

DISCOVERY OF ROCK-HEWN CHAPELS AT SILWÂN.

HAVING heard that in the village of Silwân a church had been discovered and a very remarkable inscription which no one could read, I went down with my assistants and people who could point out the place. The proprietor of the ground showed us the things, but would not allow me to take copies and measurements until after a long talk, in which I pointed out to him that my measuring and reporting on the matter would be to his interest, he said, "Do what you like, but you must know that I do not want plans or drawings, but wish to sell the place, in order to get money with which to build another home." I hear the Russians offered him 60 Napoleons, but he asks 200.

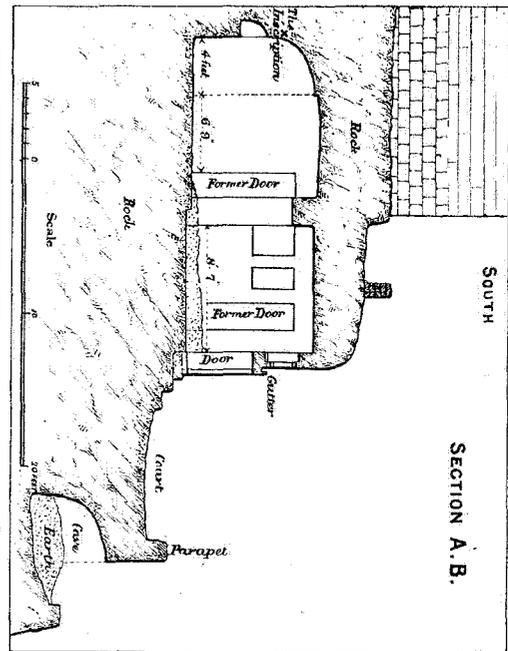
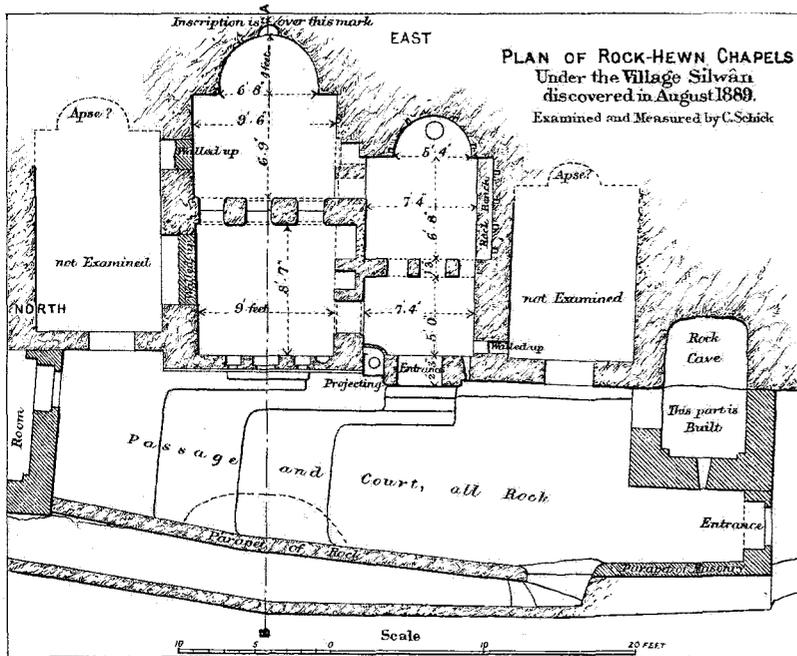
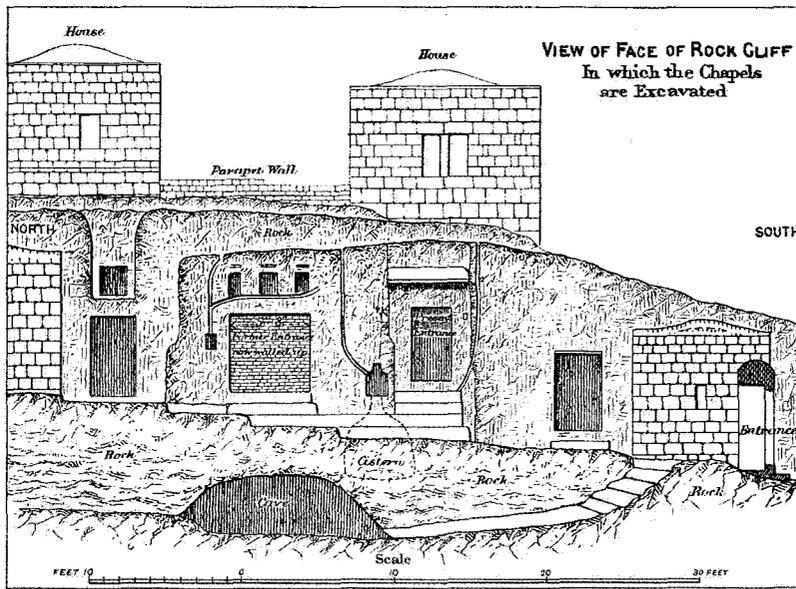
The village of Silwân is divided into two parts, namely, the "upper" and the "lower" village. The place of which I speak is between the two, but belongs to the upper village. It is opposite the Virgin's Well, but somewhat more south, opposite the letter *a* in the word "valley" on the Ordnance Survey Plan of Jerusalem, scale $\frac{1}{25000}$.

