

## GENERAL GORDON, THE PALESTINE EXPLORATION FUND AND THE ORIGINS OF ‘GORDON’S CALVARY’ IN THE HOLY LAND

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With Charles George Gordon’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1883 as our focus, we argue that Gordon was not only an essential figure in the foundation of the Garden Tomb, but that he was the penultimate symbol of Victorian England’s perception of the Holy Land, embodying the new elements of biblical critique and evangelism in the same person. He was more than a symbol of his era but also one of the last prominent Englishmen to wrestle with these conflicting ideologies. In this paper, the religious, mystical motivations for his visit to the Holy Land and its implications are highlighted, as well as his semi-ascetic retirement. Based on primary sources, including his letters written in 1883, and his sketches, maps, and other sources, we focus on his theological ideas with special reference to his view of Calvary, which led to the founding of the Garden Tomb Association in the year 1894, and to the creation of the Jerusalem Protestant Garden Tomb which exists to the present, outside the Old City walls of Jerusalem.

Charles Gordon was born in 1833 to an Anglican family in Woolwich, a suburb south-east of London (Churchill 1904, 114). He fought in the Crimea in 1856 and gained fame as ‘Chinese’ Gordon after his service in China in 1863. In 1874, as governor of the Equatorial Province in the Sudan, he worked to suppress slavery, a key cause for leading Evangelicals and activists in England. Between his many experiences he was deeply influenced by various figures and events, one being an evangelical he met at Pembroke before the Crimean war, the time he spent at Gravesend from 1865–1871 doing charity work among the poor, and another being those individuals involved with the anti-slavery movement.<sup>1</sup> At some point, he also befriended Reverend Hebert Drake, with whom he would sail to the Holy Land (Beatty 1984, 287–289).

The foundation in London of the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1865 was of major significance for the later work by Gordon in Palestine, for he published one of his articles in the organization’s journal. As described in John James Moscrop’s *Measuring Jerusalem*, and in Haim Goren’s works, the PEF had both a rationalist side, the study of the Holy Land, its mapping and archeology through science and not religion, and an evangelical backing by religious persons such as the Finns (Moscrop 2000; Goren 2001, 153–155). The PEF funded many of the major names known in excavating the Holy Land in the period, including Charles Wilson, Charles Warren, Claude R. Conder and Lord Horatio Kitchener.<sup>2</sup> Lord Shaftesbury, who was deeply involved in the mission to the Jews and in anti-slavery as well as in various reforms in England, was also president of the PEF. It was this society that led Conder to investigate the Sepulchre and act on scientific instincts rather than the ambivalent emotion of Mark Twain, who had declared it to be a ‘wicked old building’ (Tuchman 1956, 158).

This scepticism and biblical criticism, increasingly popular in this period, helped to influence Gordon, who decided, upon his arrival in Jerusalem, to investigate the ‘true’ site of Golgotha (Kochav 1995, 278–301). Biblical criticism itself had become increasingly

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widespread in the 1860s and thus was very much part of Gordon's world (Zink-Machaffie, 1982, 316–328). Without the PEF and Conder's analysis and the ideas of the times Gordon could not have come to Jerusalem with such critical views and he would not have had the journal of the PEF (*PEFQSt.*) to publish his ideas. Thus, the PEF played a central role not only in the general opening of Palestine to archaeological and historical research, and modern mapping, but also in giving a forum for various explorers and missionaries and adventurers such as Gordon, Schick and Conder (Henderson 1956, 239). The PEF provided Conrad Schick with a perfect forum to disseminate the ideas of Gordon following his untimely death at Khartoum. Schick's letters and publications describe General Gordon and relate to Schick's 'many writings, drawings and letters from the late General Gordon, as he came very often to me' (Schick to PEF, 2 January 1892).

In 1883, when Charles Gordon came ashore at Jaffa in Palestine he brought with him much of Victorian England's dreams and aspirations, a life-long service to the crown, and a world view that desired to square modern Palestine with the Bible of his youth. He was the embodiment of the nineteenth-century British soldier: worldly, Spartan, daring, soft-spoken and with many eccentricities. Having served throughout the British Empire and having already gained fame fighting in China, he endeavoured finally to set himself to biblical study. A number of his contemporaries such as Horatio Kitchener, Lawrence Oliphant and Colonel Claude Reignier Conder had already found their way to Palestine. The English-speaking world was rife with tales of new finds shedding light on the most intimate parts of the Bible. For the British reading public it must have seemed fitting that one of their most prominent, if perplexing, soldiers was seeking a semi-retirement, a return to the sources, in the Holy Land. For twenty years before the arrival of Gordon, England had been exposed to ever more frequent studies of archaeological finds in Palestine through the work of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF, 1865 onwards).

Gordon's function in this story is two-fold. His efforts at study in the Holy Land reveal an important chapter in the continuing struggle between biblical criticism and evangelicalism. As in the field of Egyptology, the exploration of the Holy Land had begun as an attempt to correlate the modern land with the Bible, but had been transformed by biblical criticism so that the real became intertwined with the latter, forming a cycle by which science proved bible and bible proved science. However, there was much to challenge this cycle, and there was deep controversy over the traditional site of the Holy Sepulchre regarding new sites for Calvary and the tomb of Christ. Gordon happened upon the Holy Land in time to resolve this question and add fuel to its fire. His championing of a new site not only became the pivotal moment in the run-up to the purchasing of that site, but also indicated the degree to which one individual in that period was able to influence the thoughts of Christians in Victorian England. Sarah Kochav has shown in her work that 'the supporters of the Garden Tomb eventually came to absorb and employ many of the arguments first used by the traditionalists' (Kochav 1995, 300). Gordon was the fulcrum on which these two axes pivoted, the one of Victorian England's perceptions of the Holy Land in light of its own religious struggles with the new sciences, and the other that of an individual's ability to give credence to new sites. Gordon was one of the last private individuals to give his name to a religious site, and his mystical works and knowledge of biblical critique would make him the last generation to truly be confounded by the two at the same time.

Gordon represents the degree to which questioning the Holy Scriptures had become common practice but not to the extent that anyone questioned their general authenticity, merely the authenticity of the old holy sites. His contemporaries and near contemporaries such as Edward Robinson were able to invent the field of biblical archaeology from scratch. At that time, no one had training in archaeology, and only years of experience separated Gordon from Schick and Conder.

Michael Musgrave has shown how George Grove, who served as one of the founders of the Palestine Exploration Fund, was emblematic of many Victorians by not having had professional education in the fields he undertook to popularize, such as exploration of Palestine through the PEF (Musgrave 2003). Gordon was a similar case. This shows the ability in that period of any person to come to the Holy Land to do his own biblical research, but this in itself was a revolution. Who would have dared to decide that he had discovered a new Holy Site outside the realm of church sanction before? Biblical archaeology thus represents the fulfilment of Protestant opposition to the power of the Catholic church and represents the degree to which Evangelicalism was able to penetrate English society, leading to renewed interest not only in the New Testament but the desire to square the spiritual bible with the temporal.

