The Ladder, the Sepulchre, and the Status Quo

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Abstract

Each day, thousands of tourists and pilgrims pass through the doorway of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, alleged site of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ, oblivious to the inconspicuous wooden ladder that rests, as it has for at least 150 years, just above their heads. Most scholars regard it as a curiosity, a small testament to a long-running dispute between the various sects occupying the church. This paper argues that the ladder represents something more: a powerful symbol of the absurdity of the status quo, the edict that has dominated the landscape of the Holy Land for centuries. The architectural, religious, and political history and significance of the church, the status quo, and the ladder are discussed using the writings, images, and studies of various experts in a multitude of fields. This research explains the pattern of spolia usage throughout the history of the church, the attribution of sacred properties to these materials, how this all led to the status quo, and why the situation could ultimately lead to the destruction of one of Christendom’s holiest places. It also sheds light on the mystery of the ladder, its origins, and how it ultimately personifies the status quo.

Keywords: Sepulchre, Ladder, Jerusalem

1. Body of Paper

One expects the central shrine of Christendom to stand out in majestic isolation, but the anonymous buildings cling to it like barnacles. One looks for numinous light, but it is dark and cramped. One hopes for peace, but the ear is assailed by a cacophony of warring chants. One desires holiness, only to encounter a jealous possessiveness.

—Father Jerome Murphy-O’Connor

Cacophony is not a word one would normally attribute to the happenings at the very heart of a religion that has for thousands of years attributed to its proprietor descriptions of love and peace. It is a term contradictory in its very nature to the adherents of a faith that promotes the promulgation of kindness through the sacrifice of its savior. At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, however, the seeds of discord run rampant. There is no one keeper of the church, as it falls under the status quo, and proprietorship seems to be first in the order of precedence among its inhabitants. It is upon this foundation that the Holy Sepulchre remains locked in an unholy struggle that has lasted for centuries. Within this setting is a bit of curios, a mysterious ladder that has rested above the entrance since at least the 19th century. To find out the origins of the ladder and how its continuous vigil may affect the very survival of the church itself it is necessary to delve into the complex history of the basilica and its various occupiers.
2. In the Beginning

Excavations have revealed that the site of the church was originally an Iron Age stone quarry. Despite arguments to the contrary, it is now presumed that at the time of the Crucifixion the site was outside the city walls which were later extended by Herod Agrippa sometime between 41 and 44 B.C. The Jewish rebellion of 133 invoked Hadrian’s wrath. *Aelia Capitolina*, Hadrian’s new city plan for Jerusalem, found several sites sacred to both Jews and Christians suitable for the construction of his pagan temples. In *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*, Eusebius states that the Tomb of Christ was covered with earth and paved with stone, upon which was constructed a temple of Venus. St. Jerome stated that a statue of Jupiter was erected above the Tomb, while a statue of Venus sat atop Golgotha. Though little is known of the design of Hadrian’s temple, remnants can currently be found throughout the church and surrounding area.

3. Constantine’s Complex

Constantine’s vision of the Cross in 312 and his subsequent Edict of Milan of 313 proclaiming religious freedom for Christians throughout the Roman Empire laid the foundations for the Council of Nicaea in 325. Among other things, the council declared the importance of constructing a shrine to commemorate the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. Soon after, Constantine’s mother Helena embarked on a quest to identify these locations. It is the subject of some contention that Helena was able to find not only the sites of these wonders, but also relics that had otherwise been lost in the centuries since the Crucifixion. She located not only Golgotha, the Tomb, and the place of the Nativity in nearby Bethlehem, but also the True Cross, the Crown of Thorns, the instruments of the Passion, and other relics. Within this setting, Constantine’s basilica was begun in 326.

The complex was entered from the *cardo* through a monumental eastward entrance with three huge doors leading to an open-air atrium, the shape of which was derived from the remains of Hadrian’s temple. This led into a five-aisled basilica, the *Martyrion*, divided by four rows of columns, followed by a triportico courtyard that featured Calvary in its southeastern corner, and then the Tomb, covered with an aedicule and centered within a rotunda called the *Anastasis*. A patriarchate was built with housing and offices on the north side of the rotunda. Eusebius contends that Constantine had Hadrian’s temple entirely removed from the site, but the evidence states otherwise. The 2nd-century *temenos* wall determined the shape of the atrium and other structures and remains in part today. Elsewhere in the church and surrounding area, capitals and columns from the time of Hadrian are evident. According to Freeman-Grenville, pieces of Hadrian’s temple are currently present “in the Rotunda, between Calvary and the Choir, in the Mary Magdalene chapel, and the very substantial remains that are visible in the Russian Alexander Hospice..., and behind Zelatimo’s sweetshop, where they can be seen only through a hole in the wall.”

