

WHERE ARE THE SACRED VESSELS OF THE TEMPLE ?

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UNCERTAINTY is often expressed regarding the fate of the holy vessels of the Temple of Jerusalem carried away by Titus to Rome and displayed in his triumph. A representation of this triumph still remains deeply engraven inside the Arch of Titus ; perhaps the most interesting of all the surviving monuments of the Eternal City. But with Gibbon's great work in our hands no such uncertainty ought to exist. Instead of being buried under the bed of the Tyber, as is sometimes suggested, it would appear that they may be actually within the walls of the Holy City itself—restored, if not to the Temple, to the Christian Church close to its former site. Their wanderings have been sufficiently remarkable. From the account of Gibbon, it appears that after the capture and sack of Rome by the Vandals under Genseric, A.D. 455, the holy instruments of the Jewish worship, the gold table, and the golden candlestick with seven branches were amongst the spoils carried away to his capital at Carthage by the victorious Vandal on his return to Africa.¹ But this is not the final account we have of them. On the capture of Carthage by Belisarius, the General of Justinian, these sacred vessels are recaptured from the Vandals and used to grace the triumph of Belisarius at Constantinople, A.D. 534 ;² and, finally, after their long peregrination, were respectfully deposited in the Christian Church of Jerusalem by the Emperor of the East himself. This was, doubtless, the so-called "Church of the Holy Sepulchre," which remains at the present day in possession of four Christian sects, the Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Armenian. *There*, if anywhere, these sacred emblems of Jewish worship are to be found ; what a crowning triumph would it be to the labours of the Palestine Exploration Society to be the agents for producing them, after so many centuries, to the view of an astonished world ! Yet a vague suspicion arises whether upon the sack of Jerusalem by Chosroes II, in A.D. 615, the sacred vessels may not have fallen into the hands of this victorious despot. If such were the case, any attempt to trace their history further would be fruitless indeed.

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¹ "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," vol. vi, chap. 36. Gibbon refers to the learned and accurate treatise of Hadrian Reland, "De Spoliis Templi Hierosolymitani," 1716.

² *Ibid.*, vol. vii, chap. 41.