

## CENOTAPHS OF THE HEBREW PATRIARCHS AT THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH.<sup>1</sup>

By THE REV. A. B. GRIMALDI, M.A.

THE Mohammedans consider Hebron one of their most sacred cities, and the cenotaphs within the Mosque there as of the utmost sanctity, and have prohibited all access to them by Jews and Christians. Edward VII obtained entrance, when Prince of Wales, only by a firman from the Sultan. George V obtained admission, when a youthful Prince, in the same way. An extremely few other Christians have entered by secret management. Even as late as 1908, when I was at Hebron, admission to visitors was impossible. I went up a vaulted passage by the side of the Haram wall, but at the top, near the entrance in the gigantic Herodian wall, was a seated Mosque official, who prohibited all further progress.

Extremely few, therefore, have entered the Mosque, and it need hardly be said, that not one of them took photographs of the monuments, nor even dared to ask permission to do so. But even this has now been accomplished, and by the indefatigable exertions of the Editor of the *Northern British-Israel Review*, a most valuable set of six photographs of the Patriarchal Monuments were secured for that Journal, and are now presented to the readers of the *Q.S.* These views are absolutely unique, and are taken from photographs made for the first time in history.

Hebron is twenty-seven miles south-west of Jerusalem. It is one of the most ancient cities in the world. It lies in a valley near two large reservoirs. Many important events in Hebrew history took place here. Here Abraham long dwelt; Isaac lived here; Joshua took it and appointed it to Caleb. It became a city of Levi, and was David's capital for seven years. The Arabs call it El-Khalil (the friend, *i.e.*, Abraham). The Moslems are specially fanatical here—when examining the Haram walls, the children threw stones at us.

<sup>1</sup> From the *Northern British-Israel Review* (Frazer, Asher & Co., Ltd., Glasgow), January, 1911, by kind permission of the Editor, Mr. M. Graham Coltart, Glasgow.

The Haram is the most remarkable structure in Hebron, and, situated on the slope of one side of the valley, is surrounded by the vineyards of Eshcol. It is a parallelogram, estimated by Robinson at 200 by 115 feet. The four walls are about 50 feet high and very thick. The stones are drafted, and hewn smooth, and very large; the edges are bevelled, like those in the Temple area at Jerusalem. Externally they are strengthened by forty-eight flat buttresses, with a plain cornice at the top. They are considered to be of Herod's era. Some of the stones are 20 feet long. This ancient Jewish wall is surmounted by a Saracenic wall of inferior work, with a minaret at each corner, only two of which are finished. The entrance is at the angle of the south end, and spacious steps lead up to it. It is one of the most striking and interesting objects in all Palestine, and creates a profound impression in the visitor's mind. Though I ascended the hillside, I could not see over these huge walls. These Haram walls enclose a large space, in which stands the celebrated Mosque of Hebron. This building was erected by the Crusaders, about 1187, as a Christian Church, but the Moslems have turned it into a Mosque. The style of architecture reminds me of that of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, whose first erection was by Helena, the British mother of Constantine, but plainer in detail. The slightly pointed arches, the plain vaulting, supported by three converging ribs from the corner columns, assimilate it to our Early English style in general appearance. But the capitals, with their floreated decorations, are clearly more elaborate, than in this style, and approach nearer to that of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The walls above the dado are remarkably plain, and unornamented either by panelling, arcades, or other architectural enrichments. But they may have been frescoed, and such pictures would have been erased, or white-washed over by the Saracens, when they made it into a mosque. The floor consists of large square flags; but rich Damascus carpets cover most of it from view. The dado is of striped tinted marble slabs in perpendicular rows.

#### THE SHRINE OF SARAH.

Plate 1.—At the entrance to the church are two octagonal chapels attached to its wall, one on each side of the north central door. In one of these is the shrine of Abraham, in the other that



"This is the Tomb of our Lady Sára . . . upon her be the Peace."

CAVE OF MACHPELAH, HEBRON, PALESTINE.

