

Church of the Holy Sepulchre

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Table of Contents

1. Church of the Holy Sepulchre.....	5
History.....	5
Construction.....	5
Damage and destruction.....	7
Reconstruction.....	8
Crusader period.....	9
Later periods.....	10
Modern arrangement of the church.....	12
Calvary (Golgotha).....	12
The Stone of Anointing.....	13
The Rotunda and the Aedicule.....	13
The Catholicon and the Ambulatory.....	14
Armenian compound.....	16
North of the Aedicule.....	17
South of the Aedicule.....	17
The roof of the church.....	17
Status quo.....	18
Challenges to authenticity.....	19
Relationship to the Temple of Aphrodite.....	19
Relationship of the site to the city.....	20
Other possible sites.....	21
Influence.....	22
Image gallery.....	23
See also.....	25
References.....	25
Bibliography.....	28

Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Further reading.....	29
External links.....	29
General sites.....	30
Custodians.....	30
Primary sources and scholarly articles.....	30
Photo galleries.....	30
Miscellaneous.....	31

Church of the Holy Sepulchre

This article is about the church building in Jerusalem. For other uses, see [The Holy Sepulchre \(disambiguation\)](#).

The **Church of the Holy Sepulchre**, also called the **Church of the Resurrection** by [Eastern Christians](#), is a [church](#) within the walled [Old City of Jerusalem](#). It is a few steps away from the [Muristan](#).

The site is venerated as



The Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre (The Tomb of Christ) with the dome of the rotunda visible above.



Main Entrance to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

[Golgotha](#)¹ (the Hill of Calvary), where [Jesus](#) was [crucified](#),¹ and is said to also contain the place where Jesus was buried (the [sepulchre](#)). The church has been an important [Christian pilgrimage](#) destination since at least the [4th century](#), as the purported site of the [resurrection of Jesus](#). Today it also serves as the headquarters of the [Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem](#), while control of the building is [shared between several Christian churches](#) and secular entities in complicated arrangements essentially unchanged for centuries. Today, the church is home to [Eastern Orthodoxy](#), [Oriental Orthodoxy](#) and [Roman Catholicism](#). [Anglican](#) and [Protestant Christians](#) have no permanent presence in the church.¹

History

Construction

In the early 2nd century, the site of the present Church had been a temple of [Aphrodite](#); several ancient writers alternatively describe it as a temple to [Venus](#), the [Roman equivalent](#) to Aphrodite.

1. ^

Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Eusebius claims, in his *Life of Constantine*,⁰ that the site of the Church had originally been a Christian place of veneration, but that Hadrian had deliberately covered these Christian sites with earth, and built his own temple on top, due to his hatred for Christianity⁰ (the authenticity/inaccuracy of this claim is [discussed below](#)). Although Eusebius does not say as much, the temple of Aphrodite was probably built as part of Hadrian's reconstruction of Jerusalem as [Aelia Capitolina](#) in 135, following the destruction of the [Jewish Revolt](#) of 70 and [Bar Kokhba's revolt](#) of 132–135.

Emperor [Constantine I](#) ordered in about 325/326 that the temple be demolished and the soil - which had provided a flat surface for the temple - be removed, instructing [Macarius of Jerusalem](#), the local Bishop, to build a church on the site. The [Pilgrim of Bordeaux](#) reports in 333: *There, at present, by the command of the Emperor Constantine, has been built a basilica, that is to say, a church of wondrous beauty.*⁰ Constantine directed his mother, [Helena](#), to build churches upon sites which commemorated the life of Jesus Christ; she was present in 326 at the construction of the church on the site, and involved herself in the excavations and construction.

During the excavation, Helena is alleged to have rediscovered the [True Cross](#), and a tomb, though Eusebius' account makes no mention of Helena's presence at the excavation, nor of the finding of the cross but only the tomb. According to Eusebius, the tomb exhibited *a clear and visible proof* that it was the [tomb of Jesus](#);⁰⁰ several scholars have criticised Eusebius' account for an uncritical use of sources, and for being dishonest⁰⁰ with [Edward Gibbon](#), for example, pointing out that Eusebius' chapter headings⁰ claim that *fictions* are *lawful and fitting* for him to use.⁰ [Socrates Scholasticus](#) (born c. 380), in his *Ecclesiastical History*, gives a full description of the discovery⁰ (that was repeated later by [Sozomen](#) and by [Theodoret](#)) which emphasizes the role played in the excavations and construction by Helena; just as the [Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem](#) (also founded by Constantine and Helena) commemorated the birth of Jesus, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre would commemorate his death and resurrection.

Constantine's church was built as two connected churches over the two different holy sites, including a great [basilica](#) (the *Martyrium* visited by the nun [Egeria](#) in the 380s), an enclosed [colonnaded atrium](#) (the *Triportico*) with the traditional site of *Golgotha* in one corner, and a [rotunda](#), called the *Anastasis* ("Resurrection"), which contained the remains of a [rock-cut room](#) that Helena and Macarius identified as the burial site of Jesus. The rockface at the west end of the building was cut away, although it is unclear how much remained in Constantine's time, as archaeological investigation has revealed that the temple of Aphrodite reached far into the current rotunda area,⁰ and the temple enclosure would therefore have reached even further to the west.