Nicolaas Rupke has commented that for some, 'biblical criticism was a continuation and completion of what was begun at the Reformation' (Rupke 2006, 188). In this respect, the questioning of the site of the Holy Sepulchre was the ultimate challenge to the Catholic Church. John James Moscrop has shown how the sites the PEF 'strove to identify were not those of the Christian New Testament but those of the Old Testament' (Moscrop 2000, 2). However, when the British explorers did examine the New Testament they strove not just to identify sites but rather, in the case of the Holy Sepulchre, to find the authentic one.

Furthermore, Jonathan Rose has claimed that the British working classes were rarely interested in the empire but one matter in which they took great interest was the Holy Land, so that 'the map of the Holy land. . . became almost as familiar to us as the map of England' (Rose 2001, 352). Gordon was emblematic of all these aspects of Victorian England and the new trends in theology; he was a walking embodiment of this religious and civic revolution. His year in the Holy Land helps to illustrate the great conflicts and issues of his day and the relationship between Victorian England and the sacred and the way in which the Holy Land was packaged for the public back home.

#### CHARLES 'CHINESE' GORDON AND THE HOLY LAND

##### *Motivation and Operations*

The information we have for Gordon's life comes from biographies written of Gordon which briefly mention the experience as well as letters sent to Conrad Schick and Reverend William Fredrick Birch from the PEF archive. However, there is a previously overlooked primary source relating to his Holy Land visit that we discuss in this paper. This is a unique collection of unpublished documents at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> The collection was donated to the Library in 1972 by the Chicago entrepreneur and collector Philip D. Sang. It includes seven manuscripts, forty-five letters and twenty plans and drawings. We have also shed light upon a few letters from the PEF Archive.<sup>4</sup>

Gordon seems to have come to Palestine owing to an abiding interest he had gained in biblical archaeology through reading the *Fund Quarterly* and other writings of the period which were popularizing the Holy Land to an English public. Having spent time in Asia and Africa, it may have been only natural for Gordon that Palestine was on his itinerary. By this period, many well known figures were visiting the Holy Land as part of tours to the region. Gordon had been connected to well known evangelical figures in England such as Lord Shaftesbury, and this certainly brought the PEF and Palestine into his world view. Having been out of work and suffered disappointment, corruption, and incessant rebellion in the Sudan, he had returned to England. He contemplated an offer by the King of the Belgians to travel to the Congo, to there suppress slavery, a job that Morton Stanley had originally been offered. By the time he chose to go to Palestine he had been promoted

to Major-General in the British army. It was not a surprise that an officer of the British army, on leave, would find time to be in Palestine, since other officers such as Charles Warren and Claude R. Conder had themselves undertaken just such missions. In his previous endeavours, he had spent most of his career working among local people; in China leading the Chinese, in Sudan leading Egyptians, and in the Cape Colony working with local Basuto chiefs. His acquaintances in Palestine were those 'after his heart' like Oliphant, those other millenarians like the American Colony members, those long resident in the land like Conrad Schick and also those connected with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) such as Reverend Longley Hall (Oliphant 1887, 204–207). He also corresponded prodigiously not only with these people but with his brother, his sister and others in England.

A number of biographies included brief sketches of his life in Palestine, including parts of a chapter in Seton Churchill's *General Gordon: A Christian Hero* and a chapter in Lord Elton's *Gordon of Khartoum: The Life of General Charles George Gordon*. Typical of the treatment of his short stay in the Holy Land was the one-line description of the event in the three-page entry in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; 'from January to December 1883 he lived in Palestine, studying antiquities' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1960, 527).

From his biographers it does not appear that Gordon had interested himself in archaeology while resident in other places. Certainly while serving in China and the Sudan he would have had plenty of time had this been one of his hobbies. It appears that Gordon only became involved with reading the PEF Quarterly shortly before his arrival in Palestine, and he was neither a contributor before or after the time he spent there, but only while resident in the Holy Land. Rather what comes out of his interest in antiquities in the Holy Land is not the antiquities themselves, but the essentially spiritual characteristics that connect them to the life of Jesus and the holy history of the Old Testament. Every detail of the Holy Land that Gordon spent time studying was transformed into a greater spiritual interest. For instance, his view of Calvary at skull hill later became an allegory of a female figure overlying the Holy City. His discussion of the Temple Mount later digressed into an exposition of a mythical 'cup' that resides inside the western wall (Gordon 1984, 6–8). Gordon's view of the Holy Land came out of a Victorian upbringing in which the Bible was central but modern Palestine was not. Gordon was also an expert in cartography, a skill in which many officers of his age would have been trained, and this skill he had put to use while on campaign in other parts of the world. Therefore, it is not surprising that, when confronted with the holy geography of Palestine, he put his sketching skills to work on various projects such as divining the true boundaries of Judea or designing a canal from Akaba to the Mediterranean.

Gordon's interest was essentially biblical, which is why he included in one of his letters a sketch of the 'true' site of the Garden of Eden located in the Seychelles (Gordon to Schick 1883, G/S 1). For the generation of Gordon, the idea that every piece of information found in the Bible could be squared with the modern landscape was never questioned. Gordon assumed that with enough hard work and prodigious contemplation he could divine and answer any question, no matter how disparate or unsystematic. This view, this perception and this belief that any obstacle could be surmounted and every mystery unravelled was certainly symbolic of Gordon's Victorian generation.

Gordon's death at Khartoum impacted on the way his life in Palestine was remembered. His letter to the PEF Quarterly appears to have been published posthumously because of its non-professional nature and schizophrenic writing style, which makes it as hard to read as his *Reflections in Palestine*. The Fund Statement claims that 'the two communications from the late General Gordon published in this number are merely, as will be seen, notes sent to the Secretary, and placed aside until they could be revised by the writer.

Of late years, he took a deep interest in the proceedings of the Society, though his own conclusions, as may be gathered from the papers here published, were based on other than purely scientific grounds. The theory put forward in the note on Golgotha has been further developed in Gordon's *Reflections in Palestine* (PEFQSt. 1885, April). Like Oliphant's *Sympneumata*, published in 1885, *Reflections*, published in April of 1884, remains a strange insight into his psyche which itself might never have been published had it not been for the Khartoum siege of 317 days during which it was rushed to publication so that people might know on whose soldiers the fate of the Crown's honour rested.

In his letters on topography and Bible, it is clear that although he was interested in biblical criticism his views were so intertwined with his own faith and beliefs that he merely created new biblical myths and illusions where old ones had been. His discovery of Golgotha or plotting the actual place of Eden or the place of the Flood or the boundary of Benjamin and Judea were based on pseudo-science, the discovery of topography and the grafting of the Bible onto it (Conder 1881, 90). He did not question if the events portrayed in the Bible were true; he merely felt that they needed to be grounded and squared using modern tools. This is an especially interesting phenomenon when one recalls that much of biblical criticism attacked Empress Helena and the later Catholic theologians for perpetrating pious frauds (Roberts 1842, 54). Gordon's attachment to the site he determined to be Calvary in many ways is a mirror of the finding of the true cross in the 4th century. In many ways this mystical attachment characterized Gordon's interest in the Holy Land much more than that of his contemporaries Claude R. Conder and Conrad Schick (Gange 2006, 1083–1103).

