

History of the Jerusalem Patriarchate



A brief history of the Jerusalem Patriarchate.

From the official web-site of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The history of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, also known as the "Romaic Patriarchate" (Deir Rum) is a story of holiness, martyrdom and continuing struggles of the Church of Christ and His Christian flock.

- **A.** The creation of the Church of Jerusalem is dated on the day of Pentecost, on the descending of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem with whom the Holy Apostles through the order of our Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, spread the gospel of the Bible throughout the world. First Bishop of the Church of Jerusalem was the hieromartyr Apostle Saint James, the brother of God (+62 AD).

Following the first persecution of the Christians under the rabbinic Judaism and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus (70 AD), the seat of the Church of Jerusalem was taken to be the city of Pella on the eastern shore of the river Jordan: then the Church of the Holy Land received many Greeks, while the number of Jewish Christians was declining, the Church continued to progressively become more and more Greek, and spreading across the whole of Palestine. A part of her returned and established herself in Jerusalem.

The last members of the Church at Pella returned and settled after the revolution of Bar Kohva (135 AD) in Jerusalem, which was then called the Aelian Capitolin by the Romans who made it a forbidden territory for the Jews, while the holy Shrines were underground with idolatric temples built over them.

At the time, the primary location for the organization of the Church of the Holy Land was the city of Caesaria, as Metropolis under which was the Bishopric of Aelias, namely Jerusalem. The Christians of the Holy land suffered great persecutions from whom many martyred under the Roman Emperors Adrian, Decius, Diocletian and Maximian.

- **B.** Jerusalem came to know a period of prosperity from the reign of the holy King and Equal to the Apostles Constantine the Great (324 AD), until the beginning of the 7th century. With the help of Saint Constantine and his king-mother Saint Helen, the Holy Cross was found as well as the empty Tomb of Christ's Resurrection. They also made known and decorated all the rest of the Holy Shrines of the on earth economy of God's Word, Lord Jesus Christ, by building about twenty five most beautiful holy Churches, on the areas of the Holy Tomb, the horrific Golgotha, the place of the discovery of the Cross, the God graced Cave of His Birth, the place of the Lord's Ascension and other holy places (326-335). The bishops of Jerusalem proved important persons in the fight against heresies such as for example Saint Kyrill the "Catechist" against the heresy of Arianism. Monasticism was developing continuously, receiving a more organized form under the laureate systems of Saints Hilarius and Charitonus at the beginning of the 4th century.

Gradually the Bishopric of Jerusalem which was rendered a pan-Christian shrine, became

the Metropolis of the three Palestines (beginning of the 5th century) while her worshipping form, the "Typicon" was continuously developing in an exemplary fashion with the language of worship almost always being completely Greek.

Finally, the 4th Ecumenical Synod at Chalcedon (451) raised the Church of Jerusalem to Patriarchate, one of the five greatest ecclesiastic centers of the then world (the Pentarchy of Patriarchates) due to the place it held in the conscience of Christians for the excellent worship, theology and monastic life, for her struggles for Orthodoxy and for her memorable ecclesiastic architecture.

The Monasticism of the Jerusalemite Church delivered to the Church during the 5th and 6th century some of the most luminous ascetic faces: Saints Euthymius the Great, Gerasimus the Jordanian, Savvas the Sactified and Kyriacus the Departing, the organizer of the Coenobitic Monasticism Saint Theodosius the Coenobiarch and many others who turned the parched deserts of Judea and Palestine in cities of angelic existence. The Corps of the "industrious Ones" of the Church of Resurrection namely the early form of the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre, was created either by the Bishop Alexander during the 3rd century or after the rebuilding of the Church of Resurrection, it settled finally during this period, at the end of the 5th century AD, under Patriarch Elijah 1st in the area around the Sepulchre. The Patriarchs of Jerusalem and the fore-mentioned Monastic leaders, beyond their looking after their flocks and ascetics, they contributed effectively in the fight against the heresies of Monophysitism and Origenism. Jerusalem was becoming a center of Christian worship and ecclesiastic literature, while the benefaction of the Emperor Justinian was supplementing those of the previous century, such as the active Empress Evdokia of Athens, benefactress of the Holy Land (in the middle of the 5th century), strengthened this progress even more. Just before Jerusalem fell in the hands of the Persians of Chosrou on the 19th May 614, her Church was at her peak, there being four large ecclesiastic Metropolises, of Caesaria, Skythoupolis, Petra and Vostron and about 365 holy Monasteries.