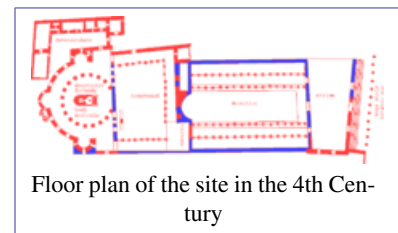
According to tradition, Constantine arranged for the rockface to be removed from around the tomb, without harming it, in order to isolate the tomb; in the centre of the rotunda is a small building

called the *Kouvouklion* (Κουβούκλιον; Modern Greek for small compartment) or *Aedicule*⁰ (from Latin: *aediculum*, small building), which supposedly encloses this tomb, although it is not currently possible to verify the claim, as the remains are completely enveloped by a marble sheath. The discovery of the *kokhim* tombs just beyond the west end of the Church, and more recent archaeological investigation of the rotunda floor, suggest that a narrow *spur* of at least ten yards length would have had to jut out from the rock face if the contents of the Aedicule were once inside it. The *dome* of the rotunda was completed by the end of the 4th century.

Each year, the *Eastern Orthodox Church* celebrates the anniversary of the *consecration* of the Church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulchre) on September 13 (for those churches which follow the traditional *Julian Calendar*, September 13 currently falls on September 26 of the modern *Gregorian Calendar*).

Damage and destruction

This building was damaged by fire in 614 when the *Persians* under *Khosrau II* invaded Jerusalem and captured the Cross. In 630, Emperor *Heraclius* marched triumphantly into Jerusalem and restored the *True Cross* to the rebuilt Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Under the *Muslims* it remained a Christian church. The early Muslim rulers protected the city's Christian sites, prohibiting their destruction and their use as living quarters. In 966 the doors and roof were burnt during a riot.



On October 18, 1009, under *Fatimid caliph Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah*, orders for the complete destruction of the Church were carried out. It is believed that Al-Hakim "was aggrieved by the scale of the *Easter* pilgrimage to Jerusalem, which was caused specially by the annual miracle of the *Holy Fire* within the Sepulchre. The measures against the church were part of a more general campaign against Christian places of worship in Palestine and Egypt, which involved a great deal of other damage: Adhemar of Chabannes recorded that the church of St George at *Lydda* 'with many other churches of the saints' had been attacked, and the 'basilica of the Lord's Sepulchre destroyed down to the ground'. ...The Christian writer Yahya ibn Sa'id reported that everything was razed 'except those parts which were impossible to destroy or would have been too difficult to carry away'.⁰ The Church's foundations were hacked down to bedrock. The Edicule and the east and west walls and the roof of the cut-rock tomb it encased were destroyed or damaged (contemporary accounts vary), but the north and south walls were likely protected by rubble from further damage. The "mighty pillars resisted destruction up to the height of the gallery pavement, and are now effectively the only remnant of the fourth-century buildings."⁰ Some minor repairs were done to the section believed to

Church of the Holy Sepulchre

be the tomb of Jesus almost immediately after 1009, but a true attempt at restoration would have to wait for decades.⁰

European reaction was of shock and dismay, with far-reaching and intense consequences. For example, [Clunian monk Raoul Glaber](#) blamed the [Jews](#), with the result that Jews were expelled from [Limoges](#) and other [French](#) towns. Ultimately, this destruction provided an impetus to the later [Crusades](#).⁰

Reconstruction

In wide ranging negotiations between the [Fatimids](#) and the [Byzantine Empire](#) in 1027-8 an agreement was reached whereby the new Caliph [Ali az-Zahir](#) (Al-Hakim's son) agreed to allowing the rebuilding and redecoration of the Church.⁰ The rebuilding was finally completed with the financing of the huge expense by Emperor [Constantine IX Monomachos](#) and Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople in 1048.⁰ As a concession, the mosque in [Constantinople](#) was re-opened and sermons were to be pronounced in az-Zahir's name.⁰ Muslim sources say a by-product of the agreement was the recanting of Islam by many Christians who had been forced to convert under Al-Hakim's persecutions.⁰ In addition the Byzantines, while releasing 5,000 Muslim prisoners, made demands for the restoration of other churches destroyed by Al-Hakim and the re-establishment of a [Patriarch](#) in Jerusalem.⁰ Contemporary sources credit the emperor with spending vast sums in an effort to restore the Church of the Holy Sepulchre after this agreement was made.⁰ Despite the Byzantines spending vast sums on the project, "a total replacement was far beyond available resources. The new construction was concentrated on the rotunda and its surrounding buildings: the great basilica remained in ruins."⁰ The rebuilt church site consisted of "a court open to the sky, with five small chapels attached to it."⁰ The chapels were "to the east of the court of resurrection, where the wall of the great church had been. They commemorated scenes from the passion, such as the location of the prison of Christ and of his flagellation, and presumably were so placed because of the difficulties for free movement among shrines in the streets of the city. The dedication of these chapels indicates the importance of the pilgrims' devotion to the suffering of Christ. They have been described as 'a sort of [Via Dolorosa](#) in miniature'... since little or no rebuilding took place on the site of the great basilica. Western pilgrims to Jerusalem during the eleventh century found much of the sacred site in ruins."⁰ Control of Jerusalem, and thereby the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, continued to change hands several times between the [Fatimids](#) and the [Seljuk Turks](#) (loyal to the [Abbasid](#) caliph in [Baghdad](#)) until the arrival of the [Crusaders](#) in 1099.⁰

