The Garden Tomb: Was Jesus Buried Here?

By Gabriel Barkay

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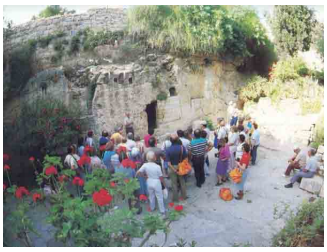


First-time visitors to Jerusalem are often surprised to learn that two very different sites vie for recognition as the burial place of Jesus. One is, as its name implies, the Holy Sepulchre Church; it is located in a crowded area of the Christian Quarter inside the walled Old City. The other, known as the Garden Tomb, is a burial cave located outside the Old City walls, in a peaceful garden just north of the Damascus Gate.

The case for the Holy Sepulchre Church as the burial place of Jesus has already been made for **BAR** readers.[a]

042

But what of the Garden Tomb? What is its claim to authenticity?

The year 1983 marked a centennial for the Garden Tomb; in 1883 the newly discovered cave was identified by the military hero of his day, General Charles George Gordon, as the tomb of Jesus. That identification caused, and still provokes, waves of controversy among pilgrims who wish to visit authentic sites of the Gospels. Even today the Garden Tomb is one of Jerusalem's best known sites; it is visited by well over a hundred thousand tourists and pilgrims a year, visitors who imbibe its serene and sacral atmosphere. Indeed, the tranquility of the Garden Tomb provides a striking contrast to the city noise and tumult just outside.

With the development of archaeological research in the Holy Land, it seems appropriate to look anew into this famous cave and the question of its authenticity, especially in light of the increasing accumulation of data on the architectural characteristics of burial caves in Jerusalem and in other areas of Judah during various ancient periods.

The burial cave known as the Garden Tomb was found in 1867 by a peasant who wanted to cultivate the land there. While trying to cut a cistern into the rock, he accidentally came upon the cave. Conrad Schick, the Jerusalem correspondent for several learned societies in Europe, visited the cave soon afterward, and it is from his reports that we first learn of the discovery. One of the few Europeans then living in Jerusalem, Schick assumed the task of keeping up-to-date scientific journals of news from the Holy City. His first report about the cave was published in 1874.[1] It is an innocent enough description of yet another Jerusalem burial cave, similar in style to others about which he periodically reported to his learned societies. According to Schick's account, the cave was filled to half its height with a mixture of earth and human bones. At the entrance to the cave, he saw an iron bar and hinge. He also observed a human skeleton in the balk, or wall, of a trench that had been dug to find the mouth of the cave. After Schick's first visit, the owner of the cave cleared it of its contents in order to use it.

In 1892, Schick published a second report,[2] which was much more detailed because it was written after the suggestion that the cave might be the tomb of Jesus. Obviously, the tomb then assumed far more importance 043than the hundreds of other caves already known in and around Jerusalem. Schick reported that he had conducted a small dig in front of the cave and had found some vaulted chambers that leaned against the rocky

escarpment of the hill in which the cave had been hewn. He also reported the clearing of a large cistern of the Crusader period within the perimeter of the garden, southwest of the cave.

Another description of the Garden Tomb is found in the Jerusalem volume of the *Survey of Western Palestine* conducted in 1884 by Charles Warren and Claude Regnier Conder for the London-based Palestine Exploration Fund. Warren and Conder mention that excavations were conducted in the garden in 1875, unearthing mostly Crusader remains.

In 1883, General Charles George Gordon arrived in 044Jerusalem, an event that proved to be critically important in the history of the Garden Tomb. Gordon, the son of a general, was the best-known and best-loved British soldier of his era. He served with distinction in the Crimean War and later went to China in the expedition of 1860, taking part in the capture of Peking. As commander of the "Ever-Victorious Army," he successfully suppressed the Taiping Rebellion. For his service in China, he was decorated by the emperor, and quickly became known as "Chinese" Gordon. In 1873, with the consent of his government, Gordon entered the service of the Khedive, the Turkish viceroy in Egypt. While in this post, he mapped part of the White Nile and Lake Albert. In 1877, he was appointed governor-general of the Sudan, where he waged a vigorous campaign against slave traders. On one occasion, he relieved Egyptian garrisons threatened by a revolutionary force by walking into the rebel camp, accompanied only by an interpreter, to discuss the situation—a bold move that proved successful when a contingent of rebels joined Gordon's forces.

When he arrived in Jerusalem in 1883, Gordon was already a luminary crowned with a halo of heroism. He stayed in Palestine less than a year. In January 1884, he was dispatched to Khartoum to report on the best way of evacuating the British from the Sudan after the revolt of the Mahdi. Although he was eventually ordered to evacuate Khartoum, Gordon took it upon himself to attempt to defeat the Mahdi. Gordon's personal heroism was unexcelled, but finally the Mahdi besieged Khartoum with Gordon trapped inside. Gordon was killed two days before a relief expedition arrived from England.

Even by 1883, when he arrived in Jerusalem, Gordon had a worldwide reputation as a military figure surrounded by an aura of mystery. He was the grand representative of the Victorian era, the personification of heroism, of duty, of loyalty to the British Empire and of faith in God. At the same time, he was an ambitious individualist, an adventurous crusader, and a captivating story-teller. Moreover, his deep religious consciousness went beyond the rational—indeed, reaching into spiritual hallucination. Motivated by a religious compulsion, Gordon came to Jerusalem to meditate on questions of faith that had perplexed him from his youth.

Immediately upon his arrival in Jerusalem, Gordon identified the hill in which the Garden Tomb cave is located as the hill of Golgotha, mentioned in the Gospels as the site of the Crucifixion (*Matthew 27:33*, *Mark 15:22*, *John 19:17*).