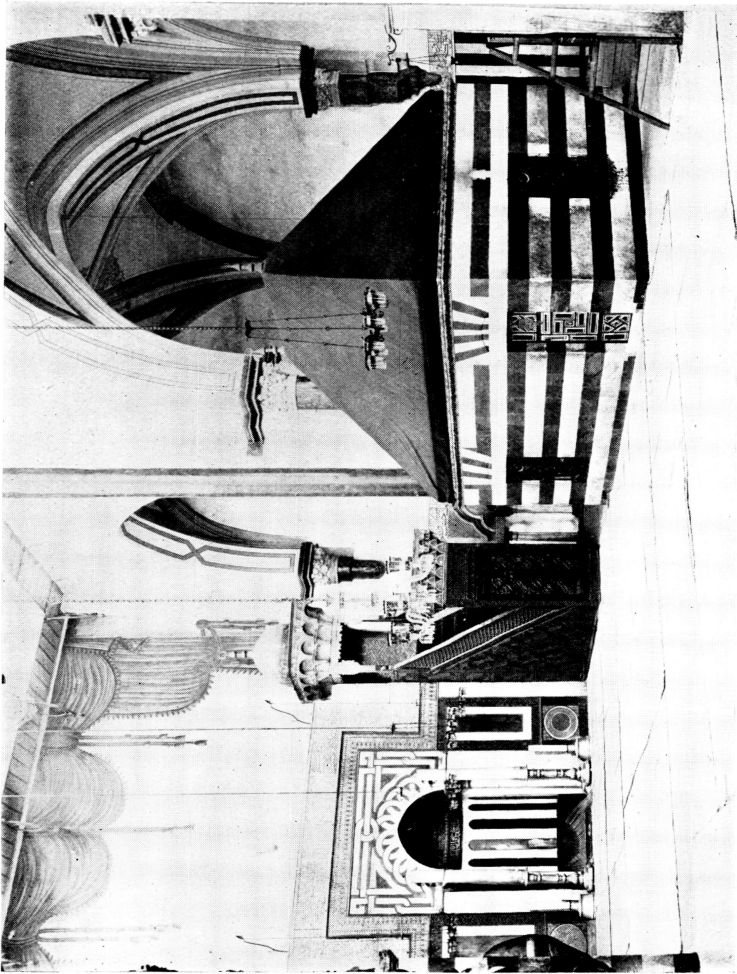
(Photo by C. Raad. By kind permission of the "Northern British-Israel Review.")



[To face p. 146.

*Palestine Exploration Fund.*

*Plate II.*



THE TOMB OF ISAAC.  
CAVE OF MACHPELAH, HEBRON, PALESTINE.

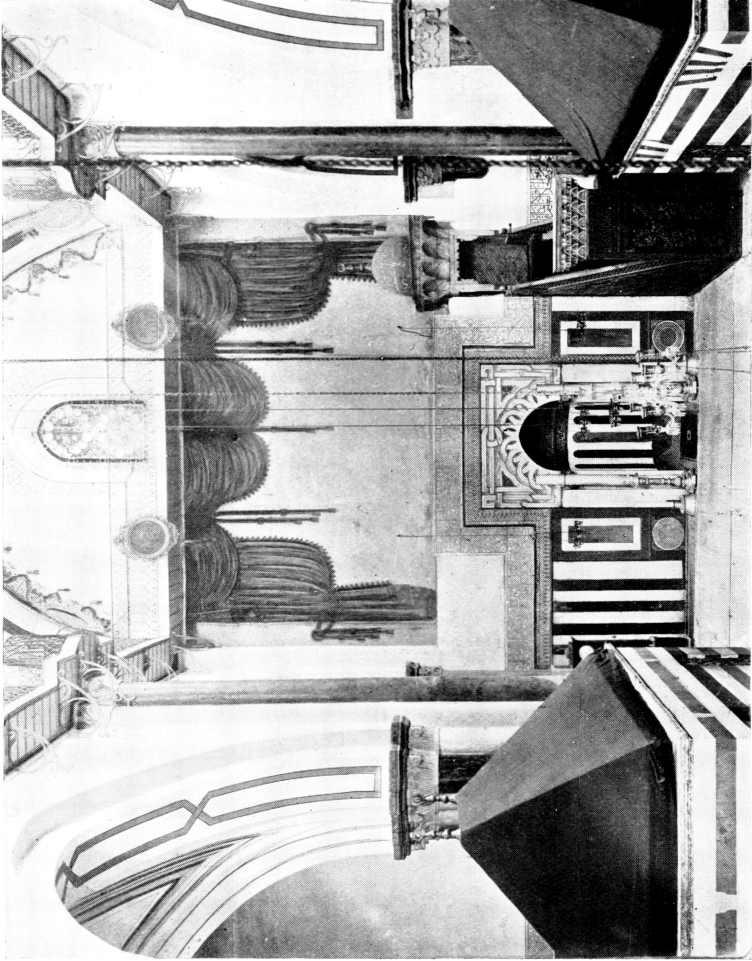
(Photo by C. Raul. By kind permission of the "Northern British-Israel Review.")