Crusader period

Many historians still maintain that the main concern of Pope **Urban II**, when calling for the **First Crusade**, was the threat to Constantinople from the Turkish invasion of Asia Minor in response to the appeal of Emperor **Alexios I Komnenos**.^[citation needed] Still, historians agree that the fate of Jerusalem and thereby the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was of concern if not the immediate goal of papal policy in 1095. The idea of taking Jerusalem gained more focus as the Crusade was underway. The rebuilt church site was taken from the Fatimids (who had recently taken it from the Abassids) by the **knights** of the **First Crusade** on 15 July 1099.⁰



The capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders on 15 July 1099 1. The Holy Sepulchre 2. The Dome of the Rock 3. Ramparts



Arms of the **Order of the Holy Sepulchre**

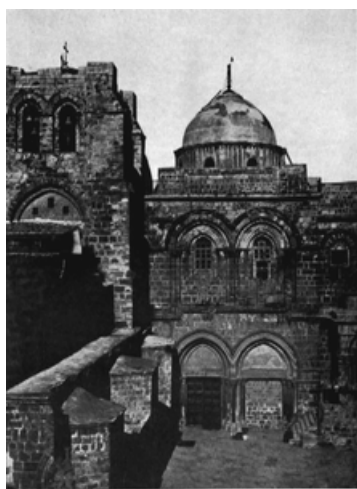
The First Crusade was envisioned as an armed pilgrimage, and no crusader could consider his journey complete unless he had prayed as a pilgrim at the Holy Sepulchre. Crusader Prince **Godfrey of Bouillon**, who became the first **crusader monarch of Jerusalem**, decided not to use the title "king" during his lifetime, and declared himself *Advocatus Sancti Sepulchri* (*Protector (or Defender) of the Holy Sepulchre*). By the crusader period, a **cistern** under the former basilica was rumoured to have been the location that Helena had found the True Cross, and began to be venerated as such; although the cistern later became the *Chapel of the Invention of the Cross*, there is no evidence for the rumour prior to the 11th century, and modern archaeological investigation has now dated the cistern to the 11th century repairs by Monomachos.⁰

The chronicler **William of Tyre** reports on the renovation of the Church in the mid-12th century. The crusaders investigated the eastern ruins on the site, occasionally excavating through the rubble, and while attempting to reach the cistern, they discovered part of the original ground level of Hadrian's temple enclosure; they decided to transform this space into a chapel dedicated to Helena (the **Chapel of Saint Helena**), widening their original excavation tunnel into a proper staircase. The crusaders began to refurbish the church in a **Romanesque** style and added a bell tower. These renovations unified the small chapels on the site and were completed during the reign of **Queen Melisende** in 1149, placing all the Holy places under one roof for the first time. The church became the seat of

Church of the Holy Sepulchre

the first [Latin Patriarchs](#), and was also the site of the kingdom's [scriptorium](#). The church was lost to [Saladin](#), along with the rest of the city, in 1187, although the treaty established after the [Third Crusade](#) allowed for Christian pilgrims to visit the site. [Emperor Frederick II](#) regained the city and the church by treaty in the 13th century, while he himself was under a ban of excommunication, leading to the curious result of the holiest church in Christianity being laid under [interdict](#). Both city and church were captured by the [Khwarezmians](#) in 1244.

Later periods



Church of the Holy Sepulchre (1885). Other than some restoration work, its appearance has essentially not changed since 1854. The same small ladder below the top-right window is also visible in recent photographs; this has remained in the same position since 1854 over a disagreement to move it.

The [Franciscan](#) friars renovated it further in 1555, as it had been neglected despite increased numbers of pilgrims. The Franciscans rebuilt the Aedicule, extending the structure to create an ante-chamber.⁰ After the renovation of 1555, control of the church oscillated between the Franciscans and the Orthodox, depending on which community could obtain a favorable *firman* from the [Sublime Porte](#) at a particular time, often through outright bribery, and violent clashes were not uncommon. There was no agreement about this question, although it was talked about it at the negotiations to the [Treaty of Karlowitz](#) in 1699.⁰ In 1767, weary of the squabbling, the *Porte* issued a *firman* that divided the church among the claimants.

