

# 'Look, the place where they put him' (Mk 16:6): The space of Jesus' tomb in early Christian memory

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The tomb of Jesus posed two main problems for early Christians: firstly, the earliest memory of the tomb seems to recall it as the site of the dishonourable burial of a man executed as an enemy of the Roman imperial system; and secondly, the narrative of the empty tomb stood for several reasons in an ambiguous relationship to the announcement of the resurrection. Yet within three centuries, that 'place' had been rehabilitated both architecturally and ritually (memorialised together with the site of the crucifixion) as 'sacred space' in the Church of the Resurrection (the typical Eastern designation for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre). For discussion, see Morris 2005:33–34). By about 380 CE, Cyril of Jerusalem could thus pronounce this place 'the very centre of the world' (*Cat.* 13.28). The present article argues that 'the place where they put him' was not originally venerated as 'sacred space', but rather was remembered as a place of shame; and also describes several different narrative and theological strategies, introduced in the canonical gospels and interpreted by early Christian readers, that changed how the tomb of Jesus was remembered and that allowed for it eventually to be regarded as 'sacred space'.

## Introduction

### 'The place where they put him'

At first glance, Mark 16:1–8, the earliest version<sup>1</sup> of the empty tomb story, seems to display little interest in the 'space' of the tomb itself. The women enter the tomb and see inside 'a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe,' who tells them: 'You are seeking Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has been raised, he is not here; look, the place where they put him' (Mk 16:5–6).<sup>2</sup> Then they exit the tomb and flee in fear, seized by 'trembling and perplexity' (τρόμος και ἔκστασις). Culturally, of course, a tomb is a liminal space and, as will be seen below, the architecture of Judean tombs symbolically reinforced this liminality. Further, as Brown (1988) and McCane (2003) have argued, Mark's narrative suggests a dishonourable burial by a council member whose interest in Jesus' body is not entirely clear. Therefore, in the Markan narrative, the tomb is first of all a place of shame; and, as the discovery of the women is described, it seems less the place where the resurrection of Jesus occurred and more the site of a mystifying, fear-inducing encounter. Indeed, the emphasis is more on the 'absence' of Jesus ('he is not here', v. 6; cf. Mk 2:19–20; Crossan 1976; Smith 2010:83–85, 97–98).

Mark's story perhaps was not the earliest memory of the discovery of the empty tomb; but, as this article argues, it stands at the beginning of a trajectory of textual developments that sought to efface some of its more problematic aspects. Later forms of the empty tomb story include additional features that define more explicitly the space of the empty tomb as the site of the resurrection: for example, the inspection of the tomb by male resurrection witnesses (Lk 24:12; Jn 20:3–10); the presence of empty graveclothes in the tomb (Lk 24:12; Jn 20:6–7); and the appearance of the risen Jesus himself at the tomb (Mt 28:9–10; Jn 20:14–18; Mk 16:9–11<sup>3</sup>). These narrative additions, however they originated, served to shape the early Christian 'memory' of the empty tomb, in effect rehabilitating a story that in its earliest form posed significant problems. The present article details these problems, and then argues that the story of the empty tomb was rehabilitated in early Christian memory by means of four different (but overlapping) narrative and theological strategies. The tomb needed these enhancements, as

1. The analyses of the Synoptic gospels herein presuppose the Two-Document Hypothesis (Mark and Q were the two documentary sources used by the authors of Matthew and Luke). Although Mark 16:1–8 is the earliest form of the empty tomb story, it might be based on an earlier tradition; and a Q-saying that refers to the disappearance of Jesus (Q 13:35) might reflect a similar idea (see Smith 2003).

2. Translations of ancient texts herein are the author's own, unless otherwise noted.

3. Mark 16:9–20 (the so-called 'Longer Ending of Mark') is a spurious 2nd century addition, which nevertheless represents an important early chapter in Mark's reception-history (see Kelhoffer 2000).

well as the interest and patronage of Constantine, for its original significance to be overcome, and finally to become 'sacred space'.<sup>4</sup>

## The tomb of Jesus in Mark: Space and memory

Early Christian texts such as Mark are usefully understood in light of the recent application of contemporary memory theory to the traditions and narratives of early Christianity. As Alan Kirk explains, such approaches see memory not as 'a passive faculty of storage and recall', but instead as an 'actively constructive cognitive faculty' which '[creates] cognitive scripts that give individuals and the groups to which they belong dispositional orientation to the world' (Kirk 2010:58). Seeing memory as constructive and social has both negative and positive consequences for the study of early Christian texts. Negatively, this challenges the old form-critical opposition of 'memory' (understood as the inert deposit of individual recall, that is, as an 'authentic' or 'factual' core) and 'tradition' (understood as interpretive embellishment or adaptation through communal circulation and use). Thus, "'tradition" and "memory" are not elements of the gospels that can be pried apart through application of particular criteria' (Kirk & Thatcher 2005:33). Positively, this allows interpreters to see the tradition of a remembering community as standing in a 'representational relationship to the past', and as 'a memory system, a dynamic, living basis for cultural identity' (Kirk 2010:60–61, emphasis original). This viewpoint applies equally to oral traditions as it does to texts such as Mark, as both have a communal, formative purpose. Thus we may see Mark's gospel, or indeed Mark's empty tomb story, as a representation of the past, that is, a 'commemorative artifact' (Kirk & Thatcher 2005:41), as much indebted to the 'memory' of his source(s) as to the constructive and ideological purposes of the author and his original community of reception. How does Mark 'remember' the tomb of Jesus?