In addition, part of the main entrance to the temple was found in the Coptic Hospice in 1873.

4. The Byzantines and the Somewhat Great Restoration

The Persians sacked Jerusalem in 614, damaging the basilica and other important landmarks. The Byzantines recaptured the city in September of 629, and on March 21st, 630, with restorations completed, Emperor Heraclius marched through the Golden Gate with the True Cross. Caliph Umar I took Jerusalem in 638 and was far more lenient than his predecessor, leaving the church intact. His reign ushered in a new period of peace that lasted relatively uninterrupted for centuries. In 966, following Byzantine victories over the Arab armies, rioters murdered the patriarch and set fires throughout the building that eventually destroyed the roof of the basilica and rotunda dome. A few decades later, Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, sometimes called the “mad” Fatimid, ordered the complete destruction of the entire complex. The Egyptian ruler was convinced that the Holy Fire ceremony celebrated each Easter was a fraud.

In 1934, H.V. Morton described the ceremony celebrated to this day:

*The air was tight with suspense. Suddenly came a burst of flame from each of the Tomb openings, one torch being thrust out by the Greek Patriarch, and the other by the Armenian. The next instant the church was a shrieking, stamping madness. Tongues of flame swept over it. Men fought to escape with the fire. The crowds lit candle from candle, laughing with joy. Some moved the flames over their faces. Women passed it under their chins and over their*
breasts. The people in the galleries hauled up lit candles on strings, and in the inconceivable pandemonium the ancient figure of the Greek Patriarch emerged from the tomb, grasping a lighted candle in each hand, and was swept onward like a piece of drift-wood on a flooded river...The whole church was a chaos of sound and movement.\(^{19}\)

Al-Hakim, witnessing the scene 900 years earlier, was incensed at the depravity of the spectacle.\(^{20}\) The damage was immeasurable. According to Freeman-Grenville, “not a trace was to be spared. The destruction began on 18 October 1009. The Martyrion was razed totally, with the rotunda and most of the edicule.”\(^{21}\) The Tomb itself was attacked with picks and hammers until the debris became so thick that the demolition could no longer continue.\(^{22}\)

Al-Hakim died in 1021. With the ascent of Constantine IX Monomachus in 1042 the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre began; the church, much smaller than its predecessor, was rededicated in 1048.\(^{23}\) The new structure featured a rebuilt rotunda and porticoed courtyard in accordance with the plans of Constantine’s complex, but the basilica and atrium remained in ruins.\(^{24}\) An apse was added to the rotunda’s eastern façade, and the new roof was conical with an oculus.\(^{25}\) The courtyard was marked in the center with the omphalos, denoting the center of the world, and bordered to the east with chapels for various events of the Passion: the Prison of Christ, the Flagellation, the Crown of Thorns, and the Division of Garments, ending at Calvary.\(^{26}\) Beneath the ruined basilica, the Chapel of the Invention of the Cross marked the spot where Helena discovered the True Cross in 327. Between the patriarchate and Anastasis transept the Chapel of St. Mary was added, while to the south were built the Chapel of St. John the Evangelist, a baptistery, and the Chapel of St. James, all three connected by a narthex.\(^{27}\)

Though al-Hakim’s destruction was thorough, the Byzantine builders used whatever could be salvaged from the original structure, and much of Constantine’s basilica was preserved. The foundations remained virtually intact, as did some of the walls, and the overall plan followed Constantine’s as closely as was financially and spatially possible.\(^{28}\) However, the atrium and basilica were never rebuilt.