This hill is located just north of the northern wall of the Old City. It was and is the site of a Moslem cemetery named Es-Sâhirah (meaning "the place of the awakened"). The hill is separated from the escarpment on 046which the Old City wall is built by a rock-hewn depression that forms a kind of dry moat. The hill itself, today called El-Edhemîyeh (named after Ibrahim el-Edhem—the founder of a Moslem spiritual sect in the eighth century), has rock-hewn sides creating a vertical escarpment of its own. The Garden Tomb cave is hewn into the vertical escarpment on the western slope of the hill, just 820 feet (250 m) north of Damascus Gate. Today the cave is located in a large, walled garden owned by the Garden Tomb Association.

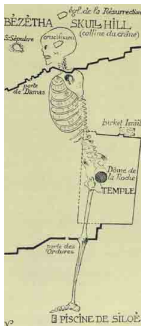
Just north of the Garden Tomb is the Monastery of St. Étienne (St. Stephen) of the French Dominican Fathers. On the grounds of the monastery is the École Biblique et Archéeologique Française—the French School of Bible and Archaeology. On the southern side of the hill into which the Garden Tomb was hewn is located the central bus station of East Jerusalem—across from the Old City wall.

The Garden Tomb is approached by a narrow street now named after Conrad Schick. Schick Street exits onto Nablus Road, which is the main road leading north from Damascus Gate.

Even before Gordon identified this hill as Golgotha, other scholars had mentioned this possibility.[b] In 1881, Conder suggested that another burial cave cut into a rocky outcrop just west of the Garden Tomb was the tomb of Jesus.[c] Conder's suggestion was based on the identification of the hill called El-Edhemiyeh as Golgotha (see map).

Although Gordon visited the cave of the Garden Tomb and, no doubt, regarded it as Jesus' tomb, oddly enough, he doesn't mention it in his writings; he concerns himself mainly with the identification of the hill as Golgotha.

This identification was based on some fantastic conclusions concerning the topography of Jerusalem. Gordon visualized the city in the shape of a human skeleton. In his imagination, the skull of the skeleton was in the north (Golgotha means "the skull" in Aramaic); the pelvis of the skeleton was at the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount; the legs extended southward on the ridge identified with the City of David; and the feet were at the Pool of Siloam (see drawing). Since, in Gordon's imagination, the hill north of Damascus Gate formed the skull of the skeleton, Gordon identified the hill as Golgotha.



These speculative identifications were published posthumously in 1885, after Gordon's courageous last stand at Khartoum. His identifications gained fame and publicity, not for any scientific validity, but because of Gordon's compelling personality and his heroically tragic death.

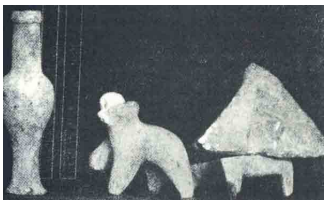
A long and extremely bitter dispute concerning the authenticity of the site followed Gordon's identification of the hill as Golgotha and the consequent identification of the cave in its western escarpment as Jesus' tomb. The authenticity of the tomb was supported mainly by Protestants. It was attacked mainly by Catholics, who held to the traditional identification of Jesus' tomb within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The dispute was conducted in scores of articles in a number of journals. Most of these articles have a theological and apologetic, rather than a scientific bent. None concerning the cave, nor any useful analysis of the archaeology of the site.

Capitalizing on the fame of Chinese Gordon, the site was soon named "Gordon's Tomb" or "Gordon's 047Calvary." (Calvary is the Latin form of Golgotha.) Later the name evolved into the "Garden Tomb," perhaps because of the similarity of the words "Gordon" and "garden," but more probably because of the mention of a garden in the New Testament in connection with Jesus' burial. In *John 19:41–42*, we learn that "at the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, not yet used for burial. There, because the tomb was near at hand and it was the eve of the Jewish Sabbath, they laid Jesus."

In 1894, the cave and the surrounding garden were purchased by the Garden Tomb Association for £2,000 sterling raised by an influential group of Englishmen that included the Archbishop of Canterbury. This association still owns and maintains the site. After the purchase, the new owners probably cleared the entire facade of the cave and removed the debris and ruins that had accumulated in front of it, although no reference to the clearing operations is made in contemporary records. The new owners also created a beautiful walled garden of moving serenity.

In 1904, Karl Beckholt, who was serving as Danish consul in Jerusalem and as warden of the Garden Tomb, conducted a small excavation in the yard of the Garden Tomb. He found some objects, which were published 20 years later by a Jerusalem scholar and Anglican clergyman named James Edward Hanauer.[d3] This 1924 publication 049renewed the bitter dispute about the location of the authentic tomb of Jesus. The opposing positions were summarized in a sharply worded article written from the Catholic point of view by Louis-Hugues Vincent, one of the Dominican scholars at the École Biblique. Father Vincent, a leading scholar on the archaeology and history of Jerusalem, defended the position that the Garden Tomb cave was of the Byzantine period. He entitled his article "The Garden Tomb—History of a Myth."[4]

In 1955, the Garden Tomb Association sponsored a small excavation in the garden area. Unfortunately, nothing is known about this dig; it was never published.



The dispute over the authenticity of the Garden Tomb was again summarized in 1975 in a book entitled *The Search for the Authentic Tomb of Jesus* by W. S. McBirnie,[5] who advocates the Garden Tomb's authenticity. McBirnie's book, however, is not based on any archaeological information, nor is the author knowledgeable about the history of the area in ancient times.

Thus, almost all published articles dealing with the Garden Tomb from its discovery through 1975 have been polemical, written to prove certain theological presuppositions. Except for the first article by Conrad Schick, who 050reported the actual discovery of the cave, there has been no objective, factual and archaeological discussion of the Garden Tomb.

