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**Skull feature of Golgotha, Jerusalem**

# Revisiting Golgotha and the Garden Tomb

*Jeffrey R. Chadwick*

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The Garden Tomb in Jerusalem is a site of significant interest to many Latter-day Saints and religious educators. In the last thirty years, tens of thousands of Latter-day Saint visitors to Israel have spent time at the pleasantly landscaped site. Many of these, if not most, have come away impressed, both by the sincere explanations of the volunteer guides and by the peaceful spirit of the place. Visitors have often left with the feeling that this was where Jesus Christ rose from the dead on a Sunday morning nearly two thousand years ago. Photos, slides, and videos featuring the tomb in that garden are often used in Church classrooms when educators discuss the events of Jesus' death and Resurrection. In a recently produced video presentation entitled "Special Witnesses of Christ," President Gordon B. Hinckley, standing at the Garden Tomb, made the following statement: "Just outside the walls of Jerusalem, in this place or somewhere nearby was the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, where the body of the Lord was interred."<sup>1</sup> There is, however, something very notable about this statement. Always a cautious observer, President Hinckley, with the words "or somewhere nearby" left wide open the possibility that the Garden Tomb might not have been the sepulchre of Jesus at all.

In 1992, I began a decade-long archaeological investigation of both the Garden Tomb and the so-called Skull Hill not far away (hereafter referred to as the "skull feature") with the goal of determining whether either or both may be identified with the New Testament "Golgotha" and the tomb of Jesus' Resurrection.<sup>2</sup> That investigation

has yielded mixed results. The good news is that evidence is quite positive for the skull feature having been Golgotha, or the “place of the skull” where Jesus was crucified. However, the bad news, for some at least, is that the Garden Tomb does not seem to meet the archaeological criteria to be the site of Jesus’ Resurrection described in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> The tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, if it still exists, will have to be sought “somewhere nearby.”

### **The Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the Site for Golgotha and the Tomb**

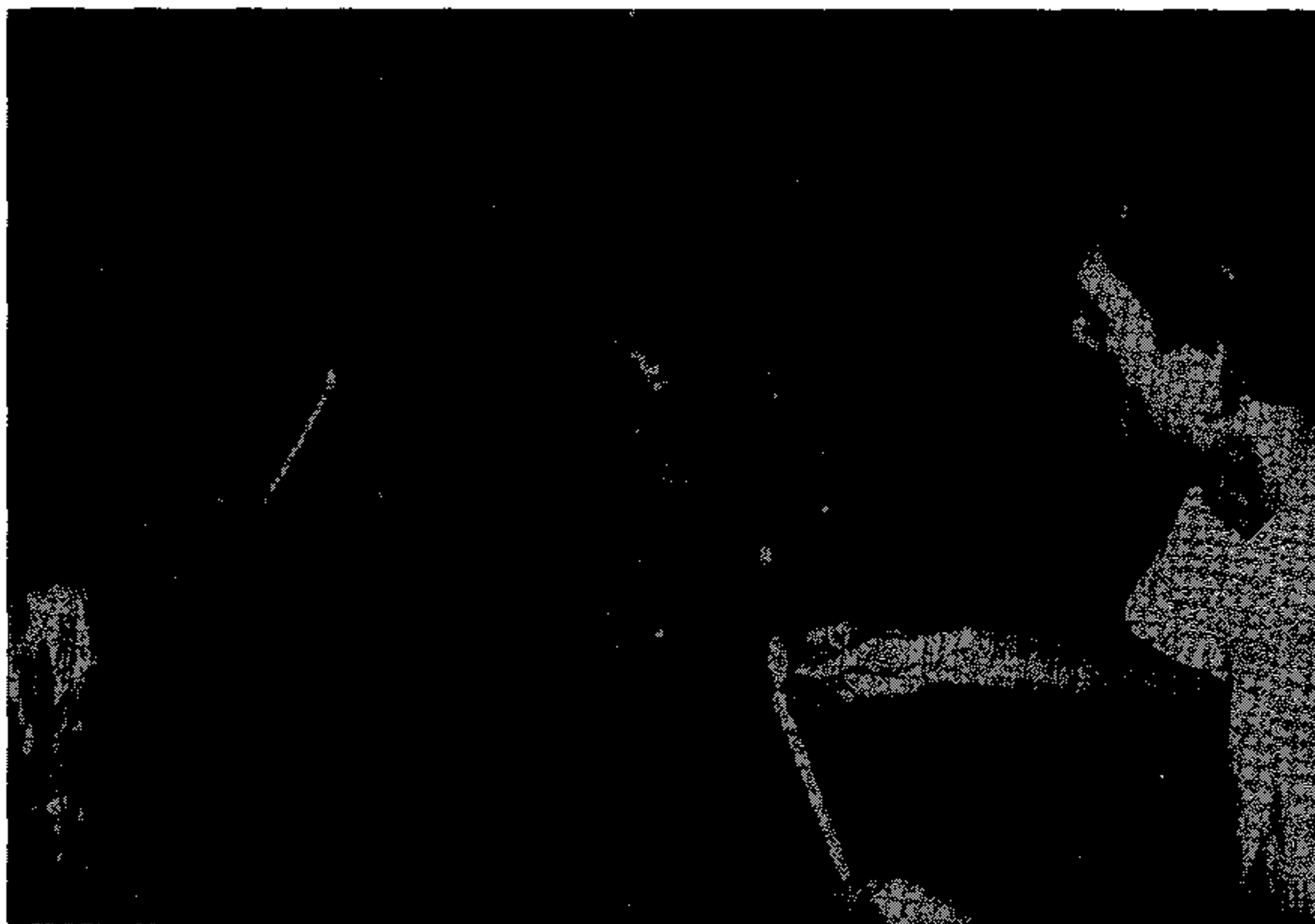
Before I discuss the investigation of the skull feature and Garden Tomb and consider whether either or both may be connected to the account of Jesus’ Crucifixion and Resurrection, I must revisit the traditional and more widely accepted candidate for Golgotha and the tomb. It must first be demonstrated that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, located inside the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem’s Old City, does not represent the correct site of Jesus’ death and burial.

The original Holy Sepulchre shrine was built by order of the Roman-Christian emperor Constantine between A.D. 326 and 335, some three hundred years after Jesus’ death. Prior to A.D. 326, the site was occupied by a pagan temple built by the Roman emperor Hadrian in A.D. 135. Archaeological soundings show that the site of the Hadrianic temple and Holy Sepulchre was a stone quarry in the seventh century B.C., at which time its topsoil was entirely removed. The site remained without vegetation thereafter, and the bare bedrock became the location of tombs carved there during a later period. In his book *The Holy Land*, noted scholar Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, professor of New Testament at the Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Francaise (otherwise known as the French School) in Jerusalem, offers an enthusiastic case in favor of the Holy Sepulchre. Murphy-O’Connor describes the location in these terms: “At the beginning of the C1 A.D. the site was a disused quarry outside the city walls. Tombs similar to those found elsewhere and dated to the C1 B.C. and the C1 A.D. had been cut into the vertical west wall left by the quarrymen. . . . Windblown earth and seeds watered by winter rains would have created the covering of green in the quarry that John dignifies by the term ‘garden.’”<sup>4</sup>

Murphy-O’Connor’s description of the quarry and the presence of tombs is basically correct (except for his “C1 A.D.” assumption), but his description of the “garden” as a naturally occurring weed patch shows little regard for the reliability of the Gospel of John. One might ask

Murphy-O'Connor why Mary Magdalene would suppose she was talking to a "gardener" (John 20:15) if she were standing in nothing more gardenlike than a windblown weed patch on denuded quarry bedrock. The scenario he presents makes no sense when compared to the setting described in the New Testament. Because of the lack of arable soil, the Holy Sepulchre site could not have been a garden in the time of Jesus.

But the New Testament account calls not just for a real working garden. It stipulates that the tomb in that garden was newly cut at the time of Jesus' death: "Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid" (John 19:41). Though horizontal burial niches (called *kokhim* in Hebrew) were found carved into the quarry bedrock under Hadrian's temple (see figure 1), none of those could have been a "new sepulchre" in A.D. 30, when Jesus was buried.



**Figure 1.** Two *kokhim* (burial vaults) at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Murphy-O'Connor is mistaken in claiming that the tomb remains at the Holy Sepulchre date to both "the CI B.C. and the CI A.D." The Byzantine Christians who selected the site assumed an incorrect date for the tombs they found when they demolished Hadrian's pagan temple. Those burial niches probably date to the third or second centuries B.C., the period of Hellenistic control that culminated in Judea's Hasmonean monarchy, but they cannot under any circumstances be dated to the first century A.D. when Jesus lived. Here is why.

From the tenth century B.C. through the first century A.D.—the archaeological Iron Age through the Herodian period—tombs were not constructed west of the inhabited areas of Jerusalem. The only exceptions were tombs located over one thousand meters west of the city walls. By and large, the west was simply avoided as a burial area. The primary reason for this seems to have been connected with the prevailing winds. In Jerusalem, like most other areas in the land of Israel, the wind blows almost exclusively from the west. Exceptions are during short transition periods in spring and fall when hot desert winds called *sharav* blow from the east or southeast. But more than 350 days a year, the wind is from the west—from the sea. Jews did not embalm dead bodies prior to burial; and corpses were left exposed in the tomb to desiccate, which could take over a year. Tombs to the west of the city presented two problems: (1) the scent of decomposing corpses would be carried over the city by breezes from the west, and (2) Jews believed ritual impurity rising from interred corpses could be carried over the city by those breezes, causing the living inhabitants of the city to become “defiled” or unclean.

The prohibition on burial to the west of Jewish cities, including Jerusalem, is noted in both the Talmud and the archaeological record. I will consider first the Talmud. A quote from the Mishnah, the portion of Talmud that was put into writing about A.D. 200 and that preserves Jewish traditions from the second century B.C. to the second century A.D., recalls how Jews dealt with dead bodies in regard to their city limits: “They distance the animal carcasses and the tombs and the tannery from the city fifty cubits. None place a tannery other than to the east of the city. Rabbi Akiva says: to every wind one places, except the west, and distances fifty cubits.”<sup>5</sup>

In this Mishnah, the sages of the late second century A.D. indicate that Jews of their day did not deposit dead bodies, whether human or animal, within twenty-five meters (“fifty cubits”) of their town limits. The same was true for tanneries, where dead animals were processed for leather—in fact, tanneries were located only east of the city. The sages then refer to an earlier authority, Rabbi Akiva, to explain older practices upon which theirs were based. Akiva had grown up in the late first century A.D. and became *nasi* (the presiding rabbinic authority) in A.D. 110. He was killed by the Romans in A.D. 135. His words, recalled to harmonize the two prior statements in the Mishnah, reflect the first century A.D. custom that corpse deposition was permissible anywhere but to the west of the city—the words “to every wind” are both an idiomatic expression of direction as well as an indication that wind was

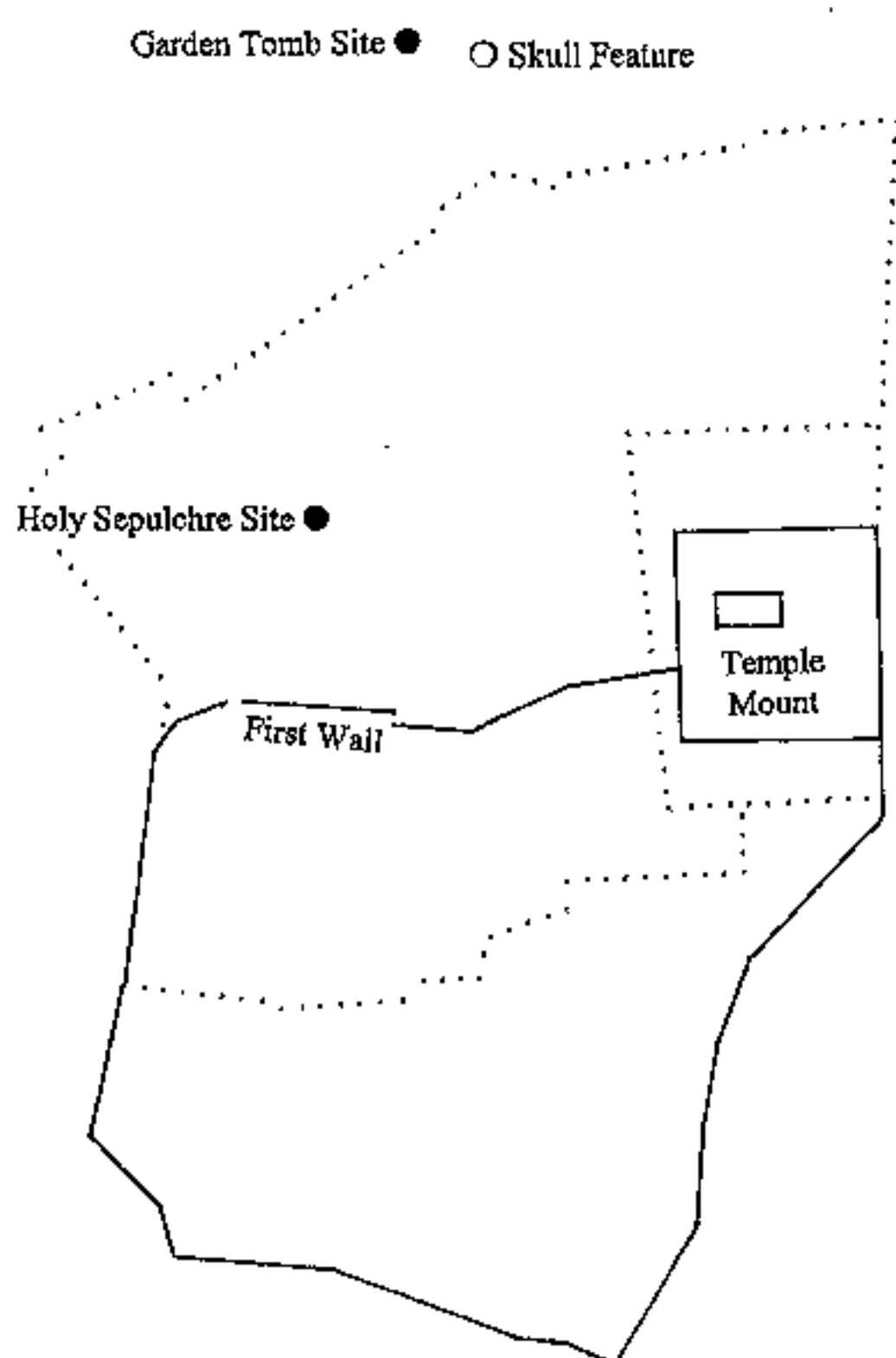


the primary factor in determining permissible direction. The sages who compiled the Mishnah often crafted preliminary statements in a way that allowed them to be harmonized or summarized by a preexisting statement from an earlier authority. That Akiva's summary statement permitting deposition in every direction "except the west" has reference both to the dead animals and tombs of the first statement as well as the tannery of the second statement is deduced from the presence of terminology from both statements: the verb "distance" and the "fifty cubit" measurement of the first statement as well as the verb "place" from the second statement. The Mishnah is indicating, in its own peculiar way, that Jews did not place tombs on the west side of their cities during the first century A.D.

