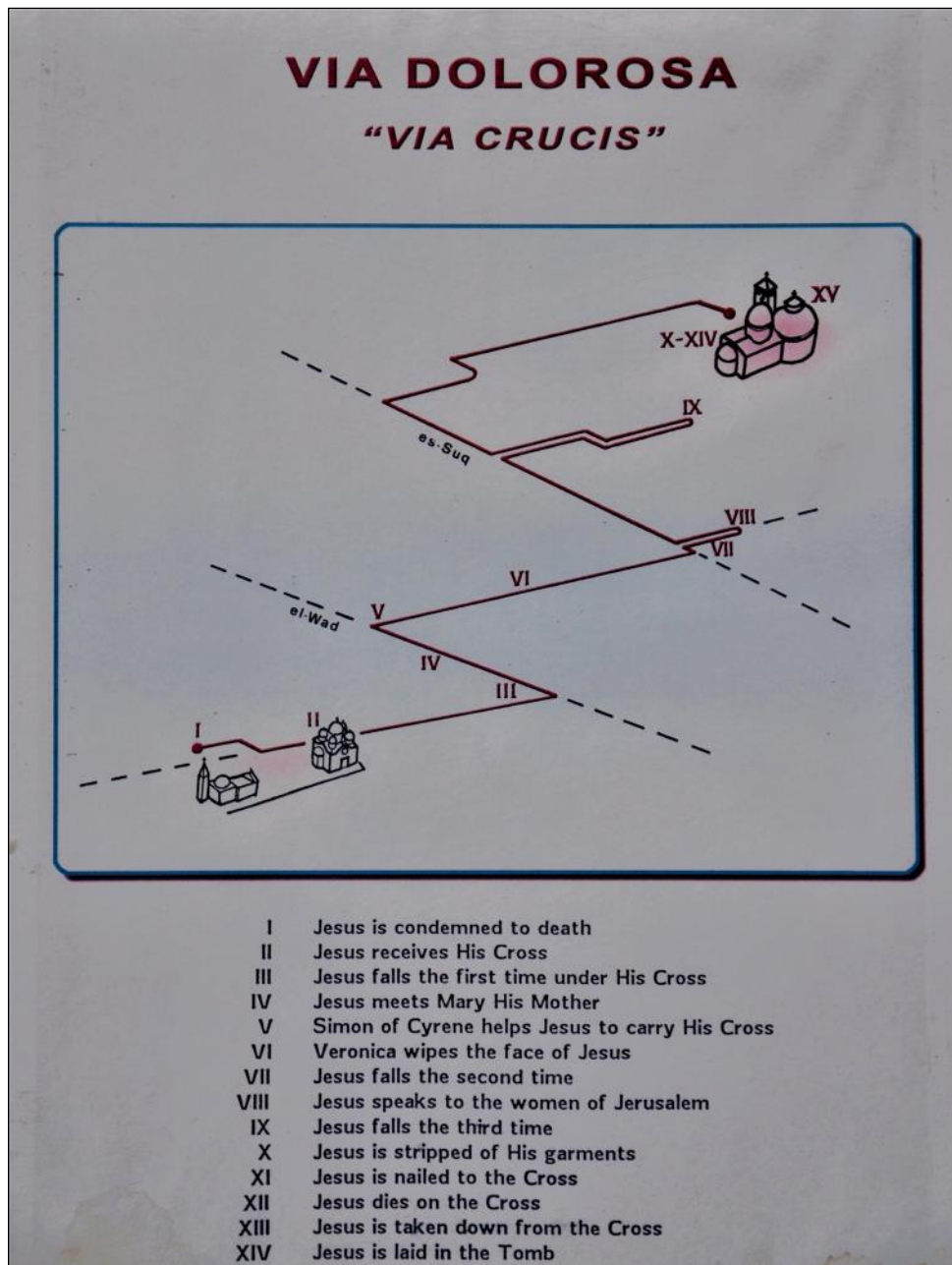


VIA DOLOROSA

The Via Dolorosa. The Via Dolorosa is the *traditional* pathway that Jesus traveled from Pilate's tribunal, where he was condemned, to Golgotha, where he was crucified. The designation Via Dolorosa is Latin, meaning "Way of Sorrows." There are fourteen stops, or "stations," that signify important events as Jesus went to the cross. Nine of these are recorded in the Gospels, and five of them come from church tradition.



