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# JERUSALEM

## *Korrespondenz*

Bi-annual report of the Austrian Pilgrims' Hospice



AUSTRIAN  
PILGRIM-HOSPICE  
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A Night in the  
Church of the Holy Sepulchre

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# Esteemed Pilgrim Friends

Recently a lady gently scolded me. Our autumn theme *Archaeology in the Holy Land* was not spiritual enough for her. Even if this one piece of feedback was counteracted by many others that were highly positive, I can well understand the lady – who incidentally has been a friend of our House for a considerable time. In fact, we have her to thank for this newsletter: “**A Night in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre**”.

**Anyone who comes to Jerusalem today as a pilgrim of course visits the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.** At first glance this historic building is disconcerting because it bears scant relation to the classic church buildings we are familiar with from other places of pilgrimage.

Today’s Church of the Holy Sepulchre is a complex web of different stages of construction and a comingling of the different Christian churches that celebrate the resurrection of Jesus there.

We first have to get to grips with the building history of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to understand its current appearance. Thanks to **Prof. Dr. Klaus Bieberstein** (University of Bamberg), a proven expert on this subject, we are able to shed light on what is still visible and assignable from the building’s long history.

Did you know that you can stay overnight in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre? Not to sleep, of course, but for contemplation and prayer, removed from the pilgrim groups who are there during the day. The famed ProSieben Galileo TV presenter and moderator **Stefan Gödde** enjoys doing so regularly. His book *Nice to meet you, Jerusalem!* acquaints us with this spiritual aspect of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

As a Franciscan **Fr Dr Gregor Geiger** belongs to the Custody of the Holy Land; he is also a teacher in the Flagellatio College, located close to us. He explains the nature and significance of the so-called Status Quo which regulates the coexistence of the churches in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

In addition to the day to day running of our pilgrim hostel, we are extremely busy behind the scenes



Photo: © Fotostudio Floyd

with preparations for our upcoming general renovation.

Since the opening of our Casa Austria shortly before the pandemic, the need for renovation has become increasingly obvious. Indeed, the last renovation took place in 1988! **No time like the present! We have a lot of work to do.**

It is also important to clarify a fundamental question: **What is actually the difference between a pilgrim hostel and a hotel?** Our circle of friends “The Austrian Society of the Holy Land” once again invites you to a **General Assembly** on June 21<sup>st</sup> 2023 after a long Corona-driven interval. For me this is a very welcome opportunity to ask you, too, to become a friend by making a declaration of membership. [gesellschaft@austrianhospice.com](mailto:gesellschaft@austrianhospice.com)

I really look forward to seeing you again! Whether with us in Jerusalem or at our General Assembly in Vienna.

Yours



RECTOR MARKUS ST. BUGNYÁR



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# The Secret Song of the Monks. Overnight in the Holy Sepulchre

BY STEFAN GÖDDE

**I really want to be locked in and stay an entire night in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The place where Jesus Christ is said to have been crucified, died, was buried and rose from the dead, undoubtedly the holiest place in Christendom.**

## **Instead of contemplation and silence ...**

To understand how I got into this situation we have to jump back a few hours. In the morning I was given a tip: you can, at your request, be locked in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre overnight. One need simply ask the Franciscan brothers inside the church during the day, and then, with a bit of luck, be granted permission to spend the night there – after all the other tourists and pilgrims have been swept out, and with them the hustle, bustle and noise of a regular church day. A particularly appealing prospect for me since my very first visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had been a sobering experience. I had imagined a quiet, dignified place, conducive to prayer and meditation. But during the peak travel season, the tomb of Jesus is literally a chattering bazaar. If you are unlucky and several groups of tourists invade the church at the same time, a camera-toting horde pushes through the front door, past the so-called Stone of Unction to the aedicule, only to be confined by metal barriers and squeezed in the direction of the tomb entrance.

The aedicule is the name given to the chapel in the heart of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a small church within the large one. It is – according to tradition – the place where Jesus Christ was laid in a burial cave following his crucifixion, after his flayed body had been rubbed with fragrant oils on the Stone of Unction.



Photo: © Stefan Gödde

## **... hordes and noise**

Today, a good 2000 years later, “contact relics” are set up on the Stone of Unction: rosaries, candles, icons and pieces of cloth that pilgrims have brought with them are placed on the stone, as are bunches of keys, refrigerator magnets and mobile phones. The pilgrims fervently wipe, rub and press these objects onto the stone so that they absorb the stone’s blessings as directly and thoroughly as possible, like a sponge. However, what many believers probably do not know is that:

Although the stone is said to commemorate the anointing of Christ, it was only laid after the fire of 1808. Tour guides at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre rarely make the effort to keep their voices down; selfie sticks appear in every nook and cranny. And inside the aedicule, i.e. in the tomb itself, after waiting in a long queue, you often have but a few seconds before a Greek monk asks you, in no uncertain terms, to pray faster since people are waiting. All of this was quite irritating on my first visit.

But back to the possibility of being locked in the church without the crowds. The Franciscan brothers, I had heard, allow a maximum of 15 people to stay each night. And so I find myself in the morning standing in the Catholic area of the church, easily recognizable by the clean, black and white marble floor, next to a friendly Franciscan brother in a dark brown habit, who disappears briefly into the sacristy, checks his list and a little later grants me permission. I am asked to appear on a wooden bench near the entrance shortly before seven

thirty, to bring something to eat and drink and not to forget a jacket, as it can get quite chilly inside the church at night. Three rules are to be observed: No singing. No sleeping. No lighting candles.

### **The Muslim Key-Holders**

So here I am, sitting on the wooden bench, waiting for the church to close, which turns out to be something of a highlight in and of itself. Not only for the tourists taking pictures outside the door, but also for those inside. The ceremony every evening is attended by representatives of the three “Church-owning” communities – a Greek, a Franciscan and an Armenian. The conflict between the Christian groups in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has a long tradition. And so it is no wonder that for many centuries two non-Christian, i.e. Muslim families have held the keys to the holiest church in Christendom. Better safe than sorry. The Nusseibeh family was invested with the keys in 637 by decree of the caliph Omar bin Khattab. After the Christian Crusaders took the key back from the Nusseibehs, Sultan Saladin, who in 1187 expelled the Crusaders from Jerusalem, appointed the Joudeh family as the new key-holders. And so is it to this day: the Joudehs are the key-holders, the Nusseibehs unlock and lock the doors. “We are a neutral party,” says doorkeeper Wajeeh Nusseibeh, “without us a holy war would probably break out between the Christians.”

### **The Portal is Closed**

Loud, hard blows echo through the ancient walls of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which has witnessed so much in its history. And again loud, hard blows. Using the heavy iron ring attached to the door, Wajeeh Nusseibeh knocks against the high wooden portal. The last tourists and pilgrims leave the holy place rather reluctantly and hesitantly, while inside the monks form a semicircle. The wing doors close, and a small square flap at abdominal height is opened through which one of the monks reaches out a ladder. The people outside the door are treated to the sight of a young man climbing up the ladder. By connecting iron pins and old hinges, he locks the doors and reaches the ladder back inside through the flap. A magical moment ensues: as the flap



Photo: © Stefan Gödde

**“The Jesus Guy” with Stefan Gödde in the Holy Sepulchre**

closes, it seems as if with every additional inch of its movement all the noise from outside is absorbed and swallowed up. All of a sudden the interior of the Church is imbued with an unexpected quiet.

