

THE HOLY SEPULCHRE.

I.—TOMB OF JOSEPH OF ARIMATHÆA.

ABOUT twenty yards west of the Holy Sepulchre, in the church itself, is a little crypt traditionally known as the Tomb of Joseph of Arimathæa, or the Tombs of Joseph and Nicodemus. The question whether this crypt is ancient or not has long been recognised as one of the essential elements in the great controversy over the authenticity of the Sepulchre.

The ascertained existence in this place of remains belonging without doubt to a Jewish burial-place, would at once remove one of the principal objections to the authenticity of the site.

The question may, in fact, be resolved into two propositions, the latter subordinate to the former—viz., (1) Can the traditional Sepulchre, which is within the walls of the modern city, really be a Jewish tomb? and (2) If so, can it be the Tomb of our Lord?

The presence round the Sepulchre of a group of ancient tombs would solve the first difficulty, which many desire to see removed before proceeding to the second. They do not see their way to admit that there were, in the time of our Lord, tombs existing on the spot which now is shown as His. It is, therefore, most important to establish, if possible, the fact that the shrine now adored has, or may have, within it, if not the very tomb in which Jesus was laid, at least a real Jewish tomb.

Both adversaries and partisans of the Sepulchre have appreciated the value of this preliminary difficulty, and have from the first made it the starting-point of their argument. But neither have, in my opinion, produced an exhaustive examination of the place in dispute.

I have been enabled, by a careful study of this crypt, to ascertain sundry points which I believe have not been noticed by my predecessors, and which appear to me decisive in this question.

Mr. W. Hepworth Dixon has recently, in a remarkable article on the Holy Sepulchre,* called attention to this aspect of an archaeological problem which, in spite of its erudite character, has had the rare privilege of exciting general interest and raising the most passionate discussions, and he has shown the value of the new facts ascertained by my own researches on this point. I will endeavour to explain very briefly the nature of these results, and to bring before the readers of the *Quarterly Statement* a few observations on their nature and extent.

A few yards west of the Holy Sepulchre, which rises isolated in the midst of the rotunda of the church, we enter, after passing through two of the columns on which the cupola rests, a little chapel belonging to the Syrians. At the end of the chapel is an apse looking west. A passage on the left, at the commencement of the apse, gives access obliquely to a narrow and dark retreat partly formed by walls cut in the rock, and partly by the wall belonging to the church itself.

* *Gentleman's Magazine*, March, 1877.

There is a step cut in the rock. Mounting this, we see at our feet, by the uncertain light of a smoky lamp, a black and angular hole in the rocky soil. A few inches beyond we have before us the wall cut vertically in the rock. In the middle of this wall is an arcade semicircular and sunk in the wall, about 4 feet in height by 24 feet in breadth. It covers two smaller arched openings, two black and gaping jaws—*kokim* (K J, Fig. 2), which are sunk horizontally into the rocky foundation to a depth which we shall presently learn.

On the right is another wall of rock, making, with that of the end, an obtuse angle. Two other openings (I H) are pierced in it, but these are walled up. Between the second mouth and the entrance of the vault the wall is constructed; in it is a door (E) shut with a key.



Fig. 1

The wall on the left is made up of a thick wall (Fig. 1) which traverses diagonally the ditch cut in the ground, and forms, with the two other walls, two very acute angles. The lamp is suspended to this wall.

This singular retreat is therefore triangular. Two only of the sides are of rock, the third being a part of the wall belonging to the church, which appears to have been thus built across a pre-existing cave. The greater part of the roof is also cut in the rock.

At the left extremity of the wall, at the back, beside the opening of the hole K, we may recognise the existence of a third opening similar to the others, but walled up and partly hidden by the thick oblique wall.

The stopping of this opening is not so perfect but that we can insert a thin stick and prove that here is a third place, L, parallel to the other two, and lying, like those, horizontally in the rock.

