ДАНИ СВ. ЦАРА КОНСТАНТИНА И ЦАРИЦЕ ЈЕЛЕНЕ



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ЗБОРНИК РАДОВА XII

НКЦ

Graham Jones

HOLY CROSS AND HOLY FIRE: PLACE, NAME AND METAPHOR IN THE NARRATIVE OF HOLY HELENA

The sign of the Cross lies at the centre of the Constantinian epic. It inspired the emperor's victory at the Milvian Bridge, emblemises the Edict of Milan, and, in the supposed discovery of the 'True Cross' by his mother Helena, crowned the triumph of the new religion at the epicentre of its origins.

The posthumously sainted Helena's role as co-patron with her son of fire-dance rituals continuing today in Thrace and Macedonia was discussed at the 2012 symposium – noting parallels elsewhere in the world and in Antiquity. Links between fire-walking and the Greek Helen were reviewed, as well as calendar commemorations of Helena and Constantine relative to the seasons and the natural world.[1]

This paper examines a further seasonal fire ritual associated with Constantine and Helena, the Easter Fire ceremony in the Holy Sepulchre church in Jerusalem. It looks at the devotional complex which Constantine's church replaced and how Helena's part in her son's programme of reappropriation, and her supposed discovery of the Cross, may have picked up on, and given new life to aspects of that site's successive devotional uses. Broadening out to Bethlehem and Sinai, it explores patterns of devotion connecting Constantine's new religion to its precursors, and asks how ideas about Helena might have played in an age of fluid beliefs and layered meaning.

The Easter Fire

The fervour of Thracian fire-walkers and Iranian fire-leapers is clear, but the reaction of worshippers to the 'miracle' of the Holy Fire, central ceremony of Easter Eve in the church of the Holy Sepulchre, must be seen to be believed.[2]

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1 Graham Jones, 'Earth, fire, and water: Constantine and Helen in the ethnographic heritage of Europe and its neighbourhood', in Miša Rakocija, *Niš and Byzantium XI: The Collection of Scientific Works* (Niš, University of Niš, 2013), pp. 385-408, hereafter Jones, 'Heritage'.

2 An extensive literature on the event includes Otto Meinardus, 'The cemermony of the Holy Fire in the Middle Ages and to-day', *Bulletin de la Societe d'Archaeologie Copte* 16 (1961-62), pp. 242-53.



Fig. 1 Easter Fire celebrations in Holy Sepulchre Church, Jerusalem, 2008. Photograph from the Offical Website, < http://www.churchoftheholy-sepulchre.net/>.

Сл. 1. Прослава ускршњег Светог пламена у цркви Светог гроба, Јерусалим, 2008. Фотографија са званичног веб сајта, < http://www.churchoftheholysepulchre.net/>.

The enormous crush of people around the free-standing Aedicule which encloses what Christians widely accept to be Christ's tomb lifted me off my feet in 2010 and carried me forward while a woman nearby cried out that she was being crushed and feared a heart attack.

On the northern side of the Aedicule, out of sight, but not sound, of the main entrance, a Syrian Orthodox priest had climbed on to the steel girder lattice which keeps the Aedicule from collapse and was whipping up the enthusiasm of young men, some riding piggy-back – an enthusiasm which regularly leads to scuffles with other denominations. An honorary Armenian for the occasion, wearing an Armenian lapel-badge, I was stopped by Syrians at the western end of the Aedicule and told 'This is Syrian space.' This boistrousness and animosity is of long standing. *Circa* 1807 a German Arabist observed that the Armenians were 'composed' but the 'Greeks' (meaning Syrian Orthodox, or Jacobites) 'behaved most indecently… so noisy that my ears rang'.[3] A recent witness observed that much of the rowdiness is the loud singing by 'the Arabs' (i.e. the Syrians) of communal anthems – 'We are the Christians, and shall be for evermore!' – accompanied by piggy-back drummers.[4]

At last the Patriarchs arrived, preceded by a Dragoman setting the pace with the strike of his staff, and entered the tomb. Then began a period of heightening tension. A shaft of sunlight pierced onto the Aedicule as the sun passed overhead, triggering shouts of anticipation. Everyone has at least one taper – a bunch or two is common. After several false reports the Patriarchs emerge with the year's Paschal Candle. Several thousand voices roar as four waiting acolytes

3 Ulrich Seetzen, *Resien durch Syrien, Palästina, etc.* (Berlin, G. Reimer, 1854-59), cited in F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 571-72, and Richard D. Hecht, 'The construction and management of sacred time and space: *Sabta Nur* in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher', in Roger Friendland and Deirdre Boden (eds), *NowHere: Space, Time, and Modernity* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994), pp. 181-235, hereafter Hecht, '*Sabta Nur*', at p. 181.

4 Niels Christian Hvidt, *Miracles: Encounters Between Heaven and Earth* (Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 2002), pp. 203-29, hereafter Hvidt, 'Miracles'.

light their own large candles and run to the four corners of the building to begin passing the fire from one pilgrim to another. Swiftly the church fills with brightness. Palpable joy lights worshippers' faces. Many pass the flames along their arms and under their chins, believing the Holy Fire harmless. A Russian priest runs from the church to begin taking the Fire to Moscow. Great clanging bells chime with the mood. Easter has begun.



Fig. 2 Easter Fire recipient, Jerusalem, 2010. Photograph by the author.

Сл. 2. Прималац Светог пламена, Јерусалим, 2010. Фотографија аутора.

The Holy Fire ceremony of *Sabta Nur*, Great Saturday – 'a miraculous sign of the unique character of Jerusalem... the very core of the liturgical cycle that reenacted the most central event in the history of salvation'[5] – seemingly evolved from a daily ritual witnessed by the pilgrim Egeria in her visit to Jerusalem and the Holy Places *circa* 383.[6] Called *Lychnicon* by Greek-speakers and by Latins *Lucernare* ('lamp'), it began between four and six, when the bishop of Jerusalem entered the 'cave' and lit a small candle from the flame burning in the *taphos* or burial chamber.[7] With it he would later light other ceremonial lamps. For Easter Saturday's *Lucernarium* the congregation swelled with pilgrims and catechumens,[8] and after the Paschal Candle was lit its flame was passed from candle to candle among them.[9] The ritual brought to life Christ's declaration on Palm Sunday (the Jewish light-drenched Feast of Tabernacles): 'I am the light… he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'[10] Here was a development of the daily evening service called Vespers, with its use of lights, incense, and psalms derived from the dusk hour of sacrifice in the Jewish temple,[11] and hymns including 'Gladsome

5 Hecht, '*Sabta Nur*', pp. 198-99.

6 John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels* ([1999] 3rd edn repr., Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 2002), hereafter Wilkinson, 'Egeria', pp. 65-66 (n.b. p. 65, fn. 6); 68-71; 83; 143-44 (Egeria 24:1-7); *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* ([1977] 2nd edn rev., Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 2002), hereafter Wilkinson, 'Pilgrims', p. 137.

7 For a reconstruction of the tomb and porch in Egeria's time, Wilkinson, 'Egeria', fig. 34, p. 174.

8 Fernand Cabrol, 'Vespers', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 15 (New York, Robert Appleton Company, 1912).

9 First mentioned in the Armenian Lectionary, 417-39: Athanasa Renoux, 'Le Codex Arménien Jérusalem 121', *Patrologia Orientalis* 163 (35/1), 168 (36/2) (1969-1971). James Monti, *The Week of Salvation: History and Traditions of Holy Week* (Huntington, Indiana, Our Sunday Visitor, 1993), pp. 372-73.

10 John, 8:12.

11 Exodus 29:39; Numbers 28:4; Psalm 140:2; Daniel 9:21; 1 Chronicles 23:30: Daniel



Fig. 3 Jerusalem in the time of Vespasian (69-79), after Charles Warren, *The Survey of Western Palestine* (London, Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1884). Note Christ's tomb (heavy dot) in an angle of the Second Wall where Golgotha is also traditionally sited.