The destruction under the Persians, a sad point in the history of the Sionite Church, left 65,000 dead in Jerusalem and leveled all the holy Shrines and Monasteries, while the Holy Cross, the Patriarch Zacharias and the notables of Jerusalem were taken in captivity to Persia. The lieutenant of the Throne and later Patriarch of Jerusalem, Saint Modesto, brought back the Shrines to almost their original glamour, while the Emperor Iracleus, after many years war, recovered the Holy Cross, which he triumphantly brought back to Jerusalem together with the prisoners, in 630. However, few years later, Iracleus, could not stop the flood of the Arab advance and in the year 638 Jerusalem finally separated from the Greekoroman Empire falling into the hands of the Arabs.

- **C.** The period of the great hardships of the Jerusalem Patriarchate lasted over a millennium, despite the good will of the conqueror of Jerusalem, Omar Ibn Al-Hattab towards the Christians and their Patriarch, Saint Sophronius: Caliph Omar by his personal order (achtiname) recognized the Patriarch of the "Royal Nation" (namely the Greeks) the position of Ethnarch and spiritual leader of all the Christians of Palestine, even of the heterodox as well as ambassador of honour between all the Christian leaders, offering to him guarantees of well being, security, and tax exemption on behalf of the future Muslim leaders.

However his successors, arbitrary Arab leaders, were very harsh; the Christian community started to suffer under co-ordinated attempts to islamize and de-hellenize it.

Despite the adverse external treaties, the spiritual life continued to be cultivated by the persecuted Christians, and the Church of Jerusalem played an important role in the overpowering of the heresies of monophysites and iconmachs (icon opposers), even of the

then appearance for the first time (808) in Jerusalem of the Frankopapist heresy of "filioque". Between the many distinguished theologians, worthy of mention is the Patriarch Saint Sophronius (+638) and the Sabbaite hieromonk Saint John Damascene (ca +784) one of the peak and unique in the ecclesiastic history faces of theology and hymnography.

The 9th century, like the 8th, was characterized by the persecutions of the Christians and the looting at the expense of the Shrines, of the Churches, Monasteries and the simple faithful, while adding the civil war between factions of Arabs and suppressing measures among which was the prohibition of litanies and the teaching of the Greek language, so that the use of Greek by the flock was limited to the worship services within the Churches; also the repeated desecrations and destructions of the Church of Resurrection and of the rest of the Holy Land, the exiles and murder of the Patriarchs etc. The zenith of evil happened under Caliph Al-Hakim (1007) who loosed the worst persecution of all until then. Beyond the impoverishment of the Christians and the confiscation of the sacred treasures, the Church of the Resurrection and the surrounding monasteries were ruined as was also the Shrine of Saint George in Lyddia, with the peak of the persecutions occurring by the looting of the sacristan's storage of the Church of Resurrection and the forced islamization by horrible tortures. A slight improvement occurred by the successor of Hakim, Al Zahir, when also the Emperor Constantine Monomachus of Constantinople (1042-1055) contributed significantly to the restoration of the Church of the Resurrection and the rest of the Holy Lands. However, the Church was again tested by the sharp juxtaposition of the Arabs and the rising power of the Selgic Turks. Some change of this situation was brought about by the arrival of the Crusaders in the year 1099 who through the prompting of the Popes and the Kings of the West, with fire and iron transformed the eastern Roman "Byzantine" Empire in small Latin Kingdoms that reached Jerusalem.