Lord Godfrey Elton has claimed that Gordon's writing during his eleven months in Palestine would 'if collected, fill several stout tomes. . .with Augusta (his sister) and with his brother Henry, he maintained a prodigious correspondence, excerpts of which have been printed. To Mr. Barnes alone he wrote forty-seven letters from Palestine; most of them lengthy and containing several thousand words. "I deluge a poor old German, Mr. Schick with papers and plans" . . .three hundred pages of Gordon's correspondence with him are still extant' (Elton 1955, 163). In addition to this he corresponded with Oliphant in Haifa (Oliphant 1887; 1891).

Gordon arrived in Jerusalem via Jaffa on 16 January 1883 (See Figure 1: Charles 'Chinese' Gordon in the Holy Land, 1883). He would remain there just a few months, residing mostly at the Arab village of Ein Kerem after Reverend Drake abandoned him to join the American Colony in Jerusalem (Parsons 1981; Dudman and Kark 1998). Like others before him such as Mark Twain, Jerusalem did not have a shattering impact on him immediately. 'Everything looks small and insignificant, but quite meets the idea I had of the worldly position of the Jews and of our Lord. . .the Temple of Solomon was fine for those days, but, setting aside its Divine significance, it was only about six times as long as the room you are in, and not much wider. . .you could walk around the city in less than an hour; it is not quite three miles round' (Churchill, 203).

According to Lord Elton his routine in the Holy Land was Spartan, a common feature of Victorian era British explorers. 'He rose at seven, read and prayed till eleven or twelve, worked at his biblical researches till four, rode along the sandy shore (when in Jaffa), walking his horse on the return journey, and read and wrote again until ten or eleven' (Elton, 268). In addition he kept up his skills and hobbies of topographical study of the various themes he was interested in: the dividing line between Benjamin and Judea, the site of the crucifixion and a plan for a canal between the Mediterranean and Akaba (Shavit 1973, 150–154). Originally he put aside many of the books he had brought with him and decided to work only with his Bible; however, this soon became problematic and he began requesting that his friends such as Schick furnish him with contemporary research on biblical sites in Palestine (Elton, 263). Gordon consumed himself with reading the Bible, Josephus and Greek texts as well as recollections of the Crusaders and the PEF.

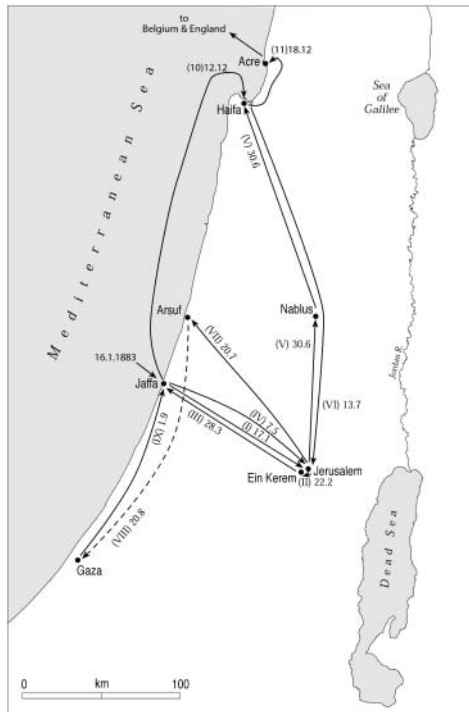


Fig. 1. Charles 'Chinese' Gordon in the Holy Land, 1883

According to the *Jewish Intelligence*, the publication of *London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews* (LJS), and Cunningham Geikie, Gordon was known among the people of Jerusalem and the Holy Land (Kochav 1997, 91; Geikie 1906). 'He gave away all he had to the poor in Jerusalem and the villages round, and the people mourn for him as for their father' (*Jewish Intelligence* 1885, 58). This claim, however, seems to have been made after his death, but does not seem to bear itself out in any other documents.

#### GORDON'S VIEW OF CALVARY

In the study Gordon conducted, he doubted the original identification of the site where Jesus was crucified and buried. He suggested another place, outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, near Damascus Gate. As Sarah Kochav has shown in her study, mentioned above, many Westerners from the English speaking and Protestant world had long been dismayed with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the true site of Golgotha, at least partly owing to the new views of biblical criticism and because of a lack of a Protestant territorial hold in the church in the Old City of Jerusalem (Kochav 1995). Kochav has given an account of the process by which biblical criticism led to a search for new sites in Jerusalem and the way in which this sparked debate in London and Jerusalem. Many new archaeological diggings and suggestions, which began as early as Edward Robinson and Eli Smith's publication of *Biblical Researches* in 1841, had called into question the position of the Sepulchre in the time of Christ and many writers alluded to the problematic fact that it would have been inside the city, an unlikely place for an execution.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there were other tombs being discovered around the city by men such as Conder (Conder 1883). As pertains to the second problem, this was an administrative and religious issue related

to the fact that, until 1850, the Ottoman authorities did not recognise the Protestants as an autonomous religious community, within the Empire (Stamatopoulos 2006, 273).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, because the Protestant penetration of the Holy Land was recent, they had no historical rights to the historical places associated with the life of Jesus, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in particular (Kochav 1995, 278–279).

Just outside Damascus gate there were two hills, one of which contained Jeremiah's Grotto and the other of which had been excavated by Colonel Conder (Ben-Arieh 1986, 11). Both hills were easily visible from the Damascus Gate in the period, there being few structures between the Gate and the hills, which were just 500 feet distant.<sup>7</sup> The hill that contained Jeremiah's Grotto became popularized as 'Skull Hill' because one portion of it appeared to have the shape of a skull in a given light. It was this second hill that would forever be connected with Gordon as an alternative site for Calvary or Golgotha, known later as 'Gordon's Calvary' or 'Gordon's Tomb' (Schick 1892, 120). Conrad Schick was particularly instrumental in connecting the name of the hill to General Gordon, and his correspondence with the PEF in London, as well as his publications in the *PEFQSt.*, illustrates this (Schick to PEF June 6th, 1901). According to Lord Elton the hill had been mentioned by 'at least four writers before Gordon, among them Ernest Renan in his *Vie De Jesus* (Life of Jesus), had championed the theory. But it was knowledge that it had been endorsed by Gordon which first gained it wide acceptance in Britain and North America' (Elton, 266). For instance, a 1901 appeal on behalf of the Garden Tomb Association noted that the tomb and garden 'has already given comfort and satisfaction to thousands of Christian travellers, who have, like the late General Charles Gordon, R.E., sought in quietness and reverence to realise for themselves "the place where the Lord lay"' (Garden Tomb Assoc. 1901).