On the wall to right we make a similar observation. There was once following the two openings I H (Fig. 2), in the place occupied by the little closed gate E, a third opening parallel to the preceding. It is easy to ascertain, towards the point O, the commencement of the lateral wall of the opening now destroyed.

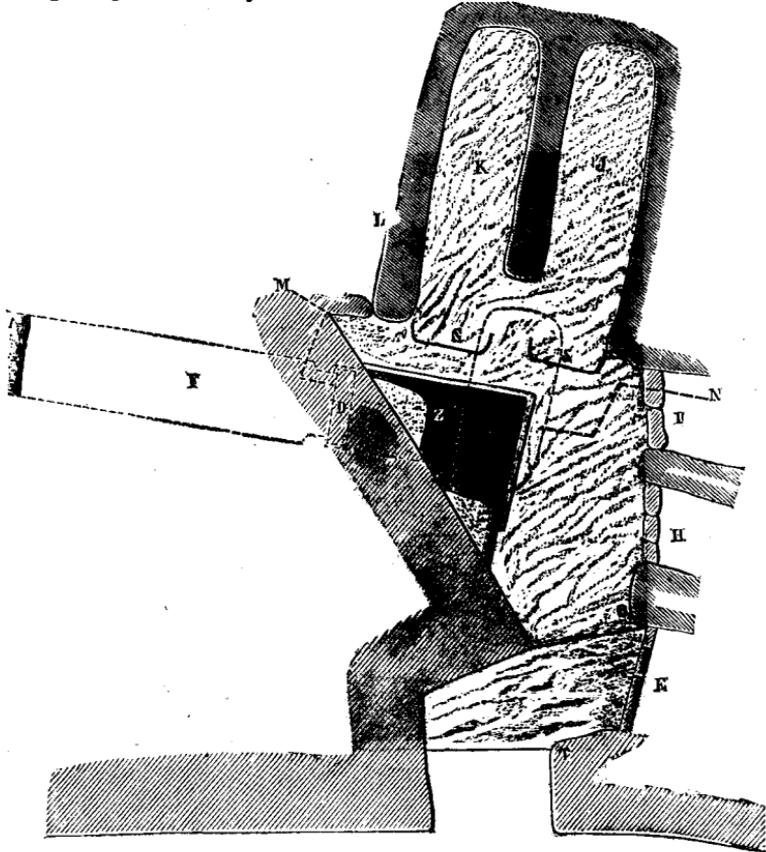


Fig. 2

Already in this disposition of rock-cut openings had been recognised the general form of Jewish tombs, which consists of a small square cave, with a certain number (generally 3+3+3) of loculi in three of the four faces. But even those who admitted this resemblance were unable to give a satisfactory account of the primitive form which belonged to this cave, and could offer no reply to the grave objections which their adversaries made on certain strange peculiarities.

Before proceeding further, let us consider a point which has contributed largely to the controversy; it is the kind of hole cut in the rocky floor of the chamber in front of the loculus K, which I have already mentioned. It consists of a triangular opening, Z G, the angle of which is opposed to the oblique wall on the left. The two sides of this angle show on the edge a small groove or rebate, probably intended to receive a horizontal slab. Along the wall the edges of the trench are irregularly cut away.

On descending (at G) into this hollow, which is 3ft. 7in. deep, we find ourselves in a kind of long cave, marked in dots on the plan (Fig. 2), which runs partly (especially on the right between S S) under the rock; thus we can see at G, on Fig. 2, how it penetrates beneath the loculi K J. This hole is less than 5ft. long by 1ft. 8in. in breadth. Certainly no adult body could have been placed in it. Still less, again, in the

