

Travelling | Religious tourism and pilgrimage | Christian pilgrimage

“As I make my slow pilgrimage through the world, a certain sense of beautiful mystery seems to gather and grow.” (A. C. Benson)

Over the centuries, Christians the world over have set out to visit the cradle of their faith in Palestine or – as they reverently call it – the Holy Land. In the 19th century, the region, with its numerous sacred locations and cities – Jerusalem most important among them – formed part of the Ottoman Empire. Improved transport links and communications networks, as well as a favourable political climate and the relative tolerance of the Ottomans towards foreigners and religious minorities, now meant that the European faithful and visitors from elsewhere felt free to explore the region. According to their respective denomination, the purpose for the journey might vary from ritual pilgrimage to pious edification and contemplation. Indigenous Christian communities across the Middle East and North Africa, meanwhile, continued to maintain their own diverse traditions and they, too, would visit Palestine as well as many other spiritually significant places in the region.



Working Number: UA 024

Name: Chancel of the Church of St Helena

Holding Museum: Sharjah Art Museum / Sharjah Museums Authority

Date: Published 1843

Materials: Lithograph

Curator Justification: The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, one of the foremost pilgrimage sites according to the Christian tradition, would have been a highlight on the itinerary of 19th-century European travellers to the Holy Land. As is typical of the work of the British artist David Roberts, he has exaggerated the proportions of the architecture in relation to the human figures, which appear dwarfed by the majesty and monumentality of the structures that surround them.



Working Number: UA 025

Name: The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt and Nubia, Volume 1, title page

Holding Museum: Sharjah Art Museum / Sharjah Museums Authority

Date: Published 1842

Materials: Lithograph

Curator Justification: A vignette, depicting the façade of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, located on the spot where, according to the Christian tradition, the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ and His burial took place. It was Easter when the British artist David Roberts visited, a time when the square in front of the church would have been crowded with pilgrims and traders selling their wares. Nevertheless, the artist shows the scene not with contemporary life milling around the church, but enlivened only with his usual repertoire of carefully staged, “Oriental” types.



Working Number: UA 023

Name: Hebron

Holding Museum: Sharjah Art Museum / Sharjah Museums Authority

Date: 1835
Materials: Steel engraving
Curator
Justification: According to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the Sanctuary at Hebron houses the graves of Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their family. According to Judaism, it is the second holiest site after Jerusalem. In the Islamic faith, the site is revered because of its associations with Abraham; Muslims view the city of Hebron (Al-Khalil) as one of the sacred cities of their faith.



Working Number: UA 029
Name: Mount Tabor
Holding Museum: Sharjah Art Museum / Sharjah Museums Department
Date: Late 19th century
Materials: Coloured wood engraving
Curator
Justification: Mount Tabor is an important biblical site associated in the Christian tradition with the Transfiguration of Christ, one of the miracles of Jesus, as described in the Gospels. In 1799, during Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition to the area, the valley between Mount Tabor and the Hill of Moreh saw a decisive battle in which a French force of about 3,000 soldiers, under the command of Napoleon and General Jean Baptiste Kléber, faced a Mamluk force of about 20,000 soldiers.



Working Number: LB 033
Name: Lady of Harissa
Holding Museum: -
Date: 1908
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: A widely admired landmark of Lebanon, the Lady of Harissa is a Marian shrine in Lebanon that is visited by large numbers of Christian pilgrims.



Working Number: LB 037
Name: The Miraculous Sea Lady Church
Holding Museum: -
Date: 19th century (unspecified)
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: This simple Greek Orthodox Church in the northern coastal city of Batroun in Lebanon has long been popular with Christian pilgrims. Famous for its many historic churches, which serve the local Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic communities, Batroun is a symbol of intercommunal and interfaith harmony.



Working Number: LB 061

Name: National Evangelical Church of Beirut

Holding Museum: -

Date: 1848

Materials: -

Curator
Justification: The National Evangelical Church of Beirut, established in 1848 by American missionaries, was furnished with the present building in 1869. As the home of the first native Arabic Protestant congregation in the Middle East, the church has been an important focus for Christian visitors to the region.



Working Number: LB 049

Name: Saint Louis Capuchin Church

Holding Museum: -

Date: 1864

Materials: -

Curator
Justification: The Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Louis Des Capuchins in Beirut was established in 1864 by Capuchin missionaries who had worked in Lebanon since the 17th century. Later, during the French Mandate of Lebanon (1920–43), the cathedral, which is named after King Louis XI of France, saw a much increased congregation.