### **The Night's Ritual**

Things get busy around the aedicule now that the doors of the church are closed. Greek monks take off their black robes and, in shirts and jeans, go about what in the secular world would probably be called cleaning and maintenance work: sweeping, wiping, scraping chewing gum off the floor, filling oil lamps. After about thirty minutes the monks are finished. The bright electric lights in front of the aedicule are switched off; now the many small oil-filled lamps in front of the tomb, over the Stone of Uncion and at Calvary bathe the room in warm, flickering light. It becomes quiet. Two doubled-over old nuns emerge from the Greek Orthodox monastery opposite the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Both are dressed entirely in black, their hair covered with a black cloth; in their hands prayer beads and books that have apparently passed through gnarled hands on countless nights. One sits sunk on a wooden bench in front of the tomb, her mouth silently forming the



Photo: © Stefan Gödde

**At night the cleaning work is done. Here,  
in the Armenian section of the church**

ancient prayers while the prayer beads in her hand slowly but steadily move forward. The other kneels in the aedicule, in the tomb, in front of the light marble slab that covers the rock on which Jesus' body is said to have been placed. In a gentle caressing movement the old woman lays her head softly on the stone. In the absolute stillness of this moment I wonder how many people have knelt before this stone over the past centuries. How many have entrusted their hearts to this special place, their sorrow and pain, their longings and their love. How much blood has already flowed for this place, how many people lost their lives in the brutal Crusades? A place almost desecrated by the hustle and bustle of the day, but which finally regains its rightful dignity in the stillness of the night. This dignity is also expressed in the liturgies, i.e. in the old rituals and songs, which almost exclusively take place at night, because there is little space or quiet for them during the day. After the church closes at 7:30 p.m. and has been cleaned up, an absolute quiet reigns. I use these valuable, intimate hours to be completely alone in the holy places, until suddenly the bells inside the church begin ringing at 11:30 p.m. Now the individual denominations start to hold their liturgies one after the other. Each denomination in its own tradition with its own songs that often seem strange to our ears. It begins with a kind of procession that literally dulls the senses. Carrying censers, whose chains have small bells attached to

them that emit a rhythmic, crystal-clear sound, the monks – Greeks, Armenians and Copts – one after the other, deliver their white smoke into every corner of the church, into every chapel, into each and every hidden niche. A panoply of scents penetrate the nostrils as here, in the closed church, the centre of faith for more than 2.5 billion Christians worldwide, the guardians of the holy places praise their God in the middle of the night. Who is allowed to pray where and when is meticulously defined in the Status Quo. The Greek-Orthodox monks start at midnight. Eight of them, now again in long black robes, stand in front of the aedicule and sing with their powerful, deep basses for almost an hour, while I watch in fascination from a corner and listen to the voices that fill every corner of the church interior. These men, who have given their lives to God, sing the praises of the Most High in the dead of night. They don't do it for themselves, certainly not for listeners like me, nor for effect, but because they desire to praise their Creator. And here at night each of us can be witness to that praise. Then the door to the Roman Catholic chapel opens and the Franciscan brothers sing old Gregorian chants softly and harmoniously, in contrast to the strong deep voices of the Greeks. In like manner, doors seem to open and close at random during the night. Armenian monks now stand in front of the aedicule. They wear pointy black hats from which long, jet black robes reach to the ground. They also have their own melodies,





Photo: © Stefan Gödde

**Worshippers light candles to accompany their prayers**

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the very special rhythm of their language. One of their priests is wrapped in a long red cloak. He wears a golden crown on his head and sings breathtakingly beautiful songs while holding a golden cross to his chest. These are ancient liturgies that are celebrated each night – in a unique, prescribed way. Unchanged for centuries. While the world outside sleeps and probably suspects nothing of what happens here in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre every night.



Photo: © Stefan Gödde

**Lock and Bolt. The right to the keys of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre belongs to two Muslim families**

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Photo: © Stefan Gödde

### Our Lady of Sorrows next to the hill of Golgotha

## A New Day Dawns

It must have happened some time between three-thirty and four in the morning, after the Armenians had finished chanting: in the stillness of the night, wrapped in fascinating and strange impressions, I must have dozed off for a moment.

Suddenly noises penetrate my ears and awaken me. Murmuring accompanied by hasty steps. Mr. Nusseibeh must have opened the doors at four o'clock sharp as the first early pilgrims are now pouring into the church. The night in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is over.

As I leave the holiest church in Christendom, the dawn of the awakening city greets me. And at this moment, at the start of the new day in Jerusalem, I hear the muezzin. Wafting loud above the rooftops it calls the Muslims of the city to prayer. I'm sure it's that experience, that direct, unmediated meeting of religions in the smallest of spaces that happens only here, in Jerusalem, and nowhere else in the world.

### What?

To be locked in the holiest church in Christianity overnight. Just ask the Franciscan brothers during the day in the Roman Catholic section of the Church, recognizable by its black and white marble floor. Don't sing, don't sleep, don't light candles. Bring a warm jacket because it can get quite chilly at night. Toilets available.

### Where?

Church of the Holy Sepulchre Jerusalem

### When?

Opening hours of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre:

April–August: 5 a.m.–9 p.m.

September: 5 a.m.–8.30 p.m., October: 5 a.m.–8 p.m.

November–February: 4 a.m.–7 p.m.

March: 4 a.m.–7.30 p.m.



## Book Mention

Stefan Gödde, Nice to meet you, Jerusalem (in German). Publisher Polyglot

ISBN 978-3-8464-0753-0. € 15.50

Stefan Gödde donates his share of the proceeds of this book to the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem for the benefit of charitable projects.

## ZUR PERSON

Stefan Gödde, TV journalist and well traveled reporter, moderates the popular ProSieben Galileo programme. His work has taken him to numerous countries around the world – but his heart belongs to Jerusalem. He discovered his love for this extraordinary city as a teenager, since which time he has been traveling to Jerusalem several times a year, never failing to encounter the unexpected and meeting a wide range of impressive people.



# Prayer isn't everything. But without prayer everything is nothing

BY JOHANNES PICHLER,  
CURRENTLY DOING *VOLUNTARY SERVICE*  
IN THE AUSTRIAN PILGRIM HOSPICE

If you spend a night in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre you are made familiar with the rules right from the start: no singing, no lighting candles, no sleeping. You could of course read something to kill time, but there really are more welcoming places to do so than here, on these well-worn marble floors, surrounded by the noise of construction and the gossip of Orthodox sisters. So what remains to be done in these long hours in Christianity's holiest place? It sounds simple and indeed it is: Pray

But is prayer really easy or uncomplicated? For many, prayer evokes phrases rattled off in a hushed voice. But there are many different prayer languages – perhaps as many as there are people: some love meditative prayers such as the Rosary or the Liturgy of the Hours, while others prefer silent devotion or Bible prayer. Still others choose to engage in prayer by playing or listening to devotional music. But all these languages and approaches have one goal: to reach out to God as best we can and to be close to Him. Not only to hear His voice, but also to answer it.

He knows everything and yet wants to find out from us what we are all about. He doesn't need our praise, time or attention, he really doesn't "need" us at all – and yet he longs to connect with us and relate to us. It is a truism that relationships won't work if they are one-sided or if communication is absent. So the first step is just to talk to each other. As Teresa of Ávila put it: "In my opinion, prayer is nothing more than a conversation with a friend with whom we often and gladly get together to talk because he loves us".

Prayer is a conversation, without doubt. Often, however, it feels more like a soliloquy: anyone who has seriously tried to lead a life of prayer – or has even tried



Photo: © Johannes Pichler

meditation – knows the theme-tune to the experience: The Song of Silence. Although boredom isn't necessarily a corollary to silence, it is often a faithful companion. And that is the feeling that many today most closely associate with prayer: boredom, pointless sitting down, wasting time. But: is prayer really boring at times because God is boring? Or rather because we humans are boring?

I think it has to be the latter. First, because little could be further from the nature of God than boredom; God is life, dynamism, and joy itself. Second, judging prayer by worldly standards is a gross error: being entertained or being useful doesn't matter in God's sight. You can also call prayer wasting time on God. Because He's worth it. Because being before God is our innermost calling.

# Place of Longing, Jerusalem

## Is every tourist here also a pilgrim?

BY MARKUS ST. BUGNYÁR

**T**he first three days were free, after that you had to pay your own bill. This is how our pilgrim hospice defined things when it was founded. Pilgrims from the Austro-Hungarian lands had a right to accommodation, the costs incurred were covered by donations from the dioceses of the crown lands.