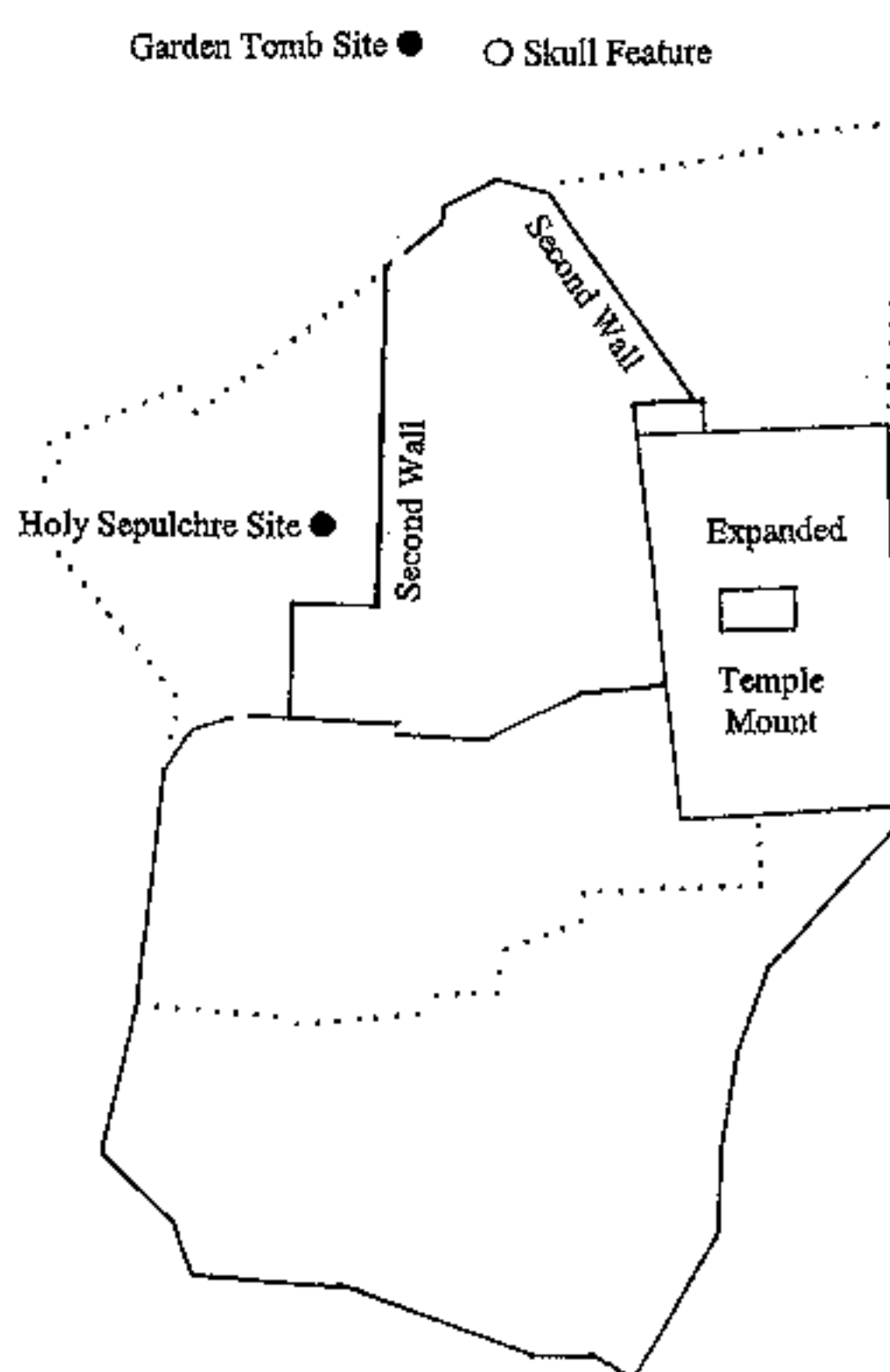
That Jerusalemites constructed their tombs only to the east, north, or south of the city is also evident from archaeological research. A map in the authoritative *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* that charts the location of Jerusalem's ancient necropoli (burial grounds) shows that hundreds of tombs were located on the Mount of Olives, east of the city, as well as in large tracts on the north and south sides of the city. But no tombs of the first century A.D. appear on those maps in any area within a kilometer of ancient Jerusalem's western limit.<sup>6</sup> Physical remains of tombs in that area are nonexistent. Both the Talmud's recollection of first century A.D. practices and the thorough surveys of archaeologists seem to indicate that the west side of Jerusalem was an area where burial was entirely out of bounds.

A related aspect of the Holy Sepulchre's location and the question of wind direction was the erection of the Temple of Herod and the expansion of the Temple Mount platform after 20 B.C. University of Haifa archaeologist Rami Arav and researcher John Rousseau have demonstrated that Pharisee tradition, the basis for most Jewish practice in the Herodian period, would not have permitted tomb construction anywhere directly west of the expanded Temple Mount because wind passing over western tombs would also have passed over the sacred temple enclosure, thus defiling it and anyone in it.<sup>7</sup> They maintain that "tombs found in this area [west of the city] are either older than the first century C.E. [A.D.] or are located more than a distance of 2,000 cubits (3,000 feet) from the Temple Mount."<sup>8</sup> Arav and Rousseau conclude that since "burial customs in the first half of the first century C.E. [A.D.] preclude burials and their attendant impurities west (windward) of the Temple, then the crucifixion and burial of Jesus could not have taken place at the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is almost exactly due west of the Holy of Holies."<sup>9</sup>

How then may we account for the tomb remains at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre? The likely answer is that when the burial niches there were initially constructed, the area actually lay to the north of the city. Until the first century B.C., the northern limit of Jerusalem's inhabited neighborhoods was the east-west line of the so-called "first wall" (see figure 2), originally built by King Hezekiah in the late eighth century B.C. and rebuilt by the Hasmoneans in the second century B.C. No prohibition would have existed, in those centuries, to locating



**Figure 2.** Jerusalem during the Hasmonean period, 164–63 B.C. The dotted line represents the present Old City wall line.



**Figure 3.** Jerusalem during the mid-Herodian period, 20 B.C.–A.D. 43. The dotted line represents the present Old City wall line.

graves a reasonable distance north of that "first wall." The Holy Sepulchre's burial niches are located some one hundred meters north of that line (two hundred cubits by the sages' measure). Those niches were most likely carved out during the third or second centuries B.C., either by Jews or possibly by non-Jewish Syrians garrisoned in the city. However, later, during the first century B.C., the growing population of Jerusalem expanded north of that "first wall," establishing residential areas along the upper Tyropoean Valley as far as today's Damascus Gate. Scholarly opinion on just when is divided, but sometime between 63 B.C. and 4 B.C. (when Herod the Great died), either during the reign of the last of the Hasmonean monarchs or of Herod himself, a



rampart known as the “second wall” was built, surrounding the newer neighborhoods and annexing them to Jerusalem (see figure 3). With the appearance of those neighborhoods and the erection of that “second wall,” the site of the Holy Sepulchre, only fifty meters west of that wall, became an area where new tombs would not have been permitted. In other words, at the time Jesus died in A.D. 30, no “new sepulchre” could have been cut out by Joseph of Arimathea at the Holy Sepulchre site—the cultural prohibition on tomb construction and burial at a point only fifty meters to the west of the “second wall” would have already come into play sixty to a hundred years earlier.

The exact reasoning behind the original placement of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is not known. But it is clear that the Byzantine Christians of the fourth century who built the shrine were essentially uninformed concerning Jewish tradition and practice at the time of Jesus as well as the historical geography of Herodian Jerusalem, or else they would not have chosen the site they did. In modern times, generally, the only conversation about the authenticity of the tomb site at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has surrounded the question of its location inside or outside the “second wall” of Herodian Jerusalem. This is a fair question itself because it is by no means certain that the “second wall” was located east of the Holy Sepulchre’s location. It may indeed have run on the west side of that location, meaning that the Holy Sepulchre site was inside the city in Jesus’ day. But inside or outside, the tombs there would have been emptied of all human remains when the city expanded northward in the first century B.C. Allowing, for the sake of argument, that the tombs at the Holy Sepulchre were outside the “second wall” in Jesus’ day, the site still cannot have been where Joseph of Arimathea was cutting his new tomb in A.D. 30. It was in extremely close proximity to the western side of Jerusalem and west of the Temple of Herod and the expanded Temple Mount platform, thus disqualified as a new tomb site by the prevailing west winds. And, as discussed above, the site was a barren stone quarry, not a working garden, and would have needed no gardener. The New Testament accounts require, for the site of Jesus’ burial, a newly cut tomb, a working garden, and the theoretical presence of a gardener. The Holy Sepulchre site fails on all counts. It is highly unlikely to have been the site of Jesus’ burial.

But what about the Holy Sepulchre’s “Hill of Calvary” as a crucifixion site? It should be noted that the New Testament does not say Jesus was executed on top of a hill, and no hill is mentioned in connection with the Crucifixion. The tradition of a hill seems to have first

appeared with the building of the Holy Sepulchre church itself and the identification of a small bedrock knoll as the crucifixion site. This was the knoll later idylized in the Protestant hymn as “a green hill far away,” but no such hill is mentioned in the New Testament. Three of the four Gospel accounts give the Aramaic name for the place of Jesus’ crucifixion as *golgotha*, which literally means “the skull.” This is what the local Jews, who all spoke Aramaic, called the site—“the skull.” Luke alone omits the Aramaic term *golgotha*, simply calling the place *kranion* (Greek for “skull”). The latinesque Catholic term “Calvary,” which appears in the English King James Version of Luke, is somewhat misleading—it is not found in the original Greek of Luke at all. Other than a few Roman soldiers who spoke Latin (and not all of them did), probably nobody called the place “Calvary” in Jesus’ day. But whether we read Matthew, Mark, and John’s *golgotha* or Luke’s *kranion*, it seems clear that there was something about the crucifixion site that led the Jews of Jerusalem to think of a skull. There is, however, no surviving feature of the Holy Sepulchre’s “Hill of Calvary” that can be identified in any way with a skull, nor is any such feature mentioned in the account of Eusebius, who chronicled the building of the church at the site in his “Life of Constantine.” Though the Holy Sepulchre site was a tomb locale a century prior to Jesus’ day, it is unlikely in a Jewish culture so careful about the disposition of human remains that skulls left lying about the site gave it the Golgotha name, as some have maintained.<sup>10</sup>

Since the Holy Sepulchre site was immediately west of an inhabited part of the city, the same ritual purity and wind-related factors that would have prohibited burials there in Jesus’ day would likely have put the location out of bounds for crucifixion or other forms of execution. (Arav and Rousseau reach the same conclusion in relation to the temple.) To the question of whether Roman soldiers would have given regard to Jewish concerns for ritual purity, it must be pointed out that Pontius Pilate and other governors found it necessary to do so, in order to work with the local Jewish leadership at keeping civil order (the Romans seem to have been closely allied with the Sadducees, from which were chosen the high priest and chief priests who administered the temple complex). Pilate, for example, gave regard to purity concerns when coming out of his residence to confer with the chief priests, who would not enter his hall “lest they should be defiled” (John 18:28–29). The ritual purity of the city and the temple would have been no less a concern; thus, the Romans would have avoided capital punishment west of the city. It becomes necessary, then, to look elsewhere for the Golgotha of Jesus’ crucifixion.

## The Skull Feature as Golgotha

The skull feature sits just north of the modern wall of Jerusalem's Old City and fits all the requirements of the New Testament setting that the Holy Sepulchre's Hill of Calvary does not. It was outside the city wall in Jesus' day and was located well over twenty-five meters (fifty cubits) to the north of the city, which avoided any question of wind direction and the ritual purity of inhabited areas or the temple. It was near an area where Jewish tombs were being located in Jesus' day (I will return to this issue later), and there is good reason to suppose that the people of ancient Jerusalem would have called it "the skull." That is because it does indeed look like a skull.

The skull feature is a naturally occurring rock formation in the southern scarp of a large hill called el-Edhemieh by local Arabs. (The toponym is derived from the name of Ibrahim el-Edhem, a Muslim mystic who lived in the eighth century.) The top of the hill has been a Muslim cemetery for nearly two centuries. Three horizontally lenticular caves, all natural and very small and shallow, pock the limestone scarp of el-Edhemieh's south side. When viewed from the south, the center cave of the three is not visible, and the two outside caves have the uncanny resemblance of slitted eye sockets in a human skull. When viewed from the west (from the Garden Tomb platform), the westernmost cave blends visually with the rock around it, but the center and eastern caves give the same impression—the two eye sockets of a skull. No matter how you look at it, it looks like a skull. A slightly protruding piece of stone that slopes downward from between the two easternmost caves gives the optical illusion of a skeletal nose bridge, and horizontally fissured layers of limestone below the nose bridge lend a jawlike quality to the whole picture.

As early as 1842, the German scholar Otto Thenius suggested the skull feature site as Golgotha.<sup>11</sup> The British Major Claude Condor came to the same conclusion prior to 1870 and the scholar Fisher Howe in 1871.<sup>12</sup> Not until 1883 did the famed British General Charles George Gordon arrive at Jerusalem and join the ranks of Christian students who concluded that the skull feature must have been Golgotha, but it was his famous name that became attached to the site, which since then has often been referred to (sometimes snidely) as "Gordon's Calvary." Prior to the buildup of modern eastern Jerusalem, and in particular the bus station that was erected there by the Jordanians in the 1950s, the skull feature was much more visible. Photographs from the late 1800s and early 1900s, when ground level of the area in front of the stone formation was lower and void of buildings, show a stone image that is

skull-like from jaw to forehead—a grim cranial visage staring off to the south (see photo at beginning of article). But even today, from the top of the Old City wall, or even from the parking lot of the bus station, the skull-like appearance of the escarpment is easily discernable from below the nose bridge to the top of the brow.

This natural formation has probably not changed significantly in the last three thousand years, though the areas around it were extensively cut away in biblical times. Because of the pocked and fissured nature of its stone, the skull feature itself was not quarried, while the area just to the east, traditionally called Jeremiah's Grotto, has experienced a great deal of stone quarrying. The entire area from Jeremiah's Grotto eastward and south to the Old City wall was cut away anciently for building stone, resulting in a wide moat north of the "second wall." Evidence of this quarrying is visible even in the hump-shaped bedrock beneath the Old City wall itself, just across the street south of the bus station (about one hundred meters east of Damascus Gate). The type of bedrock in this part of Jerusalem is called *meleke*, a medium-hard Turonian limestone excellent for quarrying because it withstands natural erosion very well. Like the stone building blocks anciently cut away, the quarry itself remains uneroded after thousands of years. The skull feature, of that same *meleke* limestone, but never quarried away, has also resisted erosion.

So the skull feature looked essentially the same in Jesus' day as it does today. That Aramaic-speaking Jewish inhabitants of Herodian Jerusalem would call this feature *golgotha* is not at all improbable; in fact, it is to be expected. Other instances come to mind of Jews calling sites after their resemblance to certain physical things. Examples include *Gamla* (Aramaic for "the camel"), the Jewish city on the Golan built atop a hill shaped like a camel's hump, and *Susita* (Aramaic for "the horse"), a town built on a horse-head-shaped hill east of the Kineret (even Greek speakers called it *Hippos*, Greek for "horse," showing that Gentiles saw the same feature).

Given the plausibility that the skull feature would have been called *golgotha*, the next question is whether crucifixions could have been carried out at the site. The answer to that is also positive. Romans crucified their capital convicts in conspicuous places near cities and towns, generally at crossroads or along the sides of other well-traveled roads, so that the public would be able to see the executed convicts without hindrance. This was thought to act as a deterrent against crime and rebellion. The skull feature is located one hundred meters northeast of Damascus Gate, the gate area of the "second wall" at the time



of Jesus (see figure 3). At that time, the open area below the skull face was a natural plaza and junction of two major roads leading away from the gate. The “Jericho Road” going east toward the Mount of Olives, now called Sultan Suleiman Street, ran through the moat-like corridor left from quarrying between the city wall and Jeremiah’s Grotto. The road going north was on the west side of el-Edhemieh and followed essentially the same route as modern Nablus Road. This northward road passed through an abandoned cemetery from the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., the tombs closest to the road having long since been cleared of their human remains, lest Jewish travelers unwittingly become ritually unclean. Archaeological research has demonstrated that burials were not interred on the west side of el-Edhemieh during the time of Jesus, not even at the Garden Tomb. The active necropolis (cemetery) to the north of Jerusalem in the early first century A.D. was located on the *east* side of el-Edhemieh, where there was no major road in Jesus’ day (although it is the site of modern Saladin Street).

Crucifixions at the natural plaza in front of the skull feature (today’s bus station parking lot) would have been close to and clearly visible to ancient Jews walking along both roads—the “Jericho Road” east and “Nablus Road” north. The grisly scene of execution would have been all the more ominous because of the giant stone face of death in the background behind the crucified victims.

In summary, when geographical, cultural, archaeological, and geological evidences are taken together—the skull feature’s location outside the northern wall of Jerusalem in Jesus’ day, the fact that it was just west of an area permissible for tomb construction at the time, its position in relation to the main roads leading north and east, and the plausibility that because of its natural appearance the Jews of the day would have called it *golgotha* (“the skull”)—the skull feature was very likely the location of the Crucifixion.

### The Garden Tomb

The burial cave known as the Garden Tomb was unearthed around 1867 by a local land owner who lived in Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> (Archaeologists often use the term “cave” to refer to a rock-cut tomb.) Because of its close proximity to the skull feature, it was soon suggested as the tomb of Jesus by a variety of different parties, including, for a time, General Gordon. At the time, there was no real archaeological expertise as we know it today—no one then could have accurately dated the tomb on the basis of content or design. The earliest descriptions of the cave were brief reports prepared in 1874 and 1892 by Conrad Schick, a German



missionary who lived in Jerusalem and who studied antiquities.<sup>14</sup> The cave and surrounding property were purchased in 1893 by a committee of British Christians founded just for the purpose—the Garden Tomb Association of London. Throughout the twentieth century, the burial cave has gained popularity, among Christians uncomfortable with the Holy Sepulchre site, as a candidate for the tomb in which Jesus was laid.

