

The Architectural History of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem: the Question of the Periodization of Melchior De Vogüé*

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Abstract—The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem has been actively studied since the middle of the 19th century. At the same time, the opinion was formed that the building passed through four construction stages. This periodization was developed and first proposed by Melchior De Vogüé in 1859. Later, it was developed in the research works of L.-H. Vincent and F.-M. Abel (1914-1922), Ch. Couasnon (1974), V.C. Corbo (1981-1982). However, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has undergone much more destruction and local restoration works, as reported by written sources. The goal of this paper is to get a more complete picture of the shrine history by analyzing the medieval descriptions of it.

Keywords—*the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; Church of the Resurrection; Church of the Anastasis; Eugene-Melchior De Vogüé the architectural reconstruction; Jerusalem; Holy Land*

I. INTRODUCTION

An outstanding monument of world architecture and one of the main religious relics, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is located in the Christian quarter and is surrounded by four monasteries: Greek from the west,¹ Franciscan from the north, Coptic from the north-east, and Ethiopian from the east; Russian The Saint-Alexandre mission (la mission Saint-Alexandre de Jérusalem) is also located nearby.

The history of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher has a rich historiographic tradition. One of the main elements of the description of all those who saw the Church was its architectural appearance. Sometimes the authors described the complex of buildings, its history of losses, destructions

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¹ Also another Greek monastery dedicated to Abraham is located south of the Church of the Resurrection; its southern facade faces St. Helena Street, west — to the southern square in front of the Church entrance.

and restorations. The inconsistency of some evidence significantly complicates the study of the architectural construction of the shrine at different stages of its existence.

II. PERIODIZATION OF MELCHIOR DE VOGÜÉ

Melchior de Vogüé laid the basis of the scientific study of the architectural history of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. In his monograph (1859) the question of the architectural structure of the Church was actualized, and many previously unknown sources were introduced into scientific use.

De Vogüé rightly wrote that the modern Church of the Holy Sepulcher is a complex of fragments of different-time constructions that have replaced each other at the same place since the epoch of Constantine the Great. The author conditionally identifies four stages in the architectural history of the shrine, giving each of them a name. The following periodization was offered: the Basilica of Constantine (326–614); the Church of Modest (614-1010); the Church of Constantine Monomachos (1010-c. 1130); the Church of the Crusaders (c. 1130-1808) [1]. The code names of the periods do not always correspond to the value of the contribution of a historical figure to the architectural appearance of the Church, e.g. “the Church of Constantine Monomachos”. However, the naming periods suggested by the researcher were firmly established in the archeographic tradition of studying the architectural history of the shrine.

The Basilica of Constantine was understood as a complex consisted of great basilica, courtyard, colonnade, etc. It was demolished in 614. And newly restored complex by Modest did not reproduce the previous one. There were separate churches erected above each of the holy places, corresponding to “the possibilities and tastes of their time”. From 614 to 1010 the Church complex of the Holy Sepulchre was subjected to frequent attacks. According to opinion of de Vogüé the architectural appearance of the shrine wasn’t changed substantially. He argued that over four centuries buildings had not undergone significant changes. However, his point of view seems to be very controversial because many written sources of this period were revealed

later. One of the heaviest destruction of the shrine happened in 1008(9) when caliph al-Hakim ordered to demolish the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was restored up to 1048 or maybe more. Due to the loss of numerous sources, the architectural history of the shrine during the period from 1008(9) to 1099 remains a mystery to researchers. With the arrival of the Crusaders, the architectural appearance of the Church had been changed significantly. Thus, in the first half of the 12 century the church complex was united into one area. Changing the original appearance of the shrine, the Crusaders erected a medieval building, which stood until the great fire in 1808 [2].

This periodization of the architectural history of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher proposed by M. de Vogüé formed the basis of scientific research. In the first half of 20th century, archaeologists, L.-H. Vincent and F.-M. Abel were guided by it in the attribution of architectural fragments embedded into the modern Church [3]. At the 1970s Ch. Coïasnon whose special subject was the Church of the Holy Sepulchre erected in the 4th century briefly touched upon the shrine architecture of the 11th and 12th centuries. The period of Constantine Monomachos Church interested the researcher only as a stage that preceded the constructive changes made in the 12th century [4]. Archaeologist V. C. Corbo considered also three centuries of the architectural history of the shrine (4th, 11th, 12th centuries). Both researchers, based on this periodization and archaeological material obtained during the excavations of the 1960s-1970s, proposed their own model for the reconstruction of the Church [5].

A subsequent analysis of the written sources describing the appearance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre suggests the architectural history of the shrine is much richer and does not fit into the proposed periodization.