In the initial years after its opening in 1863 this was a perfectly feasible prospect since comparatively few guests found their way to the Holy City. The rectors at that time divided their business year into autumn and Easter caravans; the rest of the time they devoted to their personal studies and research into the land of the Bible. It was not until 1881 that the number of overnight stays throughout the course of the year topped two-hundred. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought a significant increase in the number of guests thanks to greater travel opportunities and expanded transport routes. This coincided with the first rumblings on the part of my predecessors, whose displeasure is evident in our House chronicles: not every guest seemed to be a pious pilgrim to the holy places. Did many a “pleasure seeker” not sneak in to claim their free overnight stay, wanting to satisfy their cultural curiosity rather than meet a genuine spiritual need?

What distinguishes a pilgrim from a tourist? Is every visitor to Jerusalem *a priori* a pilgrim, because basically what this place has to offer are the holy places of Judaism, Christianity and Islam? After all, nobody comes to this city for a wellness break!

Official statistics reveal which regions a traveler visits, an evaluation which of course is not limited to Jerusalem. We see comparatively few Muslim pilgrims, although pilgrimage is prescribed for them by their faith: to Mecca and Medina. Many are currently avoiding Jerusalem for political reasons. Devout Jews have been making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem since the days of the Bible, albeit on the specific pilgrimage festivals of Pass-

over, Shavuot and Succot—visiting Jerusalem at other times is not, by definition, considered a pilgrimage to the Holy City. For Christians, however, this is the city of Jesus. Even if Lent and Easter witness the heaviest pilgrim traffic, pilgrimage is not limited to these days. Any visit to the city for religious reasons can become a pilgrimage.

These days it is more difficult to distinguish a tourist from a pilgrim than it was for my predecessors: the tourist too feels longing for certain places and joy when he finally gets to see them; only the “content” of the place is defined differently. While Jesus or a saint may be the particular focus of the pilgrim, for the non-religiously motivated visitor the focus may be a musician or contemporary personality whose house or workshop they want to see with their own eyes in order to bring them closer to their hero or idol. A first crucial difference lies in what defines a place and gives it its purpose. In the Christian realm there is a whole range of traditional places of pilgrimage (Rome, Assisi, Santiago, Fatima, Lourdes, Marizell, Mont Saint Michel etc.), with Jerusalem marking the first – already attested in the Bible – and noblest address. Nobody would think of putting Michael Jackson’s Neverland or New York’s Ground Zero on this list, although flowers are laid and prayers are said there too and they have a spiritual character for many a visitor.

For the tourist, the journey, the getting there, is a necessary, but in itself not significant, first step to their destination. For a pilgrim on foot, however, the way is already the goal insofar as this physical exertion prepares him for his arrival at the place of longing. He leaves his everyday life to get in touch with his innermost self in the course of the pilgrimage, purified and rich in experience when he comes before the holy Saint James. A separate branch of literature has developed in the past few decades on such spiritual dimensions of self growth through travel.

A pilgrimage often engenders an experience of community and solidarity; either because you start out as a group, know and trust each other, engage in conversations about faith and attend church services together, or find yourself in conversation at a local church once you have reached your destination. Of course, you can just as happily go on a pilgrimage alone, but we are doing a cross-check: an all-in group holiday is made up of par-

ticipants who until that point were total strangers, who do not share worldview or values, and are only prompted to engage in communal prayer if the bus they happen to be travelling in takes a corner too sharply or their aeroplane hits turbulence. That being said, a tourist too can also be seeking self transformation through the experiences his trip affords him. A trip can change you, enrich you, give your life a new direction.

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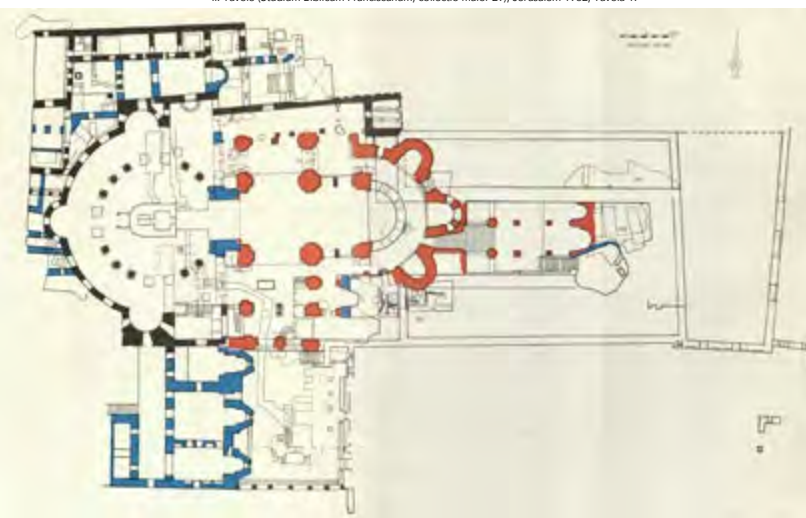
# The Holy Sepulchre throughout Time

## Four tours through its history

BY KLAUS BIEBERSTEIN, BAMBERG UNIVERSITY

Pilgrims from Western Europe are often irritated and disappointed when they enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for the first time: no nave with pews facing an altar, and no pulpit, but a labyrinth of aisles and altars, seemingly without order. But first impressions are deceptive because the construction is well thought out. The fact is that three different construction phases belonging to the fourth, eleventh and twelfth centuries resulted in the overlaying of three coherent plans, the cause of the – apparent- jumble. Three or four tours around the church make the different building phases identifiable and the jumble decipherable.

Photo: © Virgilio Corbo, Il Santo Sepolcro di Gerusalemme. Aspetti archeologici dalle origini al periodo crociato, II. Tavole (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, collectio maior 29), Jerusalem 1982, Tavola 1.



**The three most important construction phases of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, according to Virgilio Corbo (black: first structure from the 4<sup>th</sup> century; blue: second structure from the 11<sup>th</sup> century; red: third structure from the 12<sup>th</sup> century)**



Photo: © Klaus Bieberstein

### The Rock Relief

From a structural point of view, the site on which the first church was built was not ideal, but a former quarry that was probably in use from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC for the construction of that city, which at that time was still south of what is now the Christian Quarter.

Its remains can still be seen in several places in the area of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. When entering the church, it is best to first turn right into a chapel where, according to a late antique tradition, Adam was buried, because there you can still see the Golgotha rock which the stonemasons did not remove because it is cracked and its stones could not have been sold.

Then, via two long flights of stairs, descend through the Armenian Helena Chapel into the grotto that has been considered since Crusader times as the place where Empress Helena discovered the Holy Cross. There the existing rock is still preserved up to the ceiling above the grotto.

This former quarry served as a burial ground in Herodian times. In the extreme west of the church, in the former west apse, the rock is still extant and reveals a typical early Jewish burial chamber that dates from about



Photo: © Abraham Graicer, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=63385029>

**Southeast corner of the Roman temple complex  
(2<sup>nd</sup> century) in the Alexander Hospice**

the same time as the holy tomb in the centre of the Rotunda.

### **Remains of a Roman temple**

This former quarry with its early Jewish graves was filled in around 135 AD at the latest, when Emperor Hadrian had a temple complex built for Jupiter Capitolinus, Juno and Minerva to the west of the Cardo, the city's main street which still leads south from the Damascus Gate today. From this temple complex too, remains have been preserved that are worth looking at.

If you go down the stairs at the end of the right aisle of the German Evangelical Church of the Redeemer (located southeast of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre), you can visit the excavations carried out by Ute Wagner-Lux and Karel Vriezen from 1970 to 1974. Deep shafts revealed a mighty retaining wall that bounded the platform of the Roman temple to the south.

To the north of the Church of the Redeemer is the Alexander Hospice, in which the south-east corner of Hadrian's temple complex can be viewed.

The northern continuation of the same masonry reveals the propylon of the complex, its portal, the remains of

which are preserved in the back of the former Zalatimo confectionery, which unfortunately are not accessible at the moment.

### **Remains of the first church complex**

Shortly after the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325, Emperor Constantine gave orders to demolish the temple structures because it was thought that the holy tomb of Jesus Christ would still be found among them, and to build a multi-part church complex over Golgotha and the holy tomb.