Сл. 3. Јерусалим у време Веспасијана (69-79), по: Чарлсу Ворену, Истраживање Западне Палестине, London, Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1884. Обратите пажњу на Христов гроб (велика тачка) у једном углу Другог зида где се такође традиционално налази Голгота.

Light'.[12] As early as *circa* 112, Pliny the Younger writes of Christian liturgical meetings in the morning and evening: '*coetus antelucani et vespertini*'.[13]

The *Lucenarium* – the 'act behind the present-day ceremony of the Holy Fire'[14] – was specifically a prologue to the eucharist celebrating Christ's sacrificial death and Resurrection. Constantine's biographer Eusebius claimed that one Easter in the late second century the churchwardens assigned to fill the lamps, ready to symbolise the Resurrection, noticed there was no more oil. The bishop, Narcissus, ordered them to be filled with water and then lit – upon which every lamp burned as if filled with pure oil. Eusebius commented: 'A small portion of it has been preserved even to our day by many of the brethren there as a memento of the wonder.'[15] Narcissus had reason to take an interest in the Easter celebration. Elected *circa* 179, he presided at the Council of Palestinian bishops at Cæsaria in 195 which, in common with provinces elsewhere, decided Easter should be celebrated on a Sunday, and not at the Jewish feast of Passover, the 14th of Nisan regardless of the day of the week, as practised by the churches of Asia.[16]

The English Willibald, later bishop of Eichstätt, who lived in Palestine 724-726, reported fifteen golden bowls ranged on a shelf at the Tomb, filled with oil and burning day and night, but mentioned no miracle – unless silently implying that no human hand replenished the oil.[17] This is critical, because the

Bonifacius Haneberg, *Die Religiösen Alterthümer der Bibel* (Munich, J. G. Cotta, 1869), p. 362. On Vespers, C. W. Dugmore, 'Canonical hours', in J. G. Davies, *A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London, SCM Press, 1986), hereafter NDLW, pp. 140-47.

12 Armenian Lectionary, above.

13 Betty Radice, *Letters of the Younger Pliny* (New York, Viking, 1976), hereafter Pliny, 'Letters', 10.96-97.

14 Wilkinson, 'Egeria', p. 65, fn. 6.

15 Eusebius of Cæsaria, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6:9.1-3. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series 1 (Buffalo, NY, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890), hereafter Eusebius, 'History'.

16 Eusebius, 'History', 5:23,1-2.

17 *Vita Willibaldi*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *Monumenta Germaniæ Historica*, *Scriptores* 15, 1 (Hanover, 1887), pp. 86-106.

first specific reference to miraculous fire is also from the eighth-century (or possibly the ninth), in the *vita* of Theodore the Sabaite.[18] Also, Holy Sepulchre had been burnt, with Jerusalem's other churches, by the Persian Choesroe II in 614 and lay ruined until its reconstruction and the return of the Cross after the Persians' defeat by Heraclius in 629. The next account comes from Bernard the Wise, perhaps from Mont St Michel in France, who spent at least four-and-a-half months in the Holy Land *circa* 870. He wrote of a fire which descended every Easter to light the lamps hung around the tomb during the singing by the gathered faithful of the 'Kyrie eleison', fire then transmitted by the patriach to bishops, clergy, and people.[19]

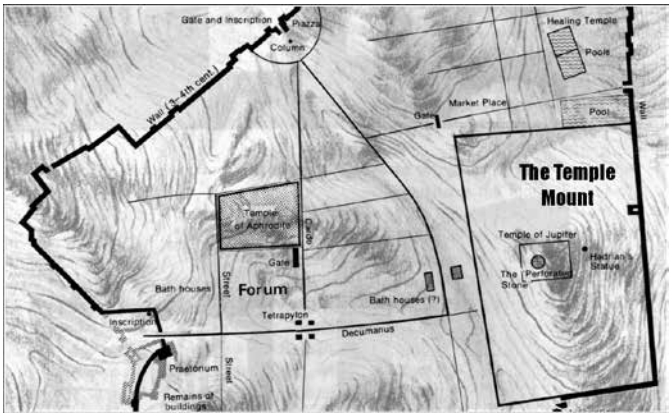


Fig. 4 Central Jerusalem after the city's rebuilding by Hadrian as Aelia Capitolina. A Temple of Venus/Aphrodite on a made-up platform covers the site of Golgotha and Christ's Tomb. A Temple of Jupiter replaces the Jewish Temple. After Thomas Harlan, *Oath of Empire: The Gate of Fire* (New York, Tor, 2000). An alternative view is that the Venus temple's precinct was occupied by a basilica related to the Forum to the south, e.g. Mary Taliaferro Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000). In either case the Calvary Rock (Fig. 10) would have intruded awkwardly and prominently.

Сл. 4. Централни Јерусалим након обнове града од стране Хадријана као Aelia Capitolina. Храм Венере/ Афродите на направљеној платформи прекрива место голготе и Христовог гроба. Јупитеров храм замењује јеврејски храм. По: Томасу Харлану, Заклетва царства: Ватрена капија, Oath of Empire: The Gate of Fire (New York, Tor, 2000. Алтернативно виђење је да је околина Венериног храма била заузета базиликом у вези са Форумом на југу, нпр.: Мери Таљаферо Боутрајт, Хадријан и градови римске империје, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000. У било ком случају, (Калвари Рок, сл. 10) би незгодно и видљиво упадао.

At what point did ritual become 'miracle', if not with Narcissus? Richard Hecht saw the ceremony as a miraculous interpretation of Egeria's Easter *Lucenarium* in line with similar pilgrim reports of biblical site miracles: thus the fountain of Gerasa flowed with wine at Epiphany, a column in the nave of St George's church at Diospolis ran with blood for three hours on the saint's day, the Jordan cured the sick, crippled and barren, and the church of the Nativity at Bethlehem imparted cures.[20] Even so, the convergence with wider and older cultural celebrations of fire and light is impossible to ignore. For

[18] A. A. Vasiliev, 'The Life of St Theodore of Edessa', *Byzantion* 16 (1942-43), pp. 165-225.

[19] *Itinerarium Bernardi monachi Franci*, in Titus Tobler (ed.), *Descriptiones Terrae Sanctae ex Saeculo VIII, IX, XII, et XV* (Leipzig, J. C. Hinrichs, 1874), pp. 85-100, at pp. 92-93. See also Andrew Jotischky, 'The Christians of Jerusalem, the Holy Sepulchre and the Origins of the First Crusade', *Crusades*, *Journal of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East*, 7 (Farnham, Ashgate Publishing, 2008), hereafter Jotischky, 'Christians', pp. 35-57.

[20] Hecht, '*Sabta Nur*', p. 199.

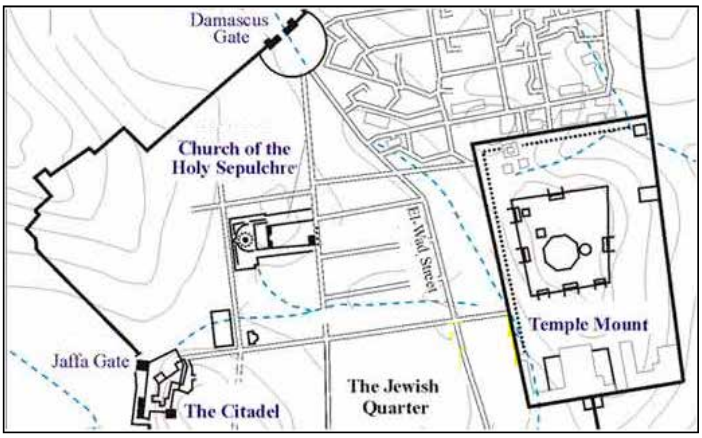


Fig. 5 Central Jerusalem today, showing Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Temple Mount.