5. The Crusader Years

The Crusaders entered Jerusalem on the 15\(^{th}\) of July, 1099 and almost immediately set to work on the Holy Sepulchre, a building they must have deemed far too small for the monumental and historic nature of the site. Like the Byzantines before them, the Crusaders kept anything still of use from previous structures while incorporating the relative modernity of 12\(^{th}\)-century technique and design.\(^{29}\)

Construction began with the Cloister of the Canons where the Martyrion had once stood and the expansion below of the Crypt of the Invention into the Chapel of St. Helena.\(^{30}\) Leaving the rotunda intact, the Crusaders then set their sights on the courtyard and chapels which were replaced by a domed transept and choir encircled by three chapels.\(^{31}\) This transept was connected to the rotunda with a roof so that both Calvary and the Tomb were part of a single, enclosed structure.\(^{32}\) The south façade became the de facto entrance to the complex, and a bell tower was built to its left above a Byzantine chapel.\(^{33}\) Opposite the tower, the Chapel of the Franks was added to provide an alternate entrance to Calvary for the growing numbers of pilgrims.\(^{34}\)

The overall contribution of the Crusaders to the structure was “Romanesque, with heavy supports and a structural system that relies on its mass for stability.”\(^{35}\) The quadripartite ribbed groin vaults, the belfry tower, and the radiating chapels all testify to the 12\(^{th}\)-century European influences that do not always mesh with the 11\(^{th}\)-century Byzantine elements. Yet, apart from the courtyard, most of the Byzantine reconstructions were preserved, sometimes to the point of redundancy or foregoing structural stability and aesthetic unity. The Arches of the Virgin, composed by the Byzantines from spolia of possible Constantinian origin, were left in situ by the Crusaders, despite the fact that another stylistically contrasting arcade was constructed directly in front of them.\(^{36}\) Elsewhere, odd systems of groin vaults unseen in medieval architecture connected the Byzantine rotunda and Crusader transept.\(^{37}\)

Irregularity may be the only consistency in the Crusader church, but these oddities are not the results of poor craftsmanship as they often required great feats of engineering.\(^{38}\) Instead, it is likely that the reverence the Crusaders had placed on the previous structure, much like the Byzantines before them, was proof of the sacred nature of the structure itself. Remnants of previous structures were reused for the explicit purpose of maintaining them as relics.\(^{39}\) In the ensuing centuries, understanding this veneration is crucial to understanding the circumstances surrounding the implementation of the status quo.
6. The Muslim Occupation

The Arab armies recaptured Jerusalem under Saladin in 1187, who blocked all entrances to the church save the current opening. Saladin, like Umar I before him, was judicious to his non-Muslim subjects, and the church remained mostly intact, despite calls for its utter destruction. His victory began a period of Muslim rule that lasted for more than seven centuries.

The Ottoman Empire occupied Palestine in 1516, bringing with them their own set of property laws. Ever since Umar’s conquest in the 7th century, the Church was subject to shari’ah law, which required that there could be no ownership of a sacred place, only rights to possession. However, Turkish law dictated that whoever paid for the repair of a structure owned the structure, and whoever owned a building’s roof was the owner of that building. Between 1625 and 1637, Sultan Murad IV issued at least 12 contradictory edicts establishing ownership of Christian shrines in Jerusalem, and in the 18th century the ownership of the Holy Sepulchre shifted between the Latins and Greek Orthodox five different times. In 1757, Grand Vizier Rajib Pasha issued a firman establishing Greek control over a majority of holy places in Jerusalem and elsewhere.

7. Fire in the Rotunda and the Status Quo

Following a fire in 1808, the rotunda dome collapsed onto the Tomb, causing significant damage and sparking allegations of carelessness between the communities. The Armenians and Latins, now majority stakeholders along with the Greeks, feared that any Greek-sponsored restoration would result in their share of the rotunda and aedicule being summarily cast aside. Following a series of bribes, the restoration was eventually awarded to the Greeks.

It was a disaster. Eugene Hoade, a Franciscan author, stated that “the sacrilegious hammer of the Greeks followed no other design than that of erasing from the edifice of the Crusaders every vestige and record of Latin civilization and Catholicism… The basilica emerged more damaged than was possible by the destructive flames.” David Roberts, a Scottish engraver, called the remodeled aedicule a “hideous kiosk.” Regardless of the awful nature of these repairs, the reconstructions, through appropriations of properties and redecorations, had successfully turned the crusader church into a Greek shrine.

Tensions flared throughout the beginning of the 19th century. It became a habit of clergymen to display their battle scars to pilgrims and tourists. An 1838 cholera outbreak that nearly wiped out the Ethiopian community, one of the three minor shareholders along with the Egyptian Copts and Syrian Orthodox, gave the Coptic clergy all the ammunition they needed to assert their rights to the Deir al-Sultan monastery located on the ground-level next to the dome of the Chapel of St. Helena.