It was Gordon's association with this tomb and his correspondence with Schick, whose findings were published in the PEF Quarterly, that led directly to the founding of the Garden Tomb Association and the purchasing of the site. Gordon's association with the site lent not only credibility, in the way of fame, but also a certain aura that the 'Christ like' Gordon had discovered the tomb of Christ so soon before he himself died a martyr at Khartoum. The women and men who popularized the Garden tomb in the period 1883–1893 were not archaeologists and their views ran contrary to Conder's own findings (Elton, 262). They based their interest on the site more on a spiritual attachment. Modern works on the Garden tomb, such as *The Weekend that Changed the World*, and Reverend Bill White's *A Special Place*, give great exposure to the Gordon connection, even after admitting that he was not the first to associate it with the tomb of Christ (White 1989).

Some authors have pointed to Otto Thenius as the first person to champion the site as the true Calvary in 1842 (Walker 1999, 113). In 1881, two years before Gordon arrived in the Holy Land, Lieutenant Claude R. Conder had undertaken a survey of a tomb located near skull hill, although not the same tomb as Gordon later popularized (Conder 1881, 201). He concluded that 'it would be bold to hazard the suggestion that the single Jewish sepulchre thus found is indeed the tomb in the garden, nigh unto the place called Golgotha, which belonged to the rich Joseph of Aramithea' (Conder 1881, 201). However, Conder also testifies to the fact in his article that by this time there were people already popularizing this place as the Holy Sepulchre. In 1883, in a separate article on the same site Conder recalls that 'the proposal of identifying this hill with Calvary was first published in his book *Tent Work in Palestine*; but, in 1881, it was found that a Jewish tomb existed on a smaller knoll west of the north road. . . this discovery led to the suggestion that the tomb thus standing alone might be the actual sepulchre of Joseph of Aramithea, and the idea excited considerable interest in England at the time' (Conder 1883, 71). We can determine from these two pieces, in

addition to a much shorter letter by a reader of the journal, Henry Harper, appearing in the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly* at a time when Gordon was not only reading the publication but preparing and departing for his stay in the Holy Land, that they certainly influenced Gordon in his observations regarding the site (Harper 1883).

Later mythmaking that claimed that Gordon had miraculously seen the Skull on the hill and identified it with Golgotha were mere fabrications (Agate 1904, 203; Dudman and Kark, 41; Vester 1950, 102–103; Nadava 1984, 40–43). For instance, most popular histories of the Garden Tomb (which was subsequently established on land below Skull Hill), e.g., those by White and Walker, have emphasized the Gordon connection (White 1999).

If not the first person to do so, it was nevertheless Gordon who claimed that a nearby tomb excavated in 1867 to determine its usability as a cistern by his acquaintance Conrad Schick was the actual sepulchre of Jesus where he had been laid to rest after his death (Schick 1892, 120). There was even more to it than that, for the land on which the tomb was discovered, which was just below and next to the cliff that appeared as a skull, was in fact identified as none other than that plot of land owned by Joseph of Aramithea. In addition, it was connected to the ‘place of stoning’ that Jewish tradition associated with the place where those to be executed, like Jesus, would have been crucified (Hanauer 1881).

It was not necessarily a coincidence that the tomb beneath Skull Hill claimed as the sepulchre of Jesus was said to have been owned by Joseph of Aramithea (Garden Tomb Assoc. 1898). Joseph was mentioned in all four gospels (Matt. 27:57–60, Mark 15:43–46, Luke 23:50–53, John 19:38–41). Joseph was the man reputed to have received and buried the body of Jesus. Joseph was also the legendary man who brought Christianity to a Celtic Britain, and was also an ancestor of King Arthur. Therefore, it is not a surprise that Gordon connected Skull Hill, thanks to the skull image, with the death of Jesus and, thence, to the tomb, and therefore back to Joseph of Aramithea himself, who was credited by adherents of British Israelitism as being the progenitor of the English people.

However, to understand how it is that Gordon connected the image of the skull to his belief that this indicated the place of burial for Jesus, one must look to Gordon’s letters, his publication in the *PEFQSt.* in 1885, and his *Reflections*. Gordon writes that ‘The morning after my arrival at Jerusalem I went to Skull Hill and felt convinced that it must be north of the Altar. . . The Latin Holy Sepulchre is west of the Altar and, therefore, unless the types are wrong, it should never have been taken as the site’ (Gordon 1885, 80). Gordon wrote in *Reflections* that ‘The crucifixion seems to have been on the skull hill, and the altar of burnt sacrifice to have been on this second remarkable rock within the temple enclosure. . . a continuous tradition connects that portion of ground outside the northern wall with the place of stoning. Adjoining this hill, but not under it, is the large cavern containing a vast cistern which is known as the grotto of Jeremiah. . . Here, also, after that time, at the skull hill, close to the slaughter-house of Jerusalem, were the head-quarters of Titus. I think that Titus put his tent under the brow of the hill, so as to be under cover. Long before, in the cave, Jeremiah had written his Lamentations. *There* Christ suffered without the gate’ (Gordon 1884, 2–3).

However, there is more to this. Gordon relies here on a variety of sources, but mostly on his Bible. In addition, he is knowledgeable about the traditions connecting the hill to the ‘place of stoning’ where victims of the Sanhedrin were executed. Here, he relies on biblical criticism and archaeological evidence (Hanauer 1881). However, his writings on the matter shed a deeper light on his more fantastical feelings regarding the site. He reads meaning into many things, writing to Reverend William Fredrick Birch that ‘the walls of Jerusalem have spiritual meanings’ (Gordon to Birch, May 12th, 1883). He writes that ‘if the skull is mentioned four times [in the Bible], one naturally looks for the body, and if you take



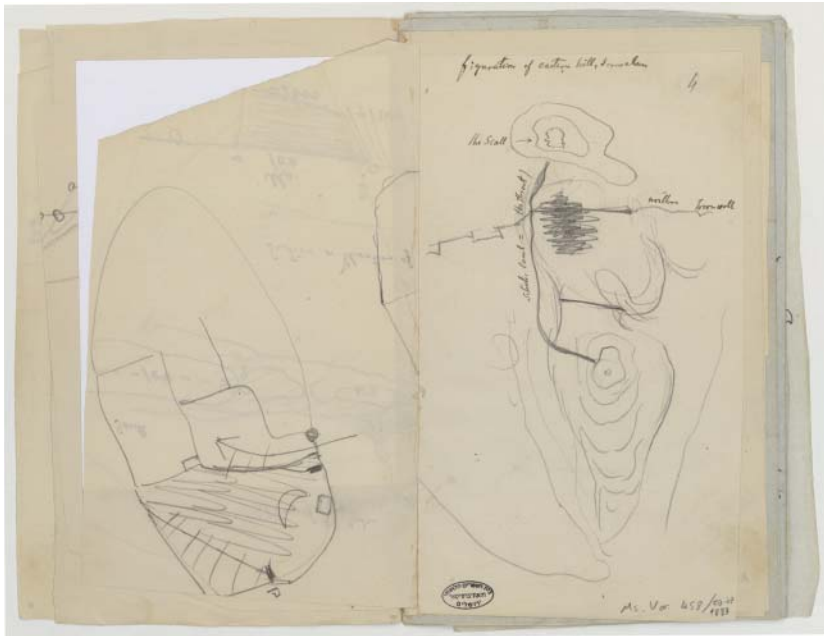


Fig. 2. Charles Gordon's sketch of 'Skull Hill'. Source: JNUL MS. Various 458.