The Roman propylon (whose remains are located in the now defunct Zalatimo confectionery) was adopted as its portal. Through this one entered an atrium, a forecourt that led to a five-nave basilica known as the Martyrium. It was completely destroyed by Caliph al-Hakim in 1009 AD, but some of its foundations are still intact. To see them, go back into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and descend to the right again into the Helena Chapel. Its north and south walls were the underground foundation walls of the nave arcades of that basilica, the floor of which was high above the heads of today's visitors, roughly at the level of the ceiling of today's chapel.



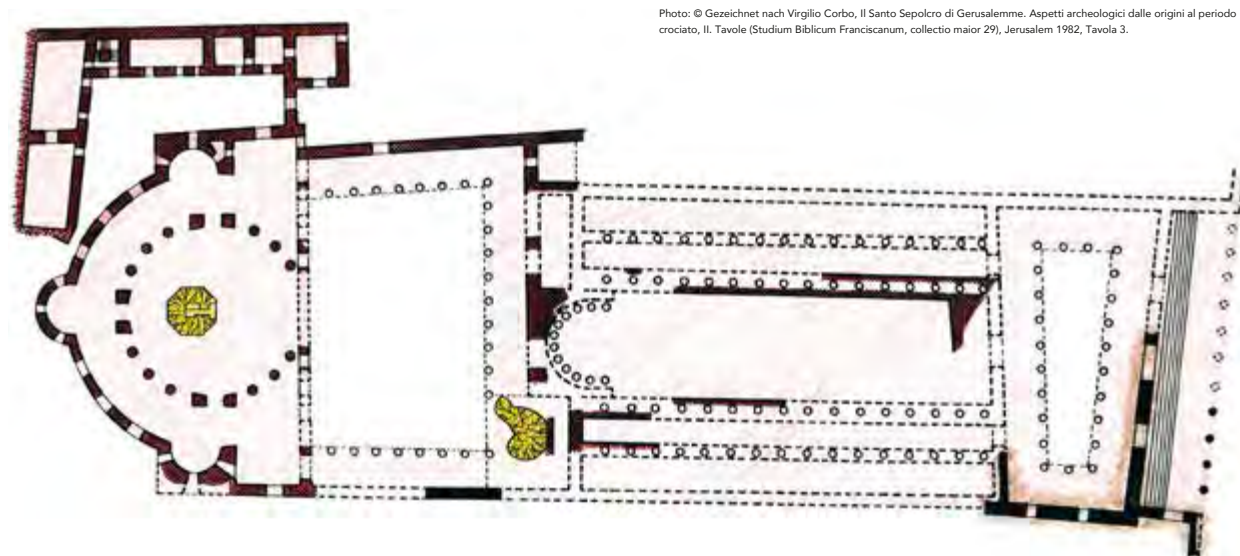


Photo: © Gezeichnet nach Virgilio Corbo, Il Santo Sepolcro di Gerusalemme. Aspetti archeologici dalle origini al periodo crociato, II. Tavole (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, collectio maior 29, Jerusalem 1982, Tavola 3.

**Ground plan of the first church complex  
(4<sup>th</sup> century)**

A second atrium followed to the west of this basilica, and some of its stonework also survives. If you climb back up into the church from the Helena Chapel and turn right, you come north of a row of columns belonging to the north wall of today's church complex. The lower eight layers of ashlar (a passage now leads to the toilets) are from the Constantinian construction, and if you go further west into the Franciscan area of the church and then turn to look east, you can see a large semicircular arch and to the right of it, above a pointed arch from the Crusader period, two narrow round arches, which also come from the Constantinian building. These also led into the second atrium, which was described in pilgrimage reports as the garden of Joseph Arimathea and in the south-east corner of which rose the Golgotha rock

The main feature of the whole complex, however, was the Rotunda around the holy tomb, the place of resurrection. The columns of the Rotunda were replaced by replicas when the complex was renovated in the 1970s, but the stonework of the gallery surrounding the peristyle with three small apses to the north, west and south survives up to the level of the first cornice above the columns. If you pass between two pillars in the north of the rotunda, you can still see the old north apse of the Rotunda behind a steel spiral staircase that leads up to the organ.

Today's chapel above the holy tomb dates from 1810, after a fire in 1808 devastated the old chapel.

Photo: © Elisabeth Ziegler



**North wall of the atrium in front of the  
Rotunda of the first church complex  
(4<sup>th</sup> century) with the groined vault of the second  
Church complex (11<sup>th</sup> century)**



## **Remains of the second church complex**

In 1009 the magnificent building of Caliph al-Hakim was destroyed. Although he gave his permission for its reconstruction as early as 1020, this only came about after the earthquake of 1033 with the help of Emperor Constantine IX. Monomachus of Byzantium; it was completed in 1048.

The great Martyrium Basilica to the east was not rebuilt. Rather, the entrance to the church complex was moved to the south, where it is still located today. In addition, the church with all the altars was turned 180 degrees to the east, and five altars were added to the west, in a row from north to south.

Two groups of construction workers were involved in the work. One group came from Palestine and built with

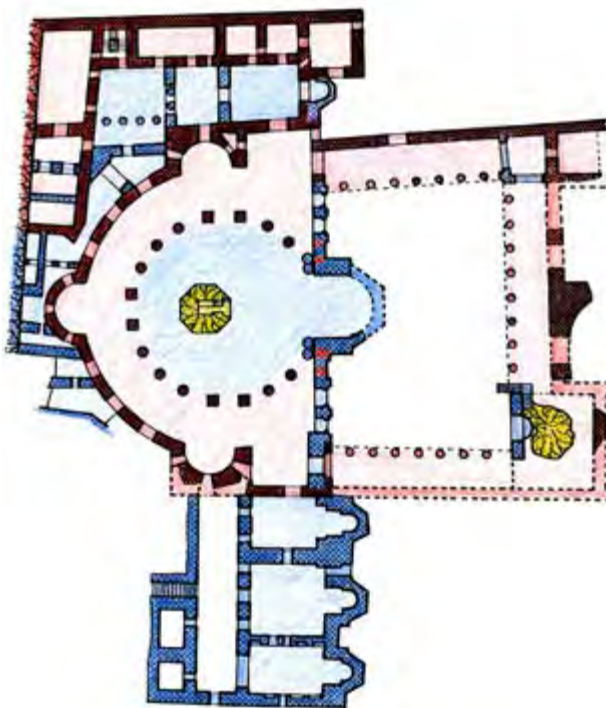
ashlars. That group built those three chapels whose three apses can be seen on the western edge of the parvis.

The other group came from Byzantium and was accustomed to decorating their masonry with layers of brick at regular intervals. This group erected the main apse of the church complex for the new main altar, east of the holy grave. This main apse was breached in Crusader times and only the large arch immediately east of the holy tomb survived.

Finally, the fifth altar is to the north, in the Franciscan chapel.