- **D.** The Crusaders showed against the vanquished Muslims a completely opposite attitude to that shown by Omar Hattab to the vanquished Greeks of Jerusalem, causing a horrific slaughter. The Orthodox Church also suffered martyric torments from the Frankolatins presence. The Patriarchs of Jerusalem were sent into exile for 88 years to Constantinople, with their position in Jerusalem being deputized by permission of the Crusaders to the Abbot of the Lavra of Saint Savva. The imposition of the Latin Church on the Orthodox clergy was forceful and all the sacred Shrines were passed on to the Latins and transferred to the clergy of the West, while the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre maintained the right to use the Church of the Discovery of the Cross and have services in Greek at the All Holy Sepulchre as well as in Bethlehem. Also they retained many monasteries outside Jerusalem, while within the Holy City, the metohion close to the Gate of David and the Monastery of the All Holy Theotokos. The Crusaders wishing to partner the Armenians and the Jacobites, ceded to them Churches and Monasteries. An important event of that period was the restoration of many Orthodox Shrines under the Greek Emperor Manuel Comninus (1143-1180), while the Crusaders having rehabilitated the Church of the Resurrection to almost its pre 614 original form, joined again the four Churches that were built under Saint Modesto (Resurrection, Golgotha, Unailing from the Cross, and the Discovery of the Cross) giving the complex of the Church of Resurrection the united form that it kept to this date.
- **E.** The defeat of the Crusaders by the Mameluks of Salah Ed Din in the year 1187 on the heights of Hattin near Tiberius, returned again Jerusalem in the hands of Islam, even though the final departure of the Crusaders from the Holy Land came after their defeat at Ptolemaid in 1291. Salah Ed Din keeping out of respect the order of Omar Hattap, returned all the pilgrimages to the Greeks, but some of his very senior government employees ceded some shrine areas to the Monophysite Copts and Ethiopians. The stance of the Mameluks towards

the Greek Patriarchate changed in the beginning of the 14th century and long lasting persecutions started later on within the framework, during the time of the Patriarch Joachim (1431) with the Church of the Resurrection almost converted into an Islamic mosque. During the year 1334, the Franciscans appeared in Jerusalem settling on the hill of Sion, while in parallel the presence of the Jacobite and the Armenian monks was strengthened. The arrival of many Georgians and Orthodox Serb monks provided a counterbalance which strengthened the Greek Orthodox presence at the Sepulchre even if it was not always without problems. To the Georgians the Greeks ceded the monastery of the Holy Cross, while to the Serbs the Holy Monastery of the Archangels, metohion of the Lavra of Saint Savva.

The fall of Constantinople to the Turks (1453) and the consequent complete loss of the official political protection, marked the beginning of new persecutions. Patriarch Athanasius 4th having travelled to the City (Constantinople) and having succeeded by his prompting in releasing a declaration of the Sultan's order (hati seraph) by Mohammed 2nd the Conqueror (in 1458) averted the danger of the destruction of the Shrines and the loss of the Orthodox rights on them. Patriarch Gregory 3rd (1468-1493AD) repeated the same by succeeding in obtaining a new order from the Conqueror. The Greek clerics suffered greatly through terrible poverty, while their turning to the Conqueror worsened their relationship with the Mameluks and of course with the Latins.

- **F.** The new period, which began with the rule of the Ottoman Turks at the Holy Land (1517) replacing the until then ruling Mameluks of Egypt, became witness of the legendary struggles of the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre for the protection of the all holy Shrines with the help of God, against the schemes of the other Christian dogmas. It was a period of formation of the status quo of the Shrines.

This period of Jerusalem is characterized by the efforts mainly of the Latins and the Armenians, the former based on diplomacy of the European powers, while the latter on economic or other means to access the High Sultanic Gate of Constantinople, with the intention of overturning the favourable regime towards the indigenous (Greek) Church of the Holy Land and achieve primacy or even exclusivity of the All Holy Shrines. Here are some of the struggles.

With the prevalence of the Turks in Palestine, under the successor of Mohammed the Conqueror, Selim (1517), the rights of the Church of Jerusalem were recognized again by the Turkish Authority, the Franciscan presence became the object of adversity and their monastery was destroyed (1523AD). Gradually though their efforts of mixing with the rest of the confessions was strengthened in the running of the Shrines.