While it was not unusual for Christians in the Byzantine period to travel from Gethsemane to the traditional site of the crucifixion and burial (the Church of the Holy Sepulcher), the practice of stopping at stations of the cross apparently originated in Europe. Those who could not make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem would reenact the journey of Jesus to the cross in their own communities, setting up stations along the way. This practice made its way to Jerusalem, but it was not until the eighteenth century that the current route was fixed and the nineteenth century that the fourteen stations were solidified. The steps of this route are retraced each Friday afternoon by Franciscan friars, who lead processions of Christian pilgrims.

The traditional trek for retracing the steps of Christ begins where the Antonia Fortress once stood; stations 1 and 2 are located in that area. Then, stations 3 through 9 are found along the streets en route to the traditional site of Golgotha. Finally, stations 10 through 14 are within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The total distance of the journey is about 2,000 feet, which is less than half a mile.

Station 1 marks the traditional site where Jesus was condemned to crucifixion (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). It is in the area of the al-Omariya school, where the Antonia Fortress stood in the first century at the northwest corner of the temple mount. The adjacent Convent of the Sisters of Zion supposedly preserves the “Stone Pavement” (*lithostrotos*; Jn. 19:13) where Pilate delivered his sentence.

Station 2 marks the place where Jesus received the cross (Jn. 19:17), located just beyond the first station on the road. The Church of the Condemnation and Imposition of the Cross marks the site. While artistic portrayals often include the whole cross (such as the one inside this church building), it is more likely that Jesus carried only the crossbeam (see Plutarch *Moralia* 554B). The Church of the Flagellation is nearby.



The Church of the Condemnation and Imposition of the Cross



Site of Jesus' Taking the Cross

Station 3 is located at the traditional spot where Jesus fell the first time, not too far away from the second station. The biblical text does not explicitly say that Jesus fell beneath the cross. The facts that he was severely scourged and Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry his cross have led to this conclusion. According to the fourteen stations, Jesus fell three times (see Stations 7 and 9).



Chapel Built by the Armenian Catholic Church



Armenian Church of Our Lady of Sorrows

Station 4 indicates the site where tradition says that Jesus met his mother Mary, who tried to comfort him.

Station 5 marks the place where Simon of Cyrene, who was coming into Jerusalem from the countryside, was compelled to carry Jesus' cross (Mt. 27:32; Mk. 15:21; Lk. 23:26).



Franciscan Chapel of Simon of Cyrene

Station 6 is located where, according to tradition, Jesus' face was wiped by a woman named Veronica. She would have been among the women who mourned and wailed for Jesus (Lk. 23:27). A cloth with the supposed sweat, blood, and facial imprint of Jesus has reportedly been kept for centuries at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome; it is known as Veronica's veil. Her name is actually a corruption of the Latin words *vera icon*, which mean "true image"; the name relates to Jesus' supposed facial imprint on the cloth. Some have associated Veronica with the anonymous woman who was healed of a twelve-year issue of blood (Mk. 5:25-34).

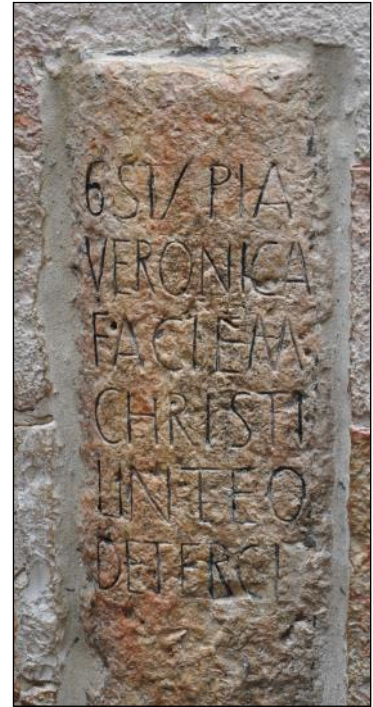


Chapel of the Holy Face

Latin Inscription:

6 ST PIA VERONICA FACIEM CHRISTI
LINTEO DETERCI

"The sixth station where the pious Veronica wiped the face of Christ with a veil."



Station 7 indicates the site where Jesus fell the second time.



Franciscan Chapel

Station 8 marks where Jesus spoke to the daughters of Jerusalem (Lk. 23:28) and is identified by a stone with a Latin cross and a Greek inscription, which reads IC XC NIKA (“Jesus Christ conquers”).

Station 9 is where Jesus supposedly fell a third time.