To understand why this is so, we need to look at the historical situation in the late 19th century. The growing western interest in the ancient Near East, the Holy Land and Jerusalem brought hordes of visitors and pilgrims who took a new and often critical approach to the traditional holy sites. More and more Protestants came to Jerusalem, and they began to question the authenticity of the holy sepulcher. Located as it is in the midst of a densely built-up area of the Old City, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre did not seem to the Protestants to be a suitable place, outside the city, as Jewish law required, where Jewish dead would have been buried in the early Roman period. The traditional site of the sepulcher within the church was in those days dark, dismal and frequently filthy. It was crowded with priests, monks and pilgrims, mainly from Eastern countries, who often bickered with each other over rights to light candles and to hold ceremonies in various parts of the church. The Protestant newcomers did not feel at home here and could not imagine that this site could be the authentic burial place of Jesus. In this frame of mind, they welcomed any suggestion locating Jesus' tomb in a place that would better fit the tastes of Protestant Westerners, especially because the Protestants were wholly without any proprietary share in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was divided among the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian and Coptic Churches.

The earliest recorded tradition about Jesus' burial in the Holy Sepulchre is about three centuries after the Crucifixion. The New Testament itself gives no clue whatever as to the location of Golgotha and the tomb of Jesus. The name Golgotha has not been preserved in any form in any written source in antiquity, either Jewish or non-Jewish. It is not attested in geographical names in or around Jerusalem.

This was enough to lead many wishful Protestants to reject the authenticity of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

On the other hand, there was never any sound scientific basis for locating the tomb of Jesus in the area of the Garden Tomb. The identification of the Garden Tomb as the tomb of Jesus thus reflects the psychology and atmosphere of late 19th-century Jerusalem, rather than any new evidence—scientific, textual or archaeological.

In 1974, I decided to investigate the matter afresh. I did so in a series of visits beginning in the latter part of the year.

I have concluded that the cave of the Garden Tomb was originally hewn in the Iron Age II, sometime in the eighth or seventh century B.C. It was reused for burial purposes in the Byzantine period (fifth to seventh centuries A.D.), so it could not have been the tomb of Jesus. All lines of reasoning support this conclusion.

Although there are numerous burial caves in the area north of Damascus Gate, most of them were excavated about a 100 years ago, when archaeology was in its infancy. Modern scholars, however, have now been able to date these burial caves to the Iron Age. (See "Jerusalem Tombs from the Days of the First Temple," by the author and Amos Kloner, in this issue.) In addition, a number of newly discovered burial caves have been excavated in various areas of Judah. These, too, are very well dated to the Iron Age, based on well-dated inscriptions and pottery and other artifacts found in the burial caves. All these dated caves now give us a clear picture of the architectural features and layout of Iron Age burial caves.

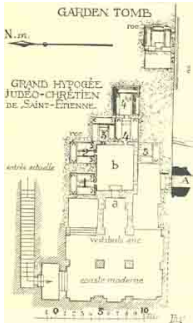
We now know that the area north of Damascus Gate was an extensive cemetery during the Iron Age. And the Garden Tomb cave is right in the middle of it, between the St. Étienne tombs on the north and two Iron Age tombs on the south, recently published by Amihai Mazar.[6] A chronological, as well as a geographical, link among all these tombs is certainly suggested.

Let us look more closely at some of this evidence.

In 1974–1975, Amos Kloner and I conducted an archaeological investigation and survey of two large and magnificent complexes of burial chambers in the courtyard of the Monastery of St. Étienne, just north of the Garden Tomb. Kloner, then District Archaeologist of Jerusalem, is an expert second to none on early Roman tombs in Jerusalem.

The conclusion of our work on the St. Étienne burial caves was that, contrary to earlier views dating the caves to the Roman period, these tombs date to the Iron Age—the time of the kings of Judah (eighth and seventh centuries B.C.). The Garden Tomb was probably part of the same cemetery as the St. Étienne tomb complexes. It lies only a few feet from Cave Complex Number 1 at St. Étienne and is hewn into the very same cliff.

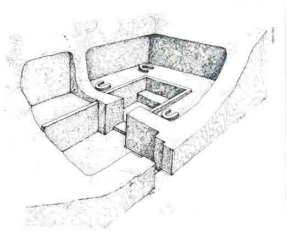
In 1976, Amihai Mazar, whom **BAR** readers already know well,[e] published two burial caves near the Damascus Gate in the area just south of the cave of the Garden Tomb. These two burial caves had been discovered in 1937 during the British Mandate, but had never been published. Mazar found the unpublished data of the 1937 excavation in old Department of Antiquities records and 051based his own conclusions on these records. Mazar reported that these burial caves were originally hewn in the Iron Age. His evidence included photographs of pottery taken *in situ* in 1937, pottery he could now identify as having typical late Iron Age shapes.



Moreover, not a single tomb from Second Temple times has been found in this area. Just as we now know much more about Iron Age tombs, we also know more about tombs

from the Second Temple period. Jesus lived in the late Second Temple period; the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.) A great number of burial caves from the Second Temple period have been 052discovered in other areas of Jerusalem, but not one in the area surrounding the Garden Tomb. By the Second Temple period, Jerusalemites had located their cemeteries further north. The southernmost burial cave of the Second Temple period is the luxurious "Tombs of the Kings," about 1,970 feet (600 m) north of the Garden Tomb.[f]

An examination of various characteristics of the typical First Temple burial caves also leads to the conclusion that the Garden Tomb cave is an Iron Age tomb.