And if you go back into the former atrium in front of the Rotunda and look up in front of the Constantinian

Photo: © Gezeichnet nach Virgilio Corbo, Il Santo Sepolcro di Gerusalemme. Aspetti archeologici dalle origini al periodo crociato, II. Tavole (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, collectio maior 29), Jerusalem 1982, Tavola 4; abweichende Interpretation der Befunde durch Bieberstein



Ground plan of the second church complex (11<sup>th</sup> century)

Photo: © Berthold Werner, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1411222>



Parvis of the Holy Sepulchre; left the three vestibules of the chapels of the second complex (11<sup>th</sup> century)

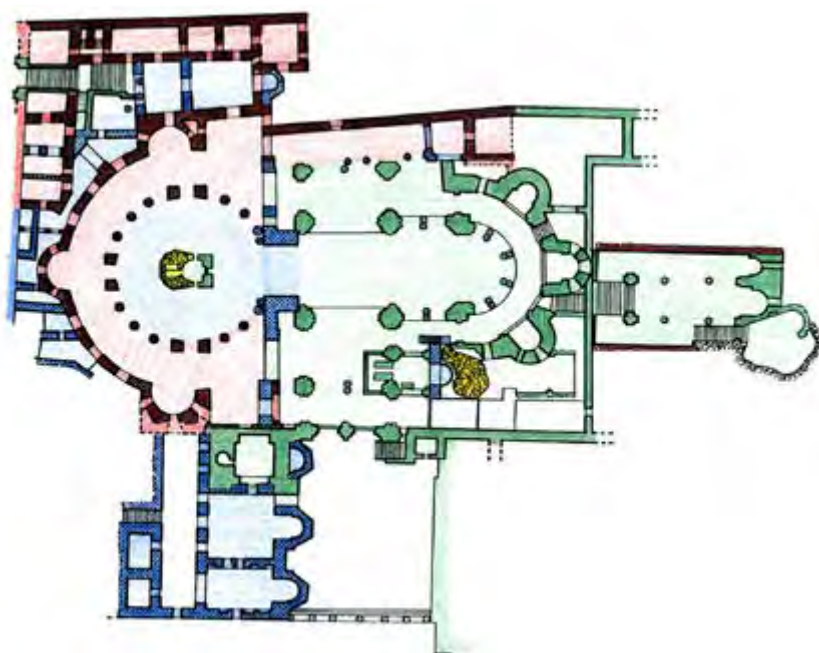


Photo: © Gezeichnet nach Virgilio Corbo, Il Santo Sepolcro di Gerusalemme. Aspetti archeologici dalle origini al periodo crociato, II. Tavole (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, collectio maior 29), Jerusalem 1982, Tavola 6.

#### Ground plan of the third church complex (12<sup>th</sup> century)

north wall of the atrium, you can still see the new groined vault of the atrium from the early 11<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Remains of the third church complex**

When the Crusaders took Jerusalem in the summer of 1099, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was given a new face that essentially corresponds to the current building. A church consecration ceremony was held on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the taking of the city, but we can no longer say with certainty whether this ceremony referred to the rededication of the entire church or only to minor building work.

What was supposed to impress the visitors most about the new structure was its new façade. It may appear poor compared to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, and even shabby given the damage sustained, but first impressions are deceptive, because if you take a closer look and analyze its architectural decor, you can see that the Crusaders were fascinated by the architecture of the Orient and created a fascinating symphony of occidental and oriental architecture in the façade.

What the Crusaders thought needed improving first inside the church was the tightness between the holy tomb and the main altar, which no longer corresponded to the



Photo: © Dinu Mendrea, Jerusalem, aus: Jürgen Krüger, Die Grabeskirche zu Jerusalem. Geschichte – Gestalt – Bedeutung, Regensburg 2000, S. 82 Abb. 79.

#### Main apse of the second church complex (11<sup>th</sup> century), which was breached in the Crusader period (12<sup>th</sup> century)

liturgical needs of their time. That is why the main apse was broken through and to the east of the same, in the former atrium, a large church room was created, the Katholikon, which is now used for worship by the Greek-Orthodox community.

Furthermore, since according to the tradition of that time the Holy Cross of Queen Helena was found in the area of the former basilica, the area was dug out and the Helena Chapel built between the foundation walls of the central nave of the former basilica. A grotto in the former quarry in the southeast of the Helena Chapel was determined as the location of the finding of the Cross. And on a level above the Helena Chapel, the extensive convent for the Canons of the Patriarchate was built, of which large remains are still preserved in the area of the Ethiopian monastery and the Coptic Patriarchate.

The walls of the church complex were not as grey and sooty as they are today. Indeed, the façade as well as the vaulting of the entire complex were decorated with



splendid mosaics donated by Emperor Manuel Comnenos of Byzantium. Sadly, the only remaining mosaic is a medallion depicting the Ascension of Christ on the ceiling of the Franciscan Chapel of the Crucifixion south of Golgotha. But late 15<sup>th</sup> century reports of pilgrims who saw and described the mosaics allow for their faithful reconstruction and attest to the fact that the artists of the time created an ecumenical synthesis of motifs of the Latin church of the West and the Greek church of the East, compared to which the modern décor of the church pales.

It is well worth taking three or four tours around the church to appreciate its splendour throughout its rich history.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Prof Klaus Bieberstein held the chair for Old Testament Studies at the Otto-Friedrich University Bamberg until his retirement in 2021. He is an acknowledged authority on the history of Jerusalem.**

Photo: © Nevborg, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=73021790>



**Helena chapel of the third church complex  
(12<sup>th</sup> century)**

Photo: © Fallaner, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=72392375>



**Mosaic depicting the Ascension of Christ,  
third church complex (12<sup>th</sup> century)**



# The Status Quo

In my Father's house  
there are many mansions  
(John 14:1–2)

BY FR. DR. GREGOR GEIGER OFM

*From: Im Land des Herrn. Ein franziskanischer Pilger- und Reiseführer für das Heilige Land, Bonifatius Verlag 2020, S. 361ff.*

## Background

Only in 1869, five years after “Holy League” defeated the Turks near Vienna, did France restore the rights of the Franciscans, returning to them the status they had enjoyed prior to 1630. The latter immediately tried to restore the endangered dome of the Holy Sepulchre, but only received permission to do so in 1719. In 1740 Sultan Mahmud I. confirmed the rights of the Franciscans in gratitude for French King Louis XV’s mediation between the Ottoman Empire and Austria in the Peace of Belgrade. From that point on, however, the pendulum swung the other way. Following his accession to power, in 1757 Sultan Mustafa III placed the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the tomb of Mary in the hands of the Greeks and made them co-owners of both the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Grotto of the Nativity. The grand vizier replied succinctly to the French ambassador’s objections:

*These places belong to my lord the Sultan; he gives them to whomever he pleases. They may have always been owned by the Franciscans, but now His Highness wants them to belong to the Greeks.*

In addition, in 1774 the Ottoman government recognized the Russian tsar as protector of the orthodox Christians, while France was initially a complete failure as protector of the Catholics in following the French Revolution in 1789. The fire of 1808 in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was a catastrophe with far-reaching consequences, not least because of its effects on ownership issues. An eyewitness reported the fire:

*The fire broke out during the night of October 11–12<sup>th</sup> 1808 in the Armenian chapel on a gallery of the church. The sacristan of the Franciscans, who was responsible*



Photo: © P. Dr. Gregor Geiger

*for the lamps that night, noticed it first and called for help. But the fire had progressed so far that it was immediately clear that there could be no hope of saving the building. After two hours the dome over the Holy Sepulchre collapsed, tearing away the galleries and part of the walls, and shattering the columns and chapels that surrounded it. Only a long time later was the fire finally brought under control.*

Recovery was difficult and expensive. At that point, Russia was gaining strength and increasingly acting on its urge to go to the Mediterranean. The Sultan entrusted the Greeks with the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre; it was carried out within a year in 1809/10; the Russian onion dome indicates where the funds came from. The Crusader tombs of Godfrey of Bouillon and Baldwin I under Calvary were removed, and the Calvary Chapel received the steep stairs of today. Even more serious: the choir of canons, completely separated by walls, became the sole choir of the Greeks.

## 1852

In the decades that followed, attempts were made, with the help of Western states, to reverse this expansion of Greek power, but in vain. In 1852, the Ottoman government announced a provisional Status Quo (Latin: “situation in which”) which regulated nothing but demanded that everything be left as it was for the time being. Nothing is more permanent than provisional! The Status Quo is still valid today, through the First World War, the British Mandate, the Second World War and the Jordanian period, and has thus been the legal basis for the relationship between the denominations at the Holy Sepulchre and other holy sites for more than 150 years. When Israel signed an international treaty with the Holy See on December 30<sup>th</sup> 1993, the Status Quo was confirmed as the legal basis.

Since the Status Quo was never written down, it almost inevitably became the cause of further conflict. There are notes, of course, but these only help if the other side is willing; they are of a private nature and have no official validity. Hence the fear of changing the slightest thing, because the other side could immediately say, "It was different last year."