Finally, under pressures from the Russian and French authorities, Sultan Abdul Mejid decided to “freeze the situation indefinitely” in February of 1852 in an attempt to prevent what would eventually become the Crimean War; a second firman in 1853 fixed these rights permanently. The decision, erroneously called an agreement, decreed that “only the last community to have repaired a certain wall, hung a certain picture, or swept a certain step could continue to do so in the future.”

The status quo only made things worse. In 1856, a fight erupted between Armenian and Greek monks inside the Aedicule on Easter Sunday during the ceremony of the Holy Fire, resulting in several serious injuries. The Greeks had been “provided with sticks and cudgels which had been previously concealed [the Armenians claimed] behind the columns and in dark corners.” Any perceived slight was subject to the utmost scrutiny and likely resulted in a fistfight or summoning of the authorities.

8. The British Invasion

The British government took control of Jerusalem in 1917 at the height of World War I. The commanding general of the British force in Palestine, Edmund Allenby, declared that the status quo was to remain in effect, and Sir Ronald Storrs was instated as the first British governor of Jerusalem soon after. Certainly, neither man was aware of the implications of the general’s announcement. The status quo referred to the standing of ownership as of 1853, a date long since passed and ultimately forgotten. With no sure way to know who owned what the disputes continued.
Storrs recorded some of the more ludicrous correspondence with the clergy in his memoirs. A Coptic shrine at the rear of the aedicule, so small that only the priest could kneel within while his congregation was forced outside, so annoyed the Latins they would move benches through the Coptic worshippers “with a zeal which would hardly have won the approval of St. Francis” noted Storrs.\(^{58}\) In retaliation, the Copts dumped “their slops out of the windows [of their convent overlooking the ninth station of the cross along the Via Dolorosa] on the exact spot upon which the Friday procession of Franciscans was accustomed to kneel.”\(^{59}\) When the only remaining Crusader tombstone at the site, that of Englishman and Magna Carta-signer Philip d’Aubigny, was discovered under the main entrance to the Holy Sepulchre, Storrs brought in a platoon of British soldiers to protect the monument from the Greeks who claimed to be “contemplating with mournful anger the preservation [in their midst] of a Latin monument.”\(^{60}\)

In 1929, Lionel George Archer Cust, a decorated hero of World War I and rising star of the British government, published the memorandum *The Status Quo in the Holy Places*.\(^{61}\) His memorandum detailed in 20 pages the meticulous status quo and has provided a legal basis for ownership rights ever since.\(^{62}\) It is fraught with factual errors and contradictions but is still often cited during conflict resolutions.\(^{63}\)

An earthquake of 1927 and a fire of 1934 left the church in shambles, and the British Mandatory Government intervened.\(^{64}\) William Harvey, an expert on reconstruction and restoration, had been brought in to survey the damage.\(^{65}\) He wrote a series of reports that warned of an impending catastrophe at the church if actions were not immediately taken to shore up the edifice, culminating in a 1934 report that concluded that the walls were slowly moving outward from the top down as a result of pressures exerted by the domes.\(^{66}\) Scaffolding erected between 1934 and 1935 would remain there for decades.

### 9. The Great Restoration

Raymond Cohen gives a fascinating account of the perilous negotiations to finally restore the church to, at the very least, a shadow of its former glory. Any summary fails to account fully the irrational displays and clandestine conspiracies of the various parties involved. Several times throughout the course of the negotiations, a compromise would be reached only to dissolve in light of a minor issue.

The benevolent actions of King Hussein of Jordan were critical to saving the otherwise doomed structure. A 1951 letter from the king, distributed to the heads of each major community, was ostensibly meant to ask the communities how they planned to deal with the melted lead recovered from the burned dome, but the communities undoubtedly took it as a suggestion that if they did nothing, King Hussein would. As has been previously noted, the status quo dictated that anyone repairing the roof of a structure owned that structure under Ottoman law. This was more than enough for the communities to agree to share the restoration costs.\(^{67}\)

King Hussein was assassinated in 1951, and the renovations were stalled until July 3, 1961. It took written assurances that the Jordanian government would pay for the parts of the restoration under contention of ownership before repairs finally began.\(^{68}\) These were conducted utilizing the same tools and techniques the crusaders would have used. Henri Deschamps, an expert on the Holy Land architecture, and Father Charles Couasnon, a priest with an architectural background, worked diligently to preserve the dignity of the Crusader structure.\(^{69}\)