For example, let us look at the basic arrangement of the rooms or chambers. The Garden Tomb cave consists of two adjoining chambers, one beside the other. The entrance from the outside to this two-room burial cave is through the northern room. After entering this northern chamber, one sees, on the right (south), the entrance to the second room or inner chamber. Thus, both the entrance chamber and the inner chamber have one wall formed by the outer face of the escarpment. This is not a natural arrangement for a two-chamber burial tomb. We would expect the inner chamber to be cut behind the entrance chamber, further under the rock, rather than at the side of the entrance chamber where there would be a danger, in the course of hewing it out, of accidentally piercing and breaking through the outer wall of the escarpment. To avoid this risk, burial caves of the Second Temple period usually have the two rooms aligned one behind the other. In contrast, a number of First Temple burial caves are cut on the plan of the Garden Tomb cave—with one room beside the other. This is the case, for example, with the famous burial cave of the "Royal Steward" in the Siloam Village, east of the Temple Mount. Two inscriptions were found on the facade of this cave, which leave no doubt as to the date of this tomb. Professor Nahman Avigad identified it as the Royal Steward's tomb. The longer inscription reads as follows: "This is [the sepulcher of …] yahu who is over the house. There is no silver and no gold here but [his bones] and the bones of his slave-wife with him. Cursed be the man who will open this." The other inscription refers to the plan of the cave—with one room at the side of the other—*H\DR BKTP HS\R[YH\]* (*h\eder beketeph hatzariah*\), "a room at the side of the monument." This inscription was intended to prevent someone from hewing out another burial chamber beside the one visible in the outer facade, and thereby accidentally breaking into the inner chamber because he didn't know about the inner chamber hewn beside the entrance chamber.

Another First Temple tomb with this same plan was excavated on the slope of Mt. Zion.[g] In this tomb, an abundance of pottery vessels and an inscribed seal were found *in situ*, thus enabling us to date the tomb with certainty to the seventh century B.C.

Still a third burial cave with this plan was found quite near the Garden Tomb, on the premises of the convent of the White Sisters on Nablus Road. The architectural features in this tomb, such as right-angled cornices where 053the walls join with the ceiling and raised burial benches, enable us to date it to the Iron Age. (This cave has not yet been published.)

A number of other burial caves from the First Temple period with this same plan have also been found outside Jerusalem—Cave Number 9 in the Iron Age II cemetery at Beth Shemesh and in a recently excavated Iron Age II burial cave at Sobah, west of Jerusalem.[7]

Thus, based on the plan of the rooms, the "Garden Tomb" cave appears to be a First Temple period, rather than a Second Temple period, burial cave.

A comparison of the Garden Tomb cave with the numerous Second Temple period burial caves in Jerusalem also emphasizes the very prominent differences. The outstanding characteristics of these Second Temple burial caves are burial niches (called *kokhim*; singular, *kokh*) cut vertically into the cave wall. *Kokhim* are very different structures from the burial benches extending lengthwise along the walls of the chamber, which characterize First Temple burial caves. In Second Temple burial caves we also typically find *arcosolia*. An *arcosolium* is an arch hewn into the wall of the cave forming the ceiling of a resting place or a shelf for stone coffins and ossuaries.[h] Finally the low burial benches in the niches of Second Temple tombs are carved around sunken floors. The Garden Tomb cave contains none of these elements of Second Temple burial caves. Another telltale sign of Second Temple tombs is evidence of the use of a so-called comb chisel, which had a toothed edge. This kind of chisel left marks that look like small parallel lines, called combing, on the rock surfaces. The Garden Tomb cave, however, contains no sign of comb chiseling. Thus, dating this cave to the Hasmonean or Herodian period (first century B.C.-first century A.D.) seems completely out of the question.

A careful examination of the carving inside the Garden Tomb cave enables us to determine the original appearance of the typical First Temple burial benches in the inner chamber of the Garden Tomb cave, although the tomb was drastically altered in the Byzantine period. Originally, the inner chamber was carved so that a rock-cut burial bench extended from each wall except the entrance wall. On entering, one would see three burial benches in the shape of a squared-off U, like this: P.

In the Byzantine period, the rock cut burial benches on which bodies had initially been laid to rest in the Iron Age were carved out to form basins, or carved in-place 056sarcophagi that resemble bathtubs or troughs. The carved-in-place sarcophagus opposite the entrance to the inner chamber is very short —less than 4 ¾ feet long on the inside. This was a result of carving out the two side burial benches to their full length, so that not enough room was left for the middle sarcophagus to extend along the full length of the wall. The traditional suggestion has been that this short resting place was intended for a child. I know of no parallel to such a short carved-out resting place.

Burial benches arranged on three walls opposite the entrance are typical of the First Temple period. Although hollowed-out sarcophagi cut into the rock, like those carved out in the Garden Tomb, are well known from the Byzantine period, in original Byzantine tombs they always appear under a vaulted ceiling, never under a flat ceiling like the ceiling in the Garden Tomb cave. Thus, on purely archaeological grounds, we can be sure that the cave was not originally hewn in the Byzantine period. Moreover, Byzantine sarcophagi are usually arranged parallel to one another, not around the three sides of the room like Iron Age burial benches. Indeed, I know of no other case where such trough-shaped sarcophagi from the Byzantine period are arranged around the room like this. It seems clear that the carving out of the rock-cut benches occurred when the cave was put to secondary use in the Byzantine period. The telltale hints of its original appearance, however, make plain that it was originally carved in the First Temple period.[i]

It would be nice if we knew what had been found in the Garden Tomb cave when it was cleaned and “excavated” from time to time. But our information is fragmentary at best.

