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978-1-108-01604-9 - A Brief Description of the Holy Sepulchre Jerusalem and Other
Christian Churches in the Holy City

George Jeffery

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PART I
HISTORY

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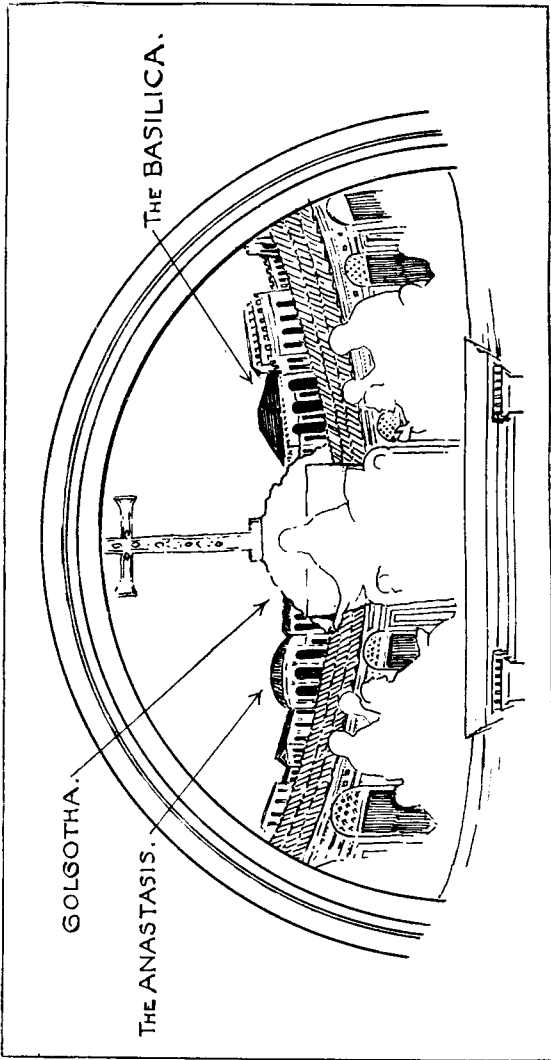


Fig. 1. Apse Mosaic in St. Pudenziana, Rome. From a photograph by Alinari 1875.

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CHAPTER I

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY

EUSEBIUS, Bishop of Cæsarea, who flourished in the early part of the fourth century, is the first writer who gives a clear and intelligible account of the Holy Sepulchre after the events recorded in the Gospel. It is to be hoped that in the new discoveries constantly being made in Egypt, some references in Christian documents may be found throwing additional light upon this most interesting subject; nothing, however, of an earlier date than the middle of the fourth century seems to have been found up to the present.

The finding of the Holy Sepulchre is described by the Bishop of Cæsarea as a simple operation. We are given to understand that the site was well known, and the presence of the pagan temple built to desecrate it was sufficient to indicate its exact position. Eusebius seems to have been present at its discovery when a boy; he speaks as an eye-witness.

The temple, already venerable after, as it is supposed, 200 years of heathen use, was first pulled down; then the podium or platform was completely cleared away, and the materials and earth carried to a considerable distance, adding possibly to the enormous accumulations in the Tyropæon valley. Roman temples in Syria were frequently erected on more or less artificial mounds, as, for instance, Baalbek, the greatest of them all. The Holy Sepulchre when laid bare by the removal of the temple podium seems to have astonished the explorers by its intact condition.

The tendency of the historians of the early Christian Church is to magnify the position of Christianity at its first recognition by the Roman Government. It is not perhaps sufficiently recognised that, although Constantine seems to have personally and privately favoured Christianity, and the famous Edict of Milan removed all restrictions as to its development, the Roman Imperial Government remained officially heathen until the time of

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THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

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Theodosius at the close of the fourth century, when the Olympian Games were abolished and the central shrine of the State religion, the Temple of Vesta in the Roman Forum, was officially closed (394). Christianity was viewed by Constantine's Government much in the way that it is viewed by the Turkish Government of the present day, and tolerated for similar reasons. Christ occupied a place in the Roman Pantheon long before the middle of the fourth century, and even Antoninus Pius, one of the builders of Baalbek, severely repressed anti-Christian riots. But Constantine went a step farther than any of his predecessors in that he permitted the destruction of a temple of the Imperial State religion for the purpose of substituting the central shrine of Christendom—the Monument of the Resurrection. It is the first instance of the kind on record.