First of all, Mark's story presupposes a complex of cultural meaning wrapped up in the architecture of the tomb itself. In the narrative, Mark distinguishes between 'the tomb (τὸ μνημεῖον)' proper, which the women enter and in which the young man is sitting, and 'the place (ὁ τόπος)' which the young man indicates. The word τόπος would probably have evoked for the reader some sort of a niche carved into the interior wall, either a shelf-like niche called an *arcosolium*, or a deep, narrow slot called a *loculus* (as described by McCane 2003:34).<sup>5</sup> Normally, the stone fashioned to block the entranceway would have been square, and kept in place by another stone. The architecture of such a tomb – a recessed area in front of the tomb, sometimes surrounded by

a low wall; a large stone (sometimes two), difficult to move, blocking the entrance; a low, narrow doorway where one would have to stoop down to enter; a small, dark, cramped forecourt area for tending to bodies and for enacting rituals of mourning; and finally the individual niches into which bodies were put – all these features encoded cultural values about death and the relationship between the dead and the living. As James Strange (2009:412) notes, Judean tombs were constructed in such a way that it was only with effort (and 'scarcely ever with dignity') that one could enter the tomb, so that 'this doorway was a liminal experience'. One would descend down (with a body or to tend to a body) about 40 cm, into the workspace of the interior forecourt:

The difference in height allows those outside to pass the body *down* to those inside, rather than passing it uphill. One can also see that in this simple movement of the body from ground level to the actual burial place, one is descending into Sheol or Hades. (Strange 2009:411)

Once inside, one was forced into a position 'between standing up and reclining in a "final resting place"' (Strange 2009:412). All these physical features, which Mark's narrative seems to presuppose, reinforce spatially the liminal nature of a tomb and Judean norms and values about death and care for the dead.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, as Raymond Brown (1988:238–245) and Byron McCane (2003:89–108) have argued, it is quite probable that, as an executed criminal, Jesus was given a 'dishonorable interment' arranged by 'one or more members of the Sanhedrin' (McCane 2003:89). This fact has left traces in the Markan narrative, albeit less in what the text actually says, than in what it does not say.<sup>7</sup> According to Mark, Jesus' body was placed in the custody not of his family but of a member of the ruling council, Joseph of Arimathea, who 'dared' (τολμήσας, Mk 15:42–43) to request the body from Pilate; consequently, Jesus' place in his kinship network was not reinforced through the burial (McCane 2003:95–99).<sup>8</sup> Although the post-Markan gospels tend to make Joseph a disciple (cf. Mt 27:57 and Jn 19:38–42), other early Christian texts (Ac 13:27–29; Gos. Pet. 6.21; Justin, Dial. 97.1) seem to reflect the idea that Jesus was not buried by supporters (Brown 1988:244).<sup>9</sup> The text of Mark is ambiguous: Joseph was 'himself also waiting for (προσδεχόμενος) the kingdom of God' (Mk 15:43).

Brown also notes that none of the canonical texts mentions the washing of the body, a necessary part of an honourable burial (see *m. Sabb.* 23:5; Ac 9:37; cf. Gos. Pet. 6.24); only John mentions spices while the Synoptics do not (1988:242).

6. According to Strange (2009:416), tombs such as those he investigated at French Hill in Jerusalem 'provide us with a visual and material model for understanding Jewish views of the dead, of burial, or burial customs, and so forth, but not with a model of a fully developed theology of death, burial, and afterlife'.

7. Thus, if one may use an argument from silence, nothing in the Markan account suggests an honorable burial rendered to Jesus by Joseph' (Brown 1988:242).

8. As McCane (2003:98) observes: 'To be buried away from the family tomb – by design, not by fate – was to be cast adrift from these cultural patterns, and dislodged from a place in the family. To be unburied by one's nearest relatives was to be effaced from the cultural landscape. It was worse than unfortunate; it was a shame.'

9. See also Acts 8:2, for the burial of Stephen by 'devout men' (ἀνδρες εὐλαβεῖς).

4. The present article purposely avoids engaging the theoretical discussions about sacred space, to concentrate on the textual evidence. For useful discussions of the topic, see Smith (1987) and Kilde (2008).

5. John seems to have a bench or perhaps an *arcosolium* niche in view, when it describes two angels as 'one at the head and one at the feet [of the place] where the body of Jesus once lay' (Jn 20:12).