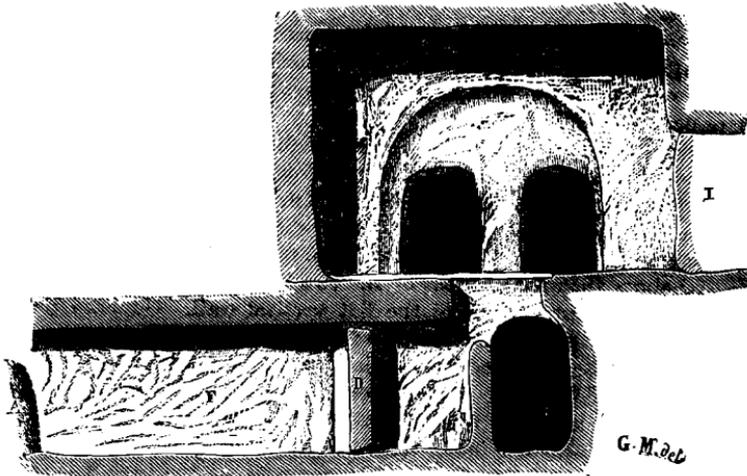


Fig. 3.

hole Z, which is close to G, and separated from it only by a thin partition cut in the rock. This is rectangular, and 2ft. in length by 1ft. 7in. in breadth; it is partly covered over by a fragment of flat rock. Its height is 2ft. 7in. Between the edge of the rock forming the ceiling and the upper edge of the partition, which separates the two trenches Z H, there is only 10in. of breadth.

The smallness of these dimensions renders the examination of these holes extremely difficult. That is probably the reason why no one before me ever ascertained a *fact of capital importance, so much so as to profoundly modify all received ideas up to the present on one side and the other.*

But before stating what I may without any exaggeration call a discovery, let me return to a few details which are not without interest.

Those who maintain the apocryphal character of the Holy Sepulchre, relying on the dimensions of the two latter holes (to which tradition attaches the names of Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus) deny them any sepulchral character, because they are not large enough to contain the bodies of adults. The objection is specious, and it has been even pushed to an extreme by the supposition that we have here a pseudo-sepulchre hollowed out at the period of the Crusaders on a Jewish model, in order to furnish a material justification of the legend. I need not point out how inadmissible this supposition is, and how little in accordance with popular habits, which generally imagine the legend in order to explain the monument.

It might be replied that we have simply two hollow places excavated as ossuaries, and intended to receive the bones accumulated in the sepulchre either directly or by means of those little funerary chests or coffins of which I collected so many and such curious specimens during my mission.

The same objection has been urged against the loculi K J placed in the higher level. In fact, these two loculi hardly measure more at the present moment than 5ft. in depth, which is insufficient for a body of ordinary proportions.

The loculi have in general a depth of 6ft. 6in.; and it must be owned that this time the objection is more embarrassing than before, and that those who think these are fictitious or artificial sepulchres may find an occasion for triumph over this argument. The reply, however, although it has never to my knowledge been made, is easy.

We saw above that the mouths of the two loculi are within a sunken arcade; hollowed out, that is, of the flat vertical wall. Suppose for a moment that the arcade was made after the loculi. What follows? The loculi would be increased in length by the space which they lost in sinking the arcade, as the arcade would have simply shortened the loculi by cutting away the front part. Well, that is exactly what has happened. The loculi originally extended as far as S S in the drawing; we have the material proof. The removal of the rock has not been so skilfully effected as not to leave behind the visible traces of this original extension. These traces are easily to be recognised in the engraving of the cave.

We must also observe that this unmistakable mark, which goes considerably beyond the end of the arcade, is slightly in advance of the perpendicular face of the wall, which would tend to prove that the wall itself had experienced a slight setting back.

If we proceed to restore the loculi to their original dimensions by measuring them from the end to the line S S, we shall find ample room for our regulation two metres.

But, it will be asked, for what purpose was this arcade hollowed out and the two loculi thus disfigured? For what purpose? Here we may introduce our legend. Popular belief attached to this place the names of Joseph and Nicodemus. The double site has been localised in the

two loculi, visible at once to pilgrims, to this crypt half destroyed by the construction of the church. Then, in order to fix this association indissolubly to the spot, and to give the sanctuary in course of formation a religious consecration, they constructed this kind of niche, convenient for the purposes of worship, and lending to these openings thus connected the aspect of a little chapel. I am convinced, for my own part, that in the middle ages the two tombs revered were the two loculi, and not, as is generally admitted, the two little subterranean hollows to the consideration of which I must now come.