Warren's or others' contours with the earth or rubbish removed showing the natural state of the land, you cannot help seeing that there is a body, that Schick's conduit is the oesophagus, that the quarries are the chest, and if you are venturesome you will carry out the analogy further' (Gordon 1885, 80). He refers here to his theory that the name 'Skull Hill' is not only connected with the death of Jesus but is allegorical for a female body laid out over the entire area of the old city. Gordon believed the Bible 'a sheath or vehicle for the incorruptible word' (Elton 263). All those who met Gordon in this period, those at the American Colony, Oliphant, Schick and Longley Hall mention this idea (Henderson 341). Gordon drew a few coloured and black and white sketches, and went so far as to have models made of his theory (Boddy 1900). The models were made by either Conrad Schick or Paulus, an assistant of his, and were part of a larger number of models that Schick completed during the same period (Goren 2006, 110). (See Figure 2: Charles Gordon's sketch of 'Skull Hill'.)

What is significant here is that Gordon was building upon the ideas of John Nelson Darby, who had passed away just before Gordon's arrival in Palestine. Darby had pioneered the idea of 'dispensationalism' and this, in turn, influenced his group of followers known as the Plymouth Brethren. In his writings, Darby had connected the literal Jerusalem with the spiritual one (Geldbach 1997, 109–111). Gordon built upon these themes in his fantastical view that the city itself was an allegory for a figure draped over it with its head as skull hill, and thus the same 'skull' as is mentioned in the New Testament (Gordon to Schick 14 October, 1883).

It was Gordon's interest in Golgotha that eventually spurred a group of English women and men to purchase the site of the tomb on Nablus road in Jerusalem. The property was purchased in 1894, roughly ten years after Gordon had sojourned in Palestine. It was the association with Gordon that led partly to the creation of this holy site.<sup>8</sup> For many years

afterward those who visited the Holy Land were shown this tomb below Skull Hill and it was referred to as 'Gordon's Calvary'. The Jerusalem-based missionary James Edward Hanauer wrote around 1892 a twenty-seven page 'Notes on the controversy regarding the site of Calvary'. He added a sketch-plan of what he called: 'Gordon's tomb'. In 1903, he referred to the site as 'Gordon's Garden Tomb', and noted that the skull shape of the hillock was altered by quarrying for the Muslim cemetery nearby (PEF archive, J. E. Hanauer papers). No doubt the excavations of Schick, and the opinions of others as well as the role of the PEF played integral roles in the creation of this Holy Site but for many the 'Christ like' character of Charles Gordon and the myths surrounding his connection to the tomb helped to encourage its popularity and fame (Oliphant 1887, 40). In 1898, The Garden Tomb Purchase Fund noted that 'the sepulchre first attracted public attention through General Gordon, who was firmly convinced that it was the actual tomb in which our Lord was laid' (Garden Tomb Assoc. 1898). Other objects associated with Gordon, for instance a bed he may have slept in while in Jaffa, obviously faded from memory, but this site and its importance and implications to the Protestant Christian world were not so easily snuffed out by the fans of time (Boddy 1900). Gordon was the central figure in the popularizing of the Garden Tomb. He himself was unable in his lifetime to bring the site's attention to very many people, but his association with it led directly to its purchase a decade after his death. Into contemporary times, his association with it has continued to be at the centre of the site's history. Conrad Schick had been the first to see the tomb in 1867 but after the death of Gordon he was the one that referred to it as 'Gordon's Tomb' in an 1892 article in the Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Journal (Schick 1892). Later, writers on the subject such as Reverend Evan Hopkins in 1899, and H. Rider Haggard in 1901 referred to the site as 'Gordon's Tomb' (Hopkins 1899; Haggard 1901).

The list of those who were primarily influenced by Gordon is quite extensive and stretches from Schick to Oliphant to Arthur W. Crawley-Boevey, an attorney associated with the purchase of the tomb, Hopkins, the publisher John Murray, and various church officials such as Reverend Canon Henry Baker Tristram and Reverend E. Carr Glyn and the Earls of Aberdeen and Compton. By opponents of associating the tomb with the place of Calvary, Gordon was seen as a sort of Svengali, the personage behind the transformation of the tomb from archaeological site to the spiritual and actual place of the crucifixion and burial. Mary Brodrick's *Handbook for Travellers in Syria and Palestine* in 1903 recalled that the idea was 'adopted unhesitatingly by a number of English and Americans upon no more sufficient datum than the pious opinion of a good man who was not an archaeologist' (Brodrick 1903, 73).

Despite the importance of Jerusalem to his work, Gordon moved to Jaffa after spending only two months in Jerusalem and Ein Kerem (Gordon to Schick 21 March 1883). He wanted to engage in charity work and to work among the people (Churchill 205), and '... find sick people to visit, feeling sure that is the necessary work for me' (Churchill 108); Lord Elton suggested that he gave away clothes to poverty stricken Jews who had arrived in the Holy Land on pilgrimage (Elton 269). Jaffa would serve as his base for the next eight months but he travelled repeatedly back to Jerusalem and was also in Gaza once, in Nablus (where he designed a mission house for the CMS), and in Haifa.

#### EVALUATION OF GORDON'S PUBLISHED VIEWS ON THE HOLY LAND

Gordon did not only spend his time discovering a new Golgotha. In fact the popularizing of 'Gordon's Calvary' really took place only following his martyrdom at Khartoum, the siege of which and his death helped fuel the publication of his two writings on Golgotha and

other recollections of his time in the Holy Land. If one peruses *Reflections* one is struck by the fact that ninety percent of the work concerns the esoteric and only the first eighteen pages of the 124 page work deal with geography, and of that only two pages deal with Golgotha. The work is divided into two sections, the first entitled 'topographical' and the second 'religious'. In the first part, he examines many of the themes found in his letters to Schick and his short article in the PEFQst, such as the boundary of Judah and Benjamin. However, he also delves into his symbolic and esoteric ideas of there being a 'cup' inside the western wall of the Temple Mount. In his section on religion, he repeats his exhortation that 'the written word is the sheath or vehicle of the incorruptible word' (Gordon 1884, 19). He emphasizes that the reason for religious differences is that 'writings of *man* are read and studied instead of the Scriptures searched' (Gordon 1884, 20). Gordon notes that it was standard practice among non-conformists of the time that 'the root principle for the right study of Jerusalem is that we should first know our Bibles, and with this knowledge examine the localities' (Gordon 1884, 7).