Сл. 5. Централни Јерусалим, данас, приказујући цркву Светог гроба и Храмову Гору.

example, it is one of three annual occasions linking commemoration of Constantine and Helena with rituals associated with fire. May 3 customs of St Helen in Britain, involving transhumance and first Spring sowing, replaced Celtic ceremonies featuring fires, and coincide with the May Day festival which in southern Turkey celebrates the last rains of Spring and includes visits to saints' tombs. May 21/22 is the joint feast of Constantine and Helena, marking transhumance in the southern Balkans and fire-walking in Thrace.[21] The May commemorations are fixed in the solar calendar, whereas Easter swings to and fro with the full moon of the Spring equinox. All are fixed to astronomical cycles, nonetheless. The solar equinox, around March 21, is both the date of the Iranian and Kurdish festival of Nowruz, New Year, linked to calving and similar celebrations around sheep husbandry, and the historical beginning of the Christians' Holy Week. Christ's Passion was first dated to March 25, and Christ is characterised by St John as both Lamb of God and Good Shepherd. It has been suggested that the Holy Fire was an attempt to make the theology of Christ's Resurrection easier for potential converts from Zoroastrianism and adherents of Cybele, whose consort Attis' rebirth Romans celebrated on March 25.[22]

In short, Hecht's explanation is attractive, but leaves the picture incomplete. (This is not the place to review the event as miracle or dissimulation.[23]) Furthermore, fourth-century developments at Jerusalem, including the building of Holy Sepulchre and development of *Lucenarium*, need to be located within Constantinian *realpolitik* and reaction to earlier appropriation of the site by Hadrian, with whom Hagith Sivan has argued Constantine was concerned to be favourably compared.[24]

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21 Jones, 'Heritage'. pp. 386-92.

22 Stephen Graham, *With the Russian Pilgrims to Jerusalem* (London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1916), hereafter Graham, 'Pilgrims', pp. 237-38.

23 On doubts in the tenth-century, Paul Riant (ed.), Jerusalem Holy Sepulchre MS 73, ff. 307-12, *Archives de l'Orient Latin* 1 (Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1881), pp. 375-82, cited by Jotischky, 'Christians', pp. 43-44; in the nineteenth, Claude R. Conder, *Tent Work in Palestine* (2 vols, London, Richard Bentley and Son, 1879) 1, p. 345, cited in Hecht, '*Sabta Nur*', p. 181; in the twenty-first, Pravda, English online edition, April 3, 2009, <http://english.pravda.ru/science/mysteries/04-03-2009/107182-holy_fire-0/>, accessed December 26, 2013.

24 Hagith Sivan, 'A passage through Palestine: Note on Eusebius' *Vita Constantini*

Helena, Venus, and the Morning Star

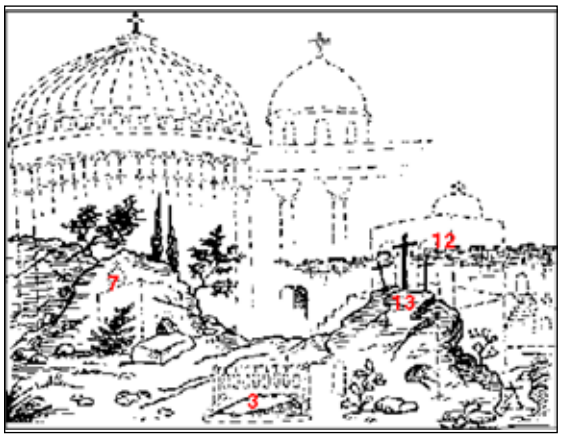


Fig. 6 Artist's impression of Golgotha (13), and the Tomb (7) as recovered by Constantine and incorporated in the Constantinian basilica, including the chapel of Calvary (12) and the Stone of Anointment (3). Diagram by Berthold Werner.

Сл. 6. Уметниково виђење Голготе (13), и Гроба (7) које је Константин повратио и уградио у Константинову базилику, укључујући капелу Калвари (12) и плочу Миропомазања (3). Дијаграм Бертолд Вернер.

Across four generations between 33 and 122, Golgotha/Calvary seems certain to have been remembered – and probably increasingly visited – as the place of Jesus' execution and burial.[25] Joan Taylor's suggestion that the execution site lay 200m further south and was 'quietly forgotten' discounts its huge salvific attraction.[26] Concurrently the Resurrection story developed as the idea of Jesus' divinity grew among groups at first predominantly Jewish but progressively more Gentile. Their devotion centred on the Passover ritual and development of a Christian interpretation expressed through the Easter vigil, whose liturgy focused on night and the coming dawn of a new era. The ancient *Exsultet* declares, 'In this night Moses led the Chosen People through the Dead Sea… In this night Christ harrowed hell…'[27] Jesus, in Luke's Gospel, is 'the dayspring from on high', the sunrise, which 'hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.'[28] Jesus was the prophesised 'Sun of Righteousness' who would 'arise with healing in his beams'.[29]

Following the destructions visited on Jerusalem after the Jewish Revolt of 70, Hadrian reconstructed the city from 122 as Aelia Capitolina – incorporating his family name – and recreated Rome's Capitol Hill by substituting for the Jews' Second Temple a temple of Jupiter, sky-god and supreme civic deity. Jews were expelled after the Bar Kochba revolt of 132-35 but Christians of one stripe

1.19', 'Saint Emperor Constantine and Christianity' conference, Niš University, May 31-June 3, 2013, hereafter Sivan, 'Palestine'.

25 Aramaic *golgotha*, Greek *kranion*, 'skull'; Latin *calva*, 'scalp without hair'.

26 Joan E. Taylor, 'Golgotha: A reconsideration of the evidence for the sites of Jesus' Crucifixion and Burial', *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998), pp. 180-203; hereafter Taylor, 'Golgotha *Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993), hereafter Taylor, 'Christians', criticised by Robert B. Ibach, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 620 (October-December 1998), pp. 474-75; Stephan Borgehammar, *Church History* 63.2 (June 1994), pp. 253-54; J. D. Wilkinson, *Journal of Theological Studies* 45.1 (April 1994), pp. 304-06.

27 Armenian Lectionary. See also Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York, Pueblo Publishing, 1986), pp. 48-49.

28 Luke 1:78-79, phrases from Malachi 3:20, Isaiah 9:1.

29 Malachi 4:2-3.



Fig. 7 Further impression of the incorporation of the holy places into Constantine's temple. After Michel Zabé *et al*, *Die Grabeskirche von Jerusalem* (Stuttgart, Belser Verlag, 2000).

Сл. 7. Даљие импресије о уградњи светих места у Константинов храм. По: Маклу Забе ет ал, Die Grabeskirche von Jerusalem, Stuttgart, Belser Verlag, 2000.

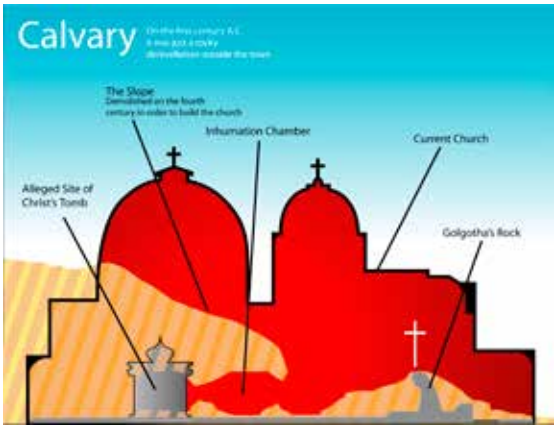


Fig. 8 The Constantinian excavations relative to the outline of the present church. Drawn by Luis Javier Rodriguez Lopez for Wikipedia.