Additionally, the hewn tomb in Mark 15:42 is not Joseph's family tomb (cf. Mt 27:60), but instead probably part of 'burial grounds for convicted criminals' proximate to the execution site (243). Mark's reader/hearer, learning that a single stone had to be rolled to close or open this tomb (Mk 15:46; 16:3–4), might have envisioned the tomb of a wealthy person (McCane 2003:33). It is important to note, however, that the tomb's design as Mark describes it has little to do with the dignity of the burial: it is much more important that Mark does not describe the body as placed in a family tomb (cf. Mt 27:60; see Brown 1988:243) and as tended to with the prescribed honorific rituals, 'the two defining marks of shame' (McCane 2003:102). The description of the stone might, in fact, be Mark's own beginning attempt to diminish the strong memory of a shameful burial, a tendency even more evident in the other gospels (McCane 2003:101–102). As to mourning rituals, all the canonical texts are cautious about the intentions of the women, because open mourning for executed criminals was forbidden (*m. Sanh.* 6.6: McCane 2003:95). The women come with spices for the body, but the language of mourning is not found until *The Gospel of Peter* 12.50–53, which still suggests that the women were not able to 'weep and lament' (κλαῦσαι καὶ κόψασθαι) on the day of Jesus' execution (v. 52; see also Mk 16:10; *Ep. Apos.* 9–10).<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Matthew's note that the women sit opposite the tomb might be a guarded reference to mourning (Mt 27:61; Standhartinger 2010:564; Strelan 1999). One may therefore distinguish between the intention of Joseph according to Mark, that is, to bury Jesus quickly (and, one may infer, dishonourably), and that of the women, that is, to tend to the body as best as the circumstances could allow, because of the hasty (and dishonourable) burial.

Thirdly, because an empty tomb is open to different interpretations than the one offered by Mark's 'young man' – that is, that Jesus 'was raised' and therefore 'is not here' (v. 6) – the empty tomb story stood at the beginning in an ambiguous relationship to the announcement of the resurrection. Mark does not narrate the resurrection itself, and reports no resurrection appearances (but cf. v. 7, where the young man predicts that Jesus will appear to the disciples in Galilee). Several scholars have argued that Mark 16:1–8 is similar to 'disappearance' or 'assumption' stories, in which certain special individuals are described as being transported into the divine realm before or after their death (Bickermann 1924; Collins 2009; Miller 2010; Smith 2010:91–98). Of course, Mark does not narrate an 'assumption' of Jesus (cf. 2 Ki 2:11–12), but rather the unsuccessful search for a body: 'you seek Jesus' but 'he is not here' (v. 6). Typically, such a situation would lead to the conclusion that an assumption had taken place.<sup>11</sup> To be taken into the divine realm was to be exalted to a higher plane of existence, although sometimes the one taken away would appear again to the living, in a glorified

state.<sup>12</sup> In the Jewish tradition, someone taken away like this was normally thought of as being preserved in a bodily state in heaven and awaiting their role in the turn of the ages (Haufe 1961).<sup>13</sup> Such are the typical implications of a missing body, and to some extent they stand in tension with what might be the implications of a risen body; that tension is expressed in the young man's announcement, 'he was raised, he is not here' (Mk 16:6). Paul's silence on the matter of the tomb of Jesus is puzzling, but it may be (if indeed he even knew of a tradition about the empty tomb) that he would have found the story posed more problems than it solved in his argument for the resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15 (see Smith 2010:27–45).

Given these problematic aspects, is it possible to assert that from the earliest times there was a 'tomb-cult', that is, a tradition of ritual observances by Christians at the tomb of Jesus? Fourth- and fifth-century Christian authors are unanimously positive that there had been.<sup>14</sup> From our perspective, the answer is partly based on another question: whether Constantine's building project in Judea found the correct location of Jesus' tomb. Eusebius (*Vit. Const.* 3.26.1–4) claimed that the Romans (whom he does not name, but calls 'ungodly men', ἄνδρες δυσσεβεῖς) had purposely covered over the tomb, 'the divine cave' (τὸ θεῖον ἄντρον), and built a temple to Venus on the site. This implied that the location was widely known even to unbelievers, and this in turn might indicate an early interest in the place on the part of Christians. However, it seems more likely that the temple of Venus was excavated and the tomb (and thus Golgotha and the Church of the Resurrection) 'discovered' there in order to '[proclaim] the victory of Christianity over paganism' (Taylor 1993:141).<sup>15</sup> Eusebius himself makes much of the contrast: whereas the Venus temple was the site of 'foul sacrifices [poured out] upon defiled and polluted altars' (*Vit. Const.* 3.26.3), and the earth that was taken away was 'contaminated with demonic gore' (3.27.1), he calls the 'cave' of Christ's tomb 'the holy of holies' (τὸ γε ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων ἄντρον, 3.28.1).

Unfortunately, since we lack any early textual evidence either for or against the 1st-century veneration of the tomb, we are left only with inferences.<sup>16</sup> Proponents of both positions draw attention to the cultural milieu of the early Christians,

12. See, for example, Plutarch, *Rom.* 28.1–3; *T. Job* 40.3.

13. See, for example, Elijah, as in *MI* 4:5–6.

14. Those who held to the things of Christ used to honour the tomb (ἐτίμων τὸ μνήμα) after the time of his passion' (Socrates Scholasticus, *Hist. Eccl.* 1.17; for further examples, see Taylor 1993:113–114).

15. Taylor herself argues (1993:116–117, 1998), largely on the basis of Melito's insistence that Jesus was executed 'in the middle of Jerusalem' and 'in the middle of a street (ἐπὶ μέσῃ πλατείᾳ)' (*Peri Pascha* 94), that before the 4th century, Christians identified 'Golgotha' as a 'disused quarry' outside the city during the time of Jesus but inside by the time Melito visited the city (according to Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.26.13–14). Taylor proposes that the execution site and the tomb were not close to each other but were still within this large area known as 'Golgotha' (1998:182–188; 193–201). Urban von Wahlde (2009), however, persuasively argues that Melito's intentions are purely rhetorical and do not reflect any accurate (i.e. factual) historical memory.