Today there is a commission made up of representatives of the individual denominations which meets regularly to discuss pending matters, such as necessary repairs, special events (e.g. a visit by the Pope) or the renovation of the entire church, which only drag on very slowly. Incidentally, the Status Quo not only regulates ownership, but also ensures a more or less orderly succession (or concurrency) of the services. It determines which denomination celebrates when, where and for how long, which route processions take, or at which services singing is allowed.

On the one hand, every denomination can celebrate services according to their traditions and needs, on the other hand, one bothers as little as possible. The basic rule is that the denomination that is celebrating the highest feast day has "priority". If holidays coincide, you celebrate one after the other or concurrently. Entering the church as an inexperienced visitor and encountering several services being celebrated at once may strike you as quite strange, especially if you find yourself in between them. On the other hand, if you consider that the other congregation is praying to the same God – in a different language, different rite, different key – it is less bothersome than a group of tourists with cameras and a voluble guide.

The Status Quo applies not only to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, but also to several other mixed-denominational or mixed-religion holy sites: the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in the Kidron Valley, the Chapel of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives, until 1948 also to the Wailing Wall and Rachel's Tomb at the entrance to Bethlehem. In addition, there are similar regulations for the Room of the Last Supper and the tomb of Lazarus in Bethany.

In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre there are five Christian denominations: the Greek Orthodox, the Catholics ("Latins") – represented by the Franciscans, the

Orthodox Armenians, the Copts and the Syriac Orthodox; the sixth denomination is the Ethiopians with the chapel in the parvis of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and their monastery on the roof of the crypt.

Visitors from Europe will be amazed to see the absence of evangelical Christians. A superficial response would be to say that the church was already fully occupied at the time of the Reformation. In fact the reason lies more in Lutheran spirituality. The principle *Sola Scriptura*, "only the Scriptures", leaves no room for *holy places*, just as there are no places of pilgrimage in the traditional sense in Protestant areas in Germany.

Between 1863 and 1869 the dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was in danger of collapsing, was rebuilt using an iron structure and the central opening of the dome was protected so that rain no longer penetrated. The Status Quo was not touched, and the powers of the Crimean War – France, Russia and the Ottoman Empire – assumed the costs. In the wake of the 1927 earthquake, English pioneers had to add iron supports to the church and, in 1947, to the holy tomb itself. This scarred the facade for 40 years, the dome until 1996, and the holy tomb until 2017. After lengthy ecumenical negotiations, the floor of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is currently being renewed and the subsoil is being archaeologically examined.

Ultimately, the promise and admonition of Jesus to his followers after the washing of feet is nowhere more apt than here:

*Don't let your heart get confused. Believe in God and believe in me! There are many mansions in my Father's house (John 14:1–2).*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Fr. Dr. Gregor Geiger is a Franciscan from Germany (Archdiocese of Freiburg) and has been living in Jerusalem since 1999. He holds a doctorate in linguistics and teaches Hebrew and Aramaic at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Station of the Cross in Jerusalem.**

**He also accompanies pilgrims through the Holy Land and is one of the cantors in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.**

# Volunteers program

BY MARKUS ST. BUGNYÁR

Since the reopening of our pilgrim hospice, Austrians are eligible to do their “civilian alternative service abroad” here in our House. The new Volunteer Act has provided the legal framework for this activity since 2016. The 12-month assignment in this region serves to broaden the young men’s cultural and social horizons. Thanks to an “educational support programme” the initiative is seen as an educational apprenticeship that begins with a three-day preparatory seminar at Puchberg Castle in Wels before the volunteers actually start work.

Over the past months the 2022/23 intake (service always begins in the summer) has experienced an almost “ideal-

typical” programme, which tackled and explored Christian, Jewish and Muslim issues. **Meeting survivors of the Holocaust** is particularly important to me personally. As long as we have the opportunity to listen to those who witnessed these crimes, we must do so. Young people in particular must be given this opportunity so that the “never again” is also filled with life.

The educational support programme includes a **guided tour through the Church of the Holy Sepulchre by Fr. Dr. Gregor Geiger ofm.** The current appearance of the church is not easily graspable and often enough confuses the pilgrim. Thanks to Father Gregor, you can also get to places that are otherwise not accessible to the public.



Photo: © ÖPH

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is not self-explanatory, but has to be “unreveled”.



Photo: © ÖPH

A guided tour of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is part of the volunteer programme every year; with Father Gregory.





Photo: © ÖPH

**The Circassians allow you to try on traditional robes**



Photo: © ÖPH

**Thanks to special permission from the Muslim religious authority (waqf) we were able to visit the interiors of both the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque**



Photo: © ÖPH

**Desert hike with Father Gregor Geiger ofm**

Since the Second Intifada it has only been possible to visit the **Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque** with special permission. The Muslim religious authority (the Jerusalem waqf) is well disposed to us. Our many years of serving as the “Arab hospital” in the Old City stands us in good stead. The interior of the two mosques is impressive and overwhelming; a proof of the historical greatness and vitality of Islam in the holy city.

Part of the educational support programme, in which all our volunteers participate, involves **a desert hike led by Father Gregor Geiger**. The purpose of this aspect of the programme is to give the volunteers a more intimate knowledge of the Holy Land, as well as to cultivate cohesion and team spirit. The hike ends on the fringes of the Dead Sea at the archaeological site of Qumran (where the world famous Dead Sea Scrolls were found), where Father Geiger gives another small explanatory tour.

# Robert (85), Otto (102) and Zwi (100) Listening to the Victims

By Michael Atzwanger

First we met **Robert Perlez**, an 85 year old man who is physically fit and emotionally content. He has spent considerable time researching his childhood in the Nazi era and has to a large extent been able to reconstruct it (on the basis of documents and stories), since he was too young to take it all in at the time of the events.

His mother fled Vienna with him when he was a toddler after the Gestapo gave them 24 hours to leave the country. Robert's father didn't get this option and had to stay behind. To this day, Robert doesn't know what happened to him. In order to reach their destination of Spain, they fled to Brussels, where they lived for half a year.

From Brussels they fled via Paris to Marseille, from where they wanted to take the ferry to Spain. But they were far from the only ones with this idea: to get a seat on the ferry you had join a waiting list, on which tens of thousands of people were already registered, while on the ferry there was only room for a few hundred.

At that time, Marseille was a giant refugee camp in which the most disparate people fleeing from the Nazis found shelter. Robert lived with his mother in the city under inhumane conditions; food and drinking water were scarce. A refugee camp was set up near Grenoble to combat the refugee problem. In the beginning, life in the camp was easy; that was before it was divided into two sections, Jews and non-Jews.

After a few days, Robert and his mother were taken to a concentration camp near Perpignan which was under the control of the Vichy regime. Robert's mother worked in the camp's laundry; this work provided an escape route whereby the two – hidden in a laundry basket – were able to leave the camp unnoticed. They took refuge in Riversaltes for a few months before moving on to Marseille. There they lived undisturbed until one day they happened to be stopped by the police, which quickly revealed that they were German refugees

since they had no papers or knowledge of French. The two were deported to Paris that same day, spent a night at a collection point with thousands of others, and the next day were deported east in cattle cars.

The situation was absolutely hopeless at that time, but for inexplicable reasons the train stopped. Hilda, a 14-year-old girl who was a friend of Robert's mother, looked out of the window and as she did so noticed that the barbed wire was loose in a certain place and could be moved aside. Hilda was able to climb out and pointed out to Robert's mother that Robert could also squeeze through, whereupon she helped him climb out of the window and he found himself in freedom, along with Hilda. This series of coincidences saved Robert's life. The train continued and the other occupants, including Robert's mother, were gassed immediately upon arrival in Auschwitz.

Hilda and Robert hid in orchards for several weeks, living on fruit and rainwater. One night they snuck into a monastery and asked for help, which thankfully was granted. The nuns were aware of their plight, Hilda was able to stay in the convent with the nuns because of her gender and Robert was brought to a farmer in the village.