If we descend into hole G and contrive to introduce a head into the narrow opening of Z (10in.) to examine its walls, we shall be amply rewarded for this disagreeable kind of *tour de force*, which makes the archæologist, so to speak, stand on his head. The same results can, to be sure, be arrived at by lying flat on the ground and then sliding into the hole head first: a position quite as uncomfortable as the first. We perceive, then, that the rectangular hollow, Z, is not in reality en-

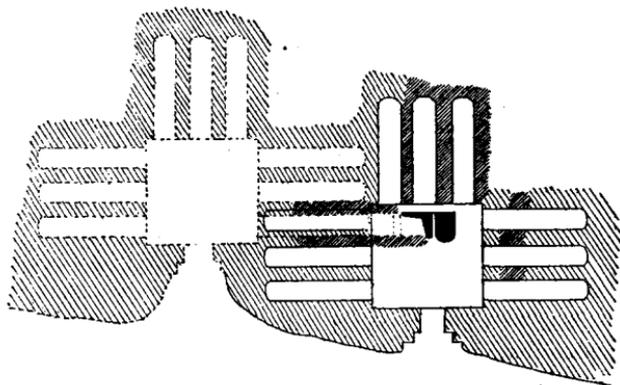


Fig. 4.

tirely formed by the rock, but that one of its sides, that of the end, parallel to the partition of rock, consists of a vertical slab about 2ft. 3in. in height.

This slab covers the entrance of a long passage apparently cut in the rock; it seems to be placed against a little rebate, also well cut and jutting out behind it. I was able to introduce between the interstices of the slab and the rock in which it rests a long stick, which penetrated to more than 6ft. 6in.; after that I could get no farther, and I thought I was stopped by earth and rubbish. I repeated my experiment several times, and touched with the stick the side walls and roof of this kind of corridor. M. Lecomte relieved me in this fatiguing work and it is thus that we were able to get the elements of the figures marked F in Figs. 2 and 3. After a good many failures I managed to light up the passage by arming the extremity of my stick

with a bit of lighted candle, and so verify by sight what I had discovered by touch.

A single glance at the drawings will show all those who are at all conversant with the question the considerable value of this fact, which, I think, I was the first to discover, and by which the field of a discussion already large is remarkably enlarged. I need hardly speak of the ardent curiosity which impelled me to find out, if possible, whither the passage blocked by this mysterious slab leads. There is the chance of finding oneself in some new sepulchral chamber totally unknown before; perhaps inviolate, perhaps pillaged, but so as to leave behind some relics precious to an archæologist—funerary objects, worthless in themselves, but furnishing valuable evidence of synchronisms; ossuaries, fragments of ossuaries, with Hebrew inscriptions such as I found in other places round Jerusalem. Cannot we picture to ourselves the conclusions which might be drawn, on the points at issue, from an epigraphic document of this kind? I indulged in all these dreams of an antiquary, and I may go on indulging in them, because the authorisation to remove the slab could not be procured. The possession of this sanctuary is, like so many others, the object of dispute among the various clergies, so that

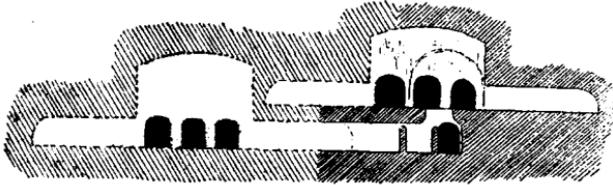


Fig. 5.

one does not know where to apply. Besides, at the moment I was in a very delicate situation towards the administrative and religious authorities of Jerusalem, in consequence of the quarrel about the "Moabite" potteries and the Gezer case. I had raised up against myself so many animosities that even my personal credit was beginning to suffer. Everybody knows, besides, what grave political complications may be caused in that singular city of Jerusalem by the least attempt to touch, not only a stone, but even a rag, or a nail, in these disputed sacred places.

