, and much of this data has yet to be treated in an updated monograph. This research has largely been non-destructive, carried out with ground penetrating radar, and digital scans, rather than with pick and trowel. The most significant of these projects was the restoration of the Edicule in early 2017, which revealed the rock-cut Tomb of Jesus for the first time in centuries (Agrafiotis *et al.* 2017; Moropoulou *et al.* 2015). Throughout this study, I have attempted to ‘unpack’ the historical and archaeological data yet again, in order to subject the work of previous scholars to a fresh analysis where applicable, while also addressing recent research that has taken place within the past two decades. All this has been done with the goal of setting the context for the presentation of an annotated ‘reader’ of primary sources pertinent to the history of the church. It is this literary piece that makes up my second reason for the necessity of a new study. While researching the church during my time as a graduate student, one of the

things that I noticed was that I was unable to locate a compilation of primary sources on the church that included: 1) texts spanning the entirety of the church's history from the events of the 1st century AD through the final phases of restoration in 1810, and 2) texts in their original languages with an English translation. Inspired by the compilations of texts on the church in Louis-H. Vincent and Félix-M. Abel's compilation of texts on the church in their 1914 work, *Jérusalem Nouvelle*, and James Earl Phillips's unpublished 1977 doctoral dissertation, I began to create my own collection of primary sources, which now makes up the bulk of this book.

The methodology employed in this study is rather simple. Following some preliminary remarks, I will: 1) present a brief history of Jerusalem from 30/33 AD through 1830, the period encompassing the major phases of the development of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, 2) discuss the history of research up to the present, 3) review the archaeological excavations that have been carried out in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and its vicinity, 4) discuss the history and archaeology of the church in chronological order from the Iron Age II through the final major phase of restoration in 1810; and 5) provide the reader with an annotated compilation of primary sources relevant to the study of the church's history ranging in date from the 1st century AD to 1831.

This book is divided into two parts. The first part (Chapters 1–4) briefly covers the history and archaeology of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The study of the church involves many different disciplines, which will be touched on in the following pages. The study is partly based in linguistics and textual criticism as there are many different literary sources in various languages, not to mention the languages of the scholars who have supplied us with the results of their research. The study is partly one of geography, geology, and topography, as one has to understand the terrain on which the church is built to understand why a tomb would have been there in the first place. Not least of these is that the study is one that requires critical engagement with the historical data supplied by the literary sources and the material remains exposed by the spade of the archaeologist. In order to probe these various aspects of the history of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it is necessary to begin with a brief look at the history of Jerusalem, for it is on this history that the entire study rests. This, therefore, will be the subject of the first chapter. Since the structure under analysis in this study was built to commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, according to the accounts preserved in the canonical Gospels, it seems appropriate that this snapshot of Jerusalem's history should begin with these events (earlier periods relevant to the discussion will be addressed in later chapters).

In Chapter 2, we transition to a different historical discussion—the history of research done on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The church has been the subject of much scholarly work since the mid-19th century, essentially beginning in 1849. In this chapter, we touch on the key studies that have appeared on the history and archaeology of the church dating from 1849 to 2017.

Chapter 3 focuses the attention of the reader on two of the key archaeological sites pertinent to the study of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre—the church itself and the Muristan complex. Here we survey the excavations done within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

led by representatives from the three major ecclesiastical communities of the church, and carried out between the years of 1960 and 1981. Then we discuss the excavations carried out to the south of the church in the Muristan complex from 1961–1967, 1970–1971, 1972–1974, and 2010–2011. Finally, we deal with the excavations carried out within the Chapel of St. Vartan in the church itself from 1975 to 1981. These excavations provide the primary archaeological data upon which the rest of the discussion of the history of the church rests.

In the fourth chapter, we look at the history of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is rich and quite complex. The church's history has been treated extensively in other volumes, especially where the early history of the church is concerned. Given the nature of the subject matter, and the scholarly work that has already been done, much of what is included here on the historical background of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is not new, though I do discuss recent research done within the past two decades, much of which has not been treated in a scholarly publication on the church itself. The goal of this chapter is to set the archaeological and literary context for the presentation of relevant ancient literature pertaining to the church in the following chapters.

In the second part of the book (Chapters 5–8), we turn to the compilation of ancient and modern primary sources relevant to the history of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The texts are presented in their original languages (with a few exceptions) with English translation and historical notes. Chapter 5 includes historical and contextual notes on the texts and their authors. The texts included in Chapters 6 and 7 are presented in chronological order relevant to the historical periods of the church's development. In Chapter 8, the primary sources expound on the legendary accounts of the discovery of the 'true cross' of Christ by Constantine's mother Helena Augusta, and the burial of the first man at the Rock of Golgotha, both of which are pertinent to the establishment of the church and its various chapels.