Many Latter-day Saint tourists and students visiting Jerusalem have become convinced that the Garden Tomb was the sepulchre provided by Joseph of Arimathea for the burial of Jesus. Since President Harold B. Lee's visit to the site in 1972, every Church President has visited the Garden Tomb and expressed feelings of reverence at the site, although none has stated absolutely that the tomb was the one in which Jesus was laid. (President Hinckley's statement that was quoted at the beginning of this article is characteristic of the caution exercised by previous Church Presidents.) If a poll were conducted, however, probably an overwhelming majority of Latter-day Saints would maintain that the Garden Tomb was the actual site of Jesus' burial and Resurrection. But was it?

In March 1986, Israeli archaeologist Gabriel Barkay, an expert on ancient Jewish tombs in Israel, published his now-famous article on the Garden Tomb in *Biblical Archaeology Review*.<sup>15</sup> In that article, he reported: "I have concluded that the cave of the Garden Tomb was originally hewn in the Iron Age II, sometime in the eighth or seventh century B.C. It was reused for burial purposes in the Byzantine period (fifth to seventh centuries A.D.), so it could not have been the tomb of Jesus."<sup>16</sup> Barkay's article presents at least three basic propositions:

1. That since the Garden Tomb was originally an Iron Age II multi-chambered, triple-bench sepulchre cut out six to seven hundred years before Jesus was born, it could not have been a "new tomb" (Matthew 27:60) "wherein never man before was laid" (Luke 23:53) in Jesus' day, as required by the New Testament.

2. That the tomb's benches were carved into fixed sarcophagi for burial of Byzantine Christians four to six hundred years after Jesus (an act that would not likely have occurred had any Christians of the time identified the tomb as that of Jesus).

3. That the features outside the Garden Tomb, including the "track" feature and large cistern, were from a stable complex for donkeys or mules constructed during the Crusader period, eleven centuries after Christ, and could not be evidence of a missing rolling stone—the "track" was in fact a water channel.

At this point, it becomes necessary to rehearse my past reactions to Barkay's claims and how subsequent research has changed those views. When Barkay's article originally appeared, my reaction to it was negative. My rebuttal, entitled "In Defense of the Garden Tomb," was published by *Biblical Archaeology Review* in its July 1986 "comments" section.<sup>17</sup> At the time, I was not a trained archaeologist but did hold a master's degree in near eastern studies, had taught in three BYU Jerusalem student programs, and reasoned myself qualified to comment on the authenticity question surrounding the Garden Tomb. In my *BAR* comments, I took Barkay to task for an "unconvincing and disappointing" article that "offered no real evidence that the Garden Tomb was cut out during the First Temple period rather than the Second Temple period."<sup>18</sup> (Those themes were later repeated in a 1990 book entitled *The Holy Land*, and although the senior coauthor of that book was D. Kelly Ogden, I alone was responsible for the section titled "The Garden Tomb and Golgotha.")<sup>19</sup>

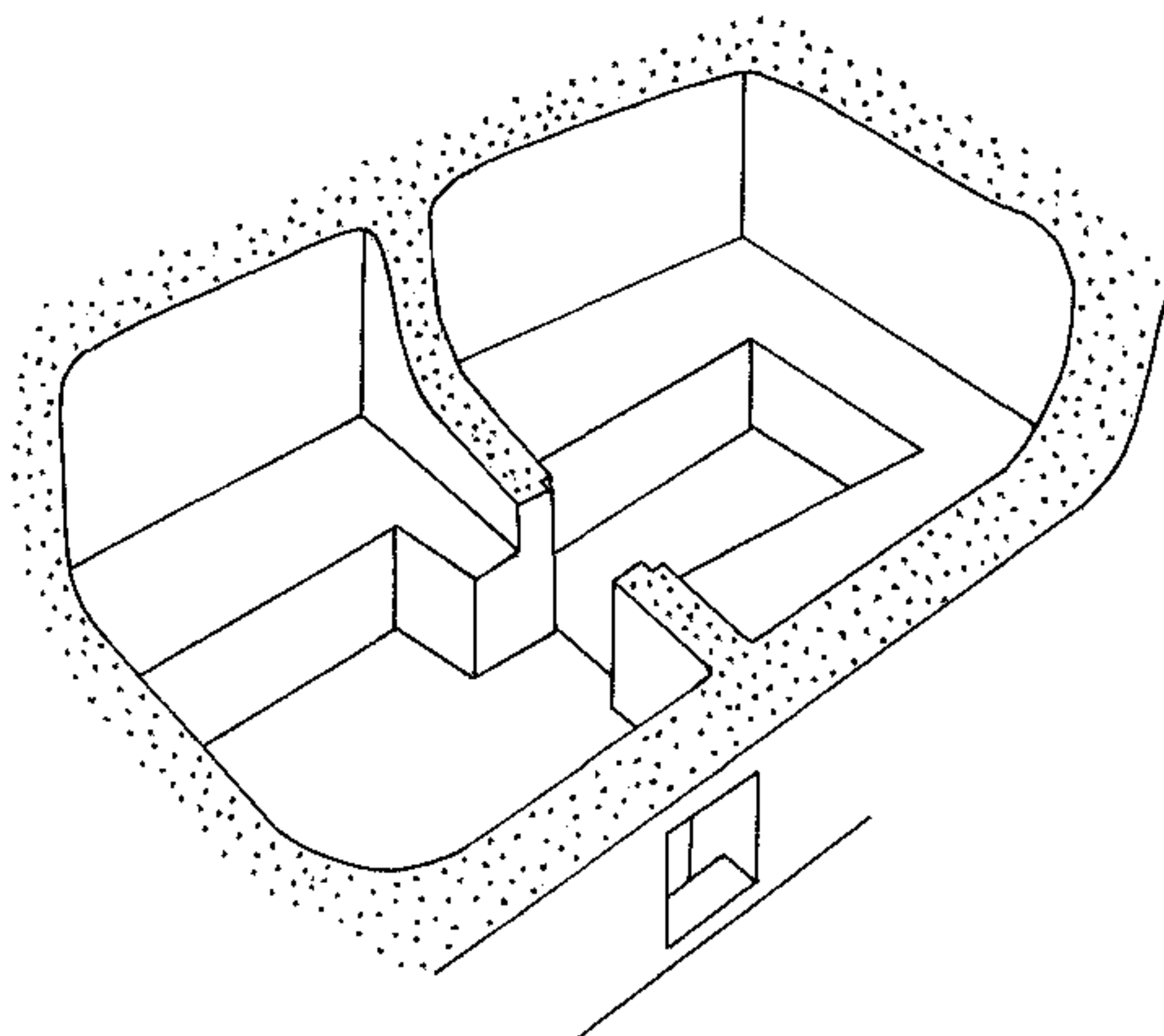
Since offering those original comments, however, I have learned a good deal more about the tombs and burial customs of the region, having since become a practicing field archaeologist in Israel with a doctorate in near eastern archaeology and anthropology. Although still maintaining that Barkay could have argued his case better by using more convincing parallels and visuals, I must now agree that on every issue Barkay addressed concerning the Garden Tomb, he was right. Here is how that realization came to be.

Upon completing a Ph.D. in archaeology, I began a systematic archaeological investigation to evaluate every aspect of the Garden Tomb, with the goal of determining if the cave could be positively identified as a first century A.D. tomb—one that could have been where Jesus was laid. The investigation turned into a multiyear project (see note 2) and included careful examination and consideration of all the physical remains outside the Garden Tomb as well as inside and the production of updated drawings of all the architectural features of the site. The Garden Tomb Association of London kindly granted permission to enter the tomb itself with measuring instruments and on two occasions (in 1993 and 1998) allowed me inside the gate of the tomb's inner chamber to examine, measure, and photograph features of the cave at the closest range possible. The data gathered were compared with published archaeological descriptions of other tombs in Jerusalem and the vicinity. Additionally, I visited anew every known and accessible Jewish tomb complex in the Jerusalem area and beyond from both the First and Second Temple periods to compare their architectural

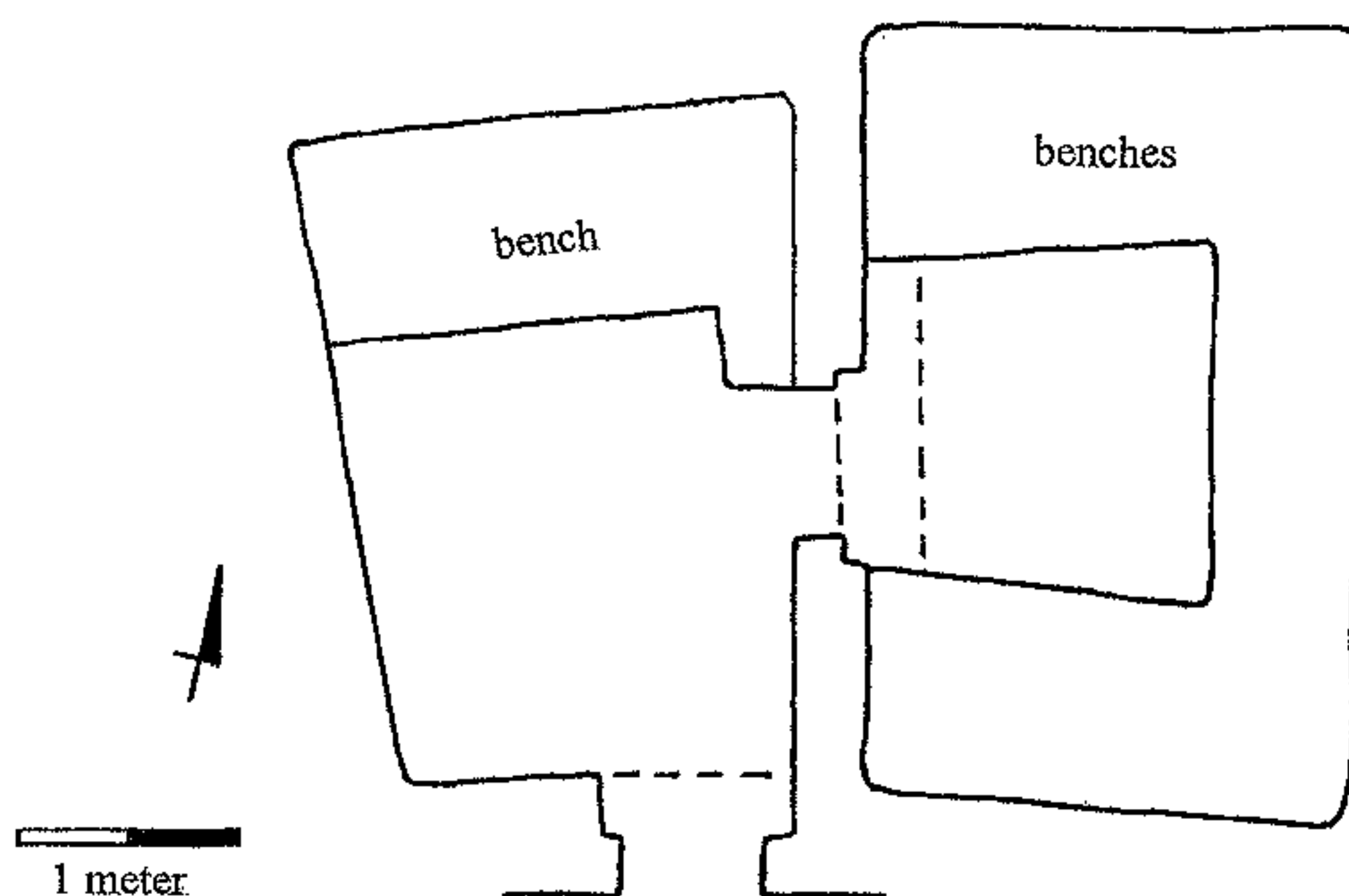
styles with the features of the Garden Tomb's interior. A key opportunity also became available during those years as the Israel Antiquities Authority excavated the large Crusader complex "Montjoie" at Nebi Samuel near Jerusalem, which I visited several times to compare with the features of the Garden Tomb's exterior and grounds. The research was essentially complete by 2001 but was supplemented with clarification visits to several sites in 2002. The results of the project seem irrefutable, although the conclusions are just the opposite of what I had presupposed. In the spirit of the principle of "two or more witnesses," it is now time to make those conclusions public.

*The burial cave interior.* The Garden Tomb itself shows every sign, as Barkay maintained, of having been constructed in the late eighth or seventh century B.C.—the end of archaeological Iron Age II. This would date it to sometime in the era beginning with the prophet Isaiah and ending with the prophet Jeremiah. Before it was altered by gentile Christians in the Byzantine period, who carved its stone benches into casket-like troughs, the Iron Age II burial cave consisted of two chambers: an outer chamber with a single stone bench along the back (north) wall and an inner chamber to the right (east) with a triple-bench design—stone benches along three walls, north, east, and south. (See figure 4 for a three-dimensional drawing of the tomb, and figure 5 for a reconstructed plan drawing.) The ceiling height of the outer chamber is just under two meters (just over six feet), but because of the lower floor of the inner chamber, its ceiling is about 2.3 meters high (seven feet). A doorway that was originally about 1.5 meters high and measuring 68 centimeters wide (2 feet 3 inches) was located in the wall between the two chambers. A small, square opening 70 centimeters wide (2 feet 4 inches) and originally about the same height sat low in the south wall of the outer chamber, serving as the entry to the tomb from outside.

The remains of the tomb's original benches are still obvious from the ridges left behind after the Byzantine vandalism, and their original measurements can still be discerned. The benches were not perfectly rectangular but measured about a meter wide (3 feet 3 inches) on average, except for the middle (eastern) bench in the inner chamber, which was only 68 centimeters wide (2 feet 3 inches). The length of the benches was over two meters long (6 feet 6 inches) in each case. Benches in the inner chamber averaged 70 centimeters high (2 feet 4 inches), rising from the floor 65 centimeters (north bench) to 75 centimeters (south bench), the floor sloping slightly downward toward the south. The bench in the outer chamber was about 75 centimeters high (2 feet 6 inches).



**Figure 4.** The Garden Tomb, Iron Age II, ca. 700–600 B.C. This cutaway drawing by the author shows the original bench design.

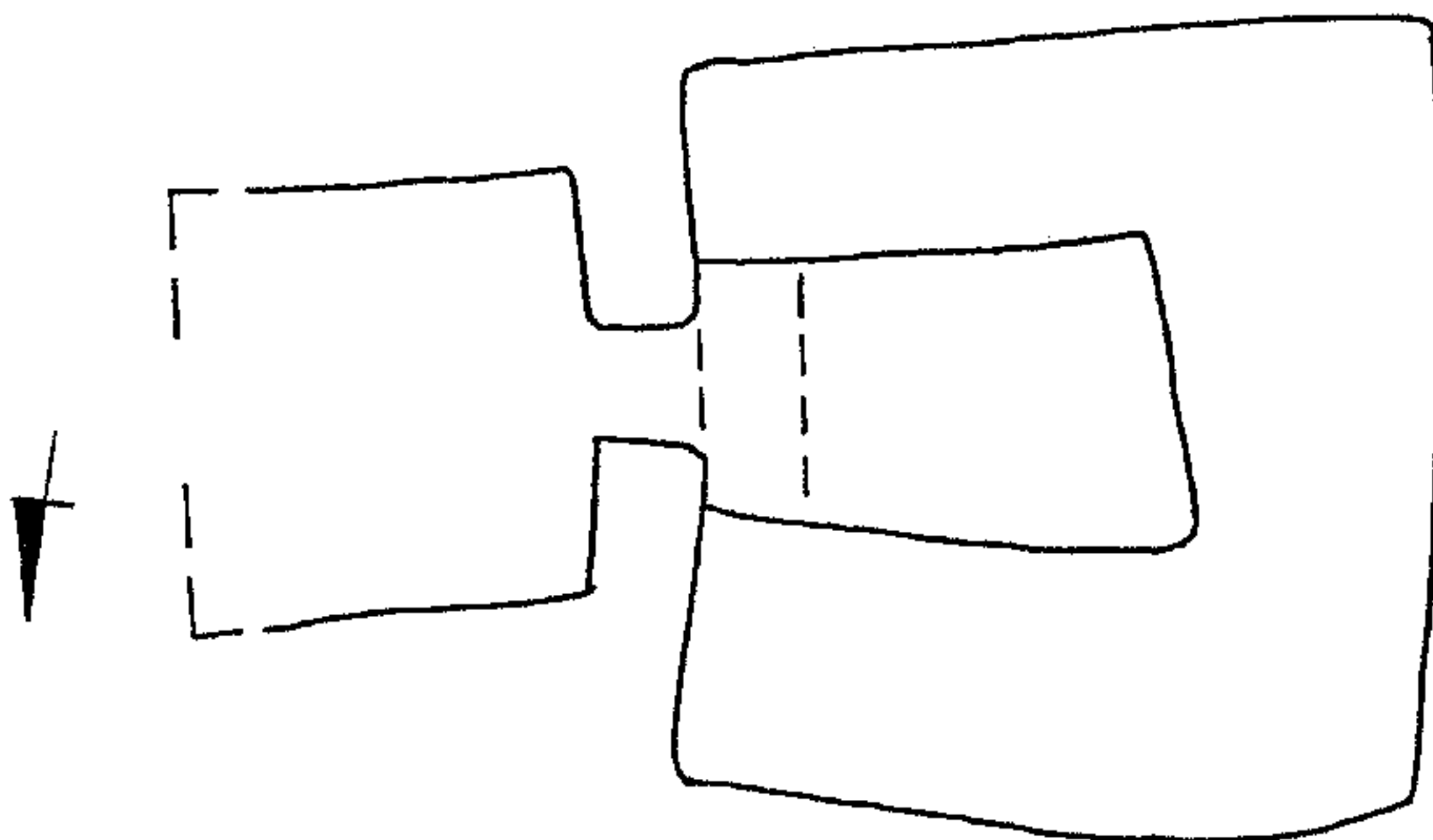


**Figure 5.** The Garden Tomb, Iron Age II, reconstructed plan drawing by the author.

In its original form, the Garden Tomb was not very similar to the highly ornate Iron Age II tombs at the St. Stephen's Monastery, located just north of the Garden Tomb grounds, even though both sites featured the triple-bench design common to many Iron Age II burial caves. In 1986, I rejected Barkay's comparison of the two tomb