Сл. 8. Константиновска ископавања релевантна на план садашње цркве. Цртеж Луис Хавијер Родригез Лопез за Википедију.

or another probably remained. A second temple, of Venus/Aphrodite, accompanied by a statue of Jupiter, was built on the Golgotha site, surrounded by a *temenos* wall with its entrance on the north-south *cardus maximus*.[30]

After his adoption of Christianity, Constantine decreed a programme of restoration. The temple and its plinth were dismantled, and the ground excavated to reveal once more the site of burial and the full height of Golgotha. A basilica was built at the eastern end of the site, fronting Hadrian's *cardo* and perhaps using *spoilia* from the temple. A *triportico* courtyard (eventually succeeded by the *chorus dominorum* of the Crusader Katholikon) was laid out on the basilica's west flank, with Calvary as an isolated knoll in its south-east corner.[31] Consecration was in 335 on September 13, now the autumnal Holy Cross Day and coinciding with both Constantine's *tricennalia* and the Roman feast of Jupiter Optimus Maximus.[32]

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[30] See the Franciscans' and Christus Rex web-site, <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/jhs/TSsptemp.html>, accessed May 25, 2013. Text by John Abela based on articles and research by Virgilio C. Corbo, *Il Santo Sepolcro di Gerusalemme* (3 vols, Jerusalem, Franciscan Printing Press, 1981-1982), hereafter Corbo, 'Sepolcro', Michele Piccirillo, and Eugenio Alliata. Photos, SBF-Jerusalem Archives.

[31] Corbo, 'Sepolcro', esp. Vol. 2, diagrams 1, 3, 6; Martin Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* (Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp. 53-73.

[32] E. D. Hunt, 'Constantine and Jerusalem', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 48

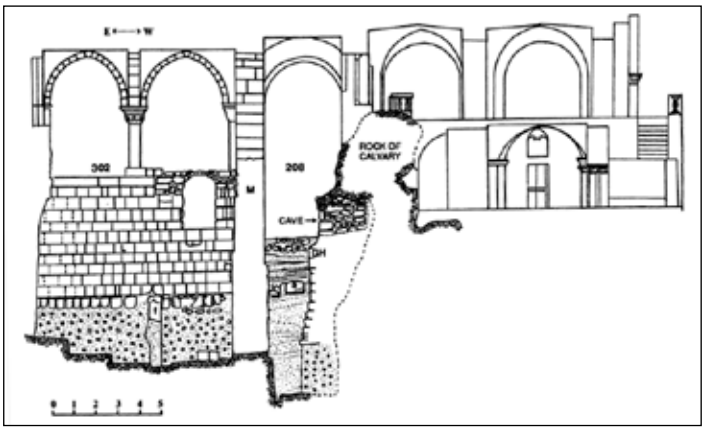


Fig. 9 Church of the Holy Sepulchre: Calvary Rock relative to archaeological levels. After Joan Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, Fig. 11.

Sl. 9 Crkva Svetog groba Gospodnjeg: stena golgote u odnosu na arheoloski nivo. Po Joan Taylor, *Hriscani i sveta mesta*, sl. 11.

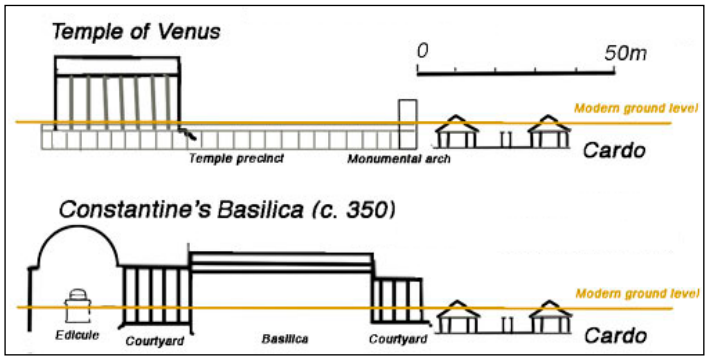


Fig. 10 Jerusalem, cross-sections of Temple of Venus/Aphrodite, above, and Constantine's reconstruction, below. After Shimon Gibson and Joan Taylor, *Beneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre*

Сл. 10. Јерусалим, пресек Венериног/Афродитиног храма, изнад, и Константинова обнова, испод. По Шимону Гибсу и Џоан Тејлор, (испод цркве Светог Гроба

As civic planning, the Venus/Aphrodite temple immediately north of the Forum, the medieval and present Muristan market-place, looks unremarkable. The choice of deity seems purposeful, too: Hadrian was also remodelling Rome, where he built a double temple of Venus Felix and Roma Aeterna, with Venus facing onto the Forum.[33] Two features give pause for thought. First, building up the ground for its platform entailed burying the Golgotha garden, a disused quarry with rock-cut tombs.[34] That Venus was associated with gardens[35] may have been relevant, but in later Christian eyes this was a straight-forward slight. Eusebius called it an attempt 'to obscure

(1997), pp. 419ff.

[33] David Watkin, *The Roman Forum* (London, Profile, 2009), pp. 53-54. Taylor, 'Golgotha: A reconsideration of the evidence for the sites of Jesus' Crucifixion and Burial', *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998), pp. 180-203.

[34] Shimon Gibson and Joan E. Taylor, *Beneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem : the archaeology and early history of traditional Golgotha* (London, Palestine Exploration Fund, 1994).

[35] See e.g. Maureen Carroll, 'Exploring the Sanctuary of Venus and its sacred grove. Politics, cult and identity in Roman Pompeii', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 78 (2010), pp. 63-106.



Fig. 11 Babylonian grain-god figure, believed to be Tammuz, before seated grain-goddess. From Sumerian seal, *circa* 4000 BCE. Stephen Herbert Langdon, *The Mythology of All Races, 5, Semitic* (Boston, Marshall Jones, 1931, repr. New York, Cooper Square, 1964), p. 90, fig. 47.

Сл. 11. Фигура вавилонског бога житарица, за кога се сматра да је Тамуз, пред богињом житарица која седи. Са сумерског печата, око 4000 пне. Стивен Херберт Лангдон, Митологија свих раса, 5, Semitic, Boston, Marshall Jones, 1931, repr. New York, Cooper Square, 1964, p. 90, fig. 47



Fig. 12 Sin, the Babylonian moon god, with his daughter Ishtar (Aphrodite/Venus) holding her star.

Сл. 12. Син, вавилонски бог месеца, са својом ћерком Иштар (Афродита/ Венера) која држи своју звезду.

the truth' represented by the 'sacred cave'. In this 'impious and godless' 'folly', 'earth was brought from a distance with much labour, and covered the entire spot; then, having raised this to a moderate height, they paved it with stone, concealing the holy cave beneath this massive mound'.[36] Second, the tip of Calvary may have been left uncovered. Jerome, in a letter to Paulinus in 395, wrote that 'since the times of Hadrian up to the empire of Constantine, for almost 180 years, [a] statue of Jupiter was venerated on the place of the Resurrection and on the rock of the cross a marble statue of Venus'.[37] The placing of the Venus/Aphrodite statue may have taken advantage of an outcrop, but why was the rock not simply removed and the statue placed on a plinth at the most appropriate spot in the temple?[38] (The temple had a number of devotional places.[39]) Was this too a slight, only shortly after prosecutions of Christians engaged imperial attention in 112, or, more benignly, a mark of recognition and integration?[40]

It is difficult to dismiss the likelihood that Christians already prayed at the tomb and Calvary in Hadrian's day, that the ruined city where 'the best among the Hebrews' had 'stretched forth his arms upon a fruitful tree', echoed to 'the sound of inspired hymns'.[41] It has been suggested that Jewish-Christians prayed

36 Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3:26.

37 Jerome, *Epistola 58 ad Paulinus*, c. 3.

38 For the archaeology of the Hadrianic levels, Taylor, 'Christians', pp. 115-16.

39 Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.36, refers to numerous 'idols' and 'accursed altars'.