I mentioned earlier that in 1924 James E. Hanauer published the results of Karl Beckholt’s 1904 excavations at the Garden Tomb. Hanauer’s publication includes photographs of several of the finds. In these photographs we can recognize a complete clay figurine of a four-legged animal (perhaps a horse), which is typically found in late Iron Age II sites. Such figurines have been found in other excavations both in Jerusalem and Judah. The animal figurine couldn’t be accurately dated either when it was excavated by Beckholt, or when it was published by Hanauer. Now it can be dated on the basis of

well-stratified and well-dated parallels. Another of Beckholt's finds was a clay model of a bed or couch, also apparently from Iron Age II.[j]

In the course of my own investigation of the Garden Tomb, I came across an old collection of artifacts stored in a closet at the site. These included "Greek Fire" hand grenades from the Middle Ages, pottery fragments from the Crusader period, Byzantine sherds and a sling stone shaped like a tennis ball, a type well known from Iron Age sites. Of particular importance, however, were three chipped oil lamps with thick bases, typical of the late Iron Age in Judah, and a fragment of a rim of a burnished deep bowl with a handle attached to it, belonging to the same period.

The question naturally arises as to whether these artifacts in fact came from excavations in the area of the Garden Tomb. The Iron Age finds from Beckholt's excavations in the courtyard suggest that they did.[k] The fact that the oil lamps were chipped and broken off, and especially the fact that a relatively small fragment of the burnished bowl rim was retained, strengthen the suggestion that this pottery was discovered at the site and was not purchased on the antiquities market. As they are, they are of little or no commerical value and would be unlikely to have been saved if they were not found at the site.

It seems likely that the closet housed a collection of items that were uncovered in excavations at the front of the cave of the Garden Tomb. It is reasonable to assume that in the Byzantine period, when many of the caves in this region were opened up for renewed use, they were cleared of bones, funerary offerings and pottery vessels in order to make room for new burials. These Garden Tomb closet artifacts were the items most probably discovered during the cleanup excavations in front of the cave conducted by the Garden Tomb Association.

If the ceramic evidence were the only basis for the dating suggested here, it would certainly be insufficient, but in conjunction with other evidence, it bears considerable weight.

On the basis of all the evidence, it seems clear that the Garden Tomb burial cave was first hewn in Iron Age II, 057the First Temple period, the eighth–seventh centuries B.C. It was not again used for burial purposes until the Byzantine period.[l] So it could not have been the tomb in which Jesus was buried.

> For further reading: L. Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs," *Biblical Archeologist*, Summer 1981, pp. 171–177; Fall 1981, pp. 229–235; Winter 1981, pp. 43–53; Spring 1982, pp. 109–119; and A. Mazar, "Iron Age Burial Caves North of Damascus Gate Jerusalem," *Israel Exploration Journal* 26 (1976), pp. 1–8.

Footnotes:

a. A new analysis of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and its claim to be the site of Jesus' burial will appear in the next issue of **BAR** ("Does the Holy Sepulchre Church Mark the Burial of Jesus?" **BAR** 12:03). In the meantime, see the convincing review of Father Charles Coüasnon's book on the Holy Sepulchre Church, *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem* (London Oxford University Press, 1974), by J.-P. B. Ross ("The Evolution of a Church—Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre," **BAR** 02:03).
b. Apparently the first to do so was Otto Thenius, a German scholar, who had already made the suggestion in 1842.
c. Today, the grounds of the Franciscan White Sisters Convent on Nablus Road cover Conder's cave.
d. One of the finds was a conical object of white stone covered with small holes resembling windows. Some scholars identified the stone as having some connection with the worship of

Venus. This “Stone of Venus” and some of the other objects Hanauer published were, according to Hanauer, probably manufactured by the excavator Beckholt himself, who carved them as souvenirs for tourists. The remaining objects published by Hanauer were unearthed by Beckholt in a pit he had dug somewhere on the premises of the Garden Tomb.

e. See “A New Generation of Israeli Archaeologists Comes of Age,” **BAR** 10:03, and “Bronze Bull Found in Israelite ‘High Place’ From the Days of the Judges,” **BAR** 09:05.
f. The area surrounding the Garden Tomb is within the line of the Third Wall from the Second Temple period though it was built by Herod Agrippa about one decade after the crucifixion and therefore, located as it was inside the city wall, it would not have been a permissible burial area.
g. D. Davis and Amos Kloner, “A Burial Cave of the Late Israelite Period on the Slopes of Mt. Zion,” *Qadmoniot* XI, 41 (1978), pp. 16–19 (in Hebrew). It is known as the tomb of H\amîohel based on the inscription found on a small seal discovered in the cave.
h. An ossuary is a stone box used to collect bones for secondary burial after the flesh had decayed. This was customary mainly in Jerusalem and its vicinity in the Second Temple period.
i. Because the Garden Tomb cave was refurbished and altered for secondary use during the Byzantine period, it bears none of the other characteristics of Byzantine burial caves. Several such Byzantine caves were discovered in the courtyard of the St. Étienne Monastery near the Garden Tomb, and they all differ from the Garden Tomb cave in plan, character and architectural details.
j. Hanauer also published the “Stone of Venus” I mentioned in the footnote above; Beckholt was accused of manufacturing this object himself.
k. Additional support for this suggestion comes from the Late Iron Age pottery found in other excavations in the vicinity—close to the Damascus Gate in R. W. Hamilton’s excavations in the 1930s, and in the German excavations under Saint Paul’s Hospice adjoining the Garden Tomb, as well as in additional digs extending up to the line of the Third Wall.
l. In the fifth century A.D., the Empress Eudocia (also spelled Eudoxia) built the great Church of Saint Stephen on the site of today’s monastery of St. Étienne, thereby initiating a wave of development in the area. It seems that the Garden Tomb cave was emptied of its original contents at that time and prepared for use as a Christian burial site—perhaps for the clergy of St. Stephen’s church. The plan of the cave was adapted to the customs of the new occupants: in place of burial benches on which to lay the deceased, burial troughs were cut out, and Christian symbols were daubed on the walls in red paint.