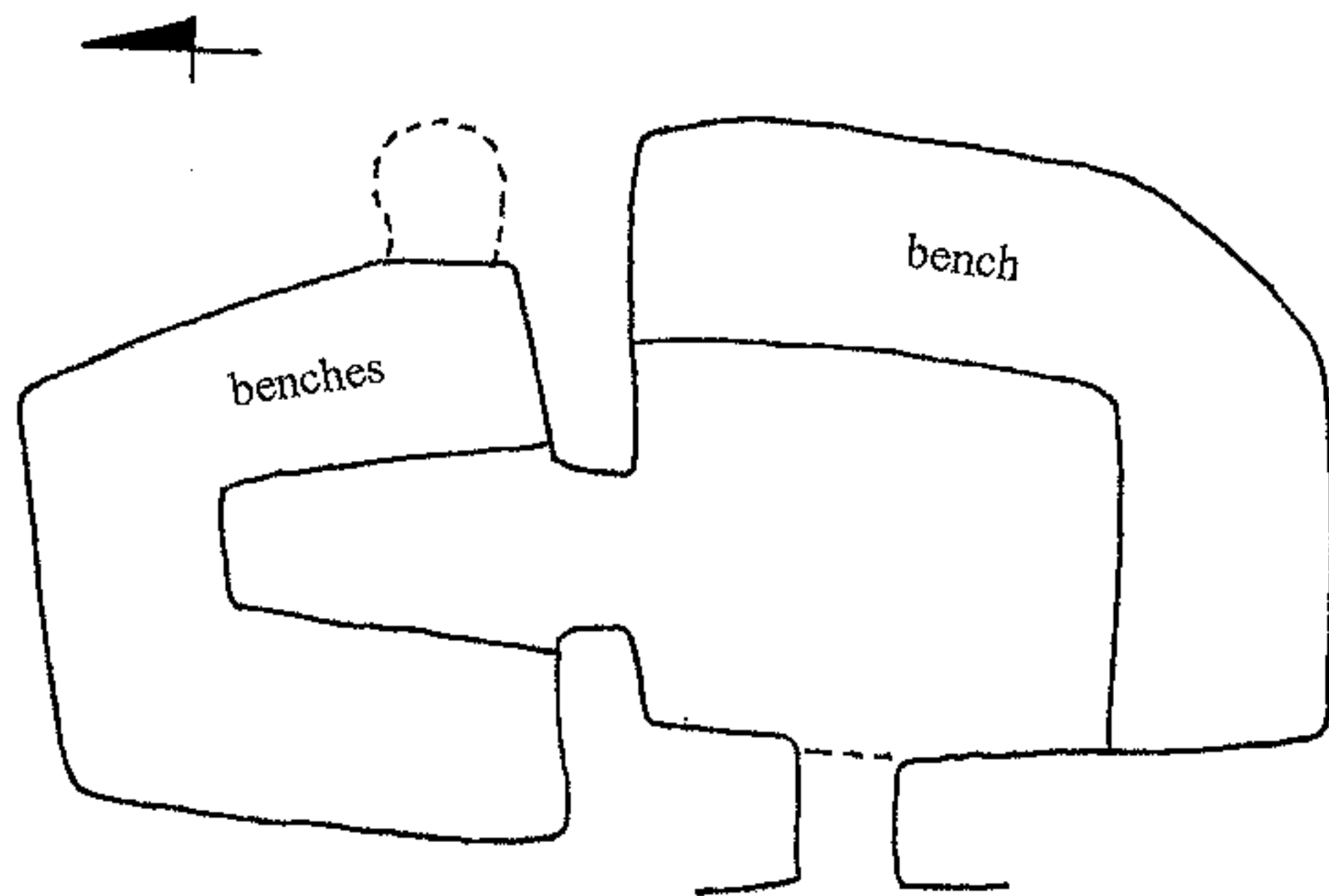
complexes on the grounds that, aside from the triple-bench layout, many of the architectural features were very different. During my own later survey of Jerusalem area tombs, however, I discovered that many other Iron Age II burial caves, plainer and simpler in design than the ornate caves at St. Stephen's, matched the features of the Garden Tomb cave in every respect. (For this reason, I maintain that Barkay would have done better if, in his 1986 *BAR* article, he had offered plan drawings of the smaller, simpler Iron Age II tombs he knew about rather than focus on the St. Stephen's caves as a parallel to the Garden Tomb.) Such tombs generally consist of an outer chamber with one or more inner chambers and feature a triple-bench plan in their inner chambers similar to the original Garden Tomb's inner chamber (see figure 6). Many are exact parallels of the two-chamber design of the Garden Tomb, with triple benches in their inner chambers but a single- or double-bench layout in their outer chambers (see figure 7). The Garden Tomb, in its original state, was a very typical example of the two-chamber, triple-bench genre. The area just north of Damascus Gate, around Nablus Road, was home to several triple-bench Iron Age II tombs of both the two-chamber and the multichamber types. Known examples include the burial caves just across the street from the Garden Tomb (on the west side of Nablus Road) at the White Sisters Convent, which are not published, but which I examined personally, and the caves discovered by British surveyors while doing work on the Jerusalem drainage system north of Damascus Gate under the modern



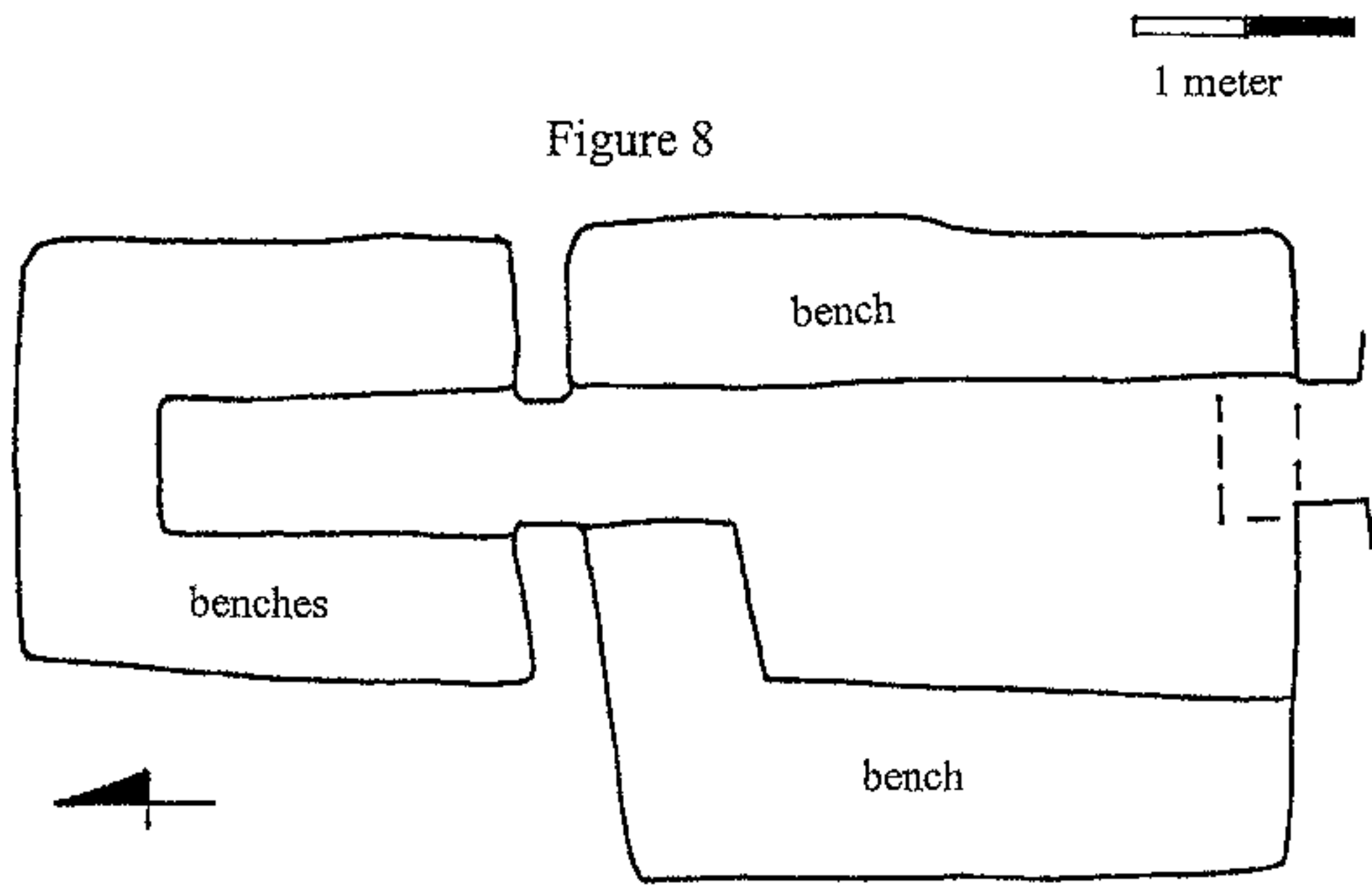
**Figure 6.** Typical Iron Age II Tomb at Ketef Hinnom (after Barkay). Note the two-chamber plan and bench alignment similar to the Garden Tomb.



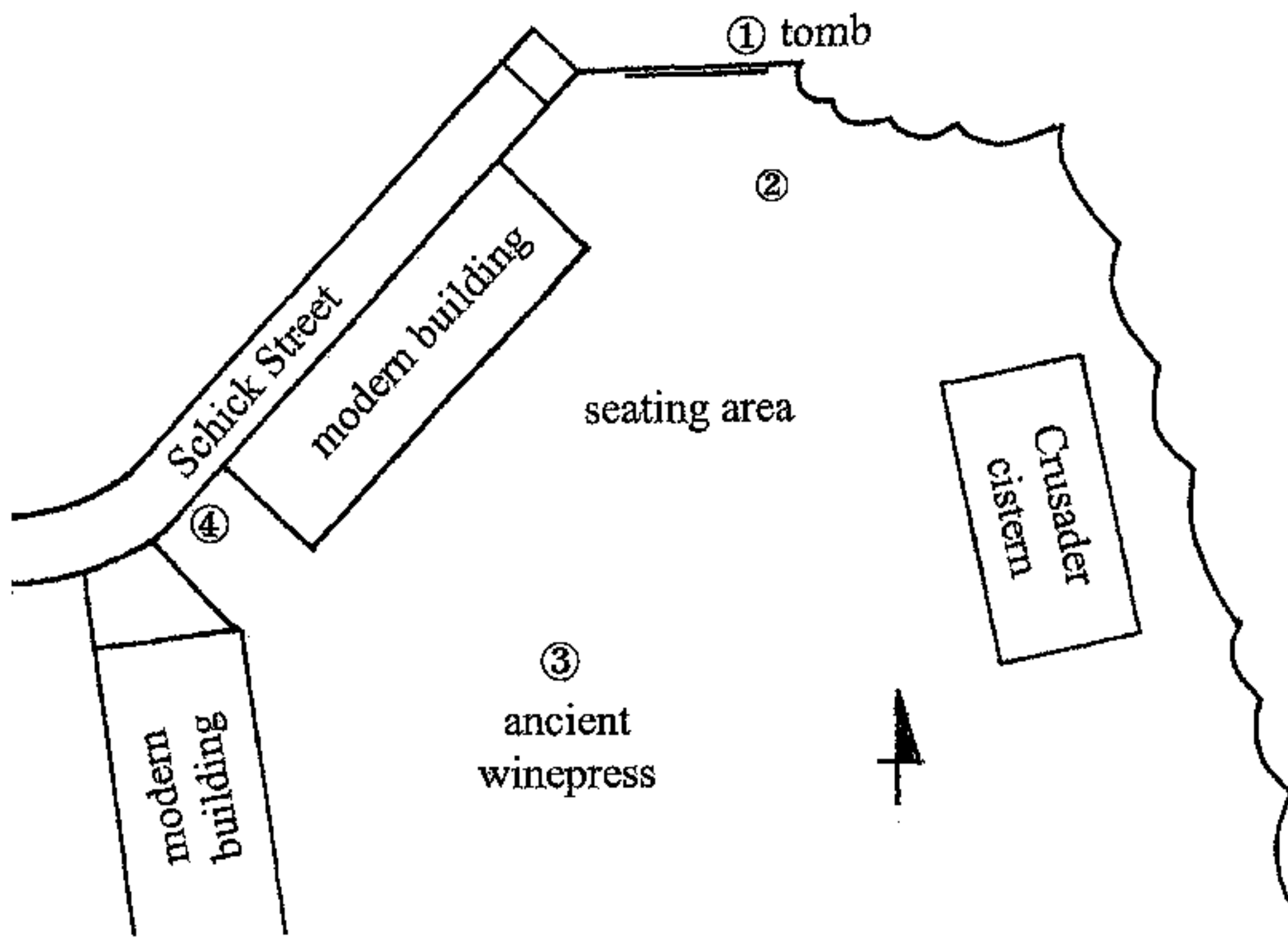
Sultan Suleiman Street, published by Amihay Mazar in 1976<sup>20</sup> (see figure 8). Additionally, the elaborate tomb complex at St. Stephen's, just north of the Garden Tomb, dates from Iron Age II. However, not a single tomb from the Second Temple Period, Herodian or otherwise, has been discovered in the Damascus Gate and Garden Tomb vicinity. Burials were simply not occurring in the area west of el-Edhemieh in Jesus' day—it was too close to the city gate and the busy road north now called Nablus Road.



**Figure 7.** Iron Age II Tomb on Mount Zion (after Geva, NEAEHL). Note the reverse image of the Garden Tomb plan.



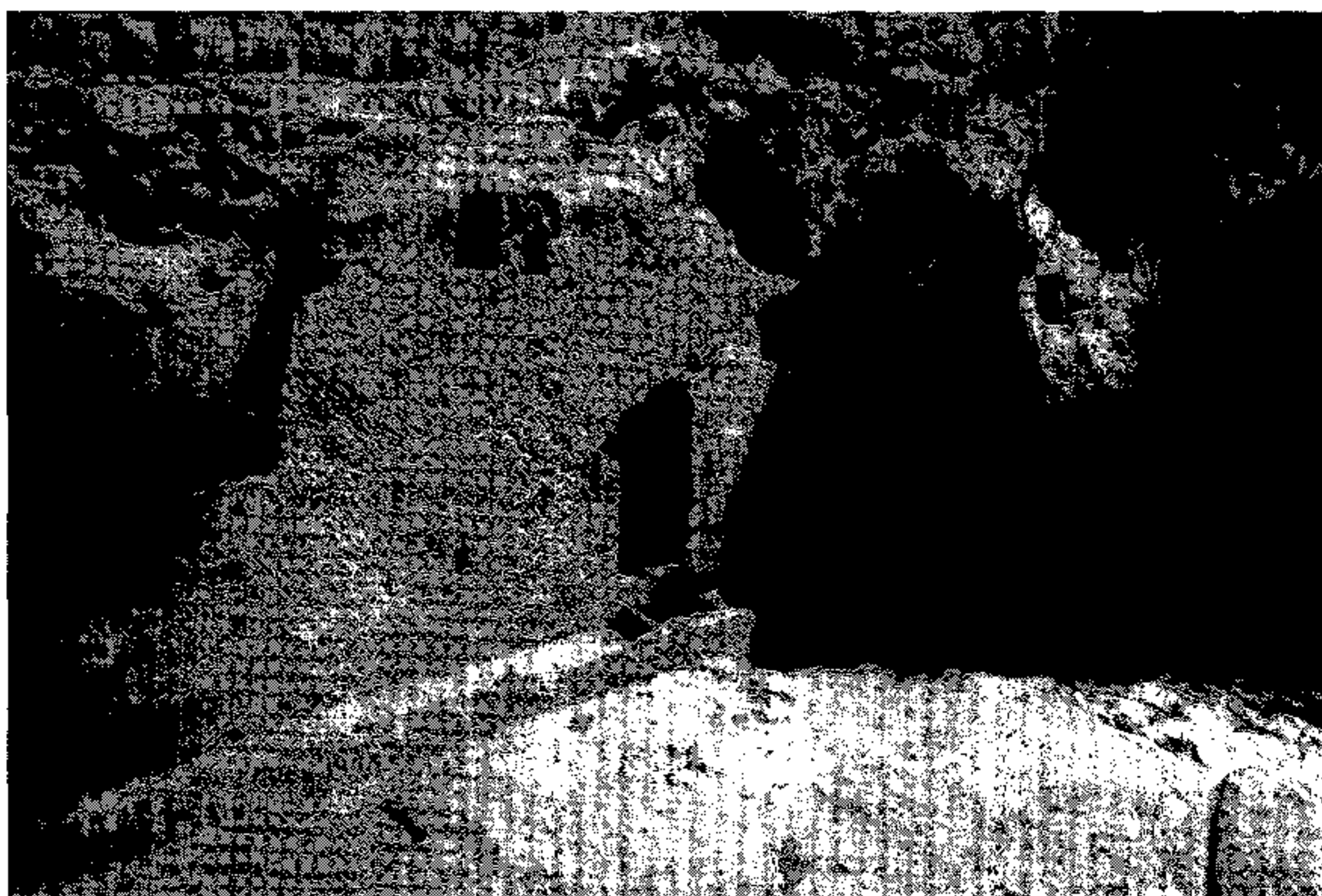
**Figure 8.** Iron Age II Tomb near Damascus Gate (after Mazar). The tomb, no longer extant, was excavated beneath Sultan Suleiman Street.