When I visited the place I followed the road in the valley southwards as far as a road which turns at a right angle to the lower village, near the "old pool," and then I had to go northwards up a steep ascent till I came to the spot.

An ordinary door on the south leads into a kind of court, sloping upwards towards the north, formed by a terrace on the rocky side of the hill. The floor, steps, the cliff on the east, and even the parapet on the west are rock. In the face of the cliff are many artificial openings, four doors, and several holes, looking like windows. The large central door is closed by masonry; the northern and southern I found locked up, but that between the central and southern doors was open. Some rock-cut steps lead up to it, and close by there is a round, bottle-shaped cistern cut in the rock. As there was *tibn* in this cistern I could not ascertain its exact size, and accordingly it is shown with dotted lines in the section. On the surface of the cliff I observed several narrow gutters cut in the rock for conducting the rain-water into the cistern.

The present entrance to the chapel is in a projecting part of the cliff, as shown in the Plan, and over the door the rock projects 1 foot more, forming a kind of roof, over which the rain-water is turned aside, so as not to fall into the doorway.

This door leads into a room, 5 feet deep and 7 feet 4 inches wide, very exactly and nicely excavated, with a straight ceiling of rock, the flooring being also rock. The room is nearly 8 feet high. The east wall of this room was originally pierced with three openings, leading into an adjoining room, 7 feet 4 inches wide by 6 feet 8 inches deep, which has along the south wall a rock bench, 1 foot 4 inches high, adapted for sitting on. The north wall was originally pierced by a doorway, the rock sides of which are now broken off. Towards the east there is a regular apse, 5 feet 4 inches wide and 2 feet 8 inches deep, in a half circle, but on the top made like a Mohammedan "mihrab." There are four round



holes in the rock, as if at one time something had been fixed there ; lower down, about 3 feet from the flooring, are again four such holes ; they are round, 2 inches in diameter, and 4 inches deep.

On the south wall, some feet above the stone bench, is a row of similar holes. On the flooring there is a round hole or pit, $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, cut down perpendicularly for several feet ; the exact measurement I cannot give, as the hole is filled with earth. I supposed it to be a well-mouth, but the proprietor of the place said that this is not the case. On the top of the apse there had once been a cross made of plaster, but the Moslems have broken it off. This room is also nearly 8 feet high, and the ceiling is exceedingly smooth, exactly hewn, as in the tombs of the Kings.