In his article 'Eden and Golgotha,' his Golgotha theory consumes only half the work, and the impetus for its publication by the PEF was the death of Gordon at Khartoum. However, testimony from his letters, sketches, and from others confirms that he did indeed spend much time discussing the topic and contemplating it as well as having a model made. He wrote from Khartoum on 6 March 1884 that Warren's plan of Jerusalem 'shows very clearly the human figure' (Gordon 1884, vii). (See Fig. 3: Gordon's sketch of the female figure transposed over Jerusalem, with the head of the figure as 'Skull Hill'.) Here we can see that, although Gordon was deeply involved in Golgotha, he was also involved in his more esoteric views of the linkage between biblical allegory and the shape of Jerusalem, even while under siege at Khartoum (Wheatcroft 2003, 196).<sup>9</sup>

Gordon's letters shed a greater degree of light on the way in which he was affected by the Holy Land. There are forty-five letters to Conrad Schick, averaging once a week and usually written on Saturdays. The majority were sent from Jaffa but a few in the beginning and one in June are from Ein Kerem and Jerusalem. (See Figure 4: One of Charles Gordon's letters from Ein Kerem, March 2nd, 1883.)

The relationship with Schick was pivotal for the role that Gordon would place in Palestine for it was Schick that transformed Gordon's mystical perceptions of 'Skull Hill' into works of archaeological merit in the PEF. Conrad Schick was born in 1822 in Germany and came to Palestine in 1846 as a missionary. In 1850, he went to work soon after for the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews (LJS), a situation he had in common with Charles Wilson, who was a member of the CMS. Schick first began work with the PEF in 1865. In 1867, it was no surprise that he excavated the tomb beneath Skull Hill that was on the Greek's property. He became locally a known amateur surveyor, architect (for instance of the German Talitha Kumi school) and engineer. The fact that the tomb was not popularized before Gordon, despite the hill having been connected to Calvary and the tomb having been seen by Schick, shows the degree to which Gordon was essential in the site's transformation. Throughout Gordon's time in Palestine, Schick proved an excellent sounding board for his ideas and enabled Gordon to turn them into reality by furnishing him with models of the hill itself (Goren 2006, 105–128).<sup>10</sup>

The correspondence with Conrad Schick sheds light on many characteristics of Gordon, his thoughts and meditations, and certainly sheds light on his mental state while he was in the Holy Land. Gordon rarely reflects on any other people, or the environment, or his personal life, seeking instead the experience of Schick in reviewing his findings. However, he always sends warm regards to Mrs. Schick and asks about their health.

From the letters, we gain insights into Gordon's views and theories. The majority deal exclusively with his various calculations and ideas surrounding a number of themes that will

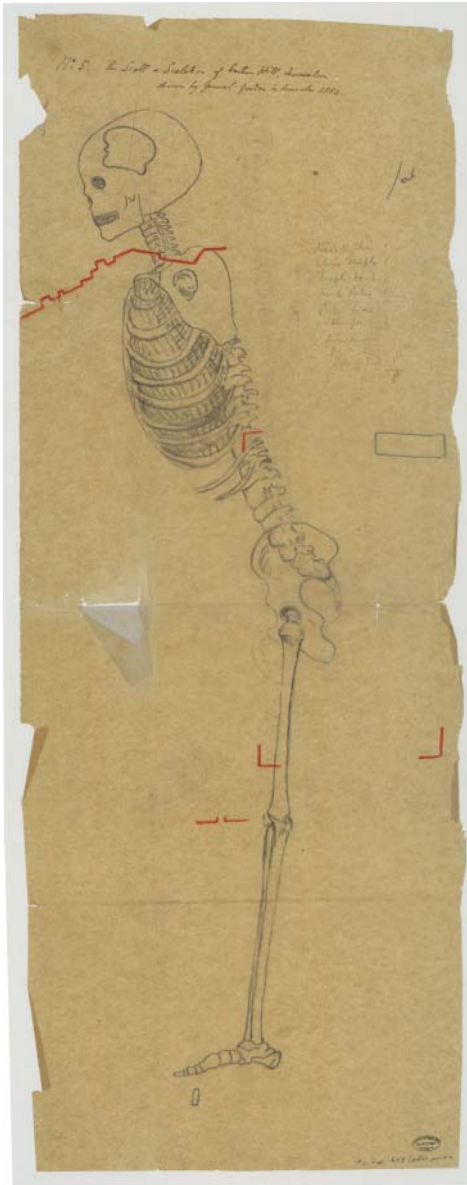


Fig. 3. Gordon's sketch of the female figure transposed over Jerusalem, with the head of the figure as 'Skull Hill'. Source: JNUL MS. Various 458.

form his later publication in the PEF and *Reflections*. Prominent among these are the ideas surrounding Skull Hill and the 'human figure' that is transposed over Jerusalem.

Secondary to this are plans for a canal to link Haifa to the Hulah valley (north of the Sea of Galilee) and thence to Akaba via the Dead Sea, a certain way to make sure the Dead Sea would no longer be known as the 'Salt Sea' in Hebrew. (See Figure 5: Charles Gordon's sketch of his idea for a canal between the Mediterranean and the Gulf of Akaba.)

In a tertiary place are a variety of theories regarding the correct place of Eden, the ancient walls of Jerusalem, diagrams of the Temple Mount, and theories about various place

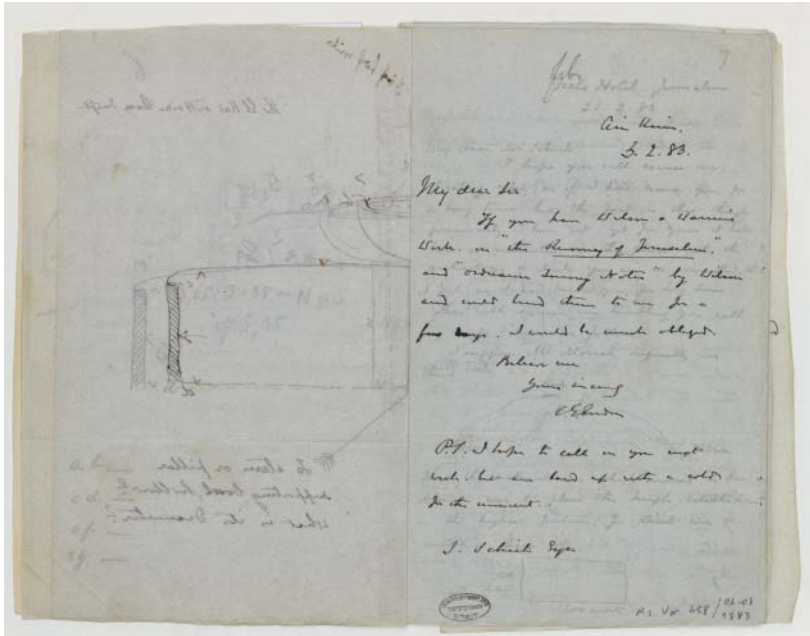


Fig. 4. One of Charles Gordon's letters from Ein Kerem, 2 March 1883.  
Source: JNUL MS. Various 458.