A fire severely damaged the structure again in 1808, causing the dome of the Rotunda to collapse and smashing the Edicule's exterior decoration. The Rotunda and the Edicule's exterior were rebuilt in 1809–1810 by architect Komminos of [Mytilene](#) in the then current Ottoman [Baroque](#) style. The fire did not reach the interior of the Aedicule, and the marble decoration of the Tomb dates mainly to the 1555 restoration, although the interior of the ante-chamber, now known as the *Chapel of the*

Angel, was partly re-built to a square ground-plan, in place of the previously semi-circular western end. Another [decree](#) in 1853 from the sultan solidified the existing territorial division among the communities and set a *status quo* for arrangements to "remain forever", caused differences of opinion about upkeep and even minor changes, including disagreement on the removal of an exterior ladder under one of the windows; this ladder has remained in the same position since then.⁰

The cladding of red marble applied to the Aedicule by Komminos has deteriorated badly and is detaching from the underlying structure; since 1947 it has been held in place with an exterior scaffolding of iron girders installed by the [British Mandate](#). No plans have been agreed upon for its renovation.

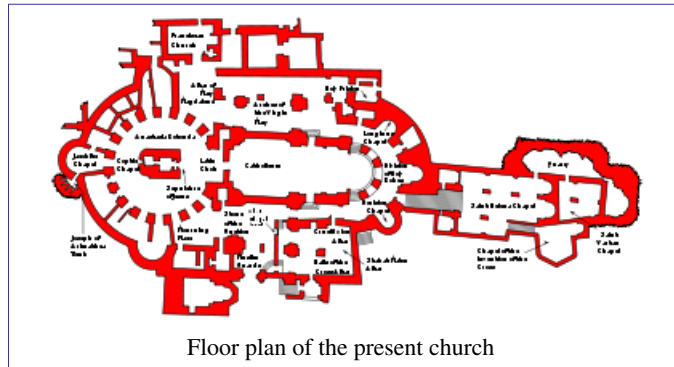
The current dome dates from 1870, although it was restored during 1994–1997, as part of extensive modern renovations to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which have been ongoing since 1959. During 1973–1978 restoration works and excavations inside the building, and under the nearby Muristan, it was found that the area was originally a quarry, from which white *meleke limestone* was struck.⁰ To the east of the *Chapel of St. Helena*, the excavators discovered a void containing a 2nd century drawing of a roman ship,⁰ two low walls which supported the platform of Hadrian's 2nd century temple, and a higher 4th century wall built to support Constantine's basilica;⁰⁰ the Armenian authorities have recently^[when?] converted this archaeological space into the *Chapel of Saint Vartan*, and created an artificial walkway over the quarry on the north of the chapel, so that the new Chapel could be accessed (by permission) from the *Chapel of St. Helena*.



There was some controversy in 2010, when the Jerusalem City Council threatened to cut off water to the site due to disputed water bills.⁰

Modern arrangement of the church

The entrance to the church is through a single door in the south **transept**. This narrow way of access to such a large structure has proven to be hazardous at times. For example, when a fire broke out in 1840, dozens of pilgrims were trampled to death. In 1999 the communities agreed to install a new exit door in the church, but there was never any report of this door being completed.



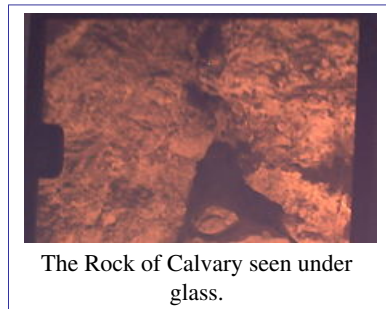
Floor plan of the present church

Calvary (Golgotha)



The Altar of the Crucifixion. There, according to the tradition, Jesus was crucified.

On the south side of the altar via the **ambulatory** (an aisle surrounding the end of the choir or chancel of a church) is a stairway climbing to **Calvary (Golgotha)**, traditionally regarded as the site of Jesus' crucifixion and the most lavishly decorated part of the church. The main altar there belongs to the Greek Orthodox, which contains **The Rock of Calvary** (12th Station of the Cross). The rock can be seen under glass on both sides of the altar, and beneath the altar there is a hole said to be the place where the cross was raised.



The Rock of Calvary seen under glass.

The Roman Catholics (**Franciscans**) have an altar to the side, **The Chapel of the Nailing of the Cross** (11th Station of the Cross). On the left of the altar, towards the Eastern Orthodox chapel, there is a statue of Mary, believed to be working wonders (the 13th Station of the Cross, where Jesus' body was removed from the cross and given to his family).

Beneath the Calvary and the two chapels there, on the main floor, there is **The Chapel of Adam**. According to tradition, Jesus was crucified over the place where Adam's skull was buried. The Rock

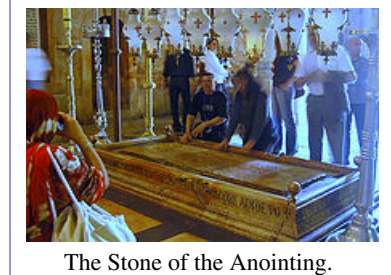
of Calvary is seen cracked through a window on the altar wall, the crack traditionally being said to be caused by the earthquake that occurred when Jesus died on the cross, and being said by more critical scholars to be the result of quarrying against a natural flaw in the rock.⁰

The Stone of Anointing

Just inside the entrance is **The Stone of Anointing**, also known as **The Stone of Uncion**, which tradition claims to be the spot where Jesus' body was prepared for burial by **Joseph of Arimathea**. However, this tradition is only attested since the crusader era, and the present stone was only added in the 1810 recon-



Painting of Christ after death, opposite the stone of Anointing



The Stone of the Anointing.

struction.⁰ The wall behind the stone was a temporary addition to support the arch above it, which had been weakened after the damage in the 1808 fire; the wall blocks the view of the rotunda, sits on top of the graves of four 12th century kings, and is no longer structurally necessary. There is a difference of opinion as to whether it is **the 13th Station of the Cross**, which others identify as the lowering of Jesus from the cross and locate between the 11th and 12th station up on Calvary. The lamps that hang over the stone are contributed by Armenians, Copts, Greeks and Latins.