III. ANNOTATED ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was first erected in 325. This date is approximate; it is associated with the First Council of Nicaea. It stood 389 years until the Persian invasion in 614. Among the texts of the 4th century in which the shrine appearance is described, are "Itinerarium burdigalense" (333), "Itinerarium Egeriae" (c. 381-384) and "Eusebii Pamphili de vita Constantini" (c. 337). The complex built by Constantine the Great included the cave of the Resurrection decorated with columns; Golgotha and the Cross located in an open courtyard; the domed Basilica (Martirium) with an atrium in which there was a sacrarium where a part of the Cross of the Crucifixion was kept; a baptismal font; a water-cistern and other buildings.

The most informative texts of the 5th-6th centuries (before 614) are "Breviarius de Hierosolyma" (c. 400), "Eucherii. Epistola Ad Faustum Presbyterum" (c. 430), "Theodosius. De situ Terrae Sanctae" (up to 518), "Breviarius de Hierosolyma A, B" (c. 525), "Antonini Placentini Itinerarium" (c. 570), "Sophronii. Carmina anacreontica" (c. 614). According to their analysis, the church complex (named the Church of the Holy Sepulchre)

had undergone some changes. It consisted of the rotunda of Holy Resurrection, inside of which there was the Aedicule of the Holy Sepulcher; Golgotha and the Cross in the courtyard; the Basilica of Constantine with the atrium; and an exedra between it and Golgotha.

The church complex of Constantine was destroyed in 614 according to Strategios and Sebeos. The restoration of the shrine was entrusted to Modest, the prior of the monastery of St. Theodosius who later became the patriarch. The Church of Modest was defiled by Arabians in 812 (approximate date).

The architectural appearance of the shrine restored by Modest was described in the following texts: "The Armenian Guide" (c. 625), "Arculfi relatio de locis sanctis scripta ab Adamnano" (before 683), "Epiphanius monachi Hagiopolitae Syria et urbs sancta" (c. 692), "Willibaldus. Hodoeporicon", recorded by the nun Huneberc (780), "<...> a list of churches, the construction of which is attributed to Helen" (8 century), "Commematorium de Casis Dei vel Monasteriis" (c. 808). During the restoration of the shrine its original architectural appearance was replicated, also some additions were made. The church complex consisted of the rotunda of Holy Resurrection, the courtyard, the Basilica, the church erected on Calvary, the exedra, the church of St. Mary, the Prison of Christ, the House of Joseph, the southern courtyard, the House of patriarchate, the "non-sanctify" church, water-cisterns.

The Church restored by Modest was desecrated in 805/812 as reported Theophanes in his "Chronographia". The next destruction of the shrine occurred in 937, according to patriarch of Alexandria Eutychius. In the period the shrine was described in the following texts: "Photius. Question to Amphilochius" (867); "Bernardus. De Locis Sanctis" (870); "Annales" by Eutychius (Sa'īd ibn Batrīq) (before 940). The descriptions became less informative. There was still a complex of buildings, of which the sources mentioned the Church of the Resurrection, the Church of Calvary, the Basilica of Constantine, the church located to the south of the shrine (maybe the Church of St. Mary), the outer courtyard. In the "Annales" of Eutychius there is information about the restoration of the dome of the Temple of Resurrection by Patriarch Thomas (807-820).

In addition, Eutychius is the only one who mentioned destruction of the shrine in 937 which took place on Palm Sunday under Patriarch Christodoulos I. The southern door of the Basilica, part of its portico, refectories and main altar were burned. Then the destroyers "entered Golgotha and the Church of the Resurrection", destroying the stone decorations, the chair, the copper grilles, etc. This event was followed by a truce of Christians and Muslims, who exchanged many prisoners [6].

The next destruction of the shrine happened in 966 and was described only once by Yahya of Antioch (Yahyā ibn Sa'īd) in "Annales" (before 1066). The Patriarch of Jerusalem John VII did not pay to emir al-Sinaji the tribute for serving the Pentecost. As a result, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was destroyed. The doors of the Basilica were burned; the doors and the dome of the Resurrection Church

were also burned. The patriarch was hiding inside the cistern with olive oil at the Church complex. He was found and killed and his body was burned fastened to one of the “pillars” (or “columns”) in the courtyard of Basilica of St. Constantine.

These two descriptions of Eutychius and Yahya of Antioch come across elements of architecture. And one can see the complex still contained the same churches as before.

