

The Body of our Lord placed in the Sepulchre

The men placed the sacred body on a species of leathern hand-barrow, which they covered with a brown-coloured cloth, and to which they fastened two long stakes. This forcibly reminded me of the Ark of the Covenant. Nicodemus and Joseph bore on their shoulders the front shafts, while Abenadar and John supported those behind. After them came the Blessed Virgin, Mary of Heli, her eldest sister, Magdalen and Mary of Cleophas, and then the group of women who had been sitting at some distance—Veronica, Johanna, Mary Salome, Salome of Jerusalem, Susanna, and Anne the niece of St. Joseph.



Cassius and the soldiers closed the procession. The other women, such as Marone of Naïm, Dina the Samaritaness, and Mara the Suphanitess, were at Bethania, with Martha and Lazarus. Two soldiers, bearing torches in their hands, walked on first, that there might be some light in the grotto of the sepulchre; and the procession continued to advance in this order for about seven minutes, the holy men and women singing psalms in sweet but melancholy tones. I saw James the Greater, the brother of John, standing upon a hill the other side of the valley, to look at them as they passed, and he returned immediately afterwards, to tell the other disciples what he had seen.

The procession stopped at the entrance of Joseph's garden, which was opened by the removal of some stakes, afterwards used as levers to roll the stone to the door of the sepulchre. When opposite the rock, they placed the Sacred Body on a long board covered with a sheet. The grotto, which had been newly excavated, had been latterly cleaned by the servants of Nicodemus, so that the interior was neat and pleasing to the eye. The holy women sat down in front of the grotto, while the four men carried in the body of our Lord, partially filled the hollow couch destined for its reception with aromatic spices, and spread over them a cloth, upon which they reverently deposited the sacred body. After having once more given expression to their love by tears and fond embraces, they left the grotto. Then the Blessed Virgin entered, seated herself close to the head of her dear Son, and bent over his body with many tears. When she left the grotto, Magdalen hastily and eagerly came forward, and flung on the body some flowers and branches which she had gathered in the garden. Then she clasped her hands together, and with sobs kissed the feet of Jesus; but the

men having informed her that they must close the sepulchre, she returned to the other women. They covered the sacred body with the extremities of the sheet on which it was lying, placed on the top of all the brown coverlet, and closed the folding-doors, which were made of a bronze-coloured metal, and had on their front two sticks, one straight down and the other across, so as to form a perfect cross.

The large stone with which they intended to close the sepulchre, and which was still lying in front of the grotto, was in shape very like a chest or tomb;¹⁵ its length was such that a man might have laid himself down upon it, and it was so heavy that it was only by means of levers that the men could roll it before the door of the sepulchre. The entrance of the grotto was closed by a gate made of branches twined together. Everything that was done within the grotto had to be accomplished by torchlight, for daylight never penetrated there.