The Rotunda and the Aedicule

The Rotunda is located in the centre of the Anastasis, beneath the larger of the church's two domes. In the centre of the Rotunda is the chapel called **The Edicule**, which contains the Holy Sepulchre itself. The Edicule has two rooms. The first one holds **The Angel's Stone**, a fragment of the stone believed to have sealed the tomb after Jesus' burial. The second one is the tomb itself.

The Status Quo in the Rotunda

Under the *status quo* the **Eastern Orthodox**, **Roman Catholic**, and **Armenian Apostolic Churches** all have rights to the interior of the tomb, and all three communities celebrate the **Divine Liturgy** or **Holy Mass** there daily. It is also used for other ceremonies on special occasions, such as the **Holy Saturday** ceremony of the **Holy Fire** celebrated by the **Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem**. To

Church of the Holy Sepulchre

its rear, within a chapel constructed of iron **latticework** upon a stone base semicircular in plan, lies the altar used by the **Coptic Orthodox**.



The Aedicule



The innermost chamber of the Aedicule, covered in medieval marble



The Icons in Jesus' Tomb

Beyond that to the rear of the Rotunda is a very rough hewn chapel, containing an opening to a rock-cut chamber, from which several **kokh**-tombs radiate. Although this space was discovered comparatively recently, and contains no identifying marks, many Christians believe it to be **the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea** in which the **Syriac Orthodox** celebrate their Liturgy on Sundays. To the right of the sepulchre on the southeastern side of the Rotunda is the Chapel of the Apparition which is reserved for Roman Catholic use.

The Catholicon and the Ambulatory

- **The Catholicon** - On the east side opposite the Rotunda is the Crusader structure housing the main altar of the Church, today *the Greek Orthodox catholicon*. The second, smaller dome sits directly over the centre of the **transept crossing** of the **choir** where the *compas*,

an **omphalos** once thought to be the centre of the world (associated to the site of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection), is situated. East of this is a large **iconostasis** demarcating the Orthodox sanctuary before which is set the throne of the **Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem** on the south side facing the throne of the Greek Orthodox **Patriarch of Antioch** on the north side.

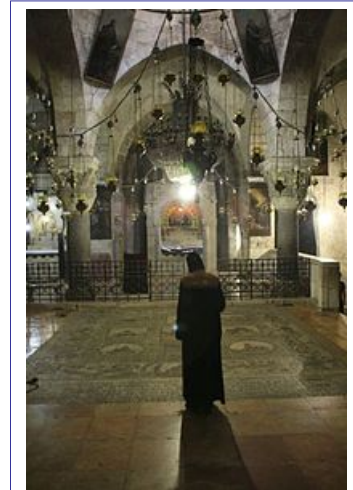
- **Prison of Christ** - In the north-east side of the complex there is *The Prison of Christ*, alleged by the Franciscans to be where Jesus was held. The Greek Orthodox allege that the real place that Jesus was held was the similarly named *Prison of Christ*, within their *Monastery of the Praetorium*, located near the **Church of Ecce Homo**, at the *first station* on the **Via Dolorosa**. The Armenians regard a recess in the *Monastery of the Flagellation*, a building near the *second station* on the Via Dolorosa, as the *Prison of Christ*. A cistern among the ruins near the **Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu** is also alleged to have been the *Prison of Christ*.



Further to the east in the ambulatory are three chapels (from south to north):

- **Greek Chapel of St. Longinus** - The Orthodox Greek chapel is dedicated to St. Longinus, a Roman soldier which according the **New Testament** pierced Jesus with a spear.
- **Armenian Chapel of Division of Robes** -
- **Greek Chapel of the Derision** - the southernmost chapel in the ambulatory.

Armenian compound



St. Helena's Chapel

The "Pantokrator" mosaic in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre

- **The Chapel of St. Helena** - between the first two chapels are stairs descending to *The Chapel of St. Helena*, belonging to the Armenians.
- **Chapel of St. Vartan** - on the north side of the Chapel of St. Helena is an ornate wrought iron door, beyond which a raised artificial platform affords views of the **Quarry**, and which leads to the *Chapel of St. Vartan*. The latter Chapel contains archaeological remains from Hadrian's temple and Constantine's basilica. These areas are usually closed.
- **Chapel of the Invention of the Holy Cross** - another set of 22 stairs from the Chapel of St. Helena leads down to the Roman Catholic *Chapel of the Invention of the Holy Cross* believed to be the place where the **True Cross** was found.