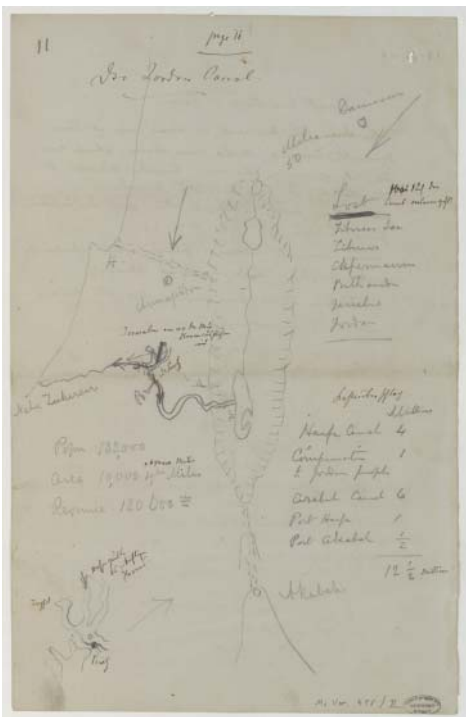


Fig. 5. Charles Gordon's sketch of his idea for a canal between the Mediterranean and the Gulf of Akaba. Source: JNUL MS. Various 458.

names in the Bible and modern times. Only some of the drawings and theories border on the fantastic; others are views attached to the scientific calculation of biblical events using on-site observation. For instance, on 21 February 1883, Gordon wrote to Schick from Jerusalem that 'The Jew[s] wail towards the "cup" which they do not see, though it is before them, it is veiled to them' in regards to his observations of the western wall and his belief that there remains inside the Temple mount an allegory of a cup and heaven (Gordon to Schick 21 February, 1883). A drawing of his theory accompanies this letter. This helps to shed light on his parallel interests of connecting real things that he sees in everyday life with the ephemeral. For instance, one letter in particular helps to explain his connection of Skull Hill with the Holy Sepulchre. Gordon writes 'scripture did not mention skull four times without object' referring to his own deduction from the Gospels and from the Prophets that biblical allusion was secretly referring to Skull Hill through reference rather than directly describing it (Gordon to Schick, 1883 G/S 46). Gordon is a sceptic; he writes to Schick that 'between ourselves I do not believe in all the identifications of the Palestine Exploration Fund' (Gordon to Schick 1883, G/S 68).

Gordon was a keen cartographer with an eye for geography and measurement. He observes correctly that the Temple Mount is not built so that its sides match the cardinal angles, but rather is askew to the compass. His models and drawings of Skull Hill and the depths of the Dead Sea illustrate his skill.

As for the local population, he observes that any native who has learned to speak English fluently is not to be trusted. He claims that he believes more in Arab traditions regarding sites than 'monkish' traditions (Gordon to Schick 20 July, 1883). His scant remarks about Jews are ambivalent and observant without judgment or particular interest.

It is in several additional letters to the Reverend Mr Birch in Manchester spanning the same period that we see him working on the same themes again and again, turning them over in his head and modifying them as they mature (Gordon to Birch 7 May, 1883). While in Jerusalem in May, Gordon writes to Birch that 'Zion is the body, the skull separated four times is the head, the quarries whence the stone was taken from the chest, the site of Zion the beautiful [are] the ribs of the north' (Gordon to Birch 7 May, 1883). Gordon is aware that Conder has commented on the skull-shaped hill and uncovered other tombs on an adjacent hill. Indeed Gordon notes that as early as 1864 Skull Hill has been mentioned (Gordon to Birch 12 May, 1883). In June, he is again writing to Birch regarding the boundaries of Judah saying 'Look to the boundaries of Judah and Benjamin for I think in them depends the division of Zion Hill' (Gordon to Birch 30 June, 1883). Also in June, he writes decisively 'I have still a strong opinion that we shall find the Constantine Sepulchre is close to the St. Stephen church outside the Damascus gate, where the cisterns are and where you took the copy of the inscription' (Gordon to Schick June 1883, G/S 92).

#### CONCLUSION: THE REFLECTION OF GORDON IN PALESTINE

After his death at Khartoum on 26 January 1885, Gordon became immortalised as one of the lions of the Victorian era. Numerous books were written about him and according to Neil Asher Silberman he was 'canonised as one of the martyrs in the British imperial cause' (Silberman 1982, 152). Upon his death, dozens of biographies were written about him, his letters were published, his diaries, some of his correspondence, and numerous other takes on his life were written in addition to at least one motion picture, 'Khartoum: sunset on the British Empire' (1966). The Queen wrote to his sister in March of 1885 thanking her for the receipt of Gordon's Bible (Churchill, 103–104). Something about Gordon rang true to the English public, and he joined others such as Lord Nelson, the defenders of Rourke's Drift, and those who died in Afghanistan, as men sacrificed for Empire. Gordon's involvement with the Holy Land left its mark clearly in the form of the Garden Tomb; without his association with the site its chances of gaining a wide following would have been severely limited.

How can we understand the diversity of Gordon's letters, his less than sound scholarship, and yet the mesmerizing affect he had on his colleagues? In his reminiscences *Thirty Years of My Life*, Edwin De Leon recalls a number of the characteristics of Gordon. He describes him as having 'nothing soldierlike in his aspect, dress, or carriage. . . with an air of abstraction. . . Even in matters of faith he followed no guide, but took his own road. . . When interested in a subject, he talked, and you listened to his monologue, delivered in a low, monotonous tone, without apparent excitement: for he was very seldom animated. . . he was a misplaced man, and the victim of his own enthusiasm and unworldliness' (De Leon 1890, 94–103). It was these contradictory and often times opposing values and character traits that enabled Gordon to arrive in the Holy Land on a whim, publish, albeit only while his life was at stake, his interest in biblical archaeology and faith, and finally contribute in some way to the establishment of a new pilgrimage site in the holy city.

Gordon's views today may seem arbitrary and bordering on 'Jerusalem Syndrome'. However, squared with the time, a time of discovery and mysticism, of science and theology mixed, it turns out that perhaps his ideas are only slightly removed from those of his contemporaries who worked in Palestine and respected him. Gordon was, in fact, following the precedent of trying to square biblical theology and story with the actual lay of the land. Gordon was a recipient of the English heritage which in the Victorian age imprinted detailed maps of the Holy Land in the minds of English pupils so that they were as familiar with that landscape as their own country (Rose 2001, 350–351). He had to square this with the new forces of biblical criticism. Since many ancient places such as Beit Shemesh or Betar existed in the time of Gordon and were being excavated, to him it meant that other things, such as the real border between Benjamin and Judah, could be demarcated (Gordon to Birch, 21 May, 1883).<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, it turns out that those such as Lord Elton who claimed Gordon was using only his Bible during this period are quite wrong (Elton 1955, 263). Gordon, as seen from the letters, kept abreast of all recent PEF publications and maps and the new ideas of Conder, and he was avidly reading of Wilson's and Warren's discoveries. He was consulting Josephus and the Greek, French and German translations of the Bible. He was also reading old pilgrim's accounts. Gordon was in fact more worldly than some have commented. His Bible inspired him to come up with many claims, but he squared them against many sources and field work. In the end, however, his inability to focus on one project at a time seems to have had the foregone conclusion of making all his work come out only half-baked. He was unable to complete any of it, and with the exception of his views regarding Golgotha and Skull Hill none of his ideas remain with us today. Places famous in his time such as Jeremiah's Grotto are today rubbish heaps. Only as a lonely street name in Tel Aviv and at his Golgotha where the modern day Garden Tomb remains is there evidence of Gordon's great interest in the Holy Land, and this is partly due to his subsequent martyrdom rather than his contemporary interest in it.