Is it possible, from what we already know, to form any idea of what this unknown passage may be?

The first idea which presents itself is that, as in many other sepulchral chambers, a corridor gives access to a second chamber situated at a lower level (Fig. 5). But, on reflection, that seems difficult to suppose. The dimensions of this corridor, although narrow, are indeed broad enough to admit of passage, and the different cemeteries of Jerusalem furnish us examples of corridors as narrow and as low; but the dimensions of the mouth of the passage, between the edge of the flooring and the partition, are certainly too small. A living man might with difficulty thrust him-

self through this kind of cleft; but it appears to me almost impossible to force a body through. The rigidity of death would prevent the bending of the limbs necessary to get through this cleft into the passage itself.

The same objection may be raised against those who may be tempted to consider this space (F, Fig. 3) as belonging simply to a supplementary loculus, the slab closing the original opening, and the loculus coming to an end in the rock close to the point A, where I ascertained the presence of the *débris*. Passage or loculus, this hole offers equal difficulties to the introduction of a corpse. Besides, in the latter assumption, we are open to new considerations.

1. The mouth, nearly impracticable, of this opening, would be in advance, in the middle of the sepulchral chamber; we should expect it to be, as usual in such cases, below the loculi in the left wall, and in the vertical level of this wall.

2. The height of this loculus, about 2ft. 7in., would be greater than that of the loculi (L K J) of the same sepulchre.*

3. The length of this pretended loculus, measured from the partition which separates G and Z to the point A reached by my rod, is 9ft. 1in.; that is, it would exceed by 2ft. 7in. the regular length of the loculi. If we only measured from the slab D—i.e., from the rebate, we should obtain the normal length of 6ft. 6in.; but what are we to make, in that case, of the trench Z, which would then be situated in front of the loculus, and would be a useless and unintelligible prolongation?

4. The accumulation of rubbish in A (Figs. 2 and 3), at the end of the passage, seems to show that there is a large space beyond from which the rubbish comes; the angle of this accumulation Δ leads us to believe that the *débris* has fallen in a direction from A to D, and not from D to A, in which case the angle would be \angle , just the reverse. Now, the end of the loculus being exactly marked by this point A, whence come the *débris* which we find where we looked for rock?

This place, therefore, is not a blind passage.

The right wall (R O, Fig. 2) is not the original wall, although it is cut in the rock. It would form, with the rocky wall at the end (in which are the loculi K J), nearly a right, and not, as in fact it does form, an acute angle. It is probable that it lay originally along the line R T, and that it was afterwards cut again to enlarge the chamber, and especially to form a passage between the wall on the left and the point O. Naturally the loculi I H E have been shortened by the operation, so that we can now predicate of them that when it is possible to explore them, they will not be found of the normal length of 6ft. 6in.

The original *point de départ* of this wall thus altered is perhaps marked in the rock by a small notch at the point R, although this lies a little behind the marks at S S, the mouths of the loculi K J.

* The same remark applies to the niche G, which is nearly of the same height, and which we cannot, for reasons given above, consider as a loculus, but as a receptacle for ossuaries.

We may observe besides, that in adopting this, so to speak, forced restoration of the wall on the right, we note that one of the walls of the loculi N and E (in O) is manifestly perpendicular to this imaginary line. If we suppose that the side walls of the three other loculi have been slightly altered or re-cut transversely to a depth at which they were originally irregular, we can establish between the wall on the right and the loculi which were pierced there, the perpendicularity which is *de rigueur*, and which the present state of the place is far from showing.

The loculus J of the wall at the end, and the loculus I on the right wall (Fig. 2), considered by themselves, are very nearly at right angles at R, as is the custom in the tombs of Palestine; but the irregularity commences at the second side wall of the loculus I, which is not parallel to the first.