16. One wonders at the certainty of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor (1998:45–46): '[The positive argument for the authenticity of the site [of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre] is the tradition of the Jerusalem community, which held liturgical celebrations at the site until AD 66.' Andries van Aarde (2013:39) seems to follow Murphy-O'Connor without much argumentation. See also Schenke (1970:95–105).

10. Elliott (1993:556) states that 'the consensus of opinion' dates the *Epistle of the Apostles* to 'the third quarter of the second century', but the original Greek is not extant; Elliott's translation is based on the later Ethiopic and Coptic versions.

11. See, for example, Plutarch, *Rom.* 27.5–8, 28.4–6, though sceptical; Chariton, *Chaer.* 3.3; Genesis 5:24 LXX; 2 En. 67.3; *T. Job* 39.11–12. See Lohfink (1971:37–41) for a list of common motifs.



in which tombs of great figures were often the site of ritual activity or purported miraculous portents: thus, the earliest Christians either would have celebrated rituals at the tomb of Jesus because this is what was typical in their cultural world (Van Aarde 2013:33), or they would not have done so because Jesus' body was not there anymore, and this makes the site indifferent or not especially holy (Morris 2005:8; Taylor 1993:137, 1998:201). Hans Dieter Betz, however, takes this point further when he observes that the early Christians did not worship Christ as others might venerate a hero, whose power would be spatially limited to the locale of their cultic celebration, typically their tomb (cf. Ekroth 2009; Whitley 1995). Betz (2005) writes:

That Jesus' grave is declared 'empty' apparently excludes an interpretation of his manner of existence as a chthonic hero, whose presence is bound up with the grave. Jesus' resurrection was instead interpreted by a Christology of elevation according to which he took his place at God's right hand as ruler of the cosmos. The result of such a Christology was that his universal presence was bound together with the Holy Spirit and with the word of proclamation. (pp. 46–47; similarly Koester 2001:259–264)

These more theological considerations, together with the problematic aspects of the Markan story described above, suggest that even for those who believed that Jesus had risen, the 'place' of the empty tomb was not 'sacred space' like a temple or like the tomb of a hero (so also Koester 2001:263). How then did it become, in Eusebius's words, 'the holy of holies', that is, the site of 'the new temple of the new Christian Jerusalem' (Smith 1987:83)?<sup>17</sup>

## Rehabilitating the empty tomb in early Christian memory

The post-Markan additions to the story, including the inspection of the tomb by the apostles and the appearance of the risen Jesus at the tomb, have the effect not only of restricting the interpretation of the empty tomb, but also of attributing a kind of 'sacredness' to the 'space'. The question of the origin of these additions need not delay us, for the important thing is how they altered the meaning of the tomb in early Christian memory.<sup>18</sup> Although the variations and subsequent interpretations and re-presentations of the story are numerous, the main narrative additions will be treated under the following headings: (1) additional witnesses of the empty tomb, including the guard (Matthew) and apostolic figures (Luke, John); (2) the presence of the graveclothes inside the tomb (Luke, John); (3) adaptations of the angelophany (John); and (4) an appearance of the risen Jesus at the tomb (Matthew, John). These alterations gave rise

17. Despite his support for Constantine and his building projects, Eusebius himself (unlike Cyril of Jerusalem) apparently was opposed to the idea of Christianity (a spiritual religion) having physical holy places (Markus 1994:258–260; Walker 1989:51–92).

18. N.T. Wright and John Dominic Crossan represent two opposing views on this question. Wright (2003:611–612) believes that the differences among the empty tomb stories point to their 'early character', since one would expect 'that inconsistencies would be ironed out' had the stories developed later on. This seems to deny to the evangelists literary control over their own compositions. Crossan (1988:282–283), however, sees 'the intracanonical tradition of the empty tomb [as] ... a single stream of redacted transmission from Mark 16:1–8 as its only source'.

to a new set of problems once the four gospels were able to be compared with each other, for the 'truth' of the narratives as historical accounts seemed to depend on whether they could be reconciled with each other.<sup>19</sup> To a great extent, ancient commentators were more concerned to make the gospels agree than to interpret them. Further, although early Christian theologians tended to focus on the canonical (i.e. 'scriptural') forms of the story, apocryphal writings also give us valuable information about how the story was being imagined and used – even if we cannot know how widely such writings were received and read.

## Additional witnesses of the empty tomb

Both Luke (Lk 24:12<sup>20</sup>) and John (Jn 20:3–10) include scenes in which apostolic figures (Peter in Luke, Peter and the Beloved Disciple in John) visit the empty tomb after the women report their discovery to them and confirm their discovery. The apostles also see the graveclothes left behind by the rising Jesus (Lk 24:12; Jn 20:5–7; see also below). Many scholars suggest that this addition was made because the women's testimony would have been considered inferior or unreliable (e.g. Bovon 2012:353; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 4.219; Origen, *Cels.* 2.55), but it is not entirely clear that this was true (Osiek 1997:112–113). Instead, the addition seems to control the way that the appearances of the risen Jesus must be interpreted (Smith 2010:112–114). Although the apostles do not actually see the risen Jesus during this visit to the tomb, later they do (Lk 24:34; Jn 20:19–23), and their confirmation that the tomb was empty means that their experience of the risen Jesus was not visionary, but tangible and bodily. The body of the risen Jesus was 'flesh and bones' (Lk 24:39), risen out of the tomb.