The 16th century under the fruitful efforts of the Patriarch Germanus the Sabbaite (1537-1579) the reorganization of the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre was sealed. The Patriarch Germanus took care of the repairs of the Shrines, succeeding in the issuing of a "Firman" (1538), by the Sultan Suleiman for the benefit of the Greeks, and then left for Russia to fundraise, placing thus the basis of the predominant ethos of the "sacred emigrants" of the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre to the homodox (same faith) countries, especially the beyond the Danube States and Russia for the economic strengthening of the All Sacred Shrines. Moreover, he reorganized the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre in a closer union with its Patriarch and Leader. His efforts were continued by his successor Patriarch Sophronius 4th (1579-1608).

In the year 1604 an agreement was signed between France and Turkey, which officially recognized the rights of the Latins in the Holy Lands, so the following year, the Latins entered the Churches of Golgotha and Bethlehem, while at the Holy Land the Jesuits appeared as competitors to the Franciscans. In parallel the Armenians tried to take over the ceremony of the Holy Light but were opposed under the Sultanic order of 1611. The

ambassador of France in Constantinople carried out a struggle against the Patriarch Theophanus 3rd who however succeeded in prompting the issuance of a string of "Firmans" (1631-1634), by the Sultan Mourat, that were equivalent and in agreement with the orders of Mohammed the Conqueror and of Selim.

Prior to this, the Patriarch Theophanus was forced to sell many highly valued sacred heirlooms, to avoid the loss of the Lavra and Metohion of the Archangels to those Latins and Armenians sent to collect the debt which was created by the careless economic practices of the Serbs who lived at the Lavra of Saint Savva.

The Patriarch Paisius (1645-1660), repelled the efforts of the Armenians to inherit the Ethiopian estates but failed to check the efforts of the Armenians on the Monastery of Saint Jacob, so in 1658 this monastery reverted finally to the Armenians, becoming the seat of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The glorious patriarchal service of Docideus 2nd (1669-1707), illumined those dark periods and became a wave breaker against the coordinated actions of the heterodox, who benefitting from the prevailing historical conditions almost succeeded in evicting the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre from the All Holy Shrines. Docideus averting a serious effort by France to surrender the Shrines to the Latin Monks and surviving two assassination attempts by them in Jerusalem, went to Constantinople where in the year 1677 he voided the concerted efforts of the ambassadors of Austria, France, Poland, Venice to cede non historic shrines to the Latins. Within a short time he saved (1680), the Monastery of the Holy Cross from the debts by the Orthodox Georgian Monks to the always stalking Latins and Armenians to collect the debts. However, the war against the Ottoman Gate by the three fore mentioned powers and Russia in 1688, the Mitre of the Patriarchate proved deadly in 1707, as the struggles for the Faith by the Patriarch Chrysanthus, initially succeeded in validating that the Orthodox Patriarch or his delegates prevailed over the Armenians in the ceremony of the Holy Light, while during the years 1719 and 1720, he repossessed part of other rights for the Orthodox. In 1740 France and Turkey countered anew the struggles with Osman (1757) and Osman Mustapha 3rd (1768), who had delivered through the working of Parthenius, legal rights and regulations to the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre which were earlier unjustly denied. Later the situation worsened despite the issuance of a "Firman" by Suleiman for the benefit of the Orthodox. The defeat of the Turks by Austria in 1688 resulted in the issuing of a "Firman" in 1689 to the benefit of the Latins which removed the shrines from the Greeks and encouraged the Latins so much that they proceeded to expel the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre from Jerusalem. However Dositheus vowed not to return to Jerusalem before the removal of the Latins from their illegal possessions of the shrines, which he succeeded, through the issuing of many beneficial "Firmans" but unfortunately with downgraded importance to the Patriarchate. Finally, not succeeding in life to savour the success of his struggles, he departed in 1707 leaving the mitre of the Patriarchate and the struggles for the Faith, to Patriarch Chrysanthus who succeeded from the start in ensuring that the Orthodox Patriarch or his delegate prevailed over the Armenians in the celebration of the Holy Light. In the year 1719 and 1720 he obtained part of other rights for the Orthodox. In 1737 the first Orthodox School of Jerusalem was built under Patriarch Parthenius. A new agreement between France and Turkey in 1740 hurt again the struggles of the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre but two orders from the Sultans Osman (1757) and Osman Mustapha 3rd (1768AD), issued through the actions of Parthenius, restored to the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre the legal rights which they were unjustly deprived since the year 1689. The Patriarch Parthenius formulated the Regulations of the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre which were later improved.