North of the Aedicule

- **Chapel of Mary Magdalene** - The chapel indicates the place where [Mary Magdalene](#) met Jesus after his resurrection.
- **The Franciscan Church** -

South of the Aedicule

The three Greek Orthodox chapels of [St. James the Just](#), [St. John the Baptist](#) and of the [Forty Martyrs of Sebaste](#), south of the rotunda and on the west side of the front courtyard originally formed the [baptistery](#) complex of the Constantinean church, the southern most chapel being the vestibule, the middle chapel being the actual [baptistery](#) and the north chapel being the chamber in which the patriarch [chrismated](#) the newly baptized before leading them into the rotunda north of this complex.

The roof of the church

One can access to the roof of the church from the courtyard of the [Greek Orthodox Patriarchate](#).



The roof of the church



Status quo

The primary custodians are the Eastern Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, and Roman Catholic Churches, with the Greek Orthodox Church having the lion's share. In the 19th century, the Coptic Orthodox, the Ethiopian Orthodox and the Syriac Orthodox acquired lesser responsibilities, which include shrines and other structures within and around the building. Times and places of worship for each community are strictly regulated in common areas.



Franciscans during the procession on The Calvary, 2006



The immovable ladder. Detail from photograph of main entrance above, 2005

Establishment of the 1853 status quo did not halt the violence, which continues to break out every so often even in modern times. On a hot summer day in 2002, a Coptic monk moved his chair from its agreed spot into the shade. This was interpreted as a hostile move by the Ethiopians, and eleven were hospitalized after the resulting fracas.⁰

In another incident in 2004 during Orthodox celebrations of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, a door to the Franciscan chapel was left open. This was taken as a sign of disrespect by the Orthodox and a fistfight broke out. Some people were arrested, but no one was seriously injured.⁰

On Palm Sunday, in April 2008, a brawl broke out when a Greek monk was ejected from the building by a rival faction. Police were called to the scene but were also attacked by the enraged brawlers.⁰ A clash erupted between Armenian and Greek monks on Sunday 9 November 2008, during celebrations for the Feast of the Holy Cross.⁰⁰

Under the *status quo*, no part of what is designated as common territory may be so much as rearranged without consent from all communities. This often leads to the neglect of badly needed repairs when the communities cannot come to an agreement among themselves about the final shape of a project. Just such a disagreement has delayed the renovation of the *edicule*, where the need is now dire, but also where any change in the structure might result in a change to the *status quo* disagreeable to one or more of the communities.

A less grave sign of this state of affairs is located on a window ledge over the church's entrance. Someone placed a wooden ladder there sometime before 1852, when the *status quo* defined both the

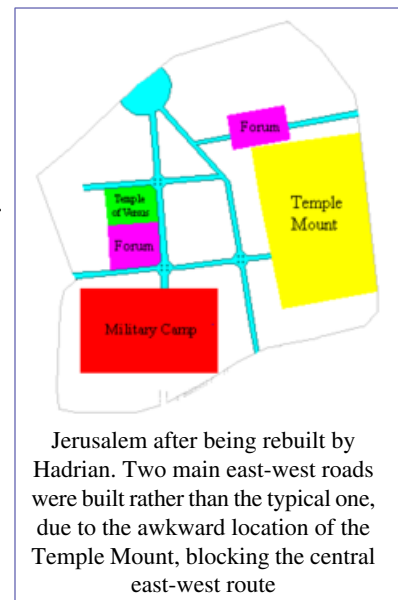
doors and the window ledges as common ground. The ladder remains there to this day, in almost exactly the same position it can be seen to occupy in century-old photographs and engravings.⁰⁰

No controls the main entrance. In 1192, [Saladin](#) assigned responsibility for it to two neighboring Muslim families. The [Joudeh](#) were entrusted with the key, and the [Nusseibeh](#), who had been the custodians of the church since the days of [Caliph Omar](#) in 637, retained the position of keeping the door. This arrangement has persisted into modern times. Twice each day, a Joudeh family member brings the key to the door, which is locked and unlocked by a Nusseibeh.

Challenges to authenticity

Relationship to the Temple of Aphrodite

As noted above, the site had been a temple of Aphrodite prior to Constantine's aedifice being built, a detail that Christian tradition puts down to Hadrian deliberately siting the temple over Jesus' tomb as a slight against Christianity. However, Hadrian's temple had actually been located there simply because it was the junction of the [main north-south road](#) (which is now the Suq Khan-ez-Zeit) with one of the two [main east-west roads](#) (which is now the [Via Dolorosa](#)),^[citation needed] and directly adjacent to the [forum](#) (which is now the location of the (smaller) [Muristan](#)); the forum itself had been placed, as is traditional in Roman towns, at the junction of the main north-south road with the (other) main east-west road (which is now El-Bazar/David Street). The temple and forum together took up the entire space between the two main east-west roads (a few above-ground remains of the east end of the temple precinct still survive in the [Russian Mission in Exile](#)).