Matthew also adds witnesses to the Markan women at the tomb, but these witnesses are 'hostile' – the guard requested by 'the Pharisees' (Mt 27:62–66; 28:4, 11–15). Matthew must reintroduce the Pharisees here (who have been absent throughout the Passion Narrative), for it was in their hearing (cf. ἐμνήσθημεν, v. 63) that Jesus uttered the 'Sign of Jonah' saying, which in Matthew is a prediction of the resurrection (Mt 12:40). Although some scholars think Matthew is using a fairly well-developed source for the story of the guard (e.g. Davies & Allison 1997:645), it seems more likely that the author created the story as an apologetic explanation of the 'origin' of the 'Jewish' (Mt 28:15) claim that the disciples had stolen the body (Mt 28:12–15; cf. Justin, *Dial.* 108; *Gos. Pet.* 8.28–11.49; so Luz 2005a:585–586).<sup>21</sup> In any event, the testimony of the guard and the Pharisees to the empty tomb

19. See, for example, Augustine, *de Cons. Ev.* 3.24; Eusebius, *Quaest. Ev., ad Marinos* 1–4. Theodore of Mopsuestia insists that the minor details are not of great concern, since the gospels agree on the main points (*Comm. loh.* 7, on Jn 20:1), but does argue at considerable length their accord on some very minor points.

20. This verse, one of the so-called 'Western non-interpolations', is often considered a secondary scribal addition (there are parallels to Jn 20:5, 10) and therefore not original to Luke (e.g. Ehrman 1993:212–217; but it is printed in the main text in Nestle, Nestle, Aland *et al.* 2012). Thus Ehrman and others attribute to 'an orthodox scribe' the intention of having the apostles confirm the empty tomb (Ehrman 1993:216–217; Parsons 1986:476). However, as Frans Neirynck has convincingly shown (1992, 2002), the verse contains several elements of Lukan style and therefore is more probably original (see also Smith 2010:115–18). Complicating matters somewhat is the fact that Luke 24:24 indicates that more than one person went to see the tomb: 'And some of those with us went off to the tomb, and they found [things] just as the women had said, but they did not see him.'

21. Luz (2005b:59–60) sees this 'Matthean fiction' as part of a literary interest in heightening the separation between Matthew's community and formative Judaism.

(and later to the resurrection itself! see *Gos. Pet.* 9.36–10.42) was a by-product of this apologetic impetus which did not go unnoticed by later commentators.<sup>22</sup> How could the story of the theft of the body be true, if hostile witnesses (have been made to) testify that they fabricated it themselves, in full knowledge of the truth? Accordingly, as John Chrysostom writes, ‘on this basis the demonstration of the resurrection is shown to be irrefutable’ (*Hom. Matt.* 89.2).<sup>23</sup>

Both the apostolic witnesses and the guards placed at the tomb confirm that this ‘place’ is the site of the resurrection. Cyril of Jerusalem counts as among the ‘witnesses of our Saviour’s resurrection’ the apostles, including Peter and John who ran to the tomb, and also the soldiers and the money they were paid to spread the false report (*Cat.* 14.22). Of course, for Cyril and his hearers – catechumens hearing lessons on the faith in the Church of the Resurrection itself – these witnesses only speak through the biblical texts, but somehow their collective voice seems all the more compelling when it speaks in ‘the place itself’ (*Cat.* 14.22), for as Jonathan Z. Smith observes, ‘in the Christian Jerusalem of the fourth century ... story, ritual, and place could be one’ (Smith 1987:86).

### The discovery of the graveclothes

Cyril also counts the graveclothes discovered by the apostles (Lk 24:12; Jn 20:5–7) as amongst his witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus (*Cat.* 14.22). Interestingly, both Luke and John have the apostles, and not the women, discover the graveclothes. This might make sense in terms of Luke’s clear intent to diminish the role of the women from those commissioned with carrying news of the resurrection (cf. Mk 16:7) to disciples who ‘remember’ the Passion Predictions (Lk 24:6–8); but in John, Mary is clearly commissioned by Jesus himself with the news that he is risen (Jn 20:17–18; cf. Mt 28:10). Both Luke and John also use the term ὀθόνια, ‘(linen) cloths’ here, where earlier the Synoptics agree that Joseph buried Jesus after wrapping him in a σινδών, that is, a single ‘linen cloth’ (Mk 15:46; Mt 27:59; Lk 23:53; cf. in Jn 19:40). It is difficult to know what to make of this differing terminology. Several scholars (e.g. Fitzmyer 1985:1542, 1548) suggest that Luke and John agree here in using ὀθόνια because they rely on a common source, but they are also concerned to explain the strange verbatim agreement between Luke and John in the words καὶ παρακύψας βλέπει ... τὰ ὀθόνια (Lk 24:12; Jn 20:5). Another explanation is that the author of Luke composed verse 12 in its entirety and, when not relying on a source (as he was in Lk 23:53), he used a term known to him (cf. ὀθόνη in Ac 10:11; 11:15). As Frans Neirynck (1994:338) explains, ‘Luke’s phrase τὰ ὀθόνια μόνα in 24:12 repeats with greater precision the negative statement “they did not find the body of Jesus” [Lk 24:3]’. In other words, when Peter entered the tomb, ‘he saw only the linen cloths’ (v. 12), but ‘him [he] did not see’ (v. 24).