Taking all these observations into consideration, we had better suppose the corridor to be nothing else than a loculus belonging to a *neighbouring chamber* (Figs. 4 and 5), and that the end of it was perforated and prolonged at the time when the trenches G and Z were cut. It is an accident which not infrequently happens in the tombs of Palestine: often two sepulchral caves are so close, that the *kokims* of the one penetrate to the interior of the other. This penetration may be accidental, the result of inaccurate measurements, or ignorance of the existence of a neighbouring chamber, or intentional to establish a communication between the two caves and make them one and the same tomb. Here the communication would seem to have been due to accident, otherwise they would have had to make access to the "corridor" easier and less painful. Nevertheless I cannot be certain on this last point; it is most prudent to wait for a complete exploration.

However that may be, loculus or corridor, it is more than probable that this passage, unknown up to the present day, leads to a second sepulchral chamber situated on a slightly lower level than that of the first, and completely covered over with the building of the church.

II.—THE FRIEZE OVER THE SOUTH DOOR.

In one of my Reports published in the *Quarterly Statement of the Palestine Exploration Fund* (1874, p. 140) I gave an account of a remarkable bas-relief in marble, found in an Arab's house in Jerusalem, and representing the triumphal entry of our Lord on the Day of Palms. I ascertained the presence in this fragment of the mediæval dressing, which I have proved to be the infallible sign of Crusaders' work in Palestine; and I drew the conclusion that the monument, despite its Byzantine air, was really Western work. I also observed a general inclination of the figures forward, which seemed to show that the sculpture was intended for some door-lintel or decorative frieze, and meant to be seen from below, like that which surmounts the entrance to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (*not* the Church of St. John, as by some typographic error I am made to say in the *Quarterly Statement*).

I believe I have found the exact origin of this interesting fragment; and if so, this origin fully confirms all the observations and conclusions I then drew from the appearance of the fragment.

It is nothing else than a piece of the frieze of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which represents different scenes in the life of our Lord. On examining recently a drawing of the frieze, I find that there is a great gap in the scene of the triumphal entry, which this fragment just fills up. I have a photograph of the fragment, but, unfortunately, none of the frieze, else I might be able to show at once that the edges of the fragment correspond with the border of the frieze.

It is to be desired that the fragment might be restored to its original place, which would be an exceedingly simple operation. They told me that it belonged to the foundation of an Arab house; very likely the truth, because the mutilation may be old enough to allow of the piece broken off being used over again in new buildings. We have on this point evidence as far back as 1480, that of the German monk, F. Faber, otherwise Friar Schmidt, who has left us a minute account of the church. After saying that the lintel over the entrance of the church is of white marble (*de candidissimo marmore*), and that it is sculptured on the outside to represent the entry into Jerusalem of the Lord mounted on an ass (*sculptum imaginibus de ingressu Domini super asinam in Jerusalem*), the scene of those who bought and sold in the Temple, and the resurrection of Lazarus, he adds that these sculptures have been broken and mutilated (*violenter destructe et mutilata membris*). The mutilation is thus at least as old as the 15th century. Baedeker's Guide says:—"Then follows the entry into Jerusalem: here, unfortunately, the principal figure is destroyed, with the exception of the head. . . . The execution of the whole work is remarkably lifelike."

C. CLERMONT-GANNEAU.

NOTES FROM THE MEMOIR.

THE memoir of Sheet 7 is now complete, and contains many points of interest. Among others the notes on Cæsarea will be of great value, as giving dated specimens of the Crusading work. It is possible to distinguish the work of Gautier D'Avesne (1218 A.D.) in the walls, from that of the time of St. Louis (1251 A.D.), and thus to give indications as to the date of many buildings in Palestine as yet undetermined and not heard of in history. The use of "male" and "female" arches in the cathedral and other buildings, also, is of importance, as disproving the idea that one kind was Saracenic, the other Gothic.

The mediæval history of Palestine is of the greatest importance. If ignorant of the towns and castles built by the Crusaders, we shall always be in danger of imputing too great antiquity to existing ruins, and unable to disentangle the threads of native and foreign tradition. I