From the archaeological excavations in the 1970s, it is clear that construction took over most of the site of the earlier temple enclosure and that the *Triportico* and *Rotunda* roughly overlapped with the temple building itself; the excavations indicate that the temple extended at least as far back as the Aedicule, and the temple enclosure would have reached back slightly further.⁰ [Virgilio Canio Corbo](#), a Franciscan priest and archaeologist, who was present at the excavations, estimated from the archaeological evidence that the western retaining wall, of the temple itself, would have passed

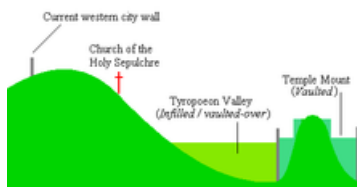
Church of the Holy Sepulchre

extremely close to the east side of the supposed tomb;⁰ if the wall had been any further west any *tomb* would have been crushed under the weight of the wall (which would be immediately above it) if it had not already been destroyed when foundations for the wall were made.

Other archaeologists have criticised Corbo's reconstructions. [Dan Bahat](#), the former official City Archaeologist of Jerusalem, regards them as unsatisfactory, as there is no known Temple of Aphrodite matching Corbo's design, and no archaeological evidence for Corbo's suggestion that the Temple Building was on a platform raised high enough to avoid including anything sited where the Aedicule is now;⁰ indeed Bahat notes that many temples to Aphrodite have a rotunda-like design, and argues that there is no archaeological reason to assume that the present rotunda wasn't based on a rotunda in the temple previously on the site.⁰

Relationship of the site to the city

The Bible describes Jesus' tomb as being outside the city wall,⁰ but the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is in the heart of Hadrian's city, well within [the Old City walls](#), which were built by Sultan [Suleiman the Magnificent](#) in 1538. Some^[who?] have claimed that the city had been much narrower in Jesus' time, with the site then having been outside the walls; since [Herod Agrippa](#) (41–44) is recorded by history as extending the city to the north (beyond the present northern walls), the required repositioning of the western wall is traditionally attributed to him as well.



If the western city wall was originally to the east of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, then the western hill, on which it is sited, would have been advantageous to an enemy

However, a wall would imply the existence of a defensive ditch outside it, so an earlier wall could not be immediately adjacent to site of the tomb, which combined with the presence of the [Temple Mount](#) would make the city inside the wall quite thin; essentially for the traditional site to have been outside the wall, the city would have had to be limited to the lower parts of the [Tyropoeon Valley](#), rather than including the defensively advantageous western hill. Since these geographic considerations imply that, not including the hill within, the walls would be willfully making the city prone to attack from it, some scholars, including the late 19th century surveyors of the [Palestine Exploration Fund](#), consider it unlikely that a wall would ever have been built that would cut the hill off from the city in the valley;⁰ archaeological evidence for the existence of an earlier city wall in such a location has never been found. The area immediately to the south and east of the sepulchre

was a quarry⁰ and outside the city during the early 1st century as excavations under the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer across the street demonstrated. This obviated the need for a defensive ditch or fosse since the line of the city wall would follow the south lip of the quarry. The quarry and tombs associated with it are north, not west of the main city and west only of the merchant area in the Tyropoeon Valley, which was enclosed by the Second Wall.

Although, in 2007, Dan Bahat stated that *Six graves from the first century were found on the area of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. That means, this place [was] outside of the city, without any doubt,*⁰ the dating of the tombs is based on the fact that they are in the *kokh* style, which was common in 1st century; however, the *kokh* style of tomb was also common in the first to 3rd centuries BC.⁰

The likelihood of a 1st century tomb being built to the west of the city is questionable, as according to the late 1st century Rabbinic leader, [Akiba ben Joseph](#), quoted in the [Mishnah](#), tombs should not be built to the west of the city, as the wind in Jerusalem generally blows from the west, and would blow the smell of the corpses and their *impurity* over the city, and the Temple Mount.⁰ Additionally, the Aedicule would be quite close to the city even the west wall of the city had been to its east; yet Akiba remarks that Jewish law insists that tombs should not be built within 50 cubits of a city.⁰ The archaeological record indicates that the instructions reported by Akiba, for choosing a burial location, were rigidly adhered to; almost all of the tombs from classical Jerusalem are to the east of the city, on the [Mount of Olives](#), except for a few located over a kilometre to the west, and those in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre⁰

One might note, however, that what is assumed to be a niche for the Torah scroll in the building probably originally built as a Judeo-Christian synagogue between AD 70 and AD 135 on the traditional site of the [Cenacle](#) or upper room of the [Last Supper](#) and now identified as the site of the [King David's Tomb](#) is oriented not towards the [Temple Mount](#), but towards the site of the Holy Sepulchre,⁰ which would seem to indicate that the Christian community that had built it had already begun to transfer many of the religious traditions originally associated with the Temple to the sites they associated with Christ's death and resurrection (such as the burial place of Adam and the centre of the world)

Other possible sites

Although the identification of the Aedicule as the site of Jesus' tomb is not a tenet of faith for any major Christian denomination, many Catholic and Orthodox Christians hold fast to this traditional location. However, due to the many issues the site raises, several scholars have rejected its valid-