The eleven months that Charles Gordon spent in the Holy Land are emblematic of several recurring and essential themes in the history of Palestine in the nineteenth century. The large brush strokes of European intellectual and religious history combined with the era of imperialism combine in the Holy Land to make possible the formation of a variety of English language works by explorers, missionaries and scientists. Charles Gordon spans a variety of these gaps, representing many of the themes of his age, but particularly contributing to Palestine in the way of biblical criticism. Gordon was the perfect Victorian age hero and, although his time in Palestine is generally forgotten, it is this very experience that adds to his eccentricity and therefore connects him to other famous Victorian adventurers and explorers of his age. In terms of his overall impact, the experience of Gordon in the Holy Land is nondescript, with the exception of the fact that his interest in a new Golgotha was used by others a decade later to create a Protestant holy site (which is active until the present). During the period when the Garden Tomb was purchased it

engendered much debate among biblical archaeologists and Protestant theologians, and it was never officially recognised by the Anglican Church. Recent archaeological discoveries continue to confound any conclusion on the merits of the tomb popularized by Gordon as the site of the tomb of Christ.<sup>12</sup> In terms of the history of travellers to the Holy Land and the Holy Land's place in English history and imagination, he joins a pantheon of others such as Joseph of Aramathea, King Richard the Lionhearted, and Lawrence of Arabia (Tuchman 1958, 181).

Barbara Tuchman has shown in her *Bible and Sword*, the long relationship between England and Palestine, but that relationship seems to be punctuated by a series of larger than life figures. For Victorian England, and especially for those who founded the Garden tomb, Gordon's involvement was essential (Tuchman 1958, 181). Gordon's experience in the Holy Land is therefore neither unique nor typical and it is for that reason that it is important to highlight not only his endeavours in the land but also his impact. Gordon was symbolic of a generation of those who came to the Holy Land, part of a historical narrative that runs through Western history. However, his influence was also great in that his interest in the Garden Tomb led to its purchase and the creation of a new site for Calvary. He was the last Titan to give his name to a site such as this. Those such as Warren and Robinson, after whom a shaft and an arch were named, respectively, had already achieved their fame, as had Conder. Gordon's ideas were biblical, not based on science but on his own Darby-like interpretations of the sheath of that 'incorruptible word' that helped him divine the human figure whose skull was the place of the crucifixion. Gordon's influence and writings were among the last in which a respected gentleman could influence popular opinion on a subject that had been given over to such scientific exploration and influence in a mystical manner. Gordon showed the degree to which so much of the new biblical criticism was tied up in assertions based in Bible and thus was susceptible to the very 'pious frauds' that it had come to challenge.

The historical, religious and scientific context, following the Napoleonic Wars, the advance of science including Darwin's theory of evolution, and the revival of religious beliefs and biblical studies in Britain led directly to Gordon's views of the Holy Land. He sits at the centre of this changing world and the revolutionary new ideas sweeping over Victorian England in the sciences, religion and new disciplines such as biblical archaeology. The influence of Darby and the millenarians is also prominent in his conception of the Bible and the land as an allegory or symbol. Gordon, the 'Christian soldier', was a product of modernity but this was a modernity that was forever re-inventing itself, coming to grips with radical new ideas and discoveries. In this light and context, a new understanding of Calvary was crafted in large part owing to a man whose religious sympathies were as diverse as those of the world at large.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *General Charles G. Gordon CB RE and his life in Gravesham*, Towncentric tourism, Gravesend 2003. www.towncentric.co.uk. According to the brochure Gordon was active in a variety of charity projects, principally teaching at the 'ragged school' for boys. Gordon commented at this time on the state of the church

'the church is like the British army, in it is One, only different regiments'.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Horatio Kitchener served in Palestine between 1874–1878 and did work both on behalf of the British government and the Palestine Exploration Fund; like Charles Wilson, Claude R. Conder and others he was



both a military man and involved in the Survey of Western Palestine.

<sup>3</sup> At the Archives of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem (Hereinafter referred to as JNUL), MS. Various 458.

<sup>4</sup> Originally, it was shown to Yigal Yadin who had become head of the Institute of Archaeology at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and may have wanted the material for a book he edited on Jerusalem Archaeology called *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City 1968–1974*. However, it has not been brought to light previously except for the publication of one of its maps by Yaacov Shavit in 'General Gordon and the Canal: Gordon and the Idea of a Canal Between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean' *Keshet* vol. 15, (1973), 145–155 (Hebrew). PEF Archive, London, MSS/Variou. In total it includes 197 pages of letters, 65 pages of manuscripts and 20 plans and drawings, many of which are in colour. Kochav in her paper mentions only the drawings in JNUL. She does not mention the letters, or their content (Kochav, 'The Search for a Protestant Holy Sepulchre', p. 289).

<sup>5</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the role of biblical criticism in the discovery of the Garden Tomb, 'Gordon's Calvary' at Skull Hill see Kochav, 'The Search for a Protestant Holy Sepulchre'. See also V. D. Lipman, *Americans and the Holy Land through British Eyes*, London, 1989, 29 and 35 regarding Robinson. Robinson wrote, 'The alleged discovery of them [Golgotha and the Tomb] by the aged and credulous Helena, like her discovery of the Cross, may not

improbably have been the work of pious fraud,' Titus Tobler also suggested similar problems in his *Topographie von Jerusalem und Seinen Umgebungen* (1853–1854). See Lipman, *Americans and the Holy Land*, 40.

<sup>6</sup> The Protestant churches, however, did not receive the same level of recognition as other churches such as the Latin Catholic and Greek Orthodox.

<sup>7</sup> See map in the *PEFQSt.* 1885, 79.

<sup>8</sup> Today's 'Garden Tomb' in Jerusalem is an unofficial Anglican and Protestant pilgrimage site for some.

<sup>9</sup> The allegory of various things in Bible or in real life to human form is not original to Gordon. Opicinus de Canistris, a French monk, developed a theory in 1335.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon also shared with Schick his idea for a canal between Haifa and the Dead Sea and thence to Aqaba.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon wrote that 'I have worked out Aramathea 'heights' to be Ramath. . . brought Joseph of Aramathea to be consequently a resident of Kiryat Jearim and it is my impression that this is also the 'abide with us' or Emmaus. The resting place of [the] Ark. It is exactly sixty furlongs from Jerusalem.'

<sup>12</sup> See [http://www.antiqities.org.il/home\\_heb.asp](http://www.antiqities.org.il/home_heb.asp). Site number 67 'Garden Tomb'. Also see the Garden Tomb's website, <http://www.gardentomb.com/>. A recent documentary claimed that a tomb unearthed in 1980 in the Jerusalem neighbourhood of Talpiot is the tomb of Jesus and his family. See Laurie Goodstein, 'Crypt held bodies of Jesus and Family, film says' in *The New York Times*, 27 February 2007.

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