After the destruction of 966 the shrine was restored for almost 40 years, from 966 to 1005; Yahya mentioned four patriarchs under whose patronage the Church of the Holy Sepulchre get the renewed architectural appearance. Christodoulos II (966-969) “restored the doors of the Church of the Resurrection, establish the altar, and began to strengthen it, but died prematurely”. Under Patriarch Thomas II (969-977) the Church was restored by Syrian from Iran (or Iraq), by the name of Ali-ibn-S. var, called Ibn-al-Hammar. He “resumed most of the buildings” but was killed before the work was completed. Under Joseph (980-983) and Orest (984-1005) Sadaki-ibn-Bishra was appointed syncellus of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. He completed the work left by previous restorer, built the dome of the Church [of the Resurrection — E.L.]. But he couldn’t finish the roof “jemel” of the Basilica of St. Constantine because of its vast space. The “jemel” was rebuilt after the departure of Orest to Constantinople under Arsenius, the patriarch of Alexandria.

Thus, by the beginning of the 11th century, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher represented itself by complex consisted of the Church of the Resurrection, the Basilica of St. Constantine and Golgotha, which was still located in inner courtyard. To the Basilica let down the outer courtyard, decorated with columns. It is interesting to note that the Church of the Resurrection could be reached only through the Basilica of Constantine, from the other side it was impossible to get there. Apparently, the Church contained the Holy Tomb was built up as closely as possible from all sides.

Soon the renewed Church was destroyed by order of the caliph al-Hakim in 1008(9). According to a contemporary evidence of Yahya of Antioch the shrine was leveled with the ground, except those parts that were difficult to destroy. The Aedicula of Holy Tomb, “Cranion”, Basilica of St. Constantine and “all that was within its boundaries” were crushed as well as the convent al-Sari located nearby [7].

There is no exact date for the start of restoration work after this horrible destruction. Adámar de Chabannes in “Chronicon” (c. 1029) wrote that al-Hakim almost immediately gave an order to restore the Christian shrine. Indirect evidence that it was restored not later than 1020 (at least partially) is the request to allow the services in the Church made Nikephoros I as soon as he became the patriarch of Jerusalem (1020-1036) [8].

It is known that in 1032, 1033 earthquakes occurred in Jerusalem [9]. There is no mention or description of the shrine, but John Skylitzes in “Sinopsis Historiarum” (late 11 c.) wrote that in 1034 byzantine emperor Romanos III Argyros and caliph az-Zahir signed an agreement, according to which the Byzantines had to restore the shrine. But in

connection with the death of the rulers the agreement was renewed by Michael IV the Paphlagonian and caliph al-Mustansir Billah [10]. However, it is unknown how long the shrine was restored and whether it retained its previous appearance? In “Safamāma” Nāšir-i Khusraw (1047) described the restored Church of the Holy Sepulcher, as a church so spacious, “that it can fit eight thousand people”. The same Church was described by Sæwulf in “Relatio de Peregrinatione” (c. 1103) and Daniel the Abbot “Vita et peregrinatio” (c. 1108).

At the first half of the 12th century the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was strengthened under the Crusaders. During this period Golgotha and Holy Tomb were integrated into one space under one roof.

For the next 700 years (up to 1808) the architectural appearance of the shrine rebuilt in the 12th century continued to change. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was no longer destroyed, but numerous earthquakes as well as inter-denomination struggles caused enormous damage to the preservation of the architectural appearance, and the building was changing by piecemeal.

The further history of the destruction that the architectural appearance of the shrine underwent after the 12 century can be based on the legislative acts (firmans, berats, hojets of Mamluk Sultanate and Ottoman Empire) because the focus of pilgrimage descriptions was shifted from architecture to the holy places, relics, icons, etc. However, this topic is very voluminous and requires a separate report.

In 1808 a two-day fire destroyed two-thirds of the medieval Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was restored by N. Comninos in 1809-1810.

IV. CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been the subject of close study for two centuries, there is no clear sequence of the architectural changes that had occurred to the shrine over the centuries.

The periodization of architectural history offered by M. de Vogüé was generally accepted in scholar literature and repeated by such major researchers as L.-H. Vincent, F.-M. Abel, Ch. Coüasnon, V.C. Corbo. It outlined four stages of changes to the original architectural appearance of the Church. However, this periodization is incomplete. According to the written sources, the architectural structure of the shrine had experienced much more destructions, local external and internal restoration changes. Destructions, restorations, rebuilding, factors confessional and even personal (influence of the patriarchs, caliphs, and Byzantine emperors on the restoration course) led, ultimately, to the loss of the original appearance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which currently cannot be restored.

Based on the identification and analysis of the written sources significant corpus, it is possible to suggest a more detailed structure of architectural changes in the history of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre from the time of its foundation to the 12th century.

Stage 1: from 325 to 614

Stage 2: from 617 to 805/812

Stage 3: after 805/812 to 937

Stage 4: after 937 to 966 [no information about restoration]

Stage 5: from 966 to 1008

Stage 6: from 1012–1020; 1034–1041 to 1099

Stage 7: from 1112–1118; 1131–1149 to 1244

In any case, this periodization does not claim to absolute certainty. It seems that it can be supplemented in the process of the further research.

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