40 Pliny, 'Letters', 10:96.

41 Ernest Rénan, 'The Emperor Hadrian and Christianity', *The North American Review* 127, no. 265 (November-December, 1878), hereafter Rénan, 'Hadrian', pp. 492-508, p. 498, quoting Judaeo-Christian Sibyllines, 5:256-59. See now Marco Rizzi (ed.), *Hadrian and the Christians* (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2010).

in an artificial cave in the side of the Rock and venerated the Tomb.[42] The Bordeaux Pilgrim in the 330s reported a baptismal pool near Constantine's basilica.[43] If Eusebius correctly placed the origin of the Holy Fire precursor, *Lucernarium*, in the late second century, where did it take place, and did it preserve a memory of ritual *before* Hadrian's appropriation of Golgotha?[44]



Fig. 13 Aphrodite (holding Eros) with Anchises, father of her child Aeneas. Selene (Moon, top left) indicates night (Museum of Aphrodisias, Turkey).

Сл. 13 Афродита (држи Ероса) са Анхисом, оцем њеног детета Енеје. Селена (Месец, горе лево) означава ноћ (Музеј Афродизијас, Турска).

Hadrian's culture was Greek. He 'accepted no religion... nor did he deny any of them'. A slight to the Christians was, it has been asserted, 'undesigned'. Nevertheless, his supervisor of the rebuilding, the Greek Aquila of Sinope, was reported to have joined, and then been expelled from the Christian community; he became a Jew and nursed resentment.[45] If desecration was indeed an additional motive, the choice of Venus/Aphrodite becomes intriguing in a way which goes beyond her civic function. To explore it, a good starting-point is the Easter Vigil liturgy, 'solemnity of solemnities, far exalted above all others' (Gregory of Nazianzus, 329-389), 'mother of all vigils' (Augustine, 354-430), 'retained with astonishing fidelity' and still observed nocturnally at thousands of churches though in the Middle Ages – as with the Holy Fire ceremony today – it gradually became a daytime event.[46] As the flame from the Paschal Candle, ceremonially lit outside the church door, passes from candle to candle through the congregation until the church is flooded with light, the deacon proclaims 'Let earth be glad, as glory floods her, ablaze with light from her eternal King' and brings the ancient *Exsultet* to its climax:

'O truly blessed night which despoiled the Egyptians and enriched the Hebrews: night in which heaven is united with earth, and humanity with divinity. We beseech thee therefore, O Lord, that this candle, consecrated in the honour of thy Name, may continue to dispel the darkness of this night. And being

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42 Bellarmino Bagatti and Emmanuele Testa, e.g. *Il Golgota e la Croce Ricerche Storico-Archaeologiche* (Jerusalem, Franciscan Printing Press, 1978). Origen, commentary on Matthew 27:33, reported that some 'Hebrews' believed Adam was buried at Golgotha.

43 C. W. Wilson (ed.), *Itinerary from Bordeaux to Jerusalem. 'The Bordeaux Pilgrim*, trs. Aubrey Stewart (London, Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1887). A cistern?: Christus Rex website, fn. 29.

44 On the lack of information about the Christians' central meeting place, Jan Willem Drijvers, *Cyril of Jerusalem: Bishop and City* (Leiden, Brill, 2004), p. 7, fn. 29, and on doubts about the historicity of the sacred sites, *ibid*, pp. 15-16.

45 Rénan, 'Hadrian', pp. 496, 493, 503.

46 J. D. Crichton, 'Paschal Vigil', NDLW, pp. 425-26. K. W. Stevenson, 'The ceremonies of light – their shape and function in the Paschal vigil liturgy', *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 99 (1985), 2, pp. 170-85.

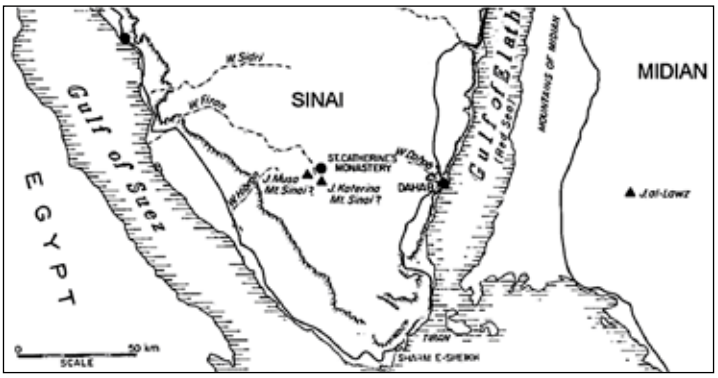


Fig. 14 Location of St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, and Jebel Musa (Mount Moses), in southern Sinai.

Сл. 14. Локација манастира Св. Катарине, Синајска Гора, и Јебел Муса (Мојсијева Гора), у јужном Синају.

accepted as a sweet savour, may it be united with the lights supernal. May the morning star find it burning: that morning star, I say, which knows no setting. That (star) which being returned from the depths, shineth serene upon the human race.'

Alan Watts observed that elsewhere the 'Morning Star' stood for Lucifer, fallen from heaven, and the planet Venus, 'representing that love which is from one standpoint divine charity, and from another venereal'. 'This is a wonderful "riddle" of the divine ambivalence, manifesting itself in duality as that star which is both Lucifer and Christ (the 'Day Star', *Phosphorus* in Greek). Cf. 2 Peter 1:19: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the Day Star arise in your hearts".'[47]

The soaring *Exsultet* – Jerome complained of its hyperbole – dates from perhaps the fourth century. Prudentius wrote a hymn for the vigil, *Inventor rutili*, full of allusions to fire and light. The vigil's textual roots are in Scripture.[48] However, Christian nocturnal worship – restricted to the Easter vigil before the time of Tertullian and Cyprian – may have been modelled on practice in older religions such as the Dionysian and Bacchanalian rites and the *Pannychis* of Venus/Aphrodite.[49] Venus was indeed, it seems, an apposite ruler of the place venerated at the Paschal full moon by Christians. Moreover, Jupiter was not here accompanied by his consort Juno and the wisdom deity Minerva as on Rome's Capitoline Hill. Rather, the king of gods, standing for action, is matched with Venus/Aphrodite who rules supreme in matters of the heart. The Babylonians named her planet after Ishtar, personification of womanhood and goddess of love and heaven.[50] Like the ancient Egyptians, the Greeks believed

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47 Alan W. Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (New York, Grove Press, 1954), hereafter Watts, 'Myth', pp. 176-77.

48 Jerome Gassner, 'The Exsultet', *Orate Fratres*, March 23, 1947. R. F. Buxton, 'Easter', in NDLW, pp. 218-220.

49 Anton Baumstark, *Nocturna Laus*, ed. Odilo Heiming, trs. F. L. Cross (Westminster, Maryland, Newman Press, 1957), contested by J. M. Hannsen, 'Nature et Genèse de l'Office des Matines', *Analecta Gregoriana* 57 (Rome, 1952).

50 Wikipedia, 'Venus', <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus>, accessed December 14, 2013.

there were two bodies. They called the morning star Phosphoros, 'Bringer of Light', or Eosphoros, 'Bringer of Dawn'; the evening star Hesperos, 'Star of the Evening'. By Hellenistic times, the Greeks realised the two were the same planet, which they named after *their* goddess of love, Aphrodite, counterpart of Ishtar, Phoenician Astarte, and Hebrew Astarath. In time, Hesperos was translated into Latin as Vesper and Phosphoros as Lucifer, 'Light Bringer' – the latter a poetic term later used to refer to the fallen angel. For Aphrodite the Romans substituted Venus, while Pliny the Elder identified the planet Venus with the Egyptian Isis.[51]

The numinous night was an important Classical theme. In his novel *Metamorphoses*, written in the third quarter of the first century CE, Apuleius had his character Lucius (literally 'as of light', figuring enlightenment) describe his initiation into the mysteries of Isis' resurrected Osiris: 'Understand that I approached the bounds of death; I trod the threshold of Persephone; and after that I was ravished through all the elements... About midnight I saw the sun brightly shine.'[52] Lucius had offered a prayer to the Queen of Heaven, 'principal of the gods celestial, the light of the goddesses', addressing her by her various names – Mother of the Gods, Minerva, Diana, Persephone, Ceres, Juno, Bellona, Hecate, Isis, and, of course, Venus.[53]