Photo: © OPH

### **Documents and photographs recall the victims**

The family accepted him as one of their own, officially he was the child of relatives from Paris. This cover worked and even appeared credible to the Gestapo when they conducted a house search. But this house search made it clear to the farmer's family how great a risk they were taking by hiding Robert. An acquaintance who was part of the Resistance organized a new shelter in the basement of a mountain farm near Grenoble. Robert lived there with some other children for several months. The mountain farmers sensed the chance to bring Robert to safety once and for all when they learned that refugee children under the age of 6 would be issued with a residence permit in Switzerland.

One rainy night, Robert and a few other children marched across the Swiss border into a village without knowing where or why. They were soon apprehended by the village gendarme, who gave them shelter at the police station and took further steps to locate the children's parents and acquaintances, which were unsuccessful. Here, too, Robert was twice lucky, firstly, the official documents entered his age as younger than he actually was, namely under 6 years, a criterion for obtaining the residence permit and secondly, when the Swiss authorities were about to make the decision to

deport Robert to France, a senior official personally intervened and wrote a letter to ensure that Robert received a residence permit.

After receiving the residence permit, he was assigned to a state children's home and later he came to a foster family in Zurich, who lovingly took him in. With great effort and patience, Hilda managed to find Robert through the Red Cross. When his aunt, who was already living in Tel Aviv, found out that her nephew was still alive, she couldn't believe her good fortune. Now the question arose, where should Robert live, in Zurich or Tel Aviv?

In the end it was Tel Aviv, although he always kept in touch with his Swiss foster family. So he emigrated to Israel/Palestine as a child, later he joined the army as a helicopter pilot and after his retirement became an aircraft technician. He started a family and today has several children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.





Photo: © ÖPH

### Meeting with Otto Nagler (102)

We then met **Otto Nagler**, a 102-year-old man who is surprisingly fit for his age.

His story begins with the annexation of Austria to Germany, which Otto witnessed as a high school student in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Life at that time was strict, hard and monotonous, as was school. His primary hope was to finish school without complications and to pass the Matura. This he did, but the classes were changed from boys and girls classes to Jew and Gentile classes and a new subject called "Vaterlandskunde" (Fatherland studies) was introduced. The political change also affected other areas of Otto's everyday life. During the November pogrom, SS men stormed the apartment and took away and arrested all the men living in the household – his father and a brother-in-law. Thanks to Otto's childlike appearance, he was not taken away. From the window, he observed how women who had to clean the street that had been vandalized by the Nazis were being tormented by kicks, spitting and insults.

Otto described the phase of his life after graduating from high school and before emigrating to Israel/Palestine, as the most dangerous in his life: "You didn't know when you went out into the street whether you would come home alive or half dead." As a consequence he tried to avoid going out of the house.

Since Otto had joined the Zionist youth movement early on, it was somewhat easier for him to get a certificate that enabled him to get a residence permit in Palestine. He took advantage of this opportunity and at the tender

age of 18 emigrated to a foreign world where he was given the opportunity to study at the Technion in Haifa. He completed his studies in structural and civil engineering and specialized in the construction of irrigation systems. After countless irrigation projects for settlements in Israel he started to apply his know-how to international projects. He also started a family and today has several children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

We managed to meet a third Holocaust survivor, namely **Zwi Nigal**. Zwi is Viennese, born in 1923, his family was middle class. His father worked as a station manager on the Northern Railway where he should have been promoted, as he was competent and more than up to the task. Instead he was sent on early retirement because people didn't want to see a Jew in such a high position. That's why, a convinced Zionist, he took up a position in the Palestine Office, all of which happened before the Anschluss. His mother was a nurse, she worked in the hospital on the Italian front during the First World War, an uncle served and died as an officer in that war. In short, a family that served and was loyal to the state of Austria.

Zwi himself was a student at the time of the Anschluss, and he experienced the time immediately after it as an adventure. For example, without his parents knowing, he sneaked to Heldenplatz to hear Hitler's speech and admired the German soldiers, whom he did not perceive as exceptionally anti-Semitic (as opposed to the SS, SA



Photo: © OPH

### It is important to us to listen to Holocaust survivors

and Hitler Jugend). An experience he relates is a good illustration: his mother hurried with him to the tram one day. As she was about to jump on, she looked like she may fall. A German soldier gave her his hand and prevented her from falling. A passer-by asked the soldier why he was helping a Jewess, to which the latter replied that he should shut up.

But such rare moments of correctness and human kindness should not cloud or gloss over the drastic deterioration in the situation of the Viennese Jews. The family apartment was confiscated, his father was lucky to find a small room for the family. Through courage and skill, Zwi escaped from the hands of the SA when they took him to party headquarters where Jews were being rounded up for transport. He managed to escape the situation by sneaking unnoticed by the crowd into the Party cafe at the party headquarters, finding a chair and hiding behind a "Völkischer Stürmer" newspaper, going home at closing time like a "good" Nazi.

The fortunate fact that Zwi's father worked in the Palestine Office got him a place on a programme that took young Jews to Palestine, where they learned farming and Hebrew. It was actually planned that his parents would follow a few weeks later, but his mother was incarcerated by the English in Mauritius for 6 years and his father was sent to the ghetto in Theresienstadt and was later deported to Auschwitz and gassed.

Zwi completed the programme alone as a teenager in a foreign part of the world. In 1944 he joined the Jewish Brigade and fought for the liberation of Europe from the Nazis. After the war ended, he returned to Palestine and joined the Haganah [Hebrew for *defense*, a Jewish paramilitary organization that became the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)] and fought in the War of Independence, Six Day War and Yom Kippur War. He continued his career in the IDF, reaching the rank of "Senior Lieutenant" and studying at the Technion in Haifa as part of his military service. After completing military service, he went into private business with a company that specialized in the sale of long-distance radio equipment. As a pensioner he worked part-time as a German-speaking tourist guide and today tells his story of being a Holocaust survivor to schools and other interested groups, such as the volunteers of the Austrian Hospice. Zwi has 2 sons, 7 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren.

It was enriching for us volunteers to hear these life stories and to learn how people who had to flee Austria without any possessions or belongings, made something of themselves here in Israel. We must not forget these stories so as to ensure that something as inhumane never happens again. We also have to admire these two gentlemen, who, despite the circumstances, achieved so much in their lives.

# Amal – Tikva – Hope

## The Hospice as a Meeting Point

Our House is in the middle. Not only in a topographical sense, but also in a political one. Since Rector Markus St. Bugnyár took office, the role of mediator between the Abrahamic religions – as formulated in our House statutes – has taken on a new shape. Corona was a painful interruption in this regard.



Photo: © ÖPH

**The exhibition Austria and the Arab World can be seen in the Hospice until Easter**



Photo: © ÖPH

**The Brazilian Ambassador Alessandro Candéas at the opening of the exhibition on the journey of the Brazilian Emperor**

Our *House in the middle* enables Israelis and Palestinians *to meet each other halfway*, to stop off at a third party who offers neutral ground. Anyone looking to enter into conversation and dialogue in this troubled Holy Land and seeking a neutral *safe space* is always welcome with us.

On November 27<sup>th</sup> 2022 we started up again. Unfortunately we cannot show you any photos of the gathering here – people's concern at being recognized and attacked is obviously too great.

Fifteen Israelis and Palestinians chose our Pilgrim Hospice for their launch event of a five-month *Peace-building* programme in cooperation with a number of NGOs.

We are delighted. It will not bring world or even regional peace. But it might forge friendships where there were none before.

### **“Austria and the Arab World” An exhibition in cooperation with the Austrian Cultural Forum Tel Aviv**

In cooperation with the Austrian Cultural Forum Tel Aviv, we are currently showing the exhibition “Austria and the Arab World”; a documentation of historical relations between Austria and the countries of the Arab world, which still have an impact today. In an era that focuses more on the differences between cultures, we look for commonalities that enrich us mutually. For example the Austrian journey by ship to Egyptian Alexandria, our support in the construction of the Suez Canal or, more recently, a concert jointly organized by Mohammed Mounir and Hubert von Goisern. Of course: a separate chapter is dedicated to the Arabic-Austrian coffee culture.

