

THE
GARDEN TOMB
Jerusalem

World Monuments Fund
350 Fifth Avenue
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WORLD MONUMENTS FUND 2014 APPLICATION – GOLGOTHA, Jerusalem

For literally millions of Christians from around the world who visit this iconic city, especially Protestants, the rock face of Golgotha situated in east Jerusalem represents the image that focusses their attention on Jesus' Crucifixion in about 32AD/32CE. John's gospel states that "So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha)." (John 19.16-17).

So the skull face naturally engraved in the rock escarpment on the edge of the former limestone quarry (which an Israeli archaeologist advised me in 2011 had been there for at least 2000 years) gives good cause to consider it may be Golgotha. The British Christian General, Charles Gordon, looked at it when on the old city wall in 1883 and declared it to be Golgotha – it may be. What is known is that St Stephen was stoned and martyred there in the quarry in Acts 7 so it is possible, even probable, that the Romans would use the same site for their executions..

Because the Garden Tomb never makes categorical claims about things it cannot prove beyond all reasonable doubt, our staff never claim that the rock face with the skull features IS the place. However along with the empty tomb hewn out of the rock in the Garden Tomb, this makes an excellent teaching aid, and we are often told that a picture of it remains etched for life on our visitors' minds. Many claim that coming to the Garden Tomb is the highlight of their time in Israel, and we welcome more than ¼ million every year from 90+ countries – indeed almost 10% of all tourists to Israel.

The rock face is viewed from an observation platform in the Garden Tomb, though it is in fact 50 meters outside the perimeter of the Garden Tomb property. The top of the rock face is owned by the Islamic Waqf, and the foot by the City of Jerusalem; lawyers would need to determine who owns the rock face itself.

The rock face is now eroding, partly from two environmental factors, the weather and very poor air quality in the vicinity of the bus station with all the exhaust gases, and partly as a result of heavy vibrations from local construction projects.

The Golgotha Foundation in concert with the Garden Tomb Association is working with the City of Jerusalem, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and the Israeli Antiquities Authority to seek a way to preserve the Golgotha rock face from further deterioration. It may be lost within 10 years. All these stakeholders agree that it needs to be guarded from further decay, but understandably none has funds for the preservation work.

Making Golgotha one of the 2014 WMF 'watch' projects would certainly be enormously helpful in maintaining focus within Israel, the various Israeli government departments knowing that eyes beyond these shores were keenly watching.

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