The metaphorical pattern of Venus' installation and substitution at Jerusalem is matched by activity during Hadrian's reign at Bethlehem. A Grove (and Temple?) of Adonis developed there – possibly a reply to Christian seizure of a pre-existing temple of Tammuz, Adonis' Semitic counterpart. This too was replaced as part of Constantine's programme of reappropriation. Tradition gave its institution to Helena, though the church was not consecrated until 333.[54] In 395 the locally settled Jerome wrote that the grove of 'Tammuz, which is Adonis', overshadowed 'ours, and the earth's, most sacred spot'. At the grotto 'where the infant Messiah once cried, the paramour of Venus was bewailed'.[55] So Hadrian, directly or otherwise, created an appealing symmetry: at Christ's birthplace Adonis, symbol of perfect manhood, and at the place of Christ's death and Resurrection the symbol of perfect womanhood, Venus/Aphrodite. Moreover, the Greek Ἄδωνις was a borrowing from Semitic *adon*, 'lord',[56] itself related to *Adonai*, one of the names for God (יְהֹוָה) in the Hebrew Bible and still used in Jewish worship today. Syrian Adonis, alias Gauas or Aos, is also akin to Egyptian Osiris, Semitic Baal Hadad, Etruscan Atunis, and Phrygian Attis, all deities of rebirth and vegetation.

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51 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (London, Wernerian Club, 1847), 1, Bk. 2:37, on pp. 72-73.

52 Apulieus, *Metamorphoses*, Ch. 48, cited by Watts, 'Myth'.

53 Apulieus, *Metamorphoses*, Ch. 47.

54 Leland M. Roth, *Understanding Architecture: its Elements, History and Meaning* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1993), pp. 30, 222. See also Giuseppe Ricciotti, *Vita di Gesù Cristo* (Rome, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1948), p. 276 fn.

55 Jerome, *Epistle* 58.

56 W. Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, trs. John Raffan (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1985, repub. 1990), hereafter Burkert, 'Religion', pp. 176-77.

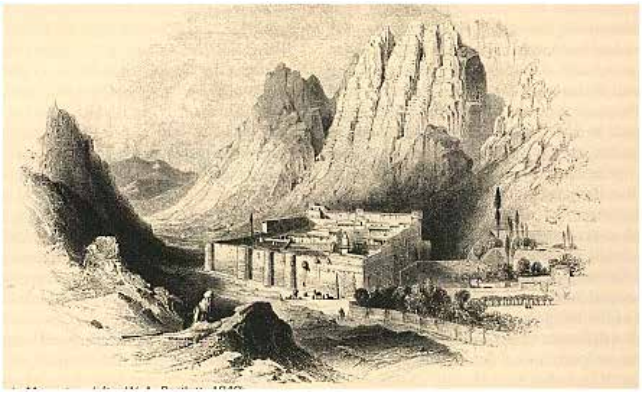


Fig. 15 St Catherine's monastery overlooked by Jebel Musa. W[illiam] A. Bartlett, *Forty Days in the Desert* (London, Arthur Hall & Co., 1848).

Сл. 15. Манастир Св. Катарине, поглед са Јебел Муса. Вилијам А. Бартлет, Четрдесет дана у пустињи, London, Arthur Hall & Co., 1848.

The grove has been tentatively attributed to Syrian immigrants following the post-Bar Kochba expulsion of the Jews.[57] The latter 'gave free rein to the development of pagan cults. Tammuz was beloved by farmers as the personification of the seed which dies and springs to life again.'[58] He had certainly been venerated by women in Palestine at least since the fifth century BCE: On the north gate of the Temple 'sat women weeping for Tammuz.'[59] In Greece, where Adonis may have arrived with Aphrodite, Burkert concluded that the special function of the legend was to allow 'the unbridled expression of emotion in the strictly circumscribed life of women, in contrast to the rigid order of *polis* and family with the official women's festivals in honour of Demeter'.[60] Women in Athens would plant 'Adonis Gardens', quick-growing herbs that sprang up from seed and died. The Festival of Adonis was celebrated by women after midsummer by sowing fennel and lettuce, and grains of wheat and barley. The plants sprang up soon, and withered quickly, and women mourned for the death of the vegetation god.[61] They mourned in Rome also, where at the temple of Venus, Ovid observed, matrons mourned Adonis 'with Assyrian rites'.[62] At Heliopolis in Phoenicia, Constantine proscribed aspects of women's involvement in the worship of Aphrodite as Venus – and built a church.[63]

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor has argued that the commemoration of Adonis'/ Tammuz' mythical death in the Bethlehem cave may have been intended to interfere with Christian devotions. Bitterness would then reinforce the memory

57 Taylor, 'Christians', p. 109.

58 Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700* (5th edn, rev., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), hereafter Murphy-O'Connor, 'Holy Land', pp. 321-32.

59 Ezekiel, 8.14-15.

60 Burkert, 'Religion', p. 177.

61 Marcel Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis: Spices in Greek Mythology*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 137.

62 Anne Mahoney (ed.), P. Ovidius Naso, *Ovid's Art of Love (in Three Books), the Remedy of Love, the Art of Beauty, the Court of Love, the History of Love, and Amours* (New York, Calvin Blanchard, 1855), carte 35.

63 Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337* (Harvard University Press, 1993), hereafter Millar, 'East', p. 217.

of local tradition attested by Justin, Origen, and Eusebius. 'Pre-Constantinian localizations of sacred sites have greater validity than identifications which first appear in the fourth century' when pilgrims' questions stimulated local guides' imaginations.[64] However, a remark by Origen, *circa* 247, suggests the beliefs coexisted: 'In Bethlehem the cave is pointed out where [Jesus] was born, and the manger in the cave where he was wrapped in swaddling clothes... This sight is greatly talked of in surrounding places, even among the enemies of the faith'.[65] Adonis/Tammuz, portrayed as a shepherd, and Christ the Good Shepherd competed for a single audience. Of three known Constantinian temple destructions, one was of Aphrodite's shrine at Aphaca high up on Mount Lebanon near the source of the river Adonis (Nahr Ibrahim), a possible surviving 'Oriental' or Semitic 'high place'.[66] Her temple at Jerusalem had a 'Syrian' gable.[67]

Holy light, holy ground

To the construction of churches at the places of Jesus' birth, and death and burial, Helena was said to have added a third, the Oleana, over a cave at the reputed place of his Ascension fifty days after his Resurrection, the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem.[68] As if to complete the spiritual geography, Constantine's mother was associated moreover with another Mount, that of Sinai, which for Jews and Christians alike symbolised God's Convenant with his Chosen People. Here at the southern tip of the Sinai peninsula, the chapel of St Helen in St Catherine's monastery contains a sarcophagus said to contain the head of Catherine and one of her hands. The convent at the foot of Jebel Mūsa marks the supposed location of the Burning Bush from which the eponymous Moses heard God's command to deliver his people from Egypt.[69] The very bush is believed to grow still from the chapel wall. From Mount Sinai itself, also known as in northern Hebrew tradition as Mount Horeb ('drought', 'desert'), Moses brought down the tablets of Jahweh's Law, the Ten Commandments. Hebrew tradition added that the whole of the legal texts of the Pentateuch[70] was enacted at the foot of this mountain. Legend presents Catherine as a martyr at Alexandria in the time of the Diocletian persecution whose body was brought to the summit of Jebel Katherin, two-and-a-quarter miles south-west of

64 Murphy-O'Connor, 'Holy Land', pp. 321-32.

65 Origen, *Contra Celsum*, ed. M. Borret (Paris, Cerf, 1967), 1.51. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (eds), *Ante-Nicene Fathers, 4* (Buffalo, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

66 Millar, 'East', p. 217.

67 Taylor, 'Christians', p. 113, citing Leo Kadman, *The Coins of Aelia Capitolina* (Jerusalem, Corpus Nummorum Palestinensium, 1956), hereafter Kadman, 'Coins', 23, 74. For survivals of Aphrodite's cult, Hagith Sivan, *Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008).

68 Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 41-43. The site of the present Church of the Pater Noster: Murphy-O'Connor, 'Holy Land', p. 143.

69 Exodus 3:1-4:17, composed of biblical 'J' and 'E' traditions, with the revelation of the name Yahweh (3:9-15) being Elohistic: Donald J. Selby and James King West, *Introduction to the Bible* (New York, Macmillan, 1971), p. 123.

70 From Exodus 20 to Numbers 10.

Jebel Mūsa,[71] but also as a woman whose learning confounded the greatest male scholars brought together to try her. She therefore stands for Sophia, Wisdom, at once the feminised spirit of the Old Testament God and the Logos, God's word personified in Christ. In later medieval legend, Catherine would be portrayed as Christ's betrothed. This was a neat echo of the mystical Jewish reading of the Convenant at Sinai as betrothal of the Hebrew nation to God the bridegroom.[72]

Surrounded by massive walls as if a fortress, the convent is attributed to Justinian in 527. Its church contains mosaics of the seventh or eighth century, and here in 1844 and 1859 Tischendorf found the *Codex Sinaiticus* of *circa* 400. The emperor is said to have built the convent around a tower erected by Helena, but this has been dismissed as a probable confusion with Justinian's construction of a castle for the protection of the monks in the region.[73] Nevertheless, the association with Helena stuck. The chapel of St Helen is certainly held to be older than the church, at the back of whose apse it stands. Once again, the programme attributed to Helena had symmetry, for commemoration of Moses' mountain-top encounter with God was contrapunctal to commemoration of the Apostles' mountain-top experience of Christ's Ascension, the purpose of the church on the Mount of Olives. Moreover, a link to a further mountain-top encounter with the divine lies in the dedication of the convent church in honour of the Transfiguration, the apostolic vision of Christ with Moses and Elijah on the summit of Mount Tabor in Galilee.[74]

As with Hadrian and Constantine's appropriations of the Rock and the Tomb, a defining theme in the understanding of Sinai was light – a light bright as fire. To bring down God's Law, Moses climbs a mountain 'wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain shook violently'.[75] 'The Lord has shown us his majestic presence, and we have heard his voice out of the fire.'[76] At Moses' earlier encounter on the mountain, the Angel of Jahweh appears to him 'in a flame of fire out of a bush'. 'The bush was blazing but not consumed.'[77] With its etymology unresolved,[78] it remains possible that 'bush' stands for something else, conceivably an object of worship. As for the fire, rationalising explanations such as the rays of the setting sun or electrical phenomena have been dismissed. So was the spot was already sacred?[79] 'Remove your sandals, for the place

71 John D. Davis (ed.), *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, rev. and rewritten Henry Snyder Gehman (London, Collins, 1944), hereafter Gehman, 'Dictionary', p. 567.

72 Rachel Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (London, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 2005), hereafter Elior, 'Temples', pp.158-59.

73 Gehman, 'Dictionary', p. 567.

74 Gehman, 'Dictionary', p. 567.

75 Exodus 19:18.

76 Deuteronomy 5:21.

77 Exodus 3:2.

78 Exodus 3:2-4. Archibald R. S. Kennedy, 'Burning Bush', and George E. Post, 'Bush', in James Hastings (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 1 (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1898), pp. 333-34.

79 W. K. Lowther Clarke, *Concise Bible Commentary* (London, SPCK, 1952), hereafter Lowther Clarke, 'Commentary', p. 358.

on which you are standing is holy ground.' A repertoire of magical ritual follows: Moses' staff becomes a snake, his own skin turns colour, and water turns to blood.[80] Moses has married a daughter of the Priest of the Midianites. Now he is told God's name and that Jahweh is the god of his ancestors: 'Jahweh' ('I am') may derive from Ya-u, attested as the name of a West Semitic god before 2000 BCE; Yau(?) is the son of El, 'Lord', the supreme deity in the rather later tablets from Ras Shamra, the ancient Ugarit.[81]



Fig. 16 The 'Burning Bush' at St Helen's Chapel. Photo: Dale Gillard.

Сл. 16. „Грм у пламену" у Капели Св. Јелене. Фотографија: Дејл Гилард

The etymology of Sinai (סִינַי) takes further this sense of pre-existing theophany. It appears to reflect Sin, moon-god of the Babylonians,[82] whose worshipppers indeed removed their footwear when entering their temples. With Shamash the sun-god, Sin ranked next to the triad of supreme dieties and the great mother-goddess, fathered Ishtar/Astarte (Jewish Esther) the 'Queen of Heaven' and Babylonian Venus/Aphrodite, and enjoyed numerous epithets. One was *Nannar*, 'the one who gives light' or 'the place of light', but the customary ideograph and most important epithet names him *En-zu*, 'lord of wisdom'. Sin supervised the starry heavens on which the Babylon science of astronomy depended and was god of counsel. Sin also lit the way for the nomads who normally travelled by night.[83]

The double theophany of Sinai, celebrated in St Helen's Chapel and its 'Burning Bush', returns the narrative to Holy Sepulchre and the Easter Fire in a further, striking way. Jewish tradition linked the Covenant with the Festival of Weeks and/or Oaths, Shavuot, whose mystical nature was preserved in Christian tradition as Pentecost, that is, the fiftieth day (having counted seven weeks of seven days) after Passover and Christ's death and Resurrection.[84] Fire again defines the moment. Tongues of flame, manifestation of the Holy Spirit of God, light painlessly on the heads of Christ's apostles. Their images surrounded the tomb of Constantine, who died at Pentecost in 337.

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80 Exodus 3:5, 4:1-9.

81 Lowther Clarke, 'Commentary', p. 359. For the Ras Shamra tablets, S. H. Hooke, *The Clarendon Bible. Old Testament 6, In The Beginning* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1947), pp. 140-42.

82 O. Odelain and R. Séguineau, *Dictionary of Proper Names and Places in the Bible* ([1978] London, Robert Hale, 1991), pp. 354-55; Adrian Room, *Place-Names of the World* (rev. edn, London, Angus & Roberts, 1987), p. 218.

83 Morris Jastrow, 'Religion of Babylon', in James Hastings (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Extra Volume (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1904), pp. 531-84, pp. 541-42; J. Rendel Harris, 'Sinai', in James Hastings (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1902), pp. 536-38.

84 Elior, 'Temples', p. 226.

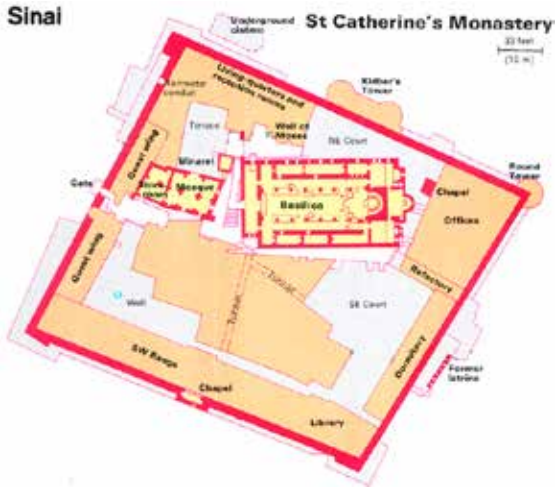


Fig. 17 Plan of St Catherine's monastery. St Helen's/ Burning Bush Chapel marked as 'Chapel' immediately east of the Basilica.

Сл. 17. План манастира Св. Катарине. Капела Св. Јелене /Грм у пламену означена као „Капела" одмах источно од Базилике.