John might have been directly or indirectly dependent on

22. *Gos. Pet.* 8.31–33 places ‘elders and scribes’ at the tomb, together with the centurion Petronius and his soldiers, setting up a tent and keeping watch.

23. Cf. Lactantius, *Inst.* 4.19, who claims the guards were stupefied with fear and did not see anything when Jesus exited the tomb (as in *Gos. Pet.* 10.38–40?). This idea is probably related to Lactantius’s insistence that Jesus did not want to reveal himself in his risen state to the Jews, lest they repent of their unbelief (*Inst.* 4.20).

Luke for some of the wording of this story (so Neirynck 1994:340). However the agreements originated, John also mentions another burial cloth, the σουδάριον, which usually is understood as a smaller cloth used for wrapping the head of the deceased, though its usual meaning is closer to ‘handkerchief’ (Bauer *et al.* 2000: *ad loc.*). The Beloved Disciple arrives first at the tomb and ‘sees the linen cloths lying [there]’, but he did not go in (Jn 20:5); then Peter arrives and enters the tomb and sees the second cloth folded up and separate from the linen wrappings (vv. 6–7); then the Beloved Disciple entered and ‘he saw and believed’ (v. 8). Commentators are not agreed as to the significance of the description of the graveclothes. Many note the use of σουδάριον in John 11:44 and suggest that the description of the graveclothes in John 20 shows that Jesus cannot be held by the trappings of death: whereas Lazarus needed someone to unbind him and let him go (Jn 11), Jesus did not (see e.g. Lincoln 2005:490; Moloney 1998:519–520). C.K. Barrett (1955:468) thinks that ‘the body had in some way disappeared from, or passed through, the cloths and left them lying as they were.’ Brown notes that this view is very old, citing Ammonius of Alexandria (1970:1007).<sup>24</sup>

As with the apostolic inspection of the tomb, this new detail is consistent with the growing interest in defining the resurrection of Jesus as bodily and tangible. It is also possible that this detail was developed to show that the body had not been stolen or moved although, unlike Matthew, neither Luke nor John give any indication that they were aware of such a rumour (but cf. Jn 20:2, 13, 15, where Mary thinks someone has taken or moved the body). For who would have unwrapped the body before removing it from the tomb? Early Christian commentators, of course, seized on this idea: John Chrysostom, for example, also noted that the various aromatics used to anoint the body before burial (in Jn 19:39–40, Joseph and Nicodemus use one hundred pounds of spices) would have made this a very difficult task (*Comm. Ioh.* 85.4). Theodore of Mopsuestia, however, takes this one step further, and says that Jesus himself ‘placed [the graveclothes] in an orderly arrangement’ as a sign to the apostles that he had been raised from the dead and that his body had not been stolen (*Comm. Ioh.* 7, on Jn 20:6–7).<sup>25</sup> One apocryphal account, however, has Jesus handing over the graveclothes to the servant of the priest as he exits the tomb (*Gos. Heb.* fr. 7; Jerome, *Vir. Ill.* 2). Other early commentators are careful to explain that, without the graveclothes, Jesus would not be naked because he was clothed with immortality, as Adam had been before the Fall (e.g. Hippolytus, *In Cant.* 25.5).

Spatially, however, this additional detail draws attention in a new way to what was left inside the tomb after Jesus rose, and it heightens the sense that Jesus ‘had now resurrected in an amazing way through inscrutable divine power, and

24. One may note here that this seems to imagine a similar ‘translation’ of the body of Jesus (here, out of the graveclothes) to what is imagined in Matthew (there, out of the tomb, for it is already empty before the angel opens it, Mt 28:2–6).

25. Translation Conti and Elowsky (2010).

had received a better life in an imperishable body and an immutable soul' (Theodore, *Comm. Ioh.* 7, on Jn 20:6–7).<sup>26</sup> In other words, the empty tomb is now no longer empty: it contains a sign now that the absent Jesus had been raised.

### Adaptations of the angelophany

Another narrative addition in the canonical accounts, this time found only in John (Jn 20:11–13), also changes the interior space of the tomb. Whereas Mark places the 'young man' inside the tomb, 'sitting on the right side' (Mk 16:5), and Luke has two angels ('men in dazzling apparel', Lk 24:4) meet the women inside the tomb (cf. v. 3, εἰσελθούσαι), John has two angels inside the tomb, specifying that Mary sees 'one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain' (Jn 20:12). The linen wrappings are not mentioned, but the position of the angels seems similar to the position of τὰ ὀθόνια and τὸ σουδάριον earlier (Jn 20:6–7), although the linens are not mentioned here. The point seems to be the same, however – to indicate that the space once occupied by Jesus' body is now empty (Lincoln 2005:492). Besides the position of the angels, there are other things noteworthy about this scene in John. The typical motif of fear is completely absent (cf. Mk 16:5–6, 8; Mt 28:4–5, 8; Lk 24:5), which suggests that the author is more interested in the presence of the angels than in their message. Thus the angelophany has no real result for Mary: they question her and she answers, but the encounter ends abruptly, and the angels do not say anything that Jesus does not soon say himself (compare Jn 20:13 with 20:15; see also Mt 28:7 and 28:10). In contrast with Mark 16:1–8, which reports no appearance of the risen Jesus, and where the focus is on the message of the 'young man' and the women's reaction, the narratives in John and Matthew must adapt the angelophanies to the appearance of Jesus himself at the tomb, or vice versa (see further below). A late 2nd-century version of the empty tomb story in *The Epistle of the Apostles* eliminates the (by now redundant) angelophany altogether, in favour of an expanded Christophany (*Ep. Apos.* 9–10; Brown 1970:999).