    Still later, in the Middle Ages, the area of the Garden Tomb became a stable for the mules and donkeys of the Crusaders. To this stage, we may attribute the water cistern in the court of the Garden Tomb, as well as the soft limestone figurines of horsemen found by Beckholt in his excavations. During this period a series of vaults was built against the escarpment into which the cave is hewn. The vaults were built to create a complex of mule stables used by the Crusaders. In order to create vaults that were high enough, but would not extend above the escarpment, the Crusader builders lowered the rock surface in front of the cave entrance. As a result, today one must step up to enter the caves. Outside the entrance to the cave, a channel was cut into the rock face; this channel was most probably used in connection with the Crusader complex of vaulted structures. This late rock-cut channel was subsequently identified by 19th- and early 20th-century defenders of the authenticity of the Garden Tomb as the groove for the rolling stone covering Jesus’ burial cave mentioned in the Gospels (*Matthew 27:60*).

Endnotes:

1. Conrad Schick, “Notes, Mr. Schick’s Work at Jerusalem” *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (*PEFQS*), 1874, p. 125.
2. Schick, “Gordon’s Tomb,” *PEFQS*, 1892, pp. 120–124.
3. James Edward Hanauer, “Model of a Columbarium. An Alleged Model of a Sanctuary from the Garden Tomb Grounds,” *PEFQS*, 1904, pp. 143–145.

4. Père Louis-Hugues Vincent, “Garden Tomb, Histoire d’un Mythe,” *Revue Biblique* 32 (1925), pp. 401–431. Vincent argued that the tomb was Byzantine. Among those who dated it to the Second Temple period are Schick, Sir Flinders Petrie and Dame Kathleen Kenyon.
5. W. S. McBirnie, *The Search for the Authentic Tomb of Jesus* (Montrose, California: Acclaimed Books, 1975).
6. Amihai Mazar, “Iron Age Burial Caves North of Damascus Gate Jerusalem,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 26 (1976), pp. 1–8.
7. Kloner, “A First Temple Period Burial Gave at Sobah,” *Hadashot Archaelogiot* 78–79 (1982), pp. 71–71 (in Hebrew).

SIDEBAR

A Detailed Description of the Garden Tomb Burial Cave

By Gabriel Barkay

051

The burial cave at the Garden Tomb, on the western escarpment of the hill, was hewn out of limestone from the Turonian geological period[m] At the Garden Tomb cave, the escarpment is about 18 feet high.

The Garden Tomb cave consists of two rooms, an entrance chamber and an inner chamber. The two rooms are beside one another. After going into the entrance chamber (on the north), the visitor sees the inner chamber on the right (south).

The rectangular opening into the entrance chamber is about 4 ½ feet high and about 21 in feet wide. Originally the opening was probably smaller than it is today. The threshold of the opening is about 1 in feet above the ground outside the cave, so that the visitor must step up to go inside.

The entrance chamber itself is roughly rectangular, nearly ten feet long, nearly seven feet wide, and six feet high.

In the east wall of the entrance chamber, opposite the doorway, a horizontal line about three feet above the floor appears in the wall. The dressing of the rock face above this line is different from the dressing below it. Originally, below the line a rock-hewn burial bench probably extended from the wall. This burial bench was later removed, most likely in the Byzantine period.

At some later date grooves were cut vertically into the north and south walls, apparently to hold vertical slabs of stone that extended across the east side of the entrance chamber about 2 ½ feet from the east wall. The vertical stone slab or slabs held in these grooves created a sarcophagus-like burial trough along the east wall where the original rock-cut burial bench had been removed.

An entryway in the southern wall of the entrance chamber leads to the inner chamber. This entryway measures over 6 ½ feet height and is only 2 feet wide. Most of the wall separating the two chambers is missing. Part of the remaining wall west of the entrance to the inner chamber has been somewhat decreased in thickness.

More important, a large section of the western wall of the inner chamber is missing. It has been replaced by a wall of stone building blocks in which a window allows light from the garden area to penetrate the inner chamber. Without this built wall, the inner chamber would be open to the outside.

The floor of the inner chamber is about 8 ½ inches lower than the entrance chamber, so there is a step down from the entrance chamber.

With a ceiling that measures 7 feet at its highest point, the inner chamber is nearly 8 feet long and 11 feet wide.

Along each of the walls of the inner chamber, except the entry wall, are trough-shaped burial places, resembling sarcophagi, carved from the rock. The outer wall of the troughs is, for the most part, missing. The top edge of the troughs is nearly 3 feet above the floor of the inner chamber. Long grooves, flat on the bottom, were cut into the side walls to support horizontal stone slabs that once covered the burial troughs. This might indicate that these grooves for the slabs that covered the burial troughs were not of the tomb's original phase. If the slabs had been part of the original design, they would probably have been supported by ledges rather than grooves. On each of the side walls, specially carved vertical grooves were cut. Apparently slabs once fit into these vertical grooves to form the burial space.

The trough-shaped, sarcophagus-like burial place opposite the entrance to the inner chamber is shorter than the burial places on the two side walls. Its length is 4 ¾ feet, compared to nearly 7 ½ feet for each of the two side sarcophagi. It has been suggested that this short burial place was intended for a child.

The correct explanation is as follows: Originally, in the Iron Age, three rock-cut burial benches, not troughs, lined the three walls of the inner chamber. In the Byzantine period, when the troughs were cut into the burial benches, one side bench was cut first, then the other. Thus both ends of the burial bench opposite the entrance to the inner chamber were cut off, leaving about 4 ½ feet of this burial bench into which to cut a burial trough.

On the eastern and southern walls of the inner chamber are Christian symbols—Greek crosses painted in dark red on the rock walls. Above the horizontal crossbar of the crosses are the Greek letters IS and CS (*iota sigma* and *chi sigma*) marked in the same red paint. *Iota* is the initial of the Greek word for Jesus; *sigma* is the last letter of the Greek word for Jesus. The *chi* stands for the initial letter for the Greek word for Christ, and the *sigma* marks again its last letter. Under the horizontal crossbar of the crosses are the letters A and W (*alpha* and *omega*)—the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, recalling the passage from *Revelation 21:6*, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end" (see also *Revelation 18*). These painted symbols clearly belong to the Byzantine period (fifth or sixth century A.D.). It is significant that no earlier Christian symbols have been found, nor any evidence of Christian use of the cave before this period.