**Figure 9.** Map of Garden Tomb grounds (after White). Legend: (1) Garden Tomb, (2) bedrock cornerstone, (3) ancient winepress, (4) modern entry.

*Outside the Garden Tomb.* On the Garden Tomb grounds are features that have often been cited as evidence that the Garden Tomb itself was located in a garden at the time of Jesus. These include the large cistern near the tomb (a cistern is an underground water reservoir cut into bedrock) as well as a small winepress to the south of the tomb's entrance (see figure 9 for a diagram of the area). The rock-cut channel below the tomb's entrance has traditionally been identified as the track of a rolling stone, and the arched feature carved into the tomb's outer facade above the entrance and the flat bedrock floor in front of the tomb entrance have usually been postulated as evidence of an early Christian church or shrine marking the place of Jesus' Resurrection (see figure 10). In light of what is now known archaeologically, all of these suppositions turn out to be false.

I will deal with the garden issue first. The small winepress is difficult to date, and it is unclear whether the press was present during the Herodian period or was constructed later. But a winepress is, in any case, no evidence of a garden, since the biblical term "garden" does not refer to an area where grapes are grown. The term in the New Testament used to describe a grape-producing plot is "vineyard" (Greek *amteloni*; see Matthew 21:28).<sup>21</sup> The term "garden" (Greek *kepos*) is used to describe an orchard of fruit-producing trees, very often olive trees (see John 18:1, where the term *kepos* refers to the olive garden



**Figure 10.** Facade of the Garden Tomb. Note the arched feature in the facade, the channel or “track” below the door, and the finished bedrock floor in front of the tomb.

near Gethsemane, and John 19:41, where *kepos* denotes the garden in which the tomb was located). Had John meant to tell us that the area where Jesus was buried was a grape-producing plot, he would probably have called it a vineyard (*amteloni*), and we could suppose that a winepress might have existed at the site. But since John called the plot a garden, it is not likely that a winepress or grapevines were present—grapes were not planted in tree gardens because shade from the trees would not allow proper growth of the vines or ripening of the fruit.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the term for the caretaker of a vineyard is “husbandman” (Greek *georgos*) in John 15:1, whereas the term employed in John 20:15 is “gardener” (Greek *kepouros*). This language also suggests that the plot in which Jesus’ tomb was found was not a vineyard. The winepress found near the Garden Tomb may suggest that a vineyard was once there but proves nothing concerning a garden there in New Testament times.

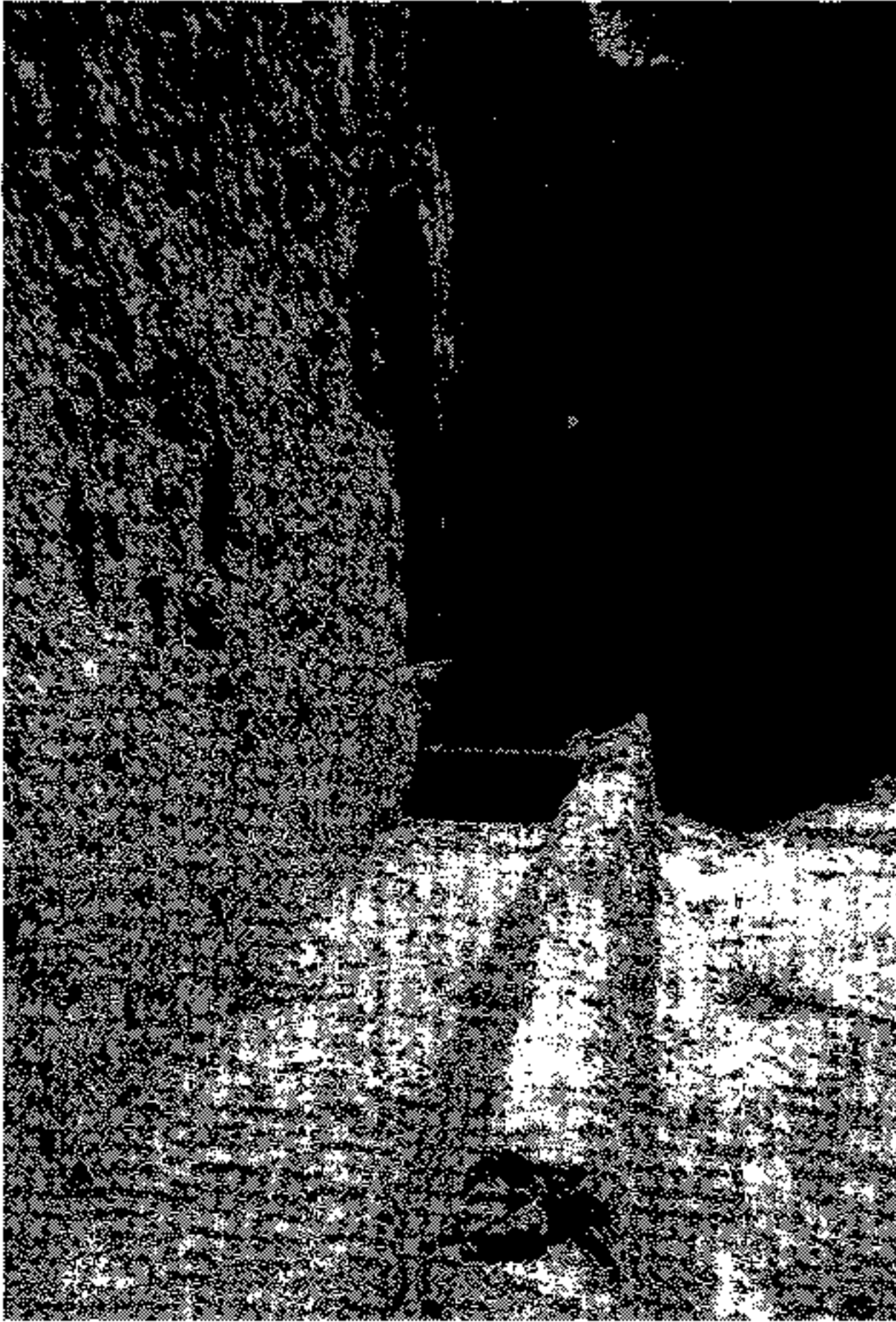
Contrary to what Garden Tomb visitors are often told, the presence of a large cistern near the tomb in no way suggests that the area was a working garden in Jesus’ day. Artificial irrigation of working gardens, whether olive gardens (like the garden near Gethsemane) or other fruit-producing gardens, was not practiced in the land of Israel during biblical times. Winter rains and summer dews were the adequate sources relied upon for watering of olives and other tree fruits, as well

as grapes, grains and grasses. The only exception was the small “garden of herbs” (vegetable garden) often maintained adjacent to a private home (see Deuteronomy 11:10). But since a tomb had been cut in the garden of Jesus’ burial and since it was outside the city wall, no home would have been in that garden—it was not a small vegetable garden of which the New Testament is speaking. The supposition that a “gardener” might be at work there (see John 20:15) also suggests that it was a fruit-producing garden of trees, most probably an olive garden, in which Jesus’ tomb was located. Such a garden, as already stated, would have required no irrigation. The large cistern near the Garden Tomb proves nothing concerning a garden.

More important, the bell-shaped cistern was not even present at the site during the first century A.D., nor anytime close to the life of Jesus. It was, in fact, cut out and plastered sometime between about A.D. 1100 and 1187, during the Crusader period. The type of plaster used to seal the cistern against water leakage is known from other Crusader cisterns in Israel, and Crusader crosses carved into the interior wall of the cistern are a typical identifying stamp of twelfth-century construction. The cistern measures 9.4 meters in depth (31 feet) with a bottom area 9 meters wide (29 feet 9 inches) by 20.1 meters long (65 feet 9 inches). When full, it could hold an estimated one million liters of water (250,000 gallons), and it is still used for water storage today. But since the cistern did not exist at the time of Jesus, it cannot be cited as proof of a garden then. It does, however, relate to other Crusader remains at the site.

A section of rock-cut channel below the entrance to the Garden Tomb, 8.5 meters long (27 feet 7 inches), is nearly always represented to visitors as a track in which a large stone disc once stood—a “rolling stone” to seal the tomb entrance. However, this “track” was not designed at all properly for a stone-disc type of tomb door. The inside face of the channel’s outer edge was not cut straight up and down but was cut at a 45-degree angle away from the tomb facade, making the width of the channel 37 centimeters wide (15 inches) at the bottom but 50 centimeters wide (19 inches) at the top (see figure 11). This is an impossible arrangement for a stone disk, since the angle of the outer edge would provide no support for the disk—a large “rolling stone” would have been prone to fall outward, crushing anyone trying to move it. The outer edge, in any case, is too low to have been meant for a large, disk-type stone. At other “rolling-stone” tombs, such as Jerusalem’s Tomb of the Kings and those found at Midras in the Shfela, the outer edge of the stone track was built straight up and was





**Figure 11.** The rock-cut channel beneath the Garden Tomb door. Note the westward slope of the channel away from the door (bottom of photo) and the angle of the outer edge's inside face, a feature insufficient for supporting a large stone disk.

essentially an outer wall as tall as the disk itself, preventing the stone from tipping or falling. In other words, the stone disk actually rolled between two upright walls, not in a low-cut track (see figure 12). There is no archaeological precedent for a low-cut track for a stone-disk door, particularly a track with a slanted outer edge as we see at the Garden Tomb.

Moreover, if the Garden Tomb channel were actually the track of a stone disk, we would expect the low point or resting point of the track to be directly in front of the cave opening. But it is not. The channel actually slopes away from the Garden Tomb entrance, downward to the west. None of the features of this channel were designed to function as a track for a “rolling stone.”

In reality, the channel was not made for a “rolling stone” at all but was cut by Crusader workmen as a water trough for an eleventh-century donkey stable built directly in front of the Garden Tomb (the stable is described below). This trough was cut well below the tomb door (see again figure 11) so that water in the trough could not run over the threshold of the tomb entrance and flood the cave itself, which was probably used as a storage room for fodder. But the trough was still high enough above the bedrock floor in front of the tomb to afford donkeys comfortable access to the water it brought into the stable. The 45-degree angle on the inside of the trough's outer edge allowed donkeys an easy drink without hitting their heads against the exterior wall of the tomb. Water for the trough was undoubtedly brought from the nearby Crusader cistern, either by manual transfer or more likely via a clay pipeline or extension channel of the trough that ran east of the stable and turned south to connect with the cistern.





**Figure 12.** Jewish “rolling stone” tomb at Midras. Note that the large disk-type stone actually rolls between two walls, not in a low track.

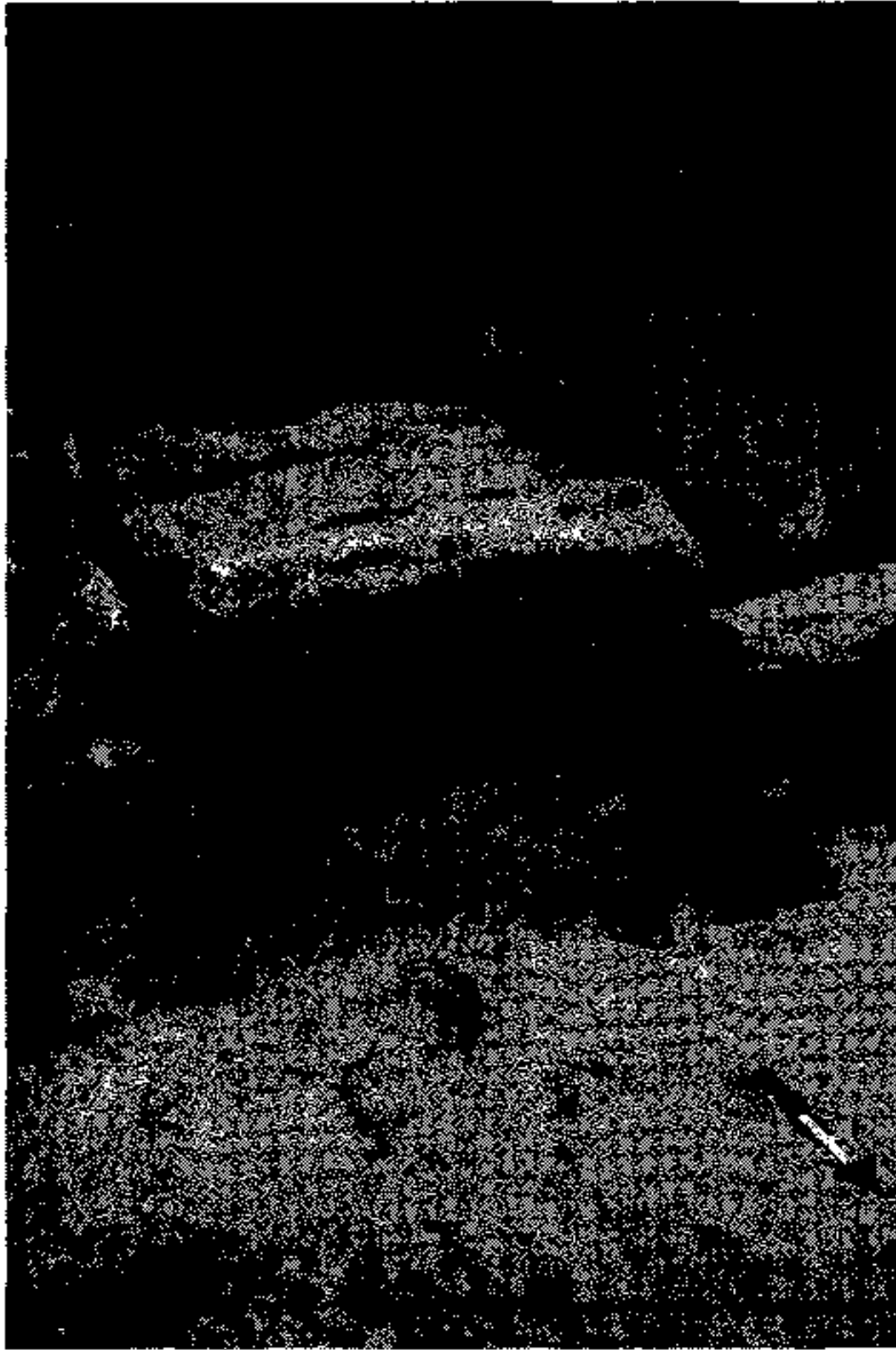
In his 1986 *Biblical Archaeology Review* article, Barkay used an endnote to argue that the “rolling stone track” was really a Crusader channel used in connection with the Crusader stable, but he did not specify its use as an animal trough.<sup>23</sup> In my 1986 response, I argued that the channel “does not seem to go anywhere nor is it correctly cut for drainage”—it was “much more likely . . . a track for a huge rolling stone.”<sup>24</sup> I was wrong on the “rolling-stone” part but right on the drainage part, even though I did not know why. Now I do. The channel did not drain because it was not designed for drainage. The Crusaders designed it to retain water—it was the stable’s water trough. The slight westward slope of the trough was meant to let water entering the stable from the east side (the cistern side) run the length of the trough, keeping it full for the animals.