The position of the angels does add an interesting spatial dimension to this part of the Johannine tomb story. Ancient commentators, as noted above, were typically more interested in harmonising the disagreements between the gospels than in interpreting details such as this; but Christian authors sometimes also tried to interpret the angels' position allegorically. Augustine (*Tract. Ioh.* 121.1), for example, thought that 'head' and 'feet' symbolise the preaching of the gospel from beginning to end, or from east to west. Curiously, no ancient commentator seems (as far as I can tell) to have noticed the possible intertextual allusion, referenced in modern commentaries at least since Matthew Henry (1706), to the two cherubim on the mercy-seat of the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 25:17–22).<sup>27</sup> Although Moloney

(1998:528) dismisses this reading as 'fanciful', Grappe (2009) makes a good case for the connection. John 1:14 alludes to the tabernacle (ἐσκήνωσεν) with respect to the incarnation of the Word, and John 2:18–22 identifies Jesus' risen body with 'the temple' as the locus of the divine presence. Not only that, but the Targumim paraphrase Exodus so that God will cause his 'word' to meet with Moses between the cherubim (e.g. *Tg. Neof.* Ex 25:22; Grappe 2009:172). Thus, 'we could have here an indication of the fact that the mercy-seat was associated in a particular way with the Word of God' in early Judaism (Grappe 2009:173).<sup>28</sup> Lunn (2009:732–735) assembles more linguistic parallels between Exodus and John in support of this intertextual allusion, but some of them seem rather tenuous.<sup>29</sup>

In any case, this allusion, because it correlates the missing (risen) body of Jesus with the space between the cherubim, which remained empty and yet was the site of the LORD's enthronement (1 Sm 4:4; Ps 80:1), creates a 'sacred space' within the tomb equivalent to the inner sanctum of the Temple. It is quite surprising, then, that Eusebius, who calls the tomb of Christ 'the holy of holies' in his description of its 'discovery' (*Vit. Const.* 3.28.1), misses the allusion to Exodus 25 in his interpretations of John 20:12 (e.g. *Quaest. Ev. ad Mar.* 3.2, where admittedly he is more interested in harmonising John with the other accounts). Even if early commentators missed the allusion, it still marks another point in the trajectory from the 'place' of Mark's empty tomb to the 'sacred space' of the Church of the Resurrection.

### The risen Jesus at the tomb

One other narrative addition in the canonical gospels added to the sacredness of the space of the empty tomb in early Christian memory, and this was making the tomb the site of a resurrection appearance, a Christophany (Mt 28:9–10; Jn 20:11–18). Betz (1990:246) finds it surprising, on the basis of his study of the Greek magical papyri, that any of the gospels would depict Jesus appearing at the tomb. The 'daimons' of those who died violently were considered especially powerful, and therefore were of particular interest to those involved in necromancy (pp. 241–245). Practitioners of this kind of magic naturally were interested in graves, as places where the dead could be summoned and where curse tablets would be most effective (pp. 245–246). Although it seems that practitioners would rather procure a body part of such a person than try to 'conjure' the daimon at the gravesite, still the average ancient person would conclude that 'what appeared to the disciples at the tomb was the spirit of the dead Jesus' (pp. 247).<sup>30</sup> Betz details (pp. 247–253) how the evangelists sought to overcome a potential 'magical-demonic interpretation' (p. 248) of the Easter events by different means, for example, by depicting the risen body of Jesus as tangible (e.g. Lk 24:36–43), or by making the Christological aspects of resurrection faith clear (e.g. Mt 28:18).

26. Translation Conti and Elowsky (2010).

27. See Henry 1706, on John 20:12 (at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5.John.xxi.html>). Grappe (2009:170) seems to indicate that J.J. Wetstein (1751) was the earliest one to notice this (but cf. Lunn 2009:731, n. 2, who mentions Henry). See also Williams (2000:183–196), who takes this allusion as the theme for an essay on the resurrection ('Between the cherubim: The empty tomb and the empty throne').

28. Author's translation.

29. For example, Lunn notes (2009:734) parallels between the restrictions (Nm 4:15, 20) placed on the Kohathites, who carried the Ark, and the activities of Peter and the other disciple, and Mary, which seem strained.

30. Author's translation; the German is 'der Totengeist Jesu'.



Despite all these considerations, an appearance at the tomb also seems in some ways quite a natural development: if Jesus had been raised from the dead, and left the tomb empty (and the graveclothes behind), then his risen body, if not in the tomb, must of course have been somewhere outside it.<sup>31</sup> As to the origins of this development, it is difficult to know whether behind Matthew and/or John there was an early tradition that Jesus appeared to the women, even if such a tradition might not originally have situated the appearance at the tomb (Smith 2010:126–127, 144–145). To a great extent, one can only answer such a question with guesswork: Paul mentions no appearance to women in 1 Corinthians 15:5–8, but he might have suppressed such a tradition; and it is difficult to see how Mary could have gained such a reputation as a visionary only on the basis of the reception of John 20; but then again, that is not impossible. Several scholars suggest that there was a very early tradition involving an appearance to Mary Magdalene (D'Angelo 2005; Schaberg 2002). Either way, the two appearance stories, as they exist in Matthew and John, are very much in keeping with the style, vocabulary and interests of the respective evangelists. In Matthew, the interest seems to be to disprove the alternate explanation of the empty tomb, that is, that the disciples had stolen the body (Mt 27:63–64; 28:12–15); thus, the appearance serves a similar end to the discovery of the graveclothes in Luke and John. In John, the commissioning encounter with the women becomes a private commissioning encounter for Mary (Jn 20:14–18).