The exact dates of the destruction of the temple and the building of the Christian church are unknown. Eusebius is supposed to have witnessed the first when a boy, and to have been present at the consecration of the latter in his capacity as bishop of the region. Some little time must therefore have elapsed between the two events, and the legendary account generally gives the period of transformation as 326–335. In the year 333 the new buildings seem, however, to have been seen in an unfinished condition by the Bordeaux Pilgrim.

Descriptio fabricæ Sancti Sepulchri

The Holy Sepulchre—this, as the chief part of the whole monument, the Emperor caused to be decorated with the greatest care, and with magnificent columns. Outside was a vast court, open to the sky, paved with polished stone, and with long porticoes on three of its sides. Towards the east, opposite the Tomb, was joined a Basilica, an admirable work of immense proportions. Its walls were encrusted with vari-coloured marbles, whilst its exterior was built of polished stonework little inferior to the marble in beauty. The roof was constructed with a lead covering impervious to winter weather, and on the inside it presented a vast surface of gilded coffers. At both sides of the Basilica were two-storied aisles, with gilded ceilings divided from the nave by colonnades.

Outside the Basilica, on its front, were enormous columns, and three doors opening towards the east as public entrances. Opposite

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these doors was the apse¹ or principal part of the church. This apse was enclosed or decorated with twelve columns to symbolise the Apostles, and on each column was a silver vase, the special gift of the Emperor.

In front of the church was an open space with porticoes on either hand, and also gates into the Atrium. This grand entrance to the Basilica stood in the midst of the market-place; and its gates of beautiful workmanship afforded a view of the interior to the passer-by, who could not but be filled with astonishment. Eusebius Pamphili, *De Vita Constantini*. Migne, *Pat. Gr.* t. xx.—supposed date of writing, A.D. 335.

The meagre account of Jerusalem by the first Christian pilgrim known to have recorded his travels (the Bordeaux Pilgrim) confirms the statements of the Bishop of Cæsarea. He seems to have been attracted on his arrival in Jerusalem by the sight of the Acropolis (modern Haram), with its Roman temple and other buildings, and its statues still standing of Hadrian. He then mentions the Domus Caiaphæ on Sion, which would appear to have been the great Christian hospice of the period as well as *Mater omnium ecclesiarum*, a title afterwards transferred to the church of the Cænaculum. Lastly, he describes the New Buildings on the Holy Sites, and makes the first recorded mention of the *Monticulus Golgotha*. He speaks of passing through the wall of Sion by the gate of the New City, which may mean either a new district rising round the Holy Sites, or from its facing Neapolis (Nablus). On the right hand he observed the ruins of the Pretorium, on the left were Golgotha and the Sepulchre.

After an interval of fifty years another native of France followed in the footsteps of the Bordeaux Pilgrim. This was Silvia of Aquitaine, whose account of her travels, discovered accidentally at Arezzo in 1887, is as tediously voluminous as the Bordeaux Pilgrim's tale is short and meagre. Silvia seems to have visited the Holy City during A.D. 380–385, when Cyril, the author of the "Catechetical Discourses," was Bishop of Jerusalem.² She

¹ *Hemisphærium*: this possibly means the Anastasis, and not the western apse of the Basilica.

² The Bishops of Ælia Capitolina were dependent on the Bishopric of Cæsarea until A.D. 451, when the Council of Chalcedon made Jerusalem the Fifth Patriarchate.

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does not mention him by name, but he doubtless was the bishop whose ritual and ministrations she watched with so much care. The *Peregrinatio* takes the form of a letter addressed to certain ladies, possibly the sisters of some convent in Aquitaine. The first few pages, a fragment in the centre, and the conclusion are missing, but the greater part of the description of the Holy Sites is fortunately intact.

