

The Lost Tomb of Jesus -05- A History of the critics of the resurrection

The critics against the resurrection of Jesus Christ have a long history of developing new theories of how to explain the evidence of a miracle in natural terms.

The Very First Rumor

The very first claim against the resurrection came merely hours after the Death of Christ as recorded in Matthew 27:62

"62 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.' So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard." (ESV)

Matthew 28:11-15

"While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, 'Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day."

In more recent history, critics have formed speculative theories about what really happened to make it appear that Jesus rose from the dead. These works were quickly forgotten due to their speculative nature or due to their character of resurrecting old theories and putting new names on them. It is probable that the latest edition of these theories will likely fade away as well.

The Passover Plot

In 1965, the Christian community was in a storm of controversy with the publication of a book that resurrected the theory of a "fainted Jesus". The Passover Plot was published by British Biblical scholar Hugh J. Schonfield. According to Schonfield, Jesus had carefully planned his own crucifixion on the eve of the Passover so that he could appear to rise from the dead.

He alleged that Jesus was involved in a conspiracy with a few others in which he wanted to be crucified but only to remain on the cross for less than three hours. The arrangement was to be crucified on the day before the Sabbath giving only a few hours to complete the execution. When the Sabbath arrived it was required that Jews be taken down. The plan was that one of his supporters would give him some water to quench his thirst that was laced with a drug to make him unconscious. Joseph of Arimathea, a well-connected supporter, would get him released off the cross while still alive (but appearing dead) so that he could be nursed back to health in the tomb under the safety of the Sabbath.

Schonfield believed that membership among Jesus' followers of a high ranking member of the Sanhedrin gives credence to a conspiracy. He points out that in several instances that access to the Temple is available the disciple John. He suggests that the Apostle John and Joseph of Arimathea were responsible for events following the Crucifixion, and that it may have been this Apostle (an 'undercover Disciple', as it were) who was seen at the Tomb on the morning of the Resurrection.

The conspiracy plan, however, went wrong on the cross when Jesus was unexpectedly and fatally wounded by the spearing in his side at the hands of one of the Roman guards. Those few supporters who were in on his plan tried desperately to revive him, but he died during the next 24 hours in the tomb. His disappearance from the tomb is explained as partly innocent bungling by his supporters, partly fear of discovery at having disturbed the dead, and partly fear of disclosing the elaborate plan to the other Disciples. The other Apostles who were not in on the conspiracy truly believed Jesus appeared to them after the resurrection. The fact that they did not recognize him leads him to believe it was another person who appeared.

The Passover Plot was made into a 1976 movie starring Zalman King as Yeshua (Jesus). The cast included Harry Andrews, Dan Hedaya, and Donald Pleasence. It was directed by Michael Campus and nominated for an Oscar for Best Costume Design.

The lasting legacy of the book and film were short-lived as is supposed will be the fate of the Family Tomb of Jesus.

The Divinci Code

More recently, author Dan Brown released the Book The Da Vinci Code in 2003. It is a mystery that covers the story of a murder linked to secret groups connected with the possible location of the Holy Grail and to a mysterious society called the Priory of Sion, as well as to the Knights Templar. The story also involves the Roman Catholic organization Opus Dei.

The attack of the book and following movie on the person of Christ involves alegded secrets held by the Vatican about the role of Mary Magdalene with Christ. The supposed secret is that Jesus Christ was married to Mary Magdalene. Their offspring are part of a secret group that still lives today.

Dan Brown's conclusions have been attacked by many experts who argue that the bloodline of Christ story has been around for centuries and has been completely proven to be a fraud. But the hype surrounding the movie and success of the novel have captured the attention of the world-wide public in a way that previous purveyors of the fable have not done in the past. The Da Vinci Code was preceded by other authors and novels including The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail by Michael Baigent. This book, however, sold more than 60.5 million copies and has been translated into 44 languages. It is thought to be the thirteenth best-selling book of all time. In 2006, a film adaptation, The Da Vinci Code, was released by Columbia Pictures.