

Archaeology and Sts. Philip and James

Today, we celebrate the feast of Sts. Philip and James. In July 2011, archaeologists working in Turkey announced that they had discovered what they believed to be the tomb of the apostle St. Philip. The octagonal tomb was found on Martyr's Hill near the ruins of a fifth-century church dedicated to St. Philip. According to a tradition recorded in the apocryphal fourth-century document known as the Acts of Philip, around the year 80 the apostle was arrested in Hierapolis, nailed by his feet to a tree, upside down, and ultimately beheaded.

The site of St. Philip's grave became a destination for Christian pilgrims, and the archaeologists even uncovered the broad road that led to the martyrion, or martyr's shrine. The shrine was destroyed in the seventh century by a violent earthquake and fire, after which the relics of St. Philip were transferred to Constantinople (modern Istanbul) and then to Rome where they were enshrined with the relics of St. James the Lesser in the Church of the Twelve Apostles.

The relics of Sts. Philip and James are still venerated in the crypt of the Twelve Apostles. The archaeologists have not yet opened the tomb in the Hierapolis martyrion; if human bones are found in the tomb, it would raise the question of who is buried in the crypt of the Twelve Apostles.

The two Sts. Jameses

In the year 44 St. James the Greater, brother of St. John, was martyred in Jerusalem – the first of the apostles to give his life for the Catholic faith. According to tradition, his body was miraculously transported to northern Spain and buried in a Christian cemetery. It lay there, forgotten, until 814 when a hermit named Pelayo followed a star out to an open field and

uncovered the apostle's relics.

Today they are enshrined in the magnificent Cathedral of St. James in Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Interestingly, beneath the cathedral archaeologists have found a first-century Christian cemetery.

St. James the Less served as the first bishop of Jerusalem and was martyred there: He was thrown from the roof of the temple and then, because he was still alive, stoned to death. According to tradition, James was buried on the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem.

In the sixth century, Emperor Justinian II moved his relics to Constantinople. At some point, a portion or perhaps all of St. James' relics were moved to the Church of the Twelve Apostles in Rome, where today they lie in the same shrine with the relics of St. Philip.

This post is an [excerpt from one that appeared originally in OSV Newsweekly](#) in August 2011.

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Watch this video about when the relics of the saints were exposed in Rome in 2016: