

THE CHURCHES OF CONSTANTINE.

By A. W. CRAWLEY-BOEVEY, Esq., M.A.,
Bombay Civil Service (Retired).

EVERYONE interested in Jerusalem antiquities has heard of Constantine's famous Churches, the Anastasis, the Marturion, and the Church of Golgotha. The chief question of historical interest has always been, Where were they built, and why was the original site selected ?

All modern authorities agree that these Churches were erected at one or other of the following sites within the area of the present city walls, (1) that covered by the existing Church of the Holy Sepulchre, (2) (according to Mr. J. Fergusson, F.R.A.S.) that covered by the so-called Mosque of Omar and the adjacent buildings within the area known as *Haram-el-Sherif*. The writings of Eusebius and of all the Palestine pilgrims clearly point to the fact that these Churches were erected *within the walls* as they existed in and after the fourth century ; but all commentators have been puzzled to reconcile the accounts published, or to come to any definite agreement about their exact position. The determination of this question about the Churches has hitherto been complicated by its connection with the religious controversy regarding the position of the Holy Sepulchre. Before entering on this difficult subject we must then be prepared to consider the preliminary question, why was the original site for these Churches selected ? The popular answer of course is, (1) that the site of the Anastasis was selected by Macarius and his advisers because it contained the actual cave in which the Saviour's body was laid. (2) That this site is now covered by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is, or stands near, the original site of Constantine's famous Church. But this answer raises the difficult question : How can the veritable Golgotha and the Tomb be found occupying a central and apparently impossible site within the walls ? Whether Macarius and his advisers in the fourth century knew the exact position of the reputed Holy

Sepulchre is disputed; but it is difficult to resist the opinion that they must at least have known or might have ascertained the position of Golgotha, which, as a notorious place of public execution, and close to a great public cemetery, is little likely to have been entirely forgotten either by Jews, Romans, or Christians. Now there are three sites in Jerusalem, and three only, where such a Golgotha has been hitherto pointed out with any show of authority. (1) The traditional site now covered by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. (2) The site fixed by Fergusson for *Goath*¹ which he identified with Golgotha or Gol-Goath, near the Golden Gate, within the present so-called Temple area. (3) The site of the small rocky hill above Jeremiah's Grotto, situated due north of the modern Damascus Gate and in close proximity to it. The first or traditional site was, it is said, entirely inappropriate from its central position for use as a cemetery, or place of public execution. This site is not now, and in the opinion of most authorities never has been, outside the walls of the city. The two remaining sites adjoin very ancient Jewish cemeteries on the east and north of the city, and both are traditionally associated with great tragedies in Jewish history. The arguments for the second site were fully stated by Fergusson in 1847 (*Antient Topography of Jerusalem*, Weale), and, though generally ignored or rejected by experts, are by no means finally disposed of. The arguments which identify the Damascus Gate site with the Calvary of the Gospels are strongly supported by many modern experts, and though lacking the support of ecclesiastical tradition, this site is for many reasons attracting increasing public attention.

If we may for the sake of argument provisionally reject the popular view that Constantine's famous Church, the Anastasis, was erected over the reputed Holy Sepulchre, we shall be in a better position to understand the reasons that probably determined the selection of that Church's original site. For mere memorial purposes the Anastasis and other Churches might well have been built at any of the sites above described. Their original location must clearly have been determined by many practical motives altogether apart from any question about the position of the Holy Sepulchre. Convenience of management and facility of defence, amongst others, were two main considerations which could not have been disregarded

¹ Jeremiah, xxxi, 38-40.

by Constantine's advisers. The question of the truth of a Jewish sepulchre, the position of which cannot be determined from Scripture or from the writings of any of the early Fathers, and which during the Roman period had been concealed for 300 years, may well have appeared to Macarius and his advisers at the time a very secondary consideration. They doubtless well understood the spirit of their own age; the longing to possess a visible and material symbol which would remind men of the Resurrection; and the readiest mode of solving all doubts about the Tomb by finding at the auspicious moment the true Cross under conditions which all their contemporaries would recognise as miraculous. No one can fail to see that events happened precisely as was inevitable. The truth of the site was proved by the famous "Invention of the Cross" traditionally discovered on the very day that the Anastasis was dedicated, and if this tradition, which is as old as 385 A.D., be true, it clearly proves that the Cross was discovered some time *after* the site of the famous Anastasis was fixed (*Pilgrimage of St. Silvia*, Palestine Pilgrim's Text Society, p. 76, and printed in Mgr. Duchesne's *Christian Worship*). In any case, whatever doubts might, before that discovery, have been felt about the truth of the Sepulchre were officially and finally set at rest for all true believers. But the spirit of our own day is very different, and we are compelled by the force of circumstances to approach the subject from an altogether different point of view. We can easily realise the fact that for mere memorial purposes any site within the city would have been more or less appropriate for the erection of Constantine's Churches, but for political and administrative reasons it was clearly necessary that the site selected should be at once convenient for ecclesiastical management, and defensible in case of external danger. These objects could only be attained by building these churches *within the walls*, in the most central and defensible position that could be found. The fact that the real Golgotha and the Tomb were notoriously outside the walls may seem to modern critics a fatal objection to the selection of any site within the walls; but in Constantine's day the question of the truth of the site was probably entirely subordinate to the practical considerations already mentioned. If the real sites were known or suspected to be outside the walls they were clearly unsuitable either for the erection of memorial buildings or for purposes of defence. The simplest course plainly was to ignore the real sites altogether, and to build the

Memorial Churches where they could most conveniently be placed. That Macarius and his supporters should have acted in this way will seem to many minds quite excusable under all the circumstances of his day; but that enlightened opinion in our day should treat this action, or as some would term it "pious fraud," as settling for all time the truth of the site seems plainly absurd; and until we can realise the literal fact that the traditional Holy Sepulchre is not a cave, or Jewish tomb at all, but merely an artificial construction of stone and marble, erected *on the floor* of a comparatively modern church, it is impossible to make intelligible to those who have not seen it or studied the evidence either of the real character of the Tomb, or the topography of Jerusalem, of which it is the central feature.

St. Willibald, who visited Jerusalem *circ.* 765, frankly tells us that there was a church in the place called Calvary. "This was formerly outside Jerusalem, but Blessed Helena, when she found the Cross, fixed that place inside Jerusalem." "*Et hæc fuit prius extra Hierusalem, sed Beata Helena quando invenerit crucem collocavit illum locum intus in Hierusalem.*" (Acta Sanctorum Ord. Benedicti. Sæc. III, para. II, p. 375 *et seq.*) This testimony is quite distinct, and is entirely in accordance both with historical probability, and with common sense. The author of the *Guide Book to Palestine*, *circ.* A.D. 1350, published by the Palestine Pilgrim's Text Society, describes at p. 5 the position of the Sepulchre, "which up to the time of the Emperor Ælius Hadrian was without the Gate." If this testimony be accepted, it is surely waste of time to argue that the Sepulchre has always been shown in the place within the walls where it now stands, or that the present site was ever outside the second wall of Herod. The perverted ingenuity displayed in arguing these points clearly shows that the supporters of tradition feel their position to be insecure; and when they are reduced to argue that the traditional site is at any rate "not impossible," we may feel quite sure that the position is felt to be untenable. Numerous writers, including Fergusson, have drawn attention to many other points which clearly suggest that the real site of the Sepulchre was known to have been originally outside the walls; and it seems very difficult to resist the conclusion that this site has been changed more than once, first in the fourth century by ecclesiastical arrangement, and afterwards, during the Mahomedan period, by necessity, to suit the political exigencies of the time. Fergusson