At the date of Silvia's visit the buildings were in their pristine condition as planned by their first builders. The Anastasis (Tomb-enclosure) is unfortunately not described in detail, but its doors (or the doors of the Tomb itself) are mentioned, outside which the catechumens stood, whilst the faithful entered within. On several occasions the Anastasis is spoken of as a "Church," and the sound of the voices of those offering praises within it, heard outside, is noted.

Silvia's descriptions of her religious life in Jerusalem are vivid and full of interesting particulars, which may be epitomised as follows. After a service of prayer in the Anastasis, the pilgrims were conducted by the Bishop (who seems to have played a very active part in the ceremonies) to the "Cross," whilst interminable kyries were sung and benedictions performed. This Cross, covered with jewels and gilding, stood on the "Monticulus Golgotha." The seat of the Bishop was placed in different positions around the hillock during these ceremonies,¹ and the open space of Golgotha is described as decorated with innumerable lamps and lighted candles, hanging presumably within the surrounding colonnades, as we see them, for instance, represented in the mosaics of Thessalonica. This illumination of Golgotha was specially important at the *Licinicon* (λνχικόν) or *Lucernarum* festival, but whether before cockcrow in the morning or at evensong these illuminations of the colonnades seem to have been very noticeable.

Silvia is probably the first person to mention the veneration of the relics of the "True Cross," which she describes as taking place on a table covered with a linen cloth arranged at the side of Golgotha. During all the ceremonies connected with Golgotha, the Bishop is always mentioned as assisting "in

¹ "Though I should deny the Crucifixion, this Golgotha confutes me near which we are now assembled" (St Cyril, Lect. XIII. 4 (c. A.D. 350), Newman's translation).

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cathedra.” She then gives picturesque details of the pilgrims’ visit to *Imbomon*, or the scene of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives: the return to Jerusalem after a night spent on Olivet; *candelæ ecclesiasticæ* or candle lamps throwing a weird light on the crowd of men, women, and children carrying palms and olive branches and singing hymns, the little ones overcome with fatigue being carried on men’s shoulders, and the noise of the returning multitude ever increasing to those who lay awake in Jerusalem. Then arriving at the city gate “at that hour when one man can distinguish another,” the Bishop leading the way into the Basilica, the great eastern doors were thrown wide open for the entering crowd.

On other occasions Silvia mentions the Bishop examining the candidates for baptism. The Bishop’s *Cathedra* was placed behind the great altar in the apse of the Basilica, and the neophytes were conducted to him one by one. No mention, however, is made of the Baptistry which fifty years before had attracted the notice of the Bordeaux Pilgrim.

Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem in the concluding years of the fourth century, has left sermons (we can almost fancy Silvia may have heard them) which contain interesting details about the Holy Sepulchre. He mentions the great modifications the Tomb had undergone more than fifty years previously when the Anastasis was erected. The monument had been reduced to a mere rock-covering of the sepulchral chamber, and the outer or entrance part of the cave (such as is usually found in tombs near Jerusalem) was hewn away for the general adornment. He mentions this fact in several parts of his lectures. Here it is interesting to remark that in the very wonderful reproduction of the Holy Sepulchre at Bologna (possibly fifth century in origin) it is represented without any outer chamber. Another curious detail mentioned by Cyril would imply the roofless state of the Anastasis. He speaks of the evidences then remaining of a garden surrounding the Tomb, as if it had been treated as a rock-hewn monument like those of Petra, or the well-known “Absalom’s Pillar” in the Valley of Jehoshaphat with somewhat natural surroundings.