[To face p. 146.]

*Palestine Exploration Fund.*

*Plate III.*



THE TOMB OF REBEKAH.  
THE TOMB OF ISAAC.  
CAVE OF MACHPELAH, HEBRON, PALESTINE.

*(Photo by C. Raul. By kind permission of the "Northern British-Israel Review.")*





“ This is the Tomb of the Prophet Jacob ; upon him be the Peace.”

CAVE OF MACHPELAH, HEBRON, PALESTINE.

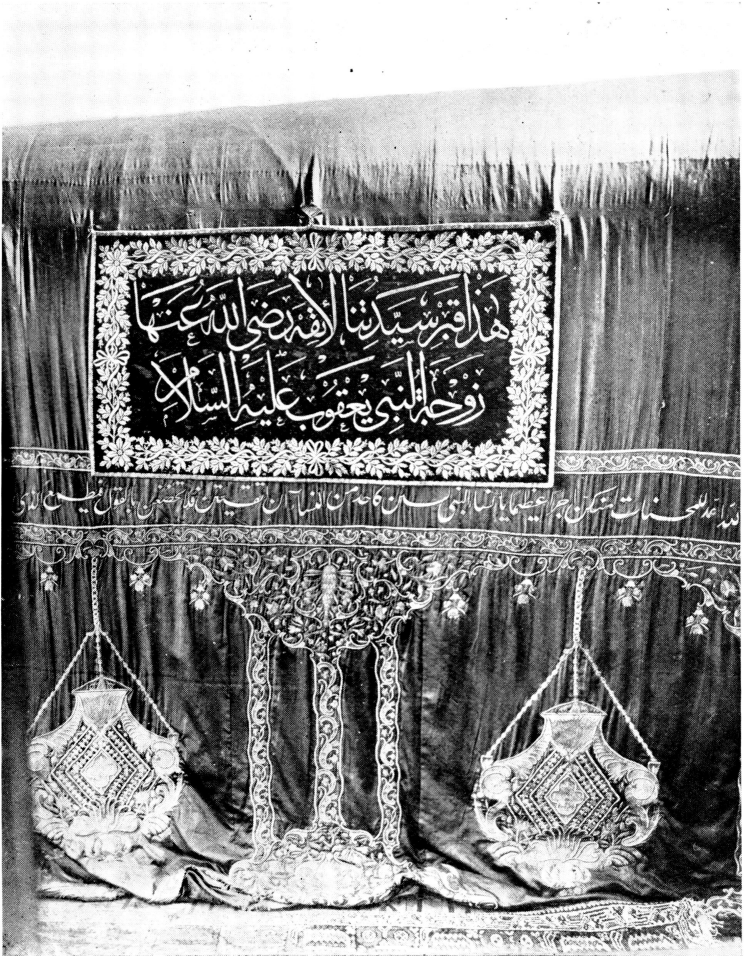
(Photo by C. Road. By kind permission of the “ Northern British-Israel Review.”)



[To face p. 146.

*Palestine Exploration Fund.*

*Plate V.*



“ This is the Tomb of the Lady Leah . . . upon her be the Peace.”

CAVE OF MACHPELAH, HEBRON, PALESTINE.

(Photo by C. Raad. By kind permission of the “ Northern British-Israel Review.”)





“This is the Tomb of the Prophet Joseph, upon him be the Peace.”