and others have argued with great force that a transfer of the original memorial site took place during the Mahomedan period, *circ.* 969 A.D., when Constantine's Basilica was burned by Muez;¹ and to suppose that Christian monks would have been allowed by their conquerors since the time of Omar (A.D. 636) to remain in undisturbed possession of sites in the Holy City equally coveted (though for very different reasons) by Christians and Mahomedans alike, requires not only abnormal faith, but a strange appreciation of ordinary history. The irony of circumstances, as Fergusson points out,² has never been more forcibly displayed than during the brief interval when the Crusaders were in possession of Jerusalem, and found themselves, by the fortune of war, in the remarkable position of having two rival sites for the Holy Sepulchre to choose from. They then deliberately adhered to the Memorial site which the Christian community had been allowed by their Mahomedan conquerors to occupy in place of the historical buildings from which they appear to have been ejected, and when the Crusaders were subsequently expelled from Jerusalem, the Christians were contemptuously left in undisturbed possession of their own buildings, with which the Mahomedans had no political or religious reason for interfering. These are the buildings which now exist, and if anyone can, in the face of the architectural and topographical evidence, believe them to be the original buildings of Constantine or built near their original site, he must possess indeed that robust faith which is capable of "removing mountains," and which argument of any kind is little likely to disturb. Mr. Fergusson may be right or wrong in his contention that the so-called Mosque of Omar and the Golden Gateway are Christian constructions of the age of Constantine; but no one can reasonably doubt that the key of Jerusalem topography is held by the power which for the time being controls and guards the secrets of the Holy City. As long as the *Haram-el-Sherif* is jealously guarded by the Turks, these secrets are little likely to be revealed, and many will see in this state of things a definite limit placed to the possibilities of effectual exploration in this direction, and the necessary uncertainty of all speculations regarding the position of the Holy Sepulchre or of Constantine's Memorial Churches.

¹ Fergusson's *Antient Topography of Jerusalem*, p. 164.

² *Id.*, p. 174 *seq.*

There is a popular tradition in the Holy City, current we are told amongst Christians and Mahomedans alike, that when Christian troops enter Jerusalem through the Golden Gateway the Turkish domination will be at an end. This tradition was not mentioned in Fergusson's account of that remarkable building, printed in pp. 94-102 of *Antient Topography of Jerusalem*, published in 1847; but if his speculation be correct, that the gateway was once the propylaeum or festal entrance of Constantine's Basilica, known as the Marturion, the interest of the tradition is unquestionably very great. The fact that no vestige of this famous Basilica now remains is attributed by Albericus to the order of El Hakim to level it with the ground, "solo aequare mandavit." William of Tyre describes this building as "usque ad solum diruta" (Lib. I, cap. IV); but if Fergusson's theory be correct the foundations almost certainly remain, and could probably be found by excavation. That the Turkish Government would ever voluntarily allow such excavations to be made in the Haram area is, under present circumstances, doubtless inconceivable; but until this is done, the truth of Fergusson's theory can never be effectually tested, and the problem of Constantine's Churches will remain, as it is at present, one of the principal unsolved problems of the Holy City.

THE SITE OF CAPERNAUM.

By DR. E. W. G. MASTERMAN.

THE very important observations made by Mr. Macalister in the neighbourhood of *Telhâm*¹ may, I fear, on account of their brevity and incidental mention, be overlooked by students of New Testament topography. The site of Capernaum has, in Anglo-American Protestant circles at any rate (not, I believe, with Roman Catholics and Jews), been a subject of such divided opinion that any new

¹ "Diary of a Visit to Safed," *Quarterly Statement*, 1907, pp. 116-120. (On p. 105, line 4, read *east* for *west*, *ib.* l. 22, *wooden* should be *wooded*, p. 108, l. 7 from foot, for *there* read *these*; p. 109, l. 13, for *Alma* read *Akma*; l. 22, *Mawwâsy* should be *Ḳudarîn*; l. 29, 'Ain Salah, which is the name in the P.E.F. Map and *Memoirs*, is not now used, this spring is called 'Ain el-Kahâleh.)