Footnotes:

a. The escarpment runs generally north-south, winding northwest as it continues northward into the courtyard of the Monastery of St. Étienne. At the end of this northwest bend, in the courtyard of St. Étienne, lies the entrance to Burial Cave Complex Number 1—the most elaborate burial cave known from the period of the kings of Judah.

The Garden Tomb: Was Jesus Buried Here?
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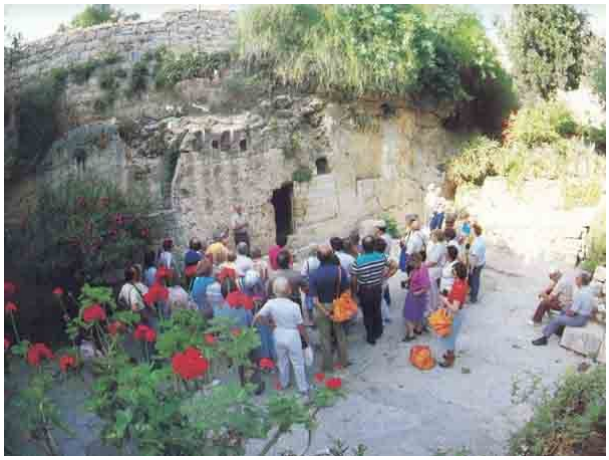


Richard Nowitz

Pilgrims and tourists visit the Garden Tomb, a burial chamber in Jerusalem often proposed as the burial place of Jesus. The tomb's serene setting amid geraniums and oleander provides a place for meditation and prayer, as well as respite from the bustle of modern Jerusalem just a few feet beyond the walls.

To the tour guide's left, a shadow-darkened doorway marks the entrance to the cave carved into the hill. The dressed stones next to the doorway, topped by a small window, were not built when the chamber was hewn, but sometime after.

On the hill, above, left, a stone wall separates the grounds of the Garden Tomb from the adjacent Moslem cemetery. On the northwest slope of this hill is the Dominican monastery of St. Étienne.

Recent archaeological investigations have revealed that both the Garden Tomb and two cave tombs at St. Étienne were carved into the same rocky escarpment. These tombs were all part of the northern cemetery of Jerusalem during the First Temple period, in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. The Garden Tomb cave was later reused, but this was in the Byzantine period and in the Middle Ages, not in the time of Jesus.

Archive of The Palestine Exploration Fund

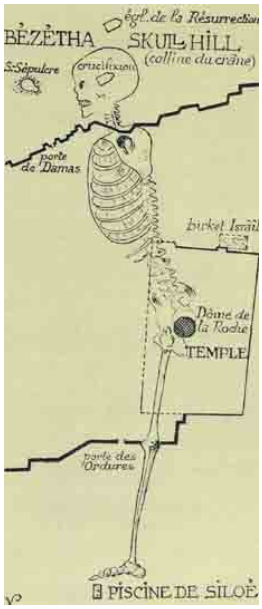
Conrad Schick (1822–1901) came to Jerusalem in 1846 from Germany as a missionary and became a correspondent for the Palestine Exploration Fund and scholarly European journals. In 1867, when a farmer trying to hew a cistern into a rocky hill discovered the cave that would become known as the Garden Tomb, Schick visited the site and wrote up a brief report. Some years later, the suggestion was made that the cave had been the burial place of Jesus. Schick revisited the cave, excavated in front of it and issued a new, detailed report.

The Library of Congress

General Gordon. A renowned British military hero, Charles George Gordon fought in the Crimean War, in China and in Egypt. When he arrived in Jerusalem in 1883, one of his first actions was to combine

his religious fervor with a general's skill and confidence in interpreting terrain. After making sketches for a short report, he announced that the hill in which the Garden Tomb cave was hewn was Golgotha ("skull" in Aramaic), the site of Jesus' crucifixion (see drawing).

In the same report, Gordon assigned a location for the Garden of Eden. He picked a true tropical paradise of giant trees and lush vegetation—the Seychelles island of Praslin in the Indian Ocean, a thousand miles from the East African coast.



Matson Collection/Library of Congress

Gordon's sketch of Jerusalem. Gordon visualized an imaginary skeleton superimposed on the city of Jerusalem: he fixed the skeleton's pelvis at the Dome of the Rock, its legs on the City of David and its feet at the Siloam Pool. With this alignment, the hill containing the Garden Tomb had to be the skull. Gordon even saw a resemblance to a skull in the rocky hill with its dark cave "eyes."

Hershel Shanks

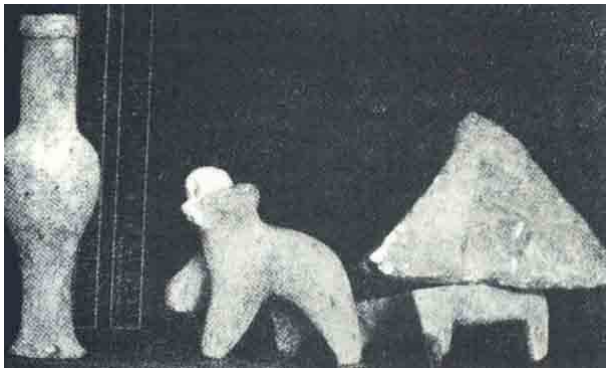
"Hill of Golgotha". Identified in 1883 by General Charles George Gordon as the site of the crucifixion, this rocky hill stands just north of Jerusalem's Old City. Tombstones of a Moslem cemetery cluster on the hilltop, while a modern bus station crowds its base. Hewn into this hill—farther to the north—are two burial cave complexes: the Garden Tomb, where, some believe, Jesus was laid to rest, and the tombs on the grounds of St. Étieenne's monastery.