Throughout the restorations, arguments continued unabated by the political upheaval in the Middle East. On the eve of the Six Day War in 1967, the scaffolding on the north and south facades was finally removed.\(^{70}\) At the resolution of the battle, the Israeli government assumed control of the entirety of Old Jerusalem, including the Holy Sepulchre.\(^{71}\) This reignited the Ethiopian and Coptic struggle for Deir al-Sultan, and the Abyssinians, allegedly aided by the Israeli police, reclaimed the monastery in 1970 by changing the locks while the Copts attended Easter mass.\(^{72}\) The dispute currently remains at a stalemate in the high courts of Israel.\(^{73}\)

Meanwhile, restorations throughout the complex progressed under much contention. A committee was established to seal the minute details of the status quo in the 1960s and most of the restoration continued.\(^{74}\) After numerous debates between the three major communities regarding the design and construction of the rotunda, on January 2, 1997, the restored dome was revealed.\(^{75}\) This was the final major structure of the church to be renovated, as the aedicule has yet to shed its unflattering skin. The church as it stands today is as much a testament to partnership and community as it is to the never-ending squabbles of centuries-long animosity.

As Cohen points out: “This is the only church in the world where first-century Herodian, second century Hadrianic, fourth century Constantianian, eleventh-century Byzantine, twelfth century Crusader, nineteenth century neo-Byzantine, and twentieth-century modern masonry are visible in one place. The church is not only a monument to the culminating events of the Gospels but also a record in stone of the Christian saga.”\(^{76}\)
10. The Ladder

The south façade is already cluttered with a retinue of odd components, so it is within reason that a small ladder located beneath the right-hand window of the façade has escaped the notice of many pilgrims, tourists, and scholars for decades. It has been described in several places as a relic of the status quo, an impartial observer of the greater fate of the church. Amos Elon gives an account of it in Jerusalem: Battlegrounds of Memory: “The rickety little wooden ladder seen leaning obliquely against a second-floor window in a well-known engraving of 1842 by David Roberts still leans against the same window in the west façade of the church, at the same odd angle. It is never used. It belongs to the Greeks and cannot be moved.”

Through email correspondence with Father Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, Dr. James Lancaster has found that the ladder, window and ledge reportedly all belong to the Armenians. The email refers to the Cust memorandum, which states that “above the doorway [of the Holy Sepulchre] runs a classical cornice, a relic of the Byzantine buildings. This is reached from the windows of the Armenian Chapel of St. John, and this community has the use thereof on the occasion of the festival ceremonies that take place in the Courtyard. The upper cornice is used in the same manner by the [Greek] Orthodox.”

The ladder appears in countless photographs and illustrations dating back to the 19th century. Several well-known images of the façade from the time feature the ladder, including the lithograph by David Roberts from 1842, an 1850 photograph by Maxime du Camp, and, of particular interest to this discussion, an 1834 engraving by Clarkson Stanfield. This image is certainly one of the earliest to feature the ladder, but it is not the first. In fact, the image itself is based on a sketch made by a then little-known artist who travelled to the Holy Land 15 years earlier.

Sir Charles Barry is celebrated for his design of the Houses of Parliament in London. However, what is not as well known is that his success prior to this was attained by a series of architectural surveys he produced of the Holy Land in 1819. Among these was a drawing of the façade of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. At the time of this research, this is the first known image of the ladder ever produced.

Interestingly, the ladder does not appear in an Ernest Breton image from 1843 or a W.H. Bartlett image from 1842. These omissions could be the result of an artistic decision not to include the ladder, but this is unlikely. In the preface to his book, Walks About the City and Environs of Jerusalem, Bartlett explicitly states that the illustrations therein were meant to portray what he saw as accurately as possible; nothing was added for the sake of beauty.

Images of the façade indicate that the ladder is necessary to reach the window above; access to either side is blocked by a wall. In some, pots are depicted, while in others there are people along the balcony and on the ladder. Most of these images were produced during the Holy Week, the pinnacle of pilgrimage each year. Almost every image produced since the Barry sketch features not only the ladder but also a railing of some sort between the columns of the eastern window. Adding to the mystery is the occasional exclusion of the ladder entirely. The ladder is elusive, only showing up consistently after 1843.

Describing the ceremony of the washing of the feet in the courtyard of the Holy Sepulchre, a traveler, observing from the belfry tower in 1909, noted that “one great window space, with red and green shutters and before it a railing, was reserved for the pasha of Jerusalem.” The pasha and other Ottoman dignitaries were often associated with the Holy Week. Their responsibilities to keep the peace and collect taxes required their presence at any event as chaotic as Easter at the Sepulchre.

The evidence from these accounts and images depicting people along the ledge, roped off from the rest of the spectators, may indicate that the ladder was once used to access the balcony which functioned as premium seating for the Jerusalem elite and Armenian clergy during the Easter ceremonies. The crowds at the Holy Sepulchre are consistently described as rowdy, and upper-level seating would surely provide a measure of solace. The ladder’s absence in some images indicates that it was not set permanently in place until the 1853 status quo. Pottery on the balcony also indicates that priests were either growing plants or receiving supplies there, a distinct possibility considering the heavy taxes being levied on entrants to the church by the Turkish government.

11. Patterns of History

In all of this complex history, it is reasonable to conclude four things. First, the status quo was implemented as a result of centuries of veneration of the structure coming to a head as bitter rivalries consumed the politics of the church. Second, the ladder, which originally appeared in or before 1819 and only when it served a purpose to the Armenians, is an artifact of the 1853 edict, persisting through fires, an earthquake, and several periods of restoration.
Third, beyond some possible, occasional use by Armenian clergy, the ladder now serves a second function: a constant reminder of the failure of the status quo as a warden of the church’s integrity. Lastly, when taking into consideration all of the factors dividing the communities within the church, the status quo, heralded by the infamous ladder, appears to be a root cause of the animosity and degradation of the structure and, as such, should be retooled or done away with completely.

Throughout this account of the church’s history, patterns have emerged. In one way or another, each owner’s creation has acted as a mold for the next generation of guardians of the site. Ousterhout asserts that this is a direct result of the sacred properties attributed to the structure itself, and it is this veneration that explains why the status quo became necessary to control the abject paranoia between the six communities. This may define a method to the madness that is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, but it can never begin to explain the unfettered irrationality with which the various sects act. The communities may battle for a larger share of the sacred structure, but the bitterness cannot be based solely on proprietary rights defined by an 1853 edict. A ladder does not sit in place for the better part of two centuries to accommodate a law that no government truly cares to enforce. If the ladder were to disappear overnight, which has happened on more than one occasion, the Israeli police would not instantly be on the case, making arrests, and interrogating witnesses. It is the communities within that continue to push this issue to the authorities. It is this sad state of affairs in which grown men, holy men who cannot cooperate under any but the most extreme circumstances, would leave such a reminder for the entire world to see.

The ladder is a physical manifestation of the error, not only of the status quo which is far too often scapegoated for this situation, but of the bitter feuds between men of God at the site that should be held most dear. Its presence above the entrance to the Holy Sepulchre personifies the folly of such an arrangement. In order for the church to survive, the status quo and all the animosity associated therewith must be removed. Countless examples of delays, failed attempts, and broken contracts to rebuild the church since the 19th century provide all the evidence that is needed. While the perception of a promising new era remains fresh in the minds of many, the headlines continue to cast a shadow over the church. A 2004 article from The Times tells an all-too-familiar story: the Deir al-Sultan monastery is in need of repair, and a collapse is imminent.84 A 2008 BBC news article features a video of monks engaged in a fistfight after Greek clergy tried to intrude during an Armenian ceremony.

As for the ladder, though its true origins may never be fully determined, it can only be hoped that it does not become yet another relic of pilgrim speculation. The church has long shown its proclivity for absorbing and assimilating the superstitions and fables of its visitors. Chapels have been added commemorating events that have no relation to the site; relics have been created and distributed to the point of absurdity. Structure has been built atop structure ad nauseum in various, misguided efforts to preserve the sanctity of stones that hold no more religious significance than having been witness to countless, senseless examples of violence and inhumanity spanning two millennia. No matter the outcome, the ladder now stands ominously as a harbinger of whatever fate befalls the Holy Sepulchre.

12. Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Dr. Jelena Bogdanović, ECU School of Art and Design, for her help in researching and editing, and Dr. James Lancaster for his help tracking down some of the more obscure references on this subject.

13. Endnotes

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