North of this double room is another and larger double room or chapel. The entrance in the west wall (*see* Drawing), which is now built up, has over it three windows, the middle one somewhat wider than the others ; they are surrounded by rock ledges, so that wooden shutters may exactly close the openings. The outer room is 9 feet wide by 8 feet 7 inches deep. In the south wall were once two cupboard niches, and a door now so much broken away that all is like one room ; on the north was a doorway, 4 feet 8 inches wide, and 5 feet 4 inches high, now closed by masonry. The wall towards the east is pierced by three openings as in the adjoining southern double room. The work is very nicely done, all the edges having a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch draft all round the openings. These openings never had doors. In the middle of the thickness of the wall there is a step in the flooring, so that the floor of the inner room is about 10 inches higher than that of the outer (*see* Plan). The inner room is 9 feet 6 inches wide, and 6 feet 9 inches deep, or 1 foot 8 inches less than the outer room. In the adjoining southern double room the outer was shorter and the inner longer ; here, on the contrary, the outer is longer and the inner shorter, but within 1 inch exactly as long as the southern inner room. This northern inner room has in the walls on the south and north openings or doorways, but that on the north is blocked up with masonry. On the east there is also an apse, much larger than that in the other room, and somewhat more than the half circle, 6 feet 8 inches wide by 4 feet deep (*see* Plan). This apse has also the form of a mihrab, as will be seen in the section. At the height of 3 feet from the floor there is a recess in the rock wall of the apse, about 1 foot deep, 1 foot 4 inches wide, and 1 foot 4 inches high. At its top begins the bow of the roof of the apse, and just there is engraved the

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Greek inscription above alluded to. Of this inscription I give an exact facsimile, made by help of a squeeze.

That Isaiah is here mentioned is rather unexpected. The place where the prophet was killed, under Manasseh, is shown more to the south, and on the opposite side of the valley. His tomb for a time was shown in the same neighbourhood; but the ancient pilgrims speak in such a manner that it is difficult to comprehend where they mean; so, after all, Isaiah's tomb may be somewhere in the village of Silwān, and perhaps under this his chapel. As will be seen in the drawings, there is a cave under the rocky court containing much earth. I hope that by digging there an entrance to rock-cut tombs may be found.

The proprietor of the place tells me, that the adjoining rooms, on the north and south of these chapels, have each such an apse, and also that the rooms, &c., are hewn in the rock, like those belonging to him. They belong to neighbours who were not at home, so that I could not measure or examine them.

That these rock-cut chambers were once used by Christians as chapels is beyond all question; and as the rooms are double, I think some anchorite lived in the outer ones, the inner ones forming the chapels, and the wall between them, with its three openings, representing the wall in front of the choir or altar of Greek churches.

Dr. Papadopoulos thinks the form of the letters of the inscription supports the suggestion that it belongs to the eighth century. But one may doubt whether Christians under Mohammedan rule were in a condition to cut out such rock chambers, and I should think they were made before the invasion of the Arabs. Probably they were Jewish rock-cut tombs before the Christian era, which afterwards were modified by the Christians, and used again for their purposes. According to Matthew, xxiii, 29, and Luke, i, 47, the Jews made monumental tombs for the Prophets, who were killed by their fathers. So we may suppose that these rooms were made by the Jews in the time of Christ, and that afterwards the Christians made apses in them, converting them into chapels. However, more learned men may judge on this matter; my duty is simply to report on them.

C. SCHICK.

FURTHER REPORT ON THE POOL OF BETHESDA.

THE Reis, or Head, of the Algerian Mission Brethren at St. Anne, has returned from his journey, so I called upon him, and was received very kindly. He showed me everything on the establishment, including their collections for a museum. Besides lamps and other pottery they have not much, but a good number of coins, Roman, Greek, Arabic, and Jewish.

With regard to excavations and clearing the place, I found they have removed all the earth down to the top of the pool, by which it was discovered that the five little rooms, or porches, just over the pool were