### **Dom Pedro II as a guest. Neither Franz Joseph nor the Brazilian Emperor had any regrets**

200 years of Brazilian independence was the spur for this exhibition in our House. The Emperor himself documented and illustrated his pilgrimage and educational journey through the Holy Land. The current ambassador





Photo: © ÖPH

**Jakub Slosarek, Czech Representative in Ramallah, with pianist Magdalena Koudelkova**



Photo: © ÖPH

**The Sain Mus duo in our salon**



Photo: © ÖPH

**Dr Felix Höflmayer of the Austrian Archaeological Institute**

in Ramallah commissioned a video documentation that shows the historical places in their current glory, to accompany a photo exhibition held at our House until the beginning of the year. The vernissage was well attended, and our buffet was enjoyed by many. Our House is open again not only for pilgrim guests, but also for our local friends in Jerusalem and the surrounding area.

In October, in cooperation with the Czech Representative Office in Rammallah, we enjoyed in our hospice an eclectic concert by a young and very talented **pianist Magdalena Koudelková**. Magdalena Koudelková is a student at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and has already won numerous prizes. After the concert, our kitchen team treated the guests to drinks and appetizers.

In December, the Austrian Hospice, in cooperation with the Austrian Cultural Forum in Tel Aviv, organized a concert by the Austrian music duo "**Sain Mus**", consisting of Florian Sighartner (violin) and Phillip Erasmus (guitar). The innovative and creative sound of their music enchanted the audience and showed the versatility of music.

In cooperation with the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Dr. Felix Höflmayer (Austrian Archaeological Institute) gave a lecture on Austria's contributions to Biblical Archaeology in the Holy Land on the occasion of the national holiday. The name Ernst Sellin and his excavations at Tel Tanach and in Jericho (Tel es-Sultan) and in Shechem (Tel Balata) is of inestimable value and dominated the presentation.

Austrian archaeologists are currently working successfully in the Holy Land, at present in Lakhish and possibly soon here in the Austrian Pilgrim Hospice. You will learn more as soon as we have any news.

"**Glory to the newborn King**" was the motto of this year's Christmas evening concert on Christmas Day with the Austrian soprano Julia Binek. Mozart, Strauss and time-honoured Christmas carols put heart and soul in the Christmas spirit, the highlight of which was undoubtedly the original version of Gruber and Mohr's "Silent Night".



Photo: © ÖPH

**Julia Binek with Nadav Lev on guitar**

## The visit of Hungarian President Katalin Novak

**T**he Hungarian President Katalin Novak visited the State of Israel. And stayed on for a few days to continue her journey in private to the Holy Places of Jerusalem.

This is quite unusual and shows a highly personal interest in not leaving the city without reflection and prayer.

Along the Via Dolorosa, the President not only stopped at the Franciscans of the Flagellatio, but also at our House. Which pleases me.

Not merely because of my Hungarian-looking surname, which is actually of Croatian origin. By the way, it means herald, drummer. The word once signified a profession. The church servant who trumpets the decisions of his Lord into the world.

Personally, I have always liked this interpretation. It fits well with my career decision to become a priest. And if I'm allowed a second aside at this point: our family history boasts a long line of clerics.

I sometimes wonder if the name imbued us with something in the cradle that prevents us from staying silent when we are convinced of something. And for those who don't know, my brother is the local mayor back home.

**No, I am pleased about the President's visit because Hungary is demonstrating tremendous commitment to the Christians of the Middle East.** Pledging huge sums of money to rebuild Christian villages in Iraq.

Certain aspects of the country's politics may not be to everyone's liking, but this aspect warrants my special respect.

The President stayed longer than planned. Of course, our conversation also revolved around the Hun-

garian element of our House history. Some say that Hungary made a historic claim to its part of the House a few years ago. Believe me, hardly anything could be further from the truth. It was more about the question of whether and how we could work together in the future. On a church level. But that has broken down. Maybe you just have to take these things more slowly. After all, our pilgrim hospice expects to be around for a few more decades. Whether or not priests and nuns will receive our guests here will ultimately depend in part on where they come from.



Photo: © ÖPH

**The pilgrim hospice is a place of regular encounter between other Christian denominations to exchange ideas and information**



Photo: © ÖPH

**Hungarian-born vice-rectors given pride of place in the salon**



Photo: © ÖPH

**A visit from my home in Burgenland – this time from Wulkaprodersdorf – is a special pleasure**





Photo: © ÖPH

**Federal Minister Karoline Edtstadler with Rector Bugnyár and Hospice volunteers**



Photo: © ÖPH

**The mayor of the city also attended the church service in Bethlehem**

## Light of Peace Journey

**O**n the eve of Christmas the light of peace shines in churches and communities and perhaps in your homes and apartments.

At the end of every November an Austrian delegation from Upper Austria and the ORF (radio station) comes to Bethlehem to perpetuate the tradition. A child is furnished with the job of lighting the flame in the place of the birth of Jesus and bringing it back to the homeland.

That child has to demonstrate something special: in the way they comport themselves with their schoolmates, in their care for fellow villagers. A small pointer as to the way a small light can work for the positive, if we allow ourselves to be ignited by it.

Along with the lighting of the flame, a church service takes place with the participation of the governor of Upper Austria as well as representatives of the churches and religious communities. **Next year we hope that a large group of pilgrims from Austria will once again also participate.** So that in this regard too we can say that Corona is finally behind us and we can enjoy life and travel and pilgrimage again.



Photo: © ÖPH

**Guesthouse manager Lucas J. Maier MA and Rector Bugnyár welcome the Federal Minister**



Photo: © ÖPH

**Federal Minister Totschnigg makes an entry in our guestbook**



Photo: © Max Mayrhofer

**Sarah Noska from Altenberg bei Linz was the Light of Peace child for 2022**



Photo: © ÖPH

**After a two-year Corona break we once again celebrated Christmas mass with many guests**



# A way to death, a way to life

BY MARKUS ST. BUGNYÁR

**D**One has to decide. The ancient Egyptians knew that, the Old Testament psalms know that too. Deciding between two paths: do I want to take the path of the good, the just, the true and the beautiful – or do I choose the path that puts me at the centre of all interests and of my actions, but ultimately is neither fair to me nor to my fellow human beings? In short: do I go left or right? Just think of the two thieves on the left and right of Jesus on the Cross.

The Crusaders recalled something similar when they created today's Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The staircase from the Cardo and the first atrium no longer existed; they had to move the main entrance to the side. But unlike the case in Europe usually, they did not place a large central portal here, flanked by two smaller doorways. It is a double portal that leads us today into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

First of all, it is strikingly similar to the so-called Golden Gate, which is closed today and led to the old Temple area. Many legends tell that Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem here on Palm Sunday. There as the

Photo: © James Emery from Douglassville, United States – Golden Gate of Jerusalem\_2234, CC BY 2.0 (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10303899>)



**The so-called Golden Gate in the Temple area**

moment Hosanna, son of David! Here the moment Crucify him! Possibly the same people, grown fickle in so short a time. Then as now.

On the other hand, one doorway of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre leads to the place of execution, i.e. to death – and thus to everything that leads us to death, to human sin. At the very beginning there was also a garden there: in paradise. It is perhaps no coincidence that Jesus' tomb had to be in a garden. At the very beginning, man's actual sin is the same as it is today: not wanting to listen to the voice of God.

But the second doorway leads to the empty tomb and thus to the resurrection. Jesus' innocent and vicarious suffering wrested death's power over us. When we side with Jesus, when we gather under His Cross, we share in His destiny.

What does that mean? That we may suffer – no matter what and why, no matter how long and by whom: in the end death always loses, in the end life always wins.

Two ways. Make up your mind!

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**The portal to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre  
from the time of the Crusaders**



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## DONATIONS

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**This is how you can assist us:**

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AT43 1919 0003 0015 0125  
BSSWATWW

**Österreichisches Hospiz – Bauspende**  
AT17 1919 0004 0015 0124  
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**I am very grateful to you!**

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