In any case, the tomb is now not only the site of the resurrection, but also the site of a Christophany, and this further sacralises the place. Later narratives tend to develop the canonical tomb appearance in unexpected ways: in *The Gospel of Peter*, the very rising of Jesus is described (Gos. Pet. 10.38–42), but there is no encounter with the women at the tomb (12.50–13.57); and in *The Epistle of the Apostles* 10, there is an expanded scene in which the risen Jesus mimics the words of the canonical angels (cf. Mk 16:6–7) and sends first one woman and then another to report to the other disciples, who do not believe (cf. Lk 24:11; Mk 16:11). Although Matthew and John narrate these appearances as tangible encounters with the risen Jesus, elsewhere the language for resurrection appearances imitates the Septuagintal expression for a theophany, that is, ὤφθη, 'he appeared, was seen' (1 Co 15:5–8, Lk 24:34; cf. Gn 14:16 LXX, Ex 3:2 LXX). The notion that the site of a theophany was somehow 'sacred ground' is common in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Ex 3:5).

## Conclusion

### 'His sepulchre shall be glorious'

The combination of all these narrative elements – the inspection of the tomb by apostolic resurrection witnesses, the description of the graveclothes, the positioning of the angels in John, and the addition of an appearance of the risen Jesus – all contributed to a general understanding

by early Christians that the tomb of Jesus could become 'sacred space'. By the time Origen wrote his response to Celsus, for example, it had been forgotten that the tomb of Jesus was once regarded as a place of shame. Seizing on the detail that Jesus had been placed in a new tomb 'in which no one had ever been laid' (Lk 23:53; Jn 19:41), Origen thought this symbolised the new life of Jesus' resurrection, and correlated this with the virgin birth: 'just as his birth was purer than any other ... so also his burial should be purer' (*Cels.* 2.69). Other authors made a similar correlation, so that tomb and womb were equated: Jesus was the only occupant of each. Not only that, but in rising from the dead he could exit the tomb without disrupting the seals or moving the stone, and thus the resurrection also could explain how the virginity of Mary could remain intact even in childbirth (Jerome, *Ep.* 48.21). This line of argumentation only added to the sacredness of the 'place' of the tomb in early Christian memory. As the Vulgate translates Isaiah 11:10, 'and his sepulchre will be glorious' (*et erit sepulchrum eius gloriosum*).<sup>32</sup> Jerome said that this meant the tomb of Jesus should be universally honoured (*Ep.* 46.5).

Of course, by the time Jerome wrote, this 'place' was already 'sacred space' by virtue of Constantine's building project and the rituals enacted therein. According to Eusebius, it was the emperor himself who was convinced of the sacredness of this site: it was 'holy from the beginning in the judgment of God', but now 'even holier' because its revelation brought assurance of Christ's passion (*Vit. Const.* 3.30.4, citing a letter from Constantine to Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem). Jonathan Z. Smith suggests that the sacredness of the Church of the Resurrection depends on it being in the correct place, even if the guarantees of its correct placement are mostly legendary. Unlike the Jerusalem temple, whose location was arbitrary:

[T]he Church of the Holy Sepulchre could not have been built anywhere else and still be the same. Its *locus* had to correspond fully to the *topos* of the gospel narratives. [...] It is its locative specificity and thick associative content, rather than its arbitrariness, that guarantees the site's power and religious function. (Smith 1987:86)

With the rise of the veneration of relics, the sacredness of the tomb of Jesus became portable, as it were, whether through visual depiction or through items (or indeed souvenirs) brought from the site (Morris 2005:58–67). Later, as Smith notes (1987:87) and as Colin Morris documents (2005), replicas of the *Anastasis* became very common in medieval Europe, whether these were permanent structures or small reproductions used in liturgies; often the sacredness of the replicas was heightened through association with relics. Pilgrimages could thus be localised and the 'sepulchre of Christ' venerated across the medieval West. Could any of this have happened had the place of Jesus' burial not been rehabilitated through the efforts of the canonical evangelists and their interpreters? The lines of the trajectory are not always clear, but the evidence is suggestive. Changing how the story of the empty tomb was told meant that the 'place where they laid him' could be celebrated as 'sacred space' – even if it had not always been remembered as such.

31. This view leaves out of the question the possibility that the resurrection of Jesus was also being depicted as 'assumption'. See Smith (2010:124–125) for the suggestion that in Matthew 28, at least, Jesus was not in the tomb because he had been taken bodily into the divine realm (whence he also appeared), for the angel removes the stone to show that Jesus is already raised and gone (Mt 28:2–6).

32. NRSV renders the Hebrew as 'his dwelling shall be glorious'.

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