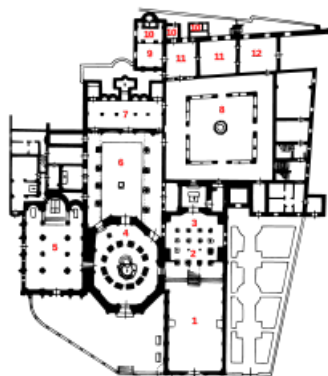
Church of the Holy Sepulchre

ity.^[who?] Additionally many [Protestants](#) have often opposed the traditional location because it has previously received support from [Catholics](#).⁰

After time spent in Palestine in 1882–83, General [Charles George Gordon](#) found a location outside the old city walls that he suggested to have been the real location of Golgotha. Although the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has its tomb just a few yards away from its Golgotha, there is no particular reason to regard this close juxtaposition as a necessity; however, Gordon followed this principle, concluding that his site for Golgotha must also be the approximate location for Jesus' burial, identifying a nearby tomb, now called the [Garden Tomb](#), as the location for the event. Pottery and archaeological findings in the area have subsequently been dated to the 7th century BC so, in the opinion of archaeologists the Garden Tomb site would have been abandoned by the 1st century.⁰ Biblically this does not match three of the Gospel accounts (Matthew, Luke, and John) which specifically state the tomb was new and no one had ever been laid inside. Despite the archaeological discoveries, the Garden Tomb has become a popular place of pilgrimage among Protestants. [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#) leaders have been more hesitant to formally commit to the identification even though many [Mormons](#) regard the Garden Tomb as the correct location of Jesus' tomb.

Currently, no other potential site for the tomb has received much attention or academic support.

Influence



Plan of [Santo Stefano](#) in [Bologna](#). (4) is the church of the Holy Sepulchre, inspired in the Anastasis.

From the 9th century, the construction of churches inspired in the Anastasis was extended across Europe.⁰ One example is [Santo Stefano](#) in [Bologna](#), Italy, an agglomeration of seven churches recreating shrines of Jerusalem.

Several churches and monasteries in [Russia](#) have been modelled on the Church of the Resurrection, some even reproducing other [Holy Places](#) for the benefit of pilgrims who could not travel to the Holy Land.

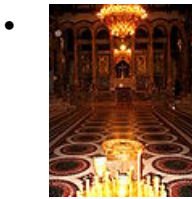
Image gallery



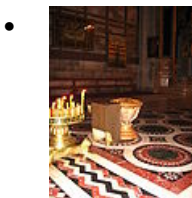
The Stone of the Anointing.



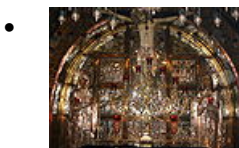
The Angel's Stone.



The [Catholicon](#).

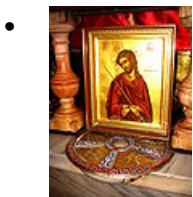


The [omphalos](#) and the North wall of the Catholicon.



Greek [altar](#) at Calvary.

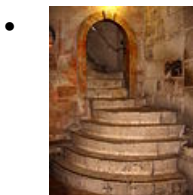
Church of the Holy Sepulchre



The place where it is believed Jesus died, now under the Eastern Orthodox altar on Calvary.



The cracked Rock of Golgotha, seen from the [Chapel of Adam](#).



Stairway to Golgotha.



[Chapel of Saint Helen](#)



Treasure Room. In centre: the [True Cross](#). Near the walls: other [relics](#).

See also

✝ *Eastern Christianity portal*

- [Holy Fire](#)
- [Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre](#)
- [Order of the Holy Sepulchre, initiated by Godfrey of Bouillon](#)
- [Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem](#)
- [History of the Eastern Orthodox Church](#)
- [Early Christian art and architecture](#)
- [Oldest churches in the world](#)
- [Constantine I and Christianity](#)
- [Art of the Crusades](#)
- [Monza ampullae](#)
- [Temple Church in London](#)
- [Talpiot Tomb](#)
- [Rock-cut tombs in ancient Israel](#)
- [Church of the Nativity](#)
- [Third Temple](#)
- [Burial places of founders of world religions](#)
- [Palestinian Christians](#)

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2. [^]



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6. ^ *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, page 594
7. ^ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Chapter 28
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19. ^ Foakes-Jackson 1921
20. ^ Fergusson 1865
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22. ^ ^{a b} Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land*, (2008), page 56

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Custodians

- [Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land](#) (Roman Catholic custodians)
- [Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre](#) (Greek Orthodox custodians)
- [Joudeh family](#) (Muslim custodian)
- [Nuseibeh family](#) (Muslim custodian)
- [Homily of John Paul II in the church of the Holy Sepulchre](#)

Primary sources and scholarly articles

- [Egeria's description in the 380s](#)
- [The Church of the Resurrection](#) (*EHR* 7:417-436, 669-684)

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- [Inside Photos of the Church](#)
- [Jerusalem Shots](#)
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- [Miracle of the Holy Fire](#)
- [Commemoration of the Founding of the Church of the Resurrection \(Holy Sepulchre\) at Jerusalem Orthodox icon and synaxarion for September 13](#)
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