A great deal of interest attaches to the few contemporary representations of the Holy Sites in the fourth century which

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have been identified up to the present. The most important is the apse mosaic in the Church of St Pudenziana, Rome, which the present writer was the first to bring into public notice for this purpose [fig. 1]. Very careful drawings of this most interesting work of art were made by the late Cav. De Rossi. He has given an elaborate sectional diagram in his great folio work on the Roman Mosaics showing all the portions which have been restored at different periods, and he has been able to define the portions which undoubtedly belong to the fourth century. The general design and the architectural background are original: the inscription on the book held by Christ may have been altered, and the sky portion with evangelistic symbols seems to have been a good deal restored. But as a whole this most valuable monument of ancient art gives us a wonderful idea of the buildings, and coincides remarkably, considering the inherent conventionality of the representation, with the remains in Jerusalem and the ancient descriptions.

The picture has evidently been executed under the careful supervision of some returned pilgrim of the period, who with true Italian poetic imagination wished to represent not only the Holy Sites of the terrestrial Jerusalem, but also the courts of the celestial Sion with Christ and His Apostles sitting in conclave. It answers both these purposes, and as a decorative work of art magnificently fills the apse of the church. Behind the figure of Christ rises the *monticulus* of Golgotha surmounted by an immense jewelled cross. This is evidently the "Cross" so often mentioned by the pilgrim Silvia—an addition to the Holy Sites of fifty years after the time of Constantine. On each side of the cross may be seen the arcades of the Atrium, and behind these rise the Anastasis and Basilica in their correct relative positions, but without any idea of proportionate size.

It will be noticed that the view is supposed to be taken in a very natural manner from the high ground, overlooking the Holy Sites, of the upper part of Sion, where the Christian quarter of the Roman city was situated. The pilgrims would be most familiar with this view of the buildings as they would usually approach them from this side.

It is curious that there should be no history, traditional or otherwise, about this very important representation of the Holy

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Sites in the Church of St Pudenziana, which is believed to have been built on the site of the house of Pudens, friend of St Paul, by Pope Pius I in A.D. 142. The restoration of the building and consequently of the mosaic is supposed to have taken place in the eighth century, and the mosaic may have again been touched when the church was modernised by the Gaetani family in 1598. De Rossi and Garrucci believe the original work to have been executed at the command of Pope Siricius in A.D. 390.



Fig. 2. The Trivulzio Ivory, Milan. From the *Bulletin of the Russian Palestine Society*, 1894.

Representations or models of the Anastasis on ivory diptychs, caskets, or other small objects of the fourth and fifth centuries frequently occur in museums. Amongst the best known are the Trivulzio ivory (evidently of the same period and design as the mosaic in St Pudenziana) now preserved in the museum of Count Trivulzio of Milan [fig. 2], the example in the British Museum (Maskell Collection) [fig. 3], the Quedlinburg ivory

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(cast in the South Kensington Museum) [fig. 5], and that in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris [fig. 4].

From such evidence as we possess at the present—descriptions by contemporaries, pictorial representations, and a few traces on the rock-cut site—we conclude that about the year 333 A.D., after the laying bare of the Holy Sepulchre, the Christians were permitted to level the whole area around the Tomb for the purpose of the “adornment” spoken of by Cyril. This levelling of the rock surface was carried



Fig. 3. British Museum. One of four plaques of stained red ivory, 4 inches by 3 inches. Italian, fifth to eighth centuries. On the door of the Holy Sepulchre is a representation of the raising of Lazarus. On the lower panel a seated figure of Mary weeping. Above the soldiers are the two Mariés in attitudes of grief.

out in such a way as to admit of the spot identified with the Crucifixion being left as a hillock or “monticulus” standing

in the midst, whilst on the west side of the levelled space the Tomb was treated as a kind of chamber with walls and covering of rock in the style of the numerous tombs of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which are precisely similar in character. Incidentally it may be remarked that this type of rock-hewn architecture is worthy of a special study; the tombs of Palestine and Idumea, Egypt and India, are amongst the most interesting monuments of archæology, and it is curi-



Fig. 4. The Anastasis and Basilica within the Walls of Jerusalem. Early Ivory (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris). One of the few representations extant of the Martyrion Basilica, and possibly of the same period as the Madaba Mosaic, which it resembles.

ous to consider that the great Christian Memorial is perhaps