- **G.** The end of the 18th century brought a turn to the status of the shrines, the development of diplomatic matters, and the status quo as we know it to day, and the start of the internal organization process and financial improvement of the Patriarchate.

The agreement of Kiouchouk Kainargi (1774) obligated Turkey to engage in the improvement of the lives of her Christian citizens and to recognize a person in Russia who would be the protector of the Christians of the Holy Lands.

The Latins and Armenians made efforts to intervene in the ghastly Golgotha, in Gethemane and Bethlehem but were unsuccessful. The Armenians trying whatever possible to obtain more rights in the All Holy Tomb through participation in its restoration after its planned destruction, for they set fire in 1808 to the Church of the Resurrection which was then built mostly from wood. In 1809 Sultan Mahmout 2nd issued an order for the restoration of the All Holy Church of the Sepulchre to be done only by the Greeks, led to an acute reaction by the Latins and the Armenians, who tried in whatever way, even through assaults against the Greek workers to impede the restoration of the Church, hoping thus to force the issuing of favourable to them "Firman", for the restoration of the Church. Finally the All Holy Church of the Resurrection was built with the sweat, blood and money from the meager wealth of the enslaved "Generation of the Romians (Greeks), it was inaugurated on the 13th September 1810, a memorable day of the Anniversary of the Church of the Resurrection, characterized as the "Miracle of the Faith of Greeks".

The Greek Revolution of 1821, placed the brotherhood of the Sepulchre with the rest of the Greeks under the unfavourable category of the betrayers of the High Gate, opened the grounds to the heterodox for their undesired expulsion of the Greeks from the Holy Lands while the Brotherhood of the Sepulcher suffered great hardships by the Turks. In 1824 the Armenians occupied a part of Sion and tried to occupy also the Golgotha and received the same rights to the Holy Sepulcher as the Latins. In 1834 when Palestine was in the hands of Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt and using the opportunity of the restoration work of the Shrines made necessary after the earthquake of 1834, the Latins and the Armenians both tried to usurp complete control of the Holy Shrines. The pressure on Turkey by the European powers led to the reconstruction of the Latin Patriarchate in 1847 which was disallowed after the Crusades, while the cooperating English (Anglicans) and German (Lutherans) Protestants as well as the Uniates had already appeared in the Holy Land by 1847. Despite all these, the Holy Lands during this period as in the past received strong Orthodox help from the Russian Empire, whose involvement unfortunately was not after all completely selfless.

The arrival in Jerusalem of the Russian Archimandrite Porphyrius Uspenski during 1843 and the construction of the Orthodox Russian Delegation in 1848 strengthened the Orthodox presence, but at the same time the Russian Delegation cultivated a climate of artificial juxtaposition between the Greek speaking Brotherhood of the Sepulchre and her Arabic speaking flock, so that the mixing of the Russian interests in the ecclesiastic matters of Jerusalem became easier on tying of the flock to the chariot of Russia, this policy which from the beginning received unfavourable criticism even from Russia herself, culminated in the events which led to the end of the patriarchal service of the illustrious Patriarch Kyrill 2nd of Jerusalem who was misled by the Russian diplomats in Constantinople, to avoid participation in the 1872 reigning synodic condemnation of the Bulgarian schism and the hidden behind it nationalism and panslavism. This of course led Kyrill 2nd to oppose the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre, which at its Council in 1872 first decided and finally brought about his dethronement despite the persecutions conducted by him and the Turkish police on the Brotherhood. However, in 1873 he elected as his successor Patriarch Procopius 2nd. Russia reacting to these events, confiscated the estates of the All Holy Sepulcher in Bessarabia and in the Caucasus which were returned again in 1875, the same year the Tall Gate validated

the new internal "Regulations of the Romaic (Greek) Patriarchate of Jerusalem".