### **Preliminary Remarks**

Prior to looking at the history of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a few preliminary remarks are necessary in regard to the terminology used in this paper. The edifice currently known as the 'Church of the Holy Sepulchre' employs this name because of the reconstruction and modification of the church in the 12th century AD by the Crusaders, because of this it is no surprise that this is the name employed today by the Catholics and Protestants. As Shimon Gibson and Joan E. Taylor (1994: 1) point out, the Constantinian monument of the 4th century AD was not a single 'church,' strictly speaking, but rather a complex encompassing three churches: the Anastasis ('resurrection') built around the Tomb of Jesus, the church building proper (*marturion* or Martyrium) to the east of the Anastasis, and the Church of Golgotha.<sup>1</sup> In the 4th century AD, it seems that the church complex was referred to as the 'Church of the Holy Cross' (*ekklēsias tou hagiou staurou*),<sup>2</sup> as

<sup>1</sup> There is some debate as to whether the Church of Golgotha was a part of the 4th century church or was added to the repertoire of churches in the 7th century.

<sup>2</sup> This is the name given to the church in the *Chronicon Paschale* 278.29 (ca. 627 AD) (CSHB 35: 531; see Chapter 5, no. 4.7).

well as the ‘Church of the Resurrection’ (*ekklēsias tou anastaseōs*).<sup>3</sup> It was the Crusaders who altered the architectural details of the 11th century monument in an effort to make it into a unified whole, which then came to be designated as the ‘Church of the Holy Sepulchre’ (*Ecclesia Sancti Sepulchri*).<sup>4</sup> In this volume, as in most studies on the subject, the whole edifice will be referred to as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, or simply ‘the church,’ even when referring to the Constantinian edifice.

Further, it should also be noted that there are terminological complexities with the titles *Anastasis* and *Martyrium* (see Coüasnon 1974: 37–38). In modern academic nomenclature the structure around the Tomb of Jesus, the Anastasis, is called the Rotunda, a word of Latin origin (from *rotundus*) denoting the spherical nature of the building.<sup>5</sup> This term will be employed in this study. The church proper that Constantine built to the east of the tomb, is typically referred to as the Basilica (*basilikē* ‘royal structure’ from *basileus* ‘king’), referring to the large rectangular structures employed by the Roman government for various functions and adapted for churches and synagogues in the Byzantine period (325–640 AD) (Parker 1999: 151). Since the term ‘Martyrium’ carries with it various interpretive possibilities,<sup>6</sup> this structure of the Constantinian church will be referred to here, predominantly, as ‘the Basilica.’

In regard to the term ‘Golgotha,’ it should be noted that a distinction will be made in this study between the site of Golgotha and the Rock of Golgotha. When referring to the former, the ‘Golgotha’ or ‘site of Golgotha’ will be employed as a toponym for the general location of the Roman execution site on the Northwestern Hill of Jerusalem, dating to the 1st century AD. The ‘Rock of Golgotha,’ on the other hand, refers to the limestone monolith enshrined in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The reason for this distinction will be made apparent in due course.

Finally, the reader should note that throughout the body of the discussions on the archaeology and history of the church in the first part of this monograph, I will refer to the primary sources in Chapters 6 through 8. The texts themselves are numbered sequentially with an initial number designating the chapter in which it appears. Thus, a reference to ‘Text 6.1,’ should direct the reader to the first text in Chapter 6. References to the passages throughout Part I of this work appear in bold. The primary sources and their numerical order can be seen at a glance in the catalog located at the beginning of Part II.

<sup>3</sup> The church was called ‘the Resurrection’ by many Byzantine writers, and it is this title that was adopted by Christian and Muslim Arab historians from the 10th century onward (see Chapter 6). Robinson and Smith (1856: 377, n. 1) noted that local Jerusalemites of the 19th century still called the church by its Arabic title *Kanisah al-Qiyamah*, ‘Church of the Resurrection.’ This title is still used by Eastern Christians to this day.

<sup>4</sup> The use of the term ‘sepulcher’ (*sepulchrum [Domini]*) to designate the Tomb of Jesus was in common use by the 12th century AD (Wilkinson 1981: 180, n. 5).

<sup>5</sup> This term was also employed by Adomnán, who notes: *Illi rotundae ecclesiae supra saepius memoratae, quae et Anastasis* (*De Loc. Sanct.* 1.4).

<sup>6</sup> Coüasnon (1974: 37) notes that Latinists tend to interpret the term in light of the suffering a martyr endures, which has therefore led to the identification of the Church of Golgotha with the Martyrium (Egeria, *Itin.* 48.1); some see the term in light of its original Greek meaning of ‘witness.’ In the pilgrimage account of Adomnán (*De Loc. Sanct.* 1.6.1), the term Martyrium is used to denote the Basilica. Egeria uses the term to denote both the Basilica (*Itin.* 27.3) and the Church of Golgotha (*Itin.* 48.1). Eusebius uses the term to denote the Constantinian edifice as a whole (*Vit Const.* 3.40).



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