CAVE OF MACHPELAH, HEBRON, PALESTINE.

(Photo by C. Raad. By kind permission of the “Northern British-Israel Review.”)



of Sarah. These chapels form part of a double portico, which is of later date than the church, and of inferior workmanship. The chapels are roofed with small domes covered with lead. The door of each chapel opens into a square vestibule, between them, and in front of the centre church door. The shrine of Sarah stands in the centre of her chapel, under its domed roof, which is ornamented with floral arabesques, terminating in a border of joined semi-circles. A plain cornice runs round the top of the walls, underneath which is a trefoil edging filled in with arabesques. The floor is seen covered with rich Persian and Damascus rugs. The entrance has open barred gates of, it is said, iron plated with silver, apparently of A.D. 1259, while the style of the gates, with heavy globular sockets, is the same as those of Damascus, of the best Arab iron-work. The walls of the chapel are cased with marble, and have gilt inscriptions in Arabic letters around the top of the wall under the dome. Silver lamps and ostrich feathers are in Abraham's Chapel, and so, probably, in this one. Most likely, also, a MS. copy of the Koran is on a low wooden rest in front of the cenotaph.

#### THE SHRINE OF ISAAC.

Plate 2.—This view shows the shrine of Sarah's only son, Isaac. It is in the church, opposite that of Rebekah, between the nave and the east aisle, on one side of where the altar was, now replaced by the mihrab or recess pointing to Mecca, to which Moslems turn when praying. This is seen in the view, cut out of the end of the massive Jewish enclosing wall. It is flanked by slender pillars, with richly-carved capitals of Gothic design. It is lined with marbles in alternate light and dark stripes, and has a coved ceiling. Two tall candles, in turned holders, stand at the entrance, and three lamps, hung on silver chains from the roof, are in front. The marble panelling of the dado is seen on either side. Close beside it is seen the mimbar or pulpit. Colonel Conder says it is beautifully constructed of cabinet work, resembling that in the Aksah Mosque in the Haram area of Jerusalem, which I remember admiring for its delicacy of carving in cedar wood and exquisite designs. He thinks that the Hebron pulpit was given by Saladin, 1187, after the capture of Ascalon from the Crusaders; of Damascus work. Above it hangs a rich lamp from the ceiling by a silver chain. The dome-roof of the pulpit is rich in Saracenic stalactite work, as seen in

the Alhambra. Curtains depend from the roof. The last bay of the east aisle is seen behind the Shrine. The Shrine lies between the two columns separating the aisle from the nave. Canon Dalton considers this position was given by the Christians. This shrine is of oblong form, with gable roof, the ridge being about 12 feet from the floor. The walls and roofs are of well-dressed ashlar, in alternate bands of yellowish and reddish limestone, called Santa Croce marble, found in the vicinity. Brass crescents are seen on the gable ends. Two windows are seen in the sides, which have heavy iron bars, through which the cenotaph can be seen. The door is of wood, adorned with various patterns in brasswork.

The cenotaph is in the centre inside, and is covered with richly-embroidered silk hangings, and has a cloth hung as a canopy above it. The coverings are green, the Moslem sacred colour; the embroidered inscriptions being in silver and gold. Arabic inscriptions on silver plates are fastened to the doors and windows. MS. copies of the Koran, as books, lie open all round on low wooden rests. A rich lamp is seen hanging from the ceiling at the shrine.

#### THE SHRINE OF REBEKAH.

Plate 3.—This view shows the position of the two shrines of Isaac and Rebekah, facing the mihrab, one on either side. Above is a circular-headed window of stained glass, resembling those in the Dome of the Rock, over the Sakhrab, at Jerusalem, about 1528. This Hebron window has large opaque discs, in the form of an hour-glass, as a border to the richly-coloured pattern. Two circular tablets, apparently bearing Arabic inscriptions, are fastened to a narrow light gallery, resting on iron brackets, which runs round the church. The shrine is similar to that of Isaac, the masonry bands, sloping roof, pinnacle crescents, are all plainly seen. It has also similar doors and windows. The cenotaph also is similar, but is covered with richly-embroidered crimson curtains, with gold and silver inscriptions.

#### THE SHRINE OF JACOB.

Plate 4.—The shrine of Jacob is in a chamber near the north-end of the Haram, separated from the church by a courtyard. Jacob's Shrine is separated from Leah's by a passage. An open barred gate opens from this passage into Jacob's Shrine, and through

it the cenotaph is visible, which resembles the others. It has green silk hangings embroidered in a zig-zag pattern, which is an emblem signifying water or waves, used from the earliest times as a hieroglyphic of the Zodiacal sign, Aquarius (Water pourer), the emblem of Reuben (Genesis xlix, 4). On the covering is an Arabic inscription, meaning: "This is the Tomb of the Prophet Jacob; upon him be the Peace." The cenotaph is encircled by hanging lamps, and on the floor are three rests holding three Korans. A cornice of Arabic writing runs round the room. It seems that this shrine has never before been entered by any but Moslems.

#### THE SHRINE OF LEAH.

Plate 5.—This view shows her Shrine. It is about 8 feet by 4 feet, and 8 feet high, made of stone, with a gable or sloping roof. It is probably similar to Rebekah's Shrine, *i.e.*, of alternate bands of yellowish or reddish limestone. It is covered with rich crimson silk. On squares let into the crimson coverings are inscriptions in gold Arabic-writing on a black ground, meaning: "This is the Tomb of our Lady Leah. Upon her be the Peace."

What appear to be two richly-decorated bags, hung by silver chains, are seen in front. Their significance is not clear. An Arabic inscription makes a border to the top covering.

#### THE SHRINE OF JOSEPH.

Plate 6.—This shrine, singularly enough, is not within the Haram area. At the north-west angle of the Haram wall, but outside it, is the shrine of Joseph, in a building probably later than the Crusades. It will be seen that the arches, ribs, and vaults correspond to those of the church, and are probably of Arabic origin. Two brass Damascene jars and an ostrich egg hang above the cenotaph. Outside are two Koran books on rests. This cenotaph is covered with pale green silk, having white lettering. The shrine has a lantern of octagonal shape, surmounted by a dome covered with lead.

Beneath this shrine is a chamber containing the second cenotaph of Joseph. On the coverings of the first is the water-emblem, and an inscription about Joseph, as in the view. Could the second cenotaph refer to Asenath?

In conclusion, the cenotaphs are monuments, not tombs. Under the church is the original Cave Tomb of Machpelah. In the church pavement are three movable slabs, which give access, by ladder or rope, to the Cave. But two are fastened up, and not even Moslems are allowed to enter by the third. It is used to throw down written petitions to Abraham; and, looking down, the floor is seen to be covered as with snow-flakes. When George V visited the mosque, a light was let down, and the rocky sides were seen, and a doorway entering out of this ante-chamber into the Tomb Cave itself.

Almost all the facts, dates, descriptions, and explanations in the above article have been taken from a very valuable report by the late Colonel Conder, R.E., in the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, October, 1882, pp. 197-206, where is also the best plan of the Haram yet printed, Colonel Conder (then Captain) having accompanied George V (then Prince) to the Hebron Mosque in that year. But these photographs add some details which are not to be found even in Colonel Conder's report.

## THE GREEK INSCRIPTIONS OF THE TEMPLE AT DAMASCUS.

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HAVING studied the inscriptions of Damascus with a view to the *Corpus* of the Greek and Roman Inscriptions of Syria, I am in a position to furnish some additional observations relating to the new text published by the Rev. J. E. Hanauer in the *Quarterly Statement* for January, 1912, pp. 40 *sqq.* As the editor has not appended to it any transcription, I may be allowed first to propose the reading, which is the more easy since the copy of your correspondent is excellent, and requires only a slight correction:—

Ἐπὶ τῶν περὶ Μηνόδω-  
ρον Ζένωνος νεώτερον  
ἱεροταμιῶν ᾠκοῖομή-  
θησαν καὶ ἐν τῇ πλευρᾷ  
ταύτῃ δόμ[ο]ι εἰς τῶν  
τοῦ κυρίου Διδ[ό]ς.]  
Ἔτους θμτ'.