Despite these, the long patriarchal service of Kyrill 2nd (1845-1872), was decisive and in the main beneficial to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. During his days, among others, the Printing Press of the Patriarchate was built (1853) which was the oldest in Palestine and the Theological School of the Holy Cross (1855) a theological offshoot of great learning of the Orthodox Church, furthermore the practice of electing the Patriarch of Jerusalem in Constantinople was discontinued, having lasted for the last two centuries, so that the Church of Sion became strengthened under the centre of Romiosyni (Greeks) of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The international relations and the intense diplomatic sparring between France and Russia in 1855 for the advancement of the rights of the Latins or of the Orthodox respectively, led to victory of the latter, so that in 1852 a beneficial towards the Greeks order (Hati Sherif) was issued, and in 1853 one more order clarifying the earlier one which determined the operation of the Shrines and corresponding rights of the Greek Patriarchate and Christian confessions, composed essentially the present status of the Shrines. The 1856 treaty of Paris confirmed the then existing Shrines status which was entrenched by the Convention of Berlin in 1878. This status is justly beneficial to the oldest Church in the Holy Land, the Orthodox Church, which was further validated by the Community of Nations and later by the Organization of the United Nations (1947-1950). To day it exists strong, and is diligently guarded by all the Christian Communities, as a safe key to the rights of operation and to the interest of the shrines, since "he who guards the order, is guarded by it".

Notable activity was displayed in the end of the 19th century by the Sacristan, Euthymius of the All Holy Church of the Resurrection who renovated the building complex of the Patriarchate, completing the renovation of most areas of the Christian sectors of the Old City of Jerusalem, from the Ioppi Gate (Gate of David) to the Church of Resurrection. Because of him this sector has been named after him (Aftimos sector). The School of the Holy Cross which after a short interruption (1873) had resumed its work under Patriarch Gerasimus (1891-1897), later again suspending its activities but again reopening. The Holy Community of the Sepulchre, namely the Brotherhood, assumed guardianship of the manuscripts and other treasures of the Patriarchate as well as the real estate property which due to the 20th century developments in Palestine became embroiled in many difficulties. At the same time the Orthodox flock, which comprises the object of the shepherding care of the Jerusalem Patriarchate and the body of its confession in the Holy Land, confronts the challenges of the ever increasing religiopolitical crisis but also originating from within it due to the propaganda of the heterodox Christian flocksof the other Christian communities, unfortunately distances itself from its patristic hearth in search of a better life, and emigrates far from the Holy Land.

Epilogue

The Church of Jerusalem is the only self sprouted and indigenious Church of the Holy Land, preserving herself fully Orthodox, as well as preserving unadulterated the Orthodox Faith of the Holy Apostles and Fathers. The rest of the Christian confessions and communities, representing in the Holy Land their ecclesiastic National or Assemblies administrations which are far away from the Holy Land, clearly lack the important body of the "industrious Ones", the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre. The Greek character of the Church of Sion beyond its immediate historic reference on the ancestry of the first Christians in Palestine, because the Patriarchate of Holy Sion inspires through the universality of the Orthodox Greeks, the spiritual and Christianocentral culture of the Holy Fathers exalts the close national bonds, thus ensuring universality also to all those who access the All Holy Shrines.

The warring divisions in the last few years in the area of the Middle East and the consequential problems led to the ever continuing decline of the Christian population of the Holy Land. The Church of Sion continues despite these, its mission to guide its flock and to preserve the liturgical character of the Shrines, by which the truth seeking souls, locals or pilgrims find their Good Shepherd, there where Himself through the Cross and the Resurrection "worked the Salvation in the midst of the Earth (Ps 73:12).

Greek Text

German Text

Pantokratoras

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