The Church Over Jacob's Well

C. K. Spyridonidis

To cite this article: C. K. Spyridonidis (1908) The Church Over Jacob's Well, Palestine Exploration Quarterly, 40:3, 248-253, DOI: [10.1179/peq.1908.40.3.248](https://doi.org/10.1179/peq.1908.40.3.248)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/peq.1908.40.3.248>

Published online: 20 Nov 2013.

Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)

Article views: 5

View related articles [↗](#)

Vinegar in which maiden-hair fern has been boiled, will cause the hair to grow with marvellous rapidity.

A woman should only cut her hair during the month the vines are pruned. It is said to be both sinful and injurious to the hair to do so at any other time.

To make a dog savage, it is considered necessary to cut off both his ears, while he is still a puppy, fry them and make him eat them.

A donkey or a horse suffering with catarrh of the nose, may be cured by tying a tin vessel to its nostrils, in which blue rags are set to smoulder.

THE CHURCH OVER JACOB'S WELL.

By C. K. SPYRIDONIDIS, Jerusalem.

Communicated by Arch. C. Dickie.

THIS Church was dedicated to one of the most holy spots in Palestine. The identification of the site with the "parcel of a field" bought by Jacob for "an hundred pieces of money," Gen. xxxiii, 19, within which the well was dug, destined to become later the meeting-place of our Lord and the woman of Samaria, St. John iv, 6, is generally accepted. It is situated in the plain at the foot of the great mountain *shoulder* from which the ancient city of Shechem takes its name.

Some authorities, among whom is the Rev. Père Lagrange, find some difficulty in accepting this identification, because of the existence of another spring of "living water" nearer to Sychar,¹ to which, it is argued, the woman of Samaria would most likely have gone for water. This argument is met by the answer that the spring—Ain Defney—was then, probably, private property, and used for irrigation, whereas Jacob's well was public, and accessible to all.

A church dedicated to the well was built by Constantine. The Bordeaux Pilgrim, A.D. 333, writes of Jacob's well at Sychar and of its association with Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and also of the Sycamore trees planted by Jacob, and the bath which was built near the well, but does not mention the church. Paula XVI, A.D. 386, mentions the church, from which it may be inferred that it was built between A.D. 300 and 386. Antoninus Martyr, A.D. 570, writes of a basilica with the

¹ The village of Iskar (Sychar), to which the woman of Samaria belonged, lies north of the well, at the base of Mount Ebal.—A.C.D.

FIG. 1.—THE CHURCH OVER JACOB'S WELL.

FIG. 2.—THE CHURCH OVER JACOB'S WELL.

well enclosed by railings, which were around the altar ; further he says that the church was built in memory of St. John the Baptist,¹ but it is well known that St. John the Baptist Church was in Sebastia.

Arculf, A.D. 670 writes that the church was built outside the walls of Shechem, and its plan was that of a Greek cross, with its arms pointing to the four cardinal points. In the centre of the cross lay the well,² which had a depth of almost 60 metres. At that time the Persians came and destroyed many of the buildings of Palestine. The church appears to have been rebuilt by the Crusaders. It was seen by El Edrisi in 1154, and was destroyed in 1187. Permission has now been obtained to rebuild it, and when this is done, one of the most venerable of Christian Sanctuaries will be preserved for future generations.

The mouth of the well, marked by a X on photograph, is in the crypt, under the high altar. The crypt is approached by two stairs, leading from either side of the sanctuary arch, but the steps seem to be of a later date, as they are irregular. The well head is broken and worn by the friction of ropes by which the water was drawn. The dimensions given by Barclay, *Q.S.*, July, 1881, p. 212, are correct, 3' 9" × 2' 7" × 1' 6" thick. It stands 1' 1" above the floor, and the diameter of the aperture is 1' 5½".

Captain Anderson, who descended the well in 1864, describes it in "The Recovery of Jerusalem." It sometimes contains water, but is often dry ; it appears likely that it would provide a constant supply if it were properly cleaned out. The walls of the crypt are plastered.

The inner facing of the church is built of a white-yellow stone, named "cacouli," but is not plastered. The thickness of the walls is 2'40 to 2'50 metres.³ The mouth of the well, as shown on my plan, indicates its position in the crypt. The height of the crypt is about 7' 9", floor to floor of church. The intermediate coupled columns, shown by dotted lines at the crossing of the transepts, were found there, hence my restoration.

¹ Antoninus Martyr VI: "There a church has been built in honour of St. John the Baptist, and the well itself is placed before the rails of the altar." This seems to indicate that the well was outside the rails of the altar, and not "enclosed by railings." Antoninus Martyr, p. 6, note (Per. S^{ae} Paulae, Ch. XVI) was "probably built fourth century. Arculf describes it, II, 19, as cruciform, Willibald (Chap. XXVII) alludes to the church and well, which he places near Sebaste. Antoninus appears to have confused the church of St. John at Samaria with that built over the well at Shechem."—A.C.D.

² This does not at all coincide with the plan of the church as now recovered, which shows the well under the sanctuary, which forms one of the arms of the cross. I am inclined to agree with Bliss, *Q.S.*, April, 1894, p. 108, that the church Arculf described was the crypt, the upper church having been destroyed by the Arabs. The plan given by Arculf shows plainly a cross, with the well marked at the crossing.—A.C.D.

³ This unusual thickness is accounted for by the fact that the church was, in all probability, groined and vaulted, and, as there are no buttresses, the thrust of the vaulting was received by the continuously thick wall.—A.C.D.

The two photos illustrating the excavations will give a clear idea of the remains of the church. Photo No. 1 is taken from the north-western angle of the church, and the position of the well-head is marked by a cross. Photo No. 2 is taken from behind the apse looking west.

NOTE.—The well has been described by Anderson, *Q.S.*, 1877, p. 73 ; Barclay, *Q.S.*, July, 1881, p. 212 ; Robinson Lees, July, 1893, p. 255 ; Bliss, April, 1894, p. 108 ; and Schick, Jan., 1900, p. 61. Discrepancies occur between these various plans and the plan prepared by Mr. Spyridonidis, but these can, to some extent, be accounted for by the fact that, until quite recently, the church had not been excavated. There is a variation in the dimensions of the crypt and its position in relation to the church over. Bliss shows a plan with five aisles, which was restored from certain imperfect surface indications. Schick's plan of three aisles, published later, corrected the previous restoration, but his plan of the side aisle apses does not seem to have been properly shown. Further, he gives the outside dimensions of the church at 140 feet long by 87 feet wide outside, not including the eastern apse, whereas Mr. Spyridonidis' plan only scales 108 feet long from west end over transept, and 82 feet wide, outside measure.

From the photographs it seems quite evident that the remains now unearthed are entirely Crusading.—A.C.D.

A JERUSALEM CHRISTIAN TREATISE ON ASTROLOGY.

(Continued from *Q.S.*, p. 150.)

By MISS GLADYS DICKSON, JERUSALEM.

Of the Rising of the Habitations and their Radical Meanings. [15]

APRIL has *Ḥamal*, and of the planets *Mirīḥ*. On the ninth rises *Nāṭiḥ* in *Batn el-Ḥāt*. If the new moon appear in it, and if it be upright, it betokens peace.

MAY has of the signs *Thawr*, and of the planets *Zuharah*. It is the house of the Happiness of the World.² On the 4th rises *Butain*. On the

¹ In the list on p. 144, lines 4 and 6 read Capricorni, and on line 10 read Cor Leonis.

² This is a literal translation of the passages, *هو بيت سعادة الدنيا* and *هو بيت ملك الدنيا* respectively. They are presumably names of stars or astrological technicalities: I have no source of information at hand to enable me to explain them.