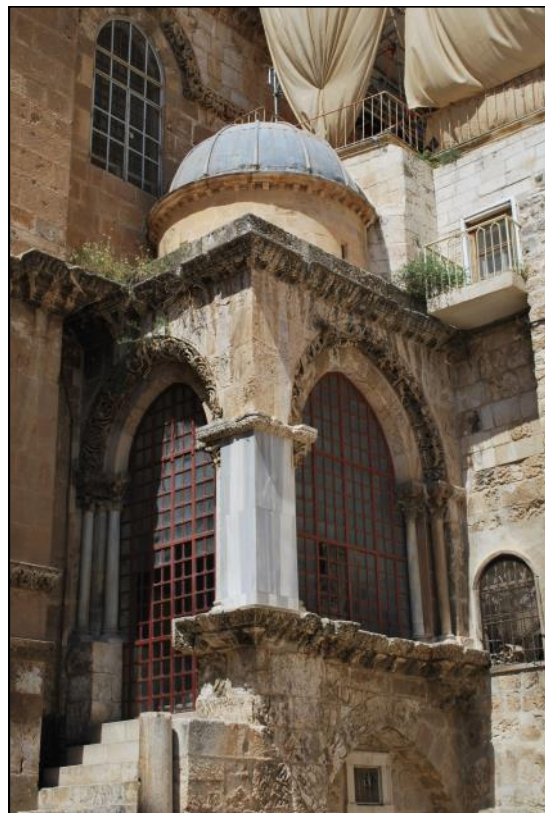


Coptic Church of St. Helen
(Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Background)



Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate Nearby

Station 10 indicates the place where Jesus was stripped of his clothes (Mt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24; Lk. 23:34; Jn. 19:23). Stations 10 through 14 all are connected to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Station 10 is located in the Chapel of the Franks (Franciscans).



Chapel of the Franks

Station 11 designates the place where Jesus was nailed to the cross (Mt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24-25; Lk. 23:33; Jn. 19:18).



Scene over the Site of Nailing

Station 12 is where Jesus died on the cross (Mt. 27:50; Mk. 15:37; Lk. 23:46; Jn. 19:30).



Scene over Crucifixion Site



Rock of Golgotha

Station 13 marks the place where Jesus' body was taken off the cross (Mt. 27:58; Mk. 15:45; Lk. 23:53; Jn. 19:38).



Place Where Jesus' Body
Was Prepared for Burial

Station 14 is the tomb where Jesus' body was laid (Mt. 27:59-60; Mk. 15:46; Lk. 23:53; Jn. 19:40-42).



Shrine Built over the Tomb
(upper left and right)

Inside the Tomb
(bottom left)

Ceilings Inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher
(bottom right)



A Critique. Three possible locations have been suggested for the Praetorium mentioned in the Gospels, where Jesus was tried before Pilate (Mt. 27:27; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:28, 33): (1) Antonia Fortress, on the northwest corner of the temple mount, (2) Herod’s Palace, on the western side of Jerusalem, and (3) the Hasmonean Palace, perhaps midway between Herod’s Palace and the temple mount. (Few scholars support this last option.)



The Via Dolorosa assumes that the Praetorium was part of or adjacent to the Antonia Fortress. Tourists are often shown an area equated with the “Stone Pavement” (*lithostrotos*) of John 19:13. On that pavement, Roman soldiers inscribed the “King’s Game,” which was played with dice. The game suggests that this was the place where Jesus was mocked by Roman soldiers (Jn. 19:2-3). Nevertheless, archaeological investigation indicates that this pavement only goes back to the time of the emperor Hadrian—the second century A.D. The area it occupies was apparently an open-air pool in the time of Christ; this was probably the Struthion Pool mentioned by Josephus (*Wars* 5.11.4).



The King’s Game

The place where Jesus was tried by Pontius Pilate was more likely the palace that Herod the Great had built, on the western side of Jerusalem. The Roman governor, whose administrative center was Caesarea Maritima, would have stayed in Herod’s luxurious palace rather than in Antonia Fortress when visiting Jerusalem. While discussing Pilate, Philo called Herod’s palace “the dwelling house of the governor” (Philo *Embassy to Gaius* 38 [299]; 39 [306]). Governors would often come to the holy city during the Jewish feasts to ensure that the crowds did not get out of hand and revolt against Rome. Josephus told of a later governor, Florus, who stayed at Herod’s palace in A.D. 66. He took his place on a raised platform—a judgment seat—and heard the chief priests and other influential Jews (Josephus *Wars* 2.14.8), just as Pilate had done (Mt. 27:19; Jn. 18:28-29). If Jesus was tried at Herod’s Palace, then the route of the *traditional* Via Dolorosa is wrong—even if the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is the correct location of Golgotha. This by no means diminishes from the suffering that the Lord endured when he bore the cross to Golgotha; there was indeed a “Way of Sorrows”! It simply reminds us to evaluate human traditions in the light of the Scriptures and other historical sources.



Statue of a Roman Soldier
(Tower of David Museum,
Jerusalem)



Narrow Street in Jerusalem