Light is a consistent theme of the Calvary/Golgotha site. Passover and Resurrection occur when 'the world is full of light', the Gospel events beginning 'before it was yet light' with women followers of Jesus finding angels 'in white' flanking the empty cave, and Mary Magdalene metaphorically seeing the light in her encounter with the risen Christ, 'the true light'. From 'new fire', here emanating from the tomb (and across Western Christendom kindled to light first the Paschal Candle), worshippers' tapers are lit, filling the church with light. The Paschal Candle will stay lit throughout the Easter season and at baptisms and funerals throughout the year, a reminder that Christ is 'light and life'. Light is likewise the theme of Hadrian's adaptation of the site. He chooses Venus, Evening and Morning Star, bringer of light, as companion to the sky-god, Jupiter. Eventually the site is restored by command of a man who has been a devotee of the Sun , Sol Invictus,[85] both before and seemingly long after his prophetic vision of the Cross in the fiery sky; while in propagandist texts of the following century the major figure and agent in the restoration of the Cross is his mother, a woman whose name recalls torchlight, salvific florescence, and moonlight. Given the metaphorical power of Helena's name, which shares its root with that of Selenē, the Greek Moon deity, Constantine's mother was in turn an apposite president for the building project whose purpose was to glorify the supposed places of Christ's Paschal Passion and burial, and the empty Tomb of the Resurrection on a night filled with light.

Popular understandings of Helena influenced by ideas about her Greek namesake include Feu d'Hélène, St Elmo's Fire, and the medicinal flower Helenion.[86] Suggestively, agents of new fire in the Greek tradition were Helen's brothers, the Dioscuri.[87] Coins of the Dioscuri as deities of the city were minted at Jerusalem – a distinction shared with Jupiter, Astarte (Aphrodite), Bacchus/ Dionysus, and Serapis.[88] Helena's Greek name, *Helenē*, shares the same lexical

[85] Graham Jones: 'Heeding Helen', 'Constantine and the Grandeur that was Rome' conference, Kellogg College, Oxford, December 10-11, 2013, publication forthcoming.

[86] Graham Jones, 'The power of Helen's name: Heritage and legacy, myth and reality', in Miša Rakocija, *Niš and Byzantium VII: The Collection of Scientific Works* (Niš, University of Niš, 2009), pp. 351-70, hereafter Jones, 'Name', pp. 358-64.

[87] Marian Wenzel, 'The Dioskuri in the Balkans', *Slavic Review* 26 (1967), pp. 363-81.

[88] Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1890), 1:2, p. 317. Venus/Aphrodite/Astarte appears on 40 per cent of coin types

root as Selenē, the Greeks' Moon deity (Latin Luna), and as the noun *helenē*, 'torch' and 'basket', extended to those carried in ceremonies of the Moon as Artemis.[89] Evidence is lacking that Helena was promoted as Luna/Artemis to her son's Sol/Apollo, but no reason to disallow that in the multi-cultural world of Late Antiquity such linkages could arise in urbane or rustic mentalities. Potentially significant is the likely role of propaganda in the *realpolitik* of the Constantinian court, with the families of Constantius' concubine Helena and his wife Theodora locked in contention. The Dowager Empress disappears from the historical record about the time of Constantine's accession.[90] Was a semi-divine role within the imperial cult assigned to, or engineered by Constantine's mother? Then later, did posthumous understanding of these roles and characters influence popular readings of Constantine and Helena in a culture built on metaphor and meaning? The Moon and its cycles were central to motherhood, and Helena was Mother of Emperors.

It remains an open question why Helena became associated with the finding of the Cross, and only in the time of Ambrose at the end of the century.[91] Alongside the possible resonance of her name, one might speculate in relation to Golgotha/Calvary that the pious mother empress was an ideal candidate for re-hallowing of a site known from the dawn visit to the tomb by the women closest to the executed Jesus, including his mother, and then appropriated for the worship of a more ancient myth itself so important to mourning mothers and involving the Queen of Heaven and Mother of Gods in her various guises – all giving way, in one widely-accepted reading, to Mary.[92]

In the myths of Tammuz/Adonis and Christ, the Cult of the Mother and the Cult of the Son overlap problematically. She is the Mother of God and he is the Son of God. As ideas of Christ's divinity merged into the struggle to define the Son and the Father as One, the new religion was coming close to the ambiguity of the old. The 'paramour' of Venus/Aphrodite was her adopted son. Christians resolved the problem through Mary's virginity. With the carnal act out of the picture, Christ could himself be at once chaste and, for example, betrothed to the equally virginal Catherine.

In Helena's imperial progress through the East with its multiple *adventi*, ceremonial civic arrivals, pomp and promotion created awe and won-

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from Aelia, Jupiter on only perhaps six: Kadman, 'Coins', pp. 36-43, cf. Ya'akov Meshorer, *The Coinage of Aelia Capitolina* (Jerusalem, Israel Museum, 1989).

89 Jones, 'Heritage', pp. 391, fig. 6, 400-02.

90 Charles Matson Odahl, *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (New York, Routledge, 2004), p. 293, noted that 'after Helen's reunion with Constantine, his court was cleared of "the other woman" and her children. Julian the Apostate later referred to Helena as the "wicked stepmother" of his father Julius Constantius, and seems to have preserved a family tradition that it was Helena who had kept the children and grandchildren of Theodora away from Constantine's court and public careers for many years.'

91 Discussed by Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*: *The mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden, Brill, 1992).

92 Geoffrey Ashe, *The Virgin: Mary's Cult and the Re-Emergence of the Goddess* (Stroud, The History Press, 2008); Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976, repub. 2013), pp. 333-39..

der.[93] Constantine gave the people a Viceroy who was also the august Mother. Mesmerised by gold and glitter, Greek-speakers and the traditionally pious may have needed only a slight mental shift to conjure thoughts of flaming Helios and moon-bright Helenē, sister of fire-givers and torch of Artemis. Christ and Aphrodite were in contention, but the common people's boundaries of belief were blurred.

Table 1: mythical relationships

Helen*	Artemis***/Diana Selene†	Luna	Helena	Mary	Venus/Aphrodite
wife	sister		mother	mother	lover/mother
Achilles**	Apollo/Helios	Sol /Phoebus†	Constantine	Christ God the Son	Adonis/Tammuz ***

Selene also sister of Eos, the Dawn

*Sister of Castor and Pollux; in one version transformed into a star
**Brought about death of Apollo
*** Artemis kills Adonis
†Derivations: σέλας, 'light'; Phoebus/e, 'Shining'
NB ambiguities in relationships

Грејем Џонс

ЧАСНИ КРСТ И СВЕТА ВАТРА: МЕСТО, ИМЕ И МЕТАФОРА У ПРИЧИ О СВЕТОЈ ЈЕЛЕНИ

Знак Часног крста налази се у центру епа о Константину. Он је инспирација за његову победу на милвијском мосту, амблем је Миланског едикта, и, кроз наводно откриће „часног крста" од стране његове мајке Јелене, крунише тријумф нове вере у самом епицентру свог порекла. На симпозијуму 2012. године, разматрали смо улогу Јелене као заштитнице, са њеним сином, у плесним ритуалима ватре у Тракији и Македонији – ритуалима који имају своју паралелу у другим деловима света а такође и у антици. Утврђено је постојање веза између древног ходања по ватри и грчке Јелене, као и календарске комеморације Јелене и Константина у вези са годишњим добима и светом природе. Овај рад се фокусира на сезонски ритуал ватре који је блиско повезан са Константином и његовом мајком, ускршњу церемонију Светог пламена у цркви Светог гроба у Јерусалиму. Поред тога што разматра актуелна сазнања, овај рад сагледава посвећена здања која је заменила Константинова црква и истражује какав је Јеленин удео у том улагању, и у наводном открићу Часног крста то је можда покупио и дао нови живот аспекту ових здања као зграда светог и заштитничког карактера.

[93] Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.45; Hunt, 'Jerusalem', pp. 418-19. Fabrizio Slavazzi, 'Elena Augusta, i Luoghi e le Residenzi', in Paolo Biscottini e Gemma Sena Chiesa (eds), *L'Editto di Milano e Il Tempo della Tolleranza: Costantino 313 d.C* (Milan, Mondadori Electa, 2012), pp. 136-40.

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