Matson Collection/The Library of Congress

In another view of “Golgotha”, taken at the end of the 19th century by the famed Jerusalem photographer G. Eric Matson, only a few tombstones dot the hilltop. At the far left, the flying buttresses of St. Étienne’s church mark the location of this monastery complex. On the grounds of St. Étienne’s, a flight of steps leads underground to one of the burial caves. In the Iron Age (eighth or seventh century B.C.) when these burial caves and the cave of the Garden Tomb were hewn out of the hill, they were all part of the same cemetery.

Garo Nalbandian

Cave “eyes” of General Gordon’s “Skull hill” are seen here closeup in the sheer Jerusalem hill that conceals a vast underground cemetery.

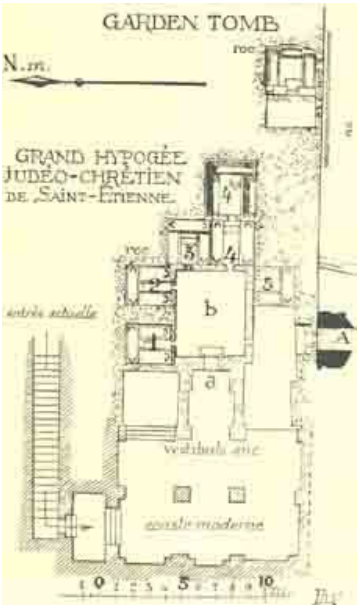


PEFQS, photographed by James Edward Hanauer

Iron Age finds from the Garden Tomb. Excavated in 1904 by Karl Beckholt, warden of the Garden Tomb, this pottery was photographed and published 20 years later by James Edward Hanauer, a Jerusalem scholar who died in the 1930s.

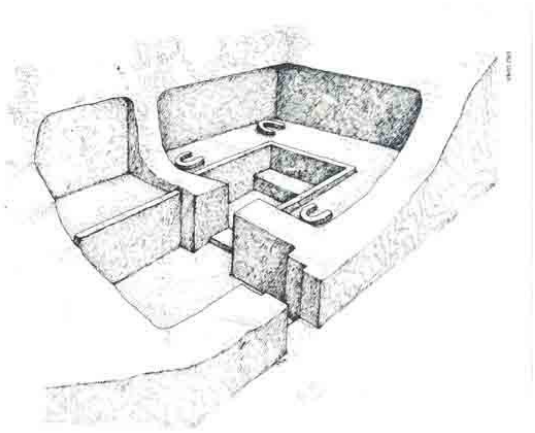
Hanauer called the objects the handiwork of medieval pilgrims who were filling idle hours in the Holy City. But two of these finds, the animal, middle, and the bed or couch, right bottom, closely resemble objects recently excavated in Jerusalem and Judah, objects that are securely dated to Iron Age II, eighth to seventh centuries B.C. The triangular shaped object that appears to be resting on the couch is probably medieval, and the spindle bottle, left, dates to the Hellenistic period, late first century B.C.

This photograph is all that remains of the 1904 finds. They were “so it was said…taken away by a ‘Turkish’ German officer during the First World War,” Hanauer reported.



Revue Biblique

The relationship between the two-chambered Garden Tomb and the large Cave Complex 1 at St. Étienne’s monastery, separated by only two meters, is evident in this plan published by Louis-Hugues Vincent in 1925.



Erez Cohen

Originally, the burial chambers in the Garden Tomb had burial benches with rims and horseshoe-shaped headrests. In the inner chamber, steps lead up to the burial benches, where three bodies could be laid to rest. In the Byzantine period, however, these burial benches were carved out to form troughs, or sarcophagi (see photograph).

Richard Nowitz

Two-chambered Garden Tomb. Stepping down from the entrance threshold to the northern room of the tomb, the visitor can see the adjoining southern room through a protective iron screen. In the Second Temple period, two chambered burial caves were usually hewn according to a different plan: the second chamber was cut behind the first, not next to it, as is the case with the Garden Tomb. During the First Temple period, many two chambered tombs had the rooms one beside the other.

Richard Nowitz

The inner chamber of the Garden Tomb. Originally, the chamber had burial benches with rims and horseshoe-shaped headrests (see drawing). In the Byzantine period, however, these burial benches were carved out to form troughs, or sarcophagi. The two side benches were completely carved out, leaving a sarcophagus only 57 inches long between them on the far wall—sometimes explained as a burial place for a child.

The chambers have flat ceilings, unlike Byzantine period tomb chambers, which all have vaulted ceilings. Although the Garden Tomb shows clear signs of reuse during the Byzantine period, its flat ceiling is one convincing piece of evidence that it was originally hewn in a much earlier period, the Iron Age.

Richard Nowitz

A crudely drawn cross marks a wall in the Garden Tomb's southern chamber. During the Byzantine period, fifth or sixth centuries A.D., the Garden Tomb was cleared of its bones and funerary offerings

and was then used anew as a burial place. This Byzantine period cross and other Christian symbols on the tomb walls provide archaeologists with evidence to date the period of the tomb's reuse.

Hedy Yehudaiov

Oil lamps. Although their rims are partially broken, these lamps clearly display design features—pinched spouts and high pedestal bases—characteristic of Late Iron Age (seventh century B.C.) lamps in Judah. Discovered by the author in a storage closet near the cave of the Garden Tomb, the lamps may have been originally placed in the tomb during the Iron Age as funerary offerings, and removed in the Byzantine period when the tomb was cleared for reuse. Perhaps they were found in late 19th-century excavations conducted in front of the cave and then were placed in this closet.

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