What of the stable itself? Above the Garden Tomb entrance, carved into the solid rock of the tomb’s exterior, is an arched feature six meters wide and some 5.5 meters high. It obviously fit into a vaulted roof that extended outward from the tomb facade, covering the bedrock floor in front of the tomb entrance. This feature is often represented to visitors as evidence of an early Christian church or shrine at the site, erected by people who felt the tomb had been the sepulchre in which

Jesus was laid. But arched vaulted roofs were not yet being built in Herodian Israel or in the second century afterward—at least not for synagogues, domestic buildings, or mundane structures such as stables. On the basis of architecture alone, the building could not date prior to the Byzantine period (fourth century A.D.)—it cannot have been an early Christian (that is, pre-Byzantine) shrine to the Resurrection. The proportional dimensions of the arched feature are, however, typical of vaulted roofs from the Crusader period. The building the vaulted roof covered was, in fact, a Crusader structure—the stable spoken of above.

The bedrock floor of the stable was flattened manually by the Crusader builders, who lowered it 30 centimeters from the top of the water trough's outer edge. In his 1986 article, Barkay explained why the Crusader floor was cut so low: "In order to create vaults that were high enough, but would not extend above the escarpment, the Crusader builders lowered the rock surface in front of the cave entrance. As a result, today one must step up to enter [the tomb]."<sup>25</sup> In the 1986 rebuttal, I disagreed: "When did Crusaders ever lower a solid stone floor . . . for a structure as common as a stable?"<sup>26</sup> Within a few years, an answer to that question was unearthed. During the mid-1990s, the Israel Antiquities Authority carried out a wide-ranging excavation of the Crusader complex "Montjoie," complete with large stables and troughs, at Nebi Samuel northwest of Jerusalem. Upon visiting the new excavations and examining the fresh finds, I was astonished at how similar they were to the area in front of the Garden Tomb. From the stone-cut troughs (set higher for horses) to the flat finished bedrock floor, the resemblance to the area in front of the Garden Tomb was striking. Nebi Samuel's stone stable floors even featured the same type of shallow drainage channels visible in the surface at the Garden Tomb a few meters south of the door. These shallow drains, about 10 centimeters in width, allowed liquid waste from the animals to flow away to the outside of the structure and also allowed wash water to drain away when workers would muck out the stable and wash the floor with water taken from the trough. The archaeological parallels between the Nebi Samuel stables and the Garden Tomb exterior were too significant to be ignored.

It is now even possible to ascertain the approximate floor plan of the Garden Tomb's Crusader stable. In July 1997, during work to expand the area for visitor seating in front of the tomb, a section of bedrock cut to function as a cornerstone was unearthed exactly 7.5 meters south of the arched feature's eastern ledge.<sup>27</sup> This bedrock cornerstone stands 70 centimeters high and was cut into the shape of a



**Figure 13.** Bedrock cornerstone discovered in 1997 in front of the Garden Tomb, photo by Brian Bush. This feature is marked on figure 9 as item 2. Photo courtesy of Brian Bush.

block about 95 centimeters square (see figure 13). Cuttings in the bedrock surface between the block and the arched feature suggest that a wall 7.5 meters long once ran from the arch's eastern ledge to that cornerstone—the eastern wall of the stable. The likely reconstruction of the building would have the wall then run south from the cornerstone some 15 meters. This is the known length of the escarpment on the north from the arch's eastern ledge to the end of the extended ledge that runs on the arch's western side. The whole stable, re-created, would have featured a 7.5-by-15-meter floor plan, with a vaulted roof on the eastern end, and probably a pitched roof on the west end (see figure 14 for proposed plan and section drawing of the stable).

But why the odd dual-roof design? Why did not the Crusaders simply run a pitched roof for the entire east-west length of their stable? The reason for vaulting the roof on the east end was that a supporting ledge for the pitched roof could not be cut into the rock face of the tomb itself. Because of the open chamber behind it, there would be no rock for a ledge at all. Thus, to cover the stable's eastern section, rather than a pitched roof resting upon a ledge, the area directly in front of the tomb had to be vaulted well above the burial cave's ceiling level. Hence, the result is the unusual combination of arch and ledges that we see in the Garden Tomb's facade today (see figure 15).

In summary, the Garden Tomb cannot be materially connected to the New Testament accounts of Jesus' burial and Resurrection. The tomb itself was not a "new sepulchre" in Jesus' day, having been cut out six or seven centuries earlier, in Iron Age II. The "track" in front of the tomb was not designed for a "rolling stone" at all; it was really a water trough that was part of the donkey stable built eleven centuries after Jesus. The stable itself was certainly no early Christian shrine. And

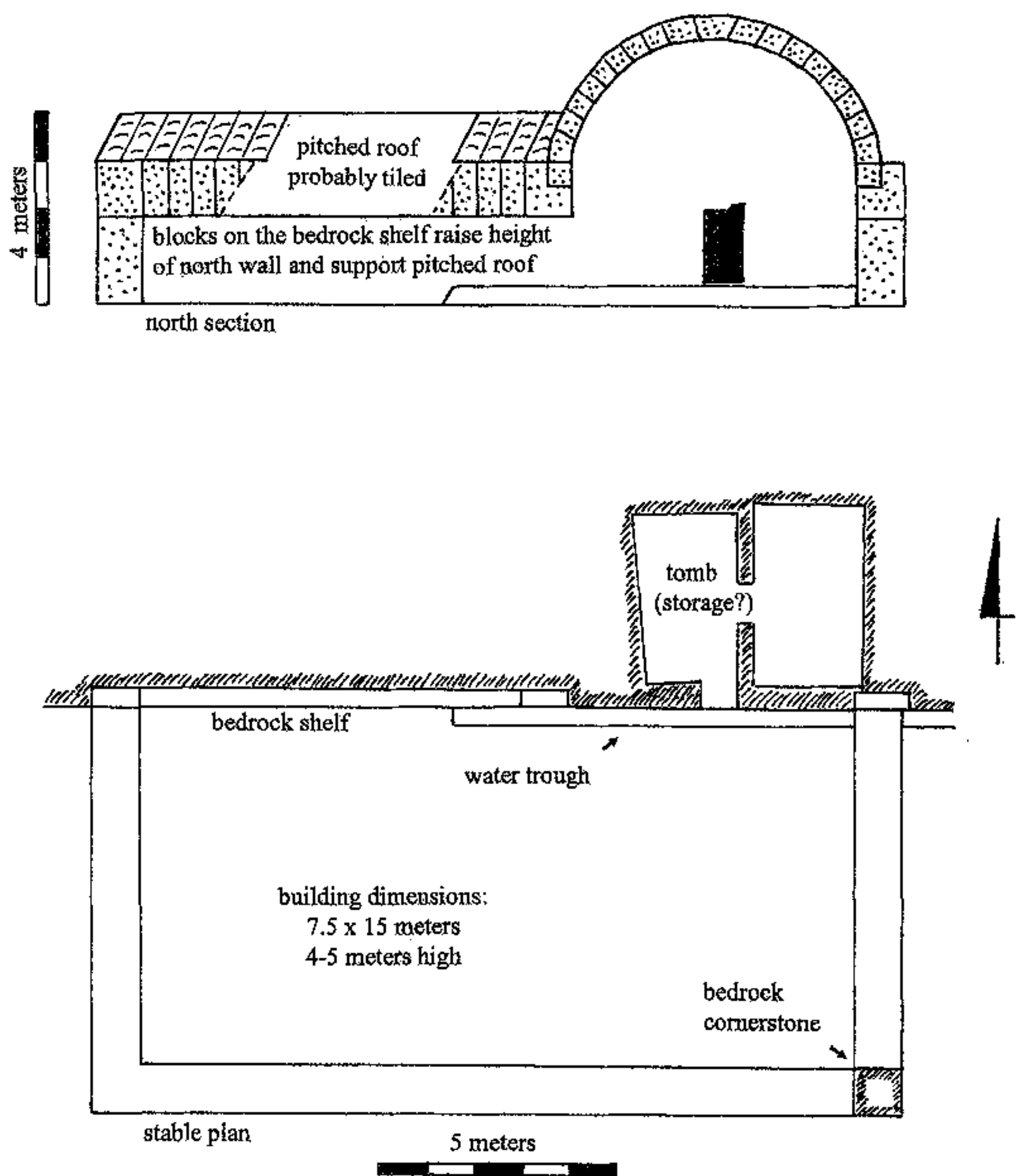


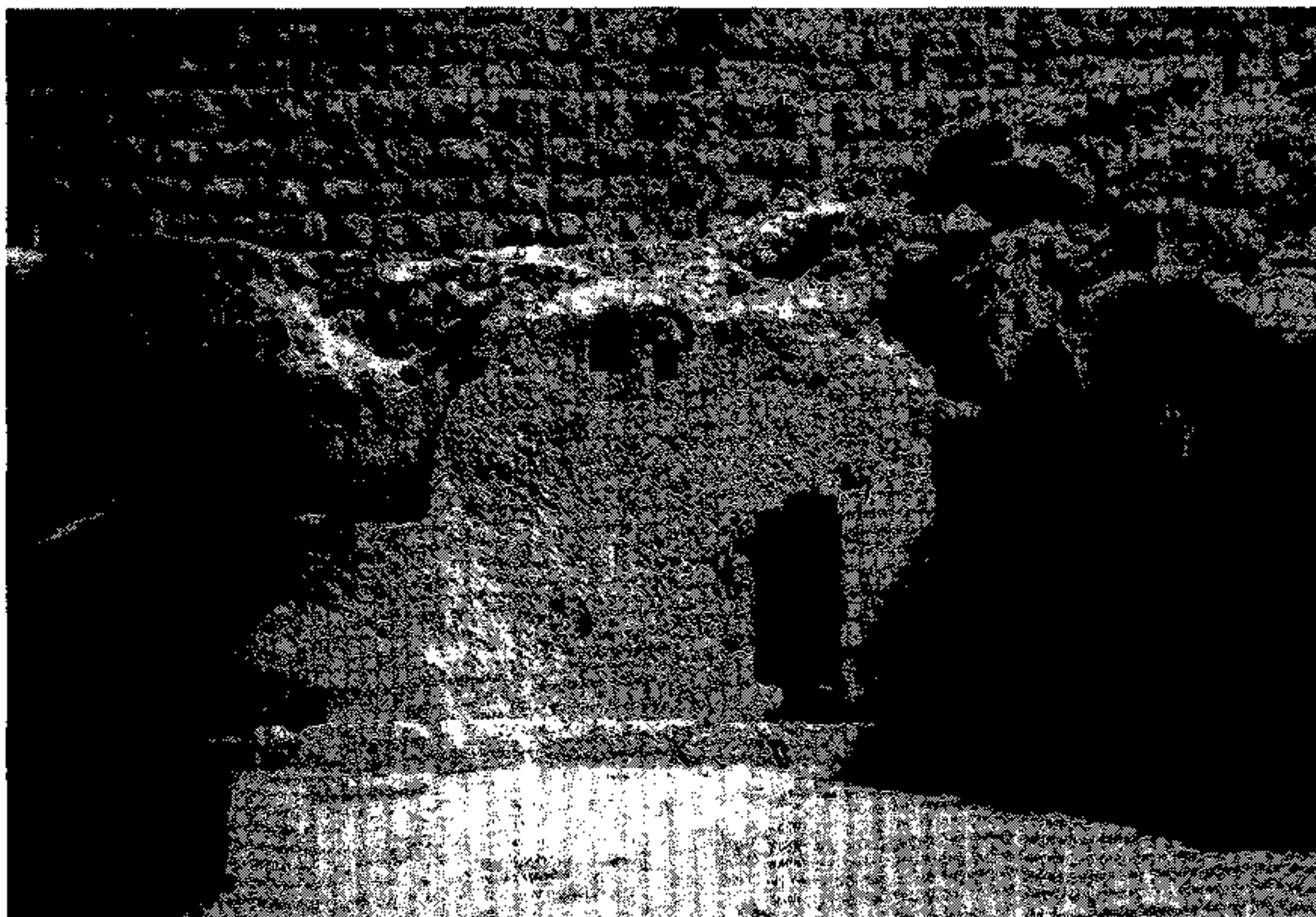
Figure 14. Proposed plan and northern section of Crusader stable at the Garden Tomb.

even though it is possible that a garden occupied the area in Jesus' day, neither the winepress nor the nearby cistern is proof of this. In any case, the cistern also dates to eleven centuries later. None of the features at the Garden Tomb, either inside the burial cave or outside it, can be connected archaeologically with the events of Jesus' burial and Resurrection as recorded in the New Testament.

### So Where Was Jesus Buried?

If the skull feature in el-Edhemieh's southern scarp is identified as the New Testament Golgotha, but the Garden Tomb is disqualified as the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, where then was the sepulchre in which Jesus was laid and from which He rose again? Probably, as President





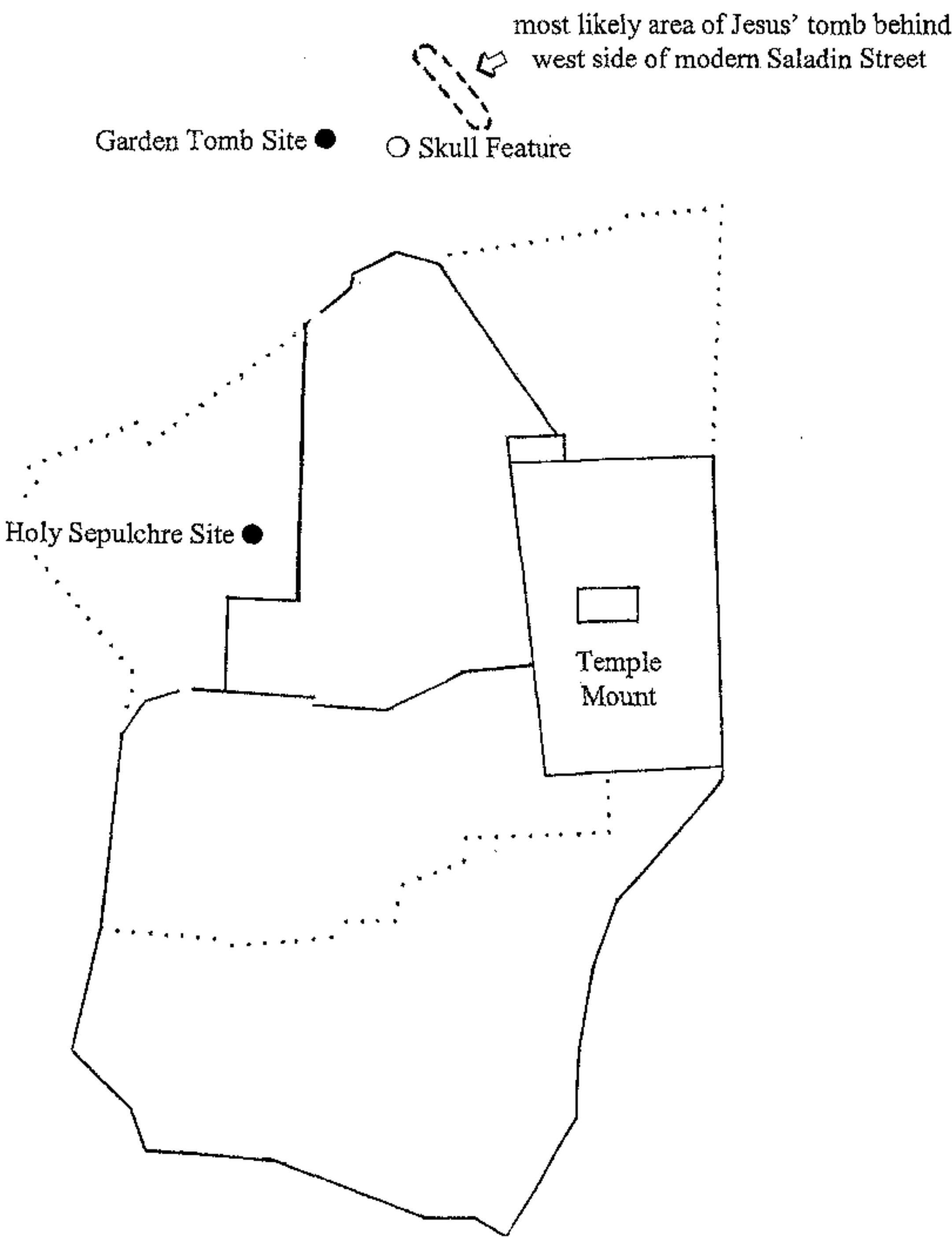
**Figure 15.** The Garden Tomb facade, looking north. Note the bedrock shelf to the left, which sits slightly lower than the level of the tomb door and ceiling.

Hinckley suggested, it was “somewhere nearby”—somewhere as near to the skull feature as the Garden Tomb is. If we take at face value the passage in John that the garden and tomb were “in the place where he was crucified” (John 19:41), it means that we cannot look too far in any direction from the skull feature.

The area west of el-Edhemieh is ruled out, that being the Nablus Road and Garden Tomb area. Heavy Jewish foot traffic there would not have allowed for tomb construction in Jesus’ day. No Second Temple period tombs have been discovered in that area.

But what about the other side of el-Edhemieh—the east side? The eastern slope of that hill (technically the northeastern slope, since that face of the hill runs southeast to northwest) actually was a place where tombs could have been dug in Jesus’ day. This is the area along modern Saladin Street, between the Israeli post office and the money changer Aladdin (a well-known landmark to Jerusalem Center faculty and students), but across the road on the west side (properly the southwest side) of the street. Behind the single line of commercial buildings on that western side of Saladin Street is the Muslim cemetery on el-Edhemieh. The hill rises steeply enough in that area to have allowed for ancient burial caves to be cut horizontally into bedrock. Photos of the area taken eighty to a hundred years ago show an agricultural hillside with more than enough slope for tomb construction. That relatively





**Figure 16.** Jerusalem during the mid-Herodian period, 20 B.C.—A.D. 43.

fertile area of Saladin Street was likely a garden area in the early first century, and the new sepulchre of Joseph of Arimathea may well have been cut into the bedrock of the el-Edhemieh hillside, on its north-eastern slope (see figure 16). Such a tomb site would have been as close to the skull feature as is the Garden Tomb area because then (unlike today) a person could simply walk from the skull feature over the el-Edhemieh hill to get there. Any site behind or under the buildings on that stretch of Saladin Street, along its west side, could qualify as having been “in the place where he was crucified.” The presence further up

Saladin Street of the so-called Tomb of the Kings, a Herodian Period burial complex dug out about twenty years after Jesus' death, demonstrates that the region east and north of el-Edhemieh was deemed acceptable for sepulchre construction in the first century A.D. However, no modern archaeological exploration has ever taken place on the west-side stretch of Saladin Street that fronts el-Edhemieh, and the presence of modern Arab buildings now there prevents any close research or excavation at present.

### How Jesus' Tomb Would Have Looked

Jewish tombs in the Herodian period were architecturally different from tombs of Iron Age II (such as the Garden Tomb) in a number of ways. The term used by archaeologists to describe the part of a tomb where a body was laid is *loculus* (plural *loculi*). Herodian period tombs featured two different types of loculi: the bench and the *kokh*. The *kokh* (a Hebrew term—plural *kokhim*) was a narrow vault carved about two meters deep into the tomb's stone wall. The vault and its opening were generally about 70 centimeters high and about 60 centimeters wide and usually were carved at floor level or low in the wall of the tomb. This type of loculus began appearing in Israel as early as the third century B.C., and *kokhim* from before Jesus' era are found at the Holy Sepulchre (see again figure 1).

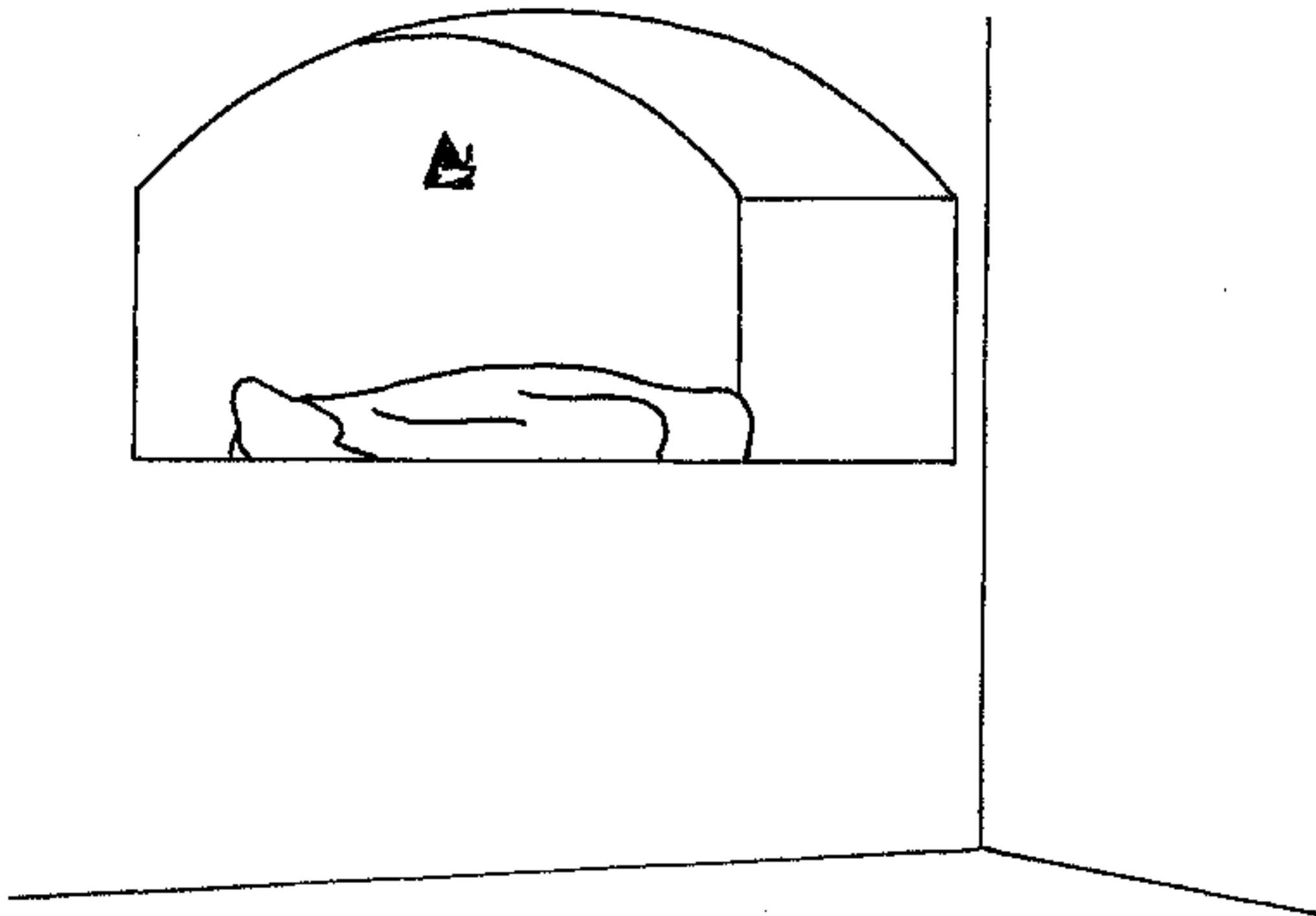


Figure 17. Drawing of a typical *arcosolium* burial bench from the time of Jesus.

But even though *kokhim* continued to appear in tombs into the first century A.D., it is virtually certain that the body of Jesus was not laid in a *kokh*. The New Testament describes angels sitting at both the head and foot of where Jesus had lain (see John 20:11–12), which would be impossible with a long, narrow *kokh* carved deep into the rock wall of the tomb. John's description strongly suggests the other type of loculus—the burial bench. Two styles of burial benches are common in Herodian period tombs. One, called *arcosolium* (plural *arcosolia*) is actually a recessed bench cut into the stone wall of the tomb with the bench surface at a level about waist high and an arch above the bench serving as the top of the recess (see figure 17). This elaborate type of burial bench is well known from wealthier tomb complexes, and it is tempting to think that Jesus might have been laid on an *arcosolium* bench in the Arimathean's tomb. But *arcosolia* are usually found only in the interior chambers of multichambered tombs. Since the bench where Jesus had lain was clearly and entirely visible from outside His tomb (see John 20:5; 20:11–12), that bench cannot have been in an interior chamber; otherwise, it could not have been seen by John and Mary from outside. Unlike drawings of Jesus' burial depicted in some popular books, the body of Jesus was probably not laid in an *arcosolium*.<sup>28</sup>

The other type of bench loculus was just a plain bench, with no elaborate decoration or overhead arching (very much like the original benches in the Iron Age II Garden Tomb). Such benches are usually waist high from the tomb floor, are about two meters long, and vary anywhere from half a meter to a meter in width. It was upon this type of plain bench that Jesus' body was most likely laid and where angels were later seen sitting at the head and foot of where he had lain. Since the bench was clearly visible through the tomb entry from outside, it is almost certain that the tomb consisted of only a single chamber. The most common bench arrangement for single-chamber tombs in the Herodian period was the triple-bench arrangement. (This was different from the Iron Age II plan only in that the Iron Age II tombs like the Garden Tomb had their triple benches in their interior chambers.)

A single-chamber, triple-bench tomb of the Herodian period would have an interior area of only about three meters square (about 10 feet). This type of tomb could contain benches only (see figure 18) or might also contain *kokhim* carved into the walls at bench level (see figure 19). For those who wonder if a single-chamber tomb could suffice as the sepulchre for a man of the social stature of Joseph of Arimathea, who was known to be a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin

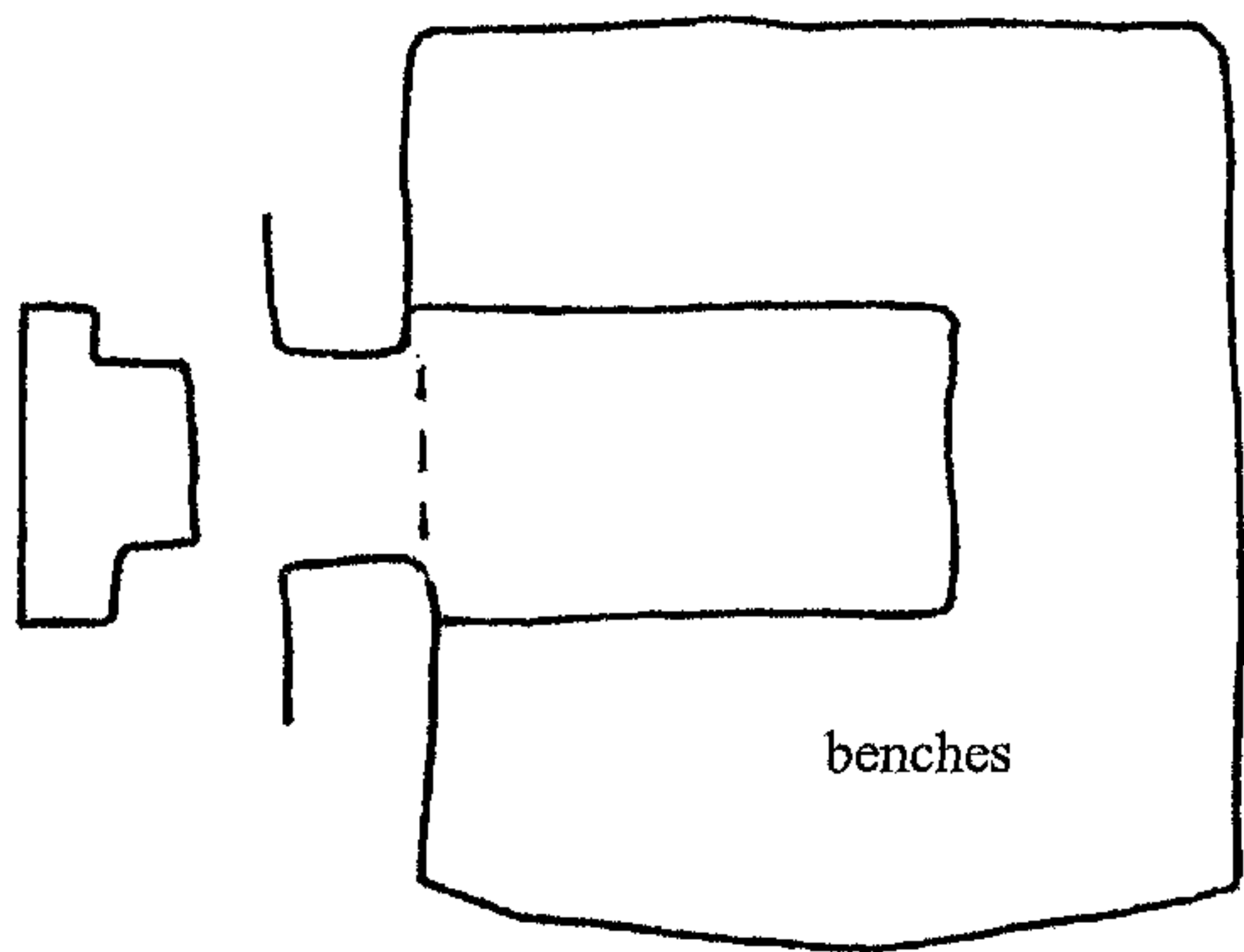


Figure 18. Single-chamber tomb from Herodian period, located at Gilo, Jerusalem, shown with blocking stone (after Kloner).

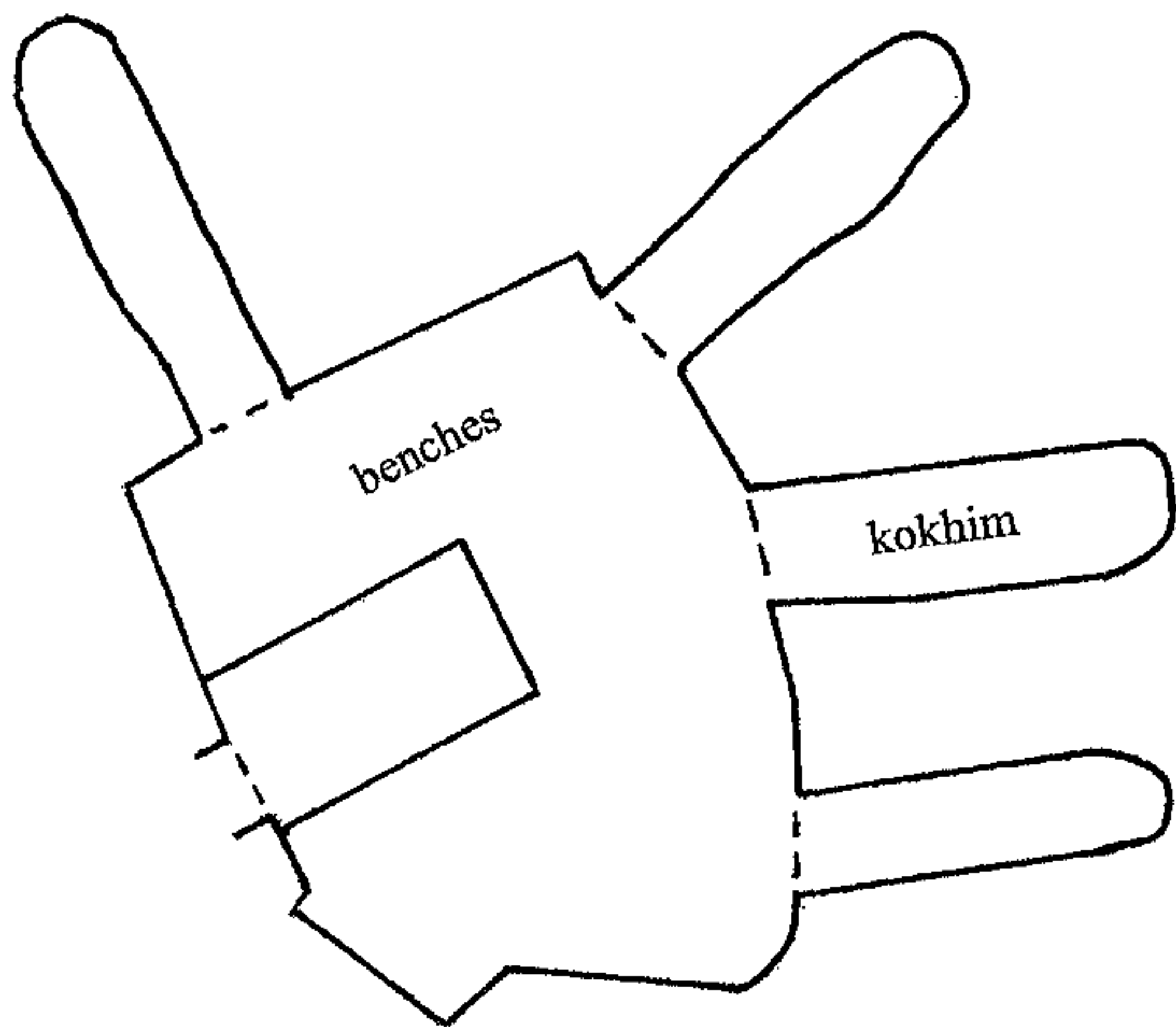


Figure 19. Single-chamber tomb from Herodian period with *kokhim*, located at Jerusalem, Peace Forest (after Kloner). Note that the ossuary of Caiaphas was found in this tomb.



(see Luke 23:50–51), it may be pointed out that the ossuary (bone box) of the high priest Caiaphas was found in just such a single-chamber tomb (the Jerusalem tomb depicted in figure 19).<sup>29</sup>

In reviewing recent archaeological literature, I am not alone in suggesting that Jesus was placed in a single-chamber, triple-bench tomb. In a very useful article in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Israeli archaeologist Amos Kloner, an expert on ancient tombs in Israel, comes to essentially the same conclusion.<sup>30</sup> Kloner also makes a somewhat surprising suggestion: that Jesus' tomb was not sealed with a disk-like "rolling stone" of the type generally imagined. Pointing out that "98 percent of the Jewish tombs from this period . . . were closed with square blocking stones," Kloner suggests that the Gospel accounts of Jesus' burial and Resurrection are probably referring to that type of stone—a square, plug-like stone about a meter wide—as the type of stone that was "rolled" to and from the door of Jesus' tomb: "Matthew, Mark, and Luke all describe the stone being 'rolled' (in John it is 'taken away'), and thus it is only natural to assume that the stone was round. But we must remember that 'rolled' is a translation of the Greek word *kulio*, which can also mean 'dislodge,' 'move back' or simply 'move.'"<sup>31</sup>

Kloner further points out that "the Hebrew word for these blocking stones, both round and square [is] *golal* or *golel* (plural *golalim*). The root means 'to roll' as well as 'to move.'"<sup>32</sup> He also suggests three other interesting considerations:

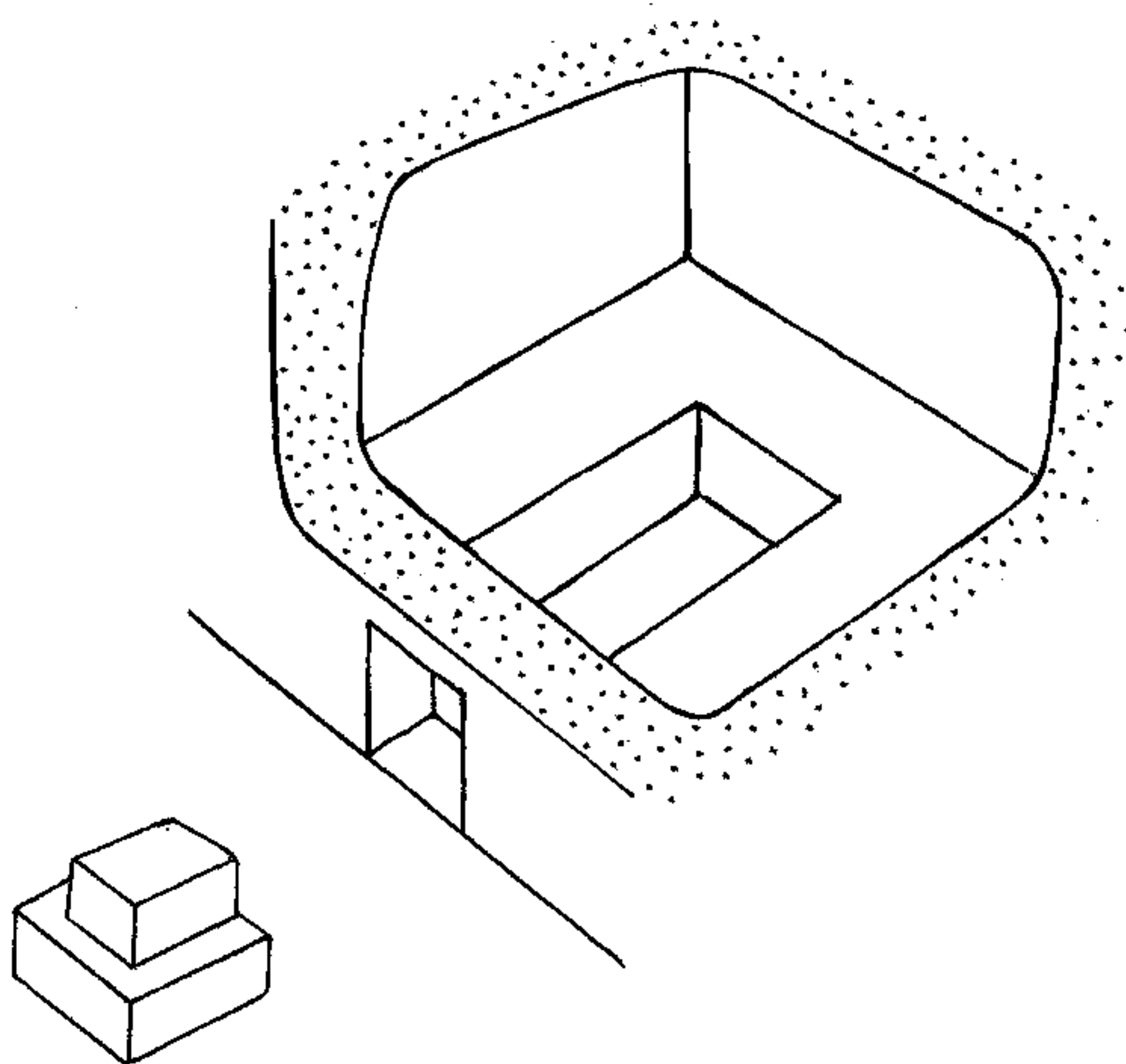
1. That only four of the huge disk-type "rolling stones" have been discovered from the time of Jesus, versus hundreds of the square blocking types—this statistically favors the latter as the type of sealing stone at Jesus' tomb.

2. That the huge disk-type of stone was employed only for very elaborate multichambered tombs (as opposed to single-chamber tombs of the type proposed above for Jesus' burial).

3. That the New Testament description of an angel sitting on the stone moved away from the tomb door (see Matthew 28:2) does not work well with a huge disk-like stone—"A square blocking stone would make a much better perch."<sup>33</sup>

So how would Jesus' tomb have looked? Based on a decade of research, and including Kloner's blocking-stone suggestion, a drawing of the tomb with a cutaway view (see figure 20) shows a small, square entry that someone would have to stoop down to look into or enter through. The single chamber of the tomb, only about three meters square, would have featured three connected benches. Quite probably,

the body of Jesus was laid on the back bench, directly opposite the entry, where on Sunday morning, John, “stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying” (John 20:5). Shortly thereafter, Mary “stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting [on that back bench], the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain” (John 20:11–12). The bench on the right-hand side of the entry would probably have been the place where the women mentioned in Mark “saw a young man [angel] sitting on the right side” (Mark 16:5). The square, plug-like blocking stone, a meter wide and very heavy, had been “taken away from the sepulchre” (John 20:1), and an angel “sat upon it” (Matthew 28:2—or “two angels” sat on it, according to the JST). It is even likely that if this tomb were cut into the eastern scarp of el-Edhemieh (the Saladin Street side), the entry faced east, allowing the first rays of Sunday dawn to illuminate the sepulchre enough for visitors to peer in and see the place where Jesus had lain. Outside the tomb (not pictured in figure 20) were olive trees—the garden of Joseph of Arimathea, where Mary Magdalene momentarily thought she was speaking with a gardener.



**Figure 20.** Proposed design of the tomb in which the body of Jesus was laid. Note that the body would have rested on the bench opposite the door. Note also the square, plug-like blocking stone to seal the entrance.

## What Do We Do Now?

With the Garden Tomb ruled out as the site of Jesus' burial and with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre also disqualified as a viable candidate, what do we do now? For those who are interested in the precise geography of the life of Jesus, for those who conduct study programs in Israel, and even for those who find it useful to display photographs of New Testament venues in their classrooms, there is simply no tomb of Joseph the Arimathean that we can represent to students as authentic. It is possible, as demonstrated above, to isolate the general area where that tomb must have been located and to reconstruct quite accurately how that tomb might have looked. But it would hardly be inspiring to march a group of students or visitors to the dingy sidewalk outside Aladdin the money changer, point west across Saladin Street, and say, "It's probably underneath there somewhere." It is even possible that the Arimathean's tomb no longer exists. And even if it does, the likelihood that it will be identified and excavated anytime in the near future is practically nil. For Latter-day Saint students and others who have the desire to know the exact places of sacred events, archaeology presents only a rather gray cloud in terms of the tomb of Jesus' Resurrection. But something of a silver lining still exists. That silver lining is, somewhat ironically, the Garden Tomb itself.

It may be an adjustment for some, but if Latter-day Saints would regard the Garden Tomb as a teaching tool rather than as a shrine, a visit to the site or even a photo of the burial cave may still provide valuable insight into New Testament events. Rather than venerate it as sacred space, we would do well to employ the Garden Tomb as a visual aid—a pleasant and useful locale that may continue to be used in teaching aspects of the accounts of Jesus' Crucifixion, burial, and Resurrection. The Garden Tomb does, after all, possess a number of qualities for the Latter-day Saint teacher and student:

1. It is adjacent to the skull feature, which is the best candidate for the site called Golgotha in the New Testament. This is an extremely important point. Even though a visit to the Garden Tomb may not bring us to the actual sepulchre of Jesus, it does bring us to the "place of a skull," where the final hours of the Savior's sacrifice were accomplished. There can be little doubt, as demonstrated above, that the skull feature was the site of the Crucifixion. In this regard, we really do access "sacred space" by going to the Garden Tomb. For those who desire knowing and visiting an exact location, the Garden Tomb's platform for viewing Golgotha is as good as it gets.



2. The Garden Tomb is almost certainly within two hundred meters of wherever the real tomb of Joseph of Arimathea was located. Since we know where Golgotha is, we know that the actual tomb in which Jesus was laid must be somewhere close by. Probably it was to the east of Golgotha, as demonstrated earlier. But, in any case, when we visit the Garden Tomb, we are no more than a few minutes' walk from where the actual garden and the actual tomb must have been. Often, there is educational value in knowing we are merely in the vicinity of a sacred event, such as in New York's Sacred Grove or Missouri's Adam-ondi-Ahman. This knowledge can certainly also be the case in terms of that most sacred of events, the Savior's Resurrection.

3. Physical aspects of the Garden Tomb itself can be used to illustrate the New Testament accounts. Even though the exterior of the tomb is of little use in demonstrating how they "rolled a great stone to the door" (Matthew 27:60), the tomb's interior originally featured benches, as Jesus' tomb most certainly did. And even though those benches have been cut away, their visible lines remain, and the form and position of the original loculi are easily distinguished. The interior chamber's triple-bench design may be used to demonstrate how a single-chamber tomb with a triple bench could fit the accounts of Jesus' burial and Resurrection (compare figure 4 with figure 20). Of course, examining any other existing bench tomb would serve the same purpose, but the Garden Tomb is especially suited for receiving groups of visitors and is very convenient for both teachers and students in this regard.

4. Last, but certainly not least, is the "spirit of place" visitors encounter at the Garden Tomb. Here, within a pleasant garden setting, a reverential memory of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection is the main concern of Christian hosts, while the meaning of those events, which can differ somewhat from denomination to denomination, is discreetly left to the minds and hearts of the individual visitors. The Garden Tomb itself is actually not the end focus of the polite and friendly guides there, who frequently summarize their presentations with a declaration of belief in Christ rather than confidence in the tomb. It is not uncommon to hear those guides say something along these lines: "The most significant thing about the Garden Tomb is that it is empty! He is risen! And because of this, we too shall all rise again!" Latter-day Saints can agree with this significant testimonial as much as any other Christians.

With these suggestions in mind, anyone who revisits Golgotha and the Garden Tomb, whether in person or by photograph, continues to have a spiritually enriching and educationally instructive adventure. **RE**



## Notes

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, in *Special Witnesses of Christ*, videotape, Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2000.

2. The author holds a Ph.D. in near eastern archaeology and is an active field archaeologist at sites in Israel. The long-term investigation was carried out periodically, during the author's free time, beginning with his two-year appointment to the full-time faculty of Brigham Young University's Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies (1992–94) and continuing as he returned to Jerusalem each summer on Jerusalem Center teaching assignments or for archaeological excavation at Tel Migne (biblical Ekron) and Tel Safi (biblical Gath) from 1995 to 2002.

3. This conclusion represents a change of position for the author, who in previous publications, prior to completing a degree in archaeology, had supported the Garden Tomb as a candidate for Jesus' sepulchre. See Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "In Defense of the Garden Tomb," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12, no. 4 (July/August 1986): 16–17; and D. Kelly Ogden and Jeffrey R. Chadwick, *The Holy Land: A Geographical, Historical and Archaeological Guide to the Land of the Bible* (Jerusalem: HaMakor and BYU Jerusalem Center, 1990), 340–45.

4. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700*, 4th ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 45–47.

5. Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 25:a, literal translation by the author. The Hebrew version reads as follows:

מרחיקין את הנבלות ואת הקברות ואת הבורסקי מן העיר חמשים אמה.  
אין עושין בורסקי אלא למזרח העיר. רבי עקיבא אומר: לכל רוח הוא  
עושה, חוץ ממערבה, ומרחיק חמשים אמה.

Although the Hebrew version uses the term *ruah* (wind), the Soncino English translation idiomatically renders the term as "direction," which is not incorrect but which does not preserve the important aspect of *wind* direction. The Gemara that follows specifies that the sages were discussing wind-related issues—hence the need for a more literal translation of the Mishnah.

6. Hillel Geva, "Jerusalem/Tombs" in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society & Carta, 1993), 748.

7. John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav, *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 169.

8. Rousseau and Arav, *Jesus and His World*, 167–68. The singular presence of the so-called "Herod family tomb" to the west of Jerusalem's Old City, on the grounds of the present-day King David Hotel, is explained by its distance from the Temple Mount—over 2,000 cubits, or 3,000 feet.

9. Rousseau and Arav, *Jesus and His World*, 169.

10. James E. Talmage incorrectly supposed that "the exposure of skulls and other human bones . . . would not be surprising; though the leaving of bodies or any of their parts unburied was contrary to Jewish law and sentiment." But he also concluded that "the origin of the name is of . . . little importance" (*Jesus the Christ* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1915, 1973], 667).

11. Bill White, *A Special Place: The Story of the Garden Tomb, Jerusalem* (Lincolnshire, England: Stanborough Press, 1989), 15.

12. William Steuart McBirnie, *The Search for the Authentic Tomb of Jesus* (Montrose, California: Acclaimed Books, 1975), 42.

13. McBirnie, *The Search for the Authentic Tomb*, 47.

14. McBirnie, *The Search for the Authentic Tomb*, 47.

15. Gabriel Barkay, "The Garden Tomb—Was Jesus Buried Here?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12, no. 2 (March/April 1986): 40–57.

16. Barkay, "Garden Tomb," 50.

17. Chadwick, "In Defense," 16.

18. Chadwick, "In Defense," 16.

19. Ogden and Chadwick, *The Holy Land*, 340–45.

20. Amihay Mazar, "Iron Age Burial Caves North of the Damascus Gate, Jerusalem" *Israel Exploration Journal* 26, no. 1 (1976): 1–8.

21. The same is true in the Old Testament, where the Hebrew term *kerem* is consistently rendered as "vineyard."

22. Even today, grapevines are usually not planted in modern Arab tree gardens (orchards) because the shade from the trees would hinder vine growth and ripening of the grapes. On the other hand, it is not uncommon in modern Arab vineyards to see one of two fruit trees growing among the rows of grapevines—an occasional tree does not cast enough shade to block the vines from needed sunlight as the angle of the sun changes throughout the day. It is unlikely, however, that this Arab habit was practiced by ancient Jews, since the law of Moses specifically forbade mixing other fruit species in a vineyard (see Deuteronomy 22:9). In any case, the point is moot because the setting of Jesus' tomb is referred to as a garden and not a vineyard, and grapevines would not likely have been planted among the trees of that garden.

23. Barkay, "Garden Tomb," 57.

24. Chadwick, "In Defense," 17.

25. Barkay, "Garden Tomb," 57.

26. Chadwick, "In Defense," 17.

27. The discovery of the bedrock cornerstone was made by Brian Bush, the Garden Tomb's director of grounds and maintenance, who permitted me to use the photo he took.

28. Amos Kloner, "Did a Rolling Stone Close Jesus' Tomb?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 25, no. 5 (September/October 1999): 29. Kloner reaches the same conclusion for a different reason. He maintains that *arcosolia* were at most two feet high, and angels could not have sat upright in such a niche. But I have visited tombs in Jerusalem and the Shfelah with *arcosolia* more than three feet high and have sat upright in them.

29. Zvi Greenhut, "Burial Cave of the Caiaphas Family," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 18, no. 5 (September/October 1992): 29–36.

30. Kloner, "Rolling Stone," 29.

31. Kloner, "Rolling Stone," 28.

32. Kloner, "Rolling Stone," 29.

33. Kloner, "Rolling Stone," 23–29.