

The Holy Sacristy

In the Patriarchates of the Eastern Church and especially in the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem there have always been sacristies adjusted to the Churches for the preservation and protection of holy vestments, church vessels, manuscripts of codes, portable icons and all holy artefacts. For this reason the sacristies were originally called artefact archives divided into archives for sacristies and those for liturgic items.

Initially the holy vessels and the brocaded vestments were kept in Prothesis and Diakoniko, on either side of the Holy Altar. Symeon of Thessaloniki notes that the Protheses were present in the big churches for the keeping of the vessels (p. 155,348). Isidore of Pyromallous notes that after the Holy Communion, the holy vessels would be taken to the sacristy, while the priests come out of the sacristy and remove their vestments near the Prothesis.

In the Patriarchate of Jerusalem there is one of the oldest and most important sacristies of the Orthodox Church. According to history sources, when Saint Helen erected the first Church of the Resurrection, she saw to the creation of a special space for the keeping of the holy vessels. In that space were deposited precious Empire offerings, as well as a silver and gold casing made by Saint Helen, which contained a precious fragment of the Sacred Cross. This casing was kept in a special room on the left hand side of the Basilica entrance, as witnessed by the Anonymous travelogue: On the left hand side of the Basilica entrance there is a chamber where the Lord's Cross is placed. A similar piece of information is given by Antony's travelogue in 570: In Constantine's Basilica by the Sepulchre and Golgotha, at the forecourt of the Basilica, there is the room where the wood of the Cross has been deposited.

We draw information about the wealth of the holy artefacts in the Church of the Resurrection from Aitheria's travelogue, where it is mentioned that every Sunday you see nothing but gold and precious stones and silk everywhere. "As far as the coverings are concerned, they are made of pure silk and gold. All precious items made of gold and precious stones are taken out on that day; as for the number or the weight of the candles, canticles and lamps, or the various other vessels, how can one estimate their value or describe them?"

Aitheria also mentions that Constantine the Great offered in the Church sacristy valuable gold and silver gifts decorated with precious stones. Most likely, the sacristy hosted King Constantine's brocaded with real gold holy vestment he had offered the Archbishop of the holy city Makarios in order to wear it when he was performing the mystery of Christening.

Later on the sacristy was enriched with other offerings, such as those of Eudokia and Theodosius, who offered a gold-decorated cross to be placed on Golgotha. Augusta Theodora donated her pearl cross and Justinian sent many other holy artefacts such as the onyx chalice which, according to the tradition Christ used at the Last Supper, as well as the gold vessels of Solomon's Temple. All the above mentioned precious offerings were seized at the fall of the Holy City by the Persians in 614, when the Church of the Resurrection was burnt and destroyed.

When Heraklios recovered the holy items, he returned many of them to the Holy Sepulchre's sacristy which again began to receive rich offerings. In a short while the sacristy obtained so many offerings that it became one of the most important sacristies of the Byzantine Empire. Nevertheless, most of them were destroyed with the recurrent arsons and looting in the Church of the Resurrection, while others were sold at difficult for the finances of the Patriarchate times, or were donated to exceptional people of authority. Indeed, history documents mention that Patriarch Cyril was accused of selling

Makarios' holy vestment (Constantine's gift to him) for the urgent needs of the Patriarchate and Patriarch Theodosius offered Ignatius of Constantinople the complete set of liturgic vestments of Saint James the brother of God, his Episcopal miter, the holy relic of his head, together with a holy vessel of the Resurrection artefacts, and a silver holder with an embossed icon for the sanctification of the Church there.

In 1009, when the Church of the Resurrection was destroyed by Al-Hakim, his soldiers stole all holy vestments with the silver and gold vessels that were kept in the Holy Sepulchre's sacristy. Likewise, when the Latin Fathers were dislodged by Salah ad-Din in 1187, they took all the holy offerings of the Church of the Resurrection, while the Latin Patriarch removed all the gold and silver artefacts and jewellery from the Holy Sepulchre and the other churches. Finally, in 1439, when the Mamluks wanted to seize the Church and turn it into a mosque, Patriarch Joachim redeemed the church by offering them 6.500 gold Venetian coins and many of the sacristy's holy artefacts.

During the post-Byzantine period the Holy Sepulchre's sacristy received wealthy donations and valuable artefacts from the clergy of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood – Patriarchs, Bishops, sacristy assistants, monks – from Russian Tsars and sovereign lords of Danube as well as famous and anonymous pious pilgrims. In 1559 Tsar Ivan sent to the Patriarch a valuable cloak apart from the financial aid of one thousand gold coins. Likewise, in 1593 before he became Tsar, Boris Goudounof sent a decorated with precious stones crystal chalice, three gold bowls and a gold censer. Moreover, once a Tsar in 1604, Boris sent a Greek Gospel decorated with precious stones and pearls, which is still preserved to this day in the sacristy, as a token of gratitude for Patriarch Sophronius' former gifts to him. Later on, in 1606 when the Patriarchate faced again financial disability, Tsar Theodore sent Sophronius 980 roubles for the Patriarchate monasteries

with the request to have two ever-lit canticles in the Holy Sepulchre and one in Golgotha. On the contrary, when the Serbian monks left Saint Savvas monastery due to their debts, in order to extinct the debt and obtain the Lavra's ownership for the Greeks, Patriarch Theophanes sold holy artefacts from the Holy Sepulchre and his own Episcopal miter in Egypt; some time later, the Orthodox Seydilah bought these items from the Hebrews and returned them to Theophanes.

Great financial aid to the Holy Sepulchre was given in 1634 by the pious Sovereign Lord of Moldovlachia Vasilios, while rich gifts were received in 1643 by Tsar Mihail and the Russian Archimandrite Anthimos: 10 big icons of the Saviour, Theotokos and other Saints, a valuable miter for the Patriarch which cost 880 roubles and other valuable gifts were sent from him. Additionally in 1652, Tsar Alexios and his wife sent to the Holy Sepulchre icons, church vessels and holy vestments. The gold miter of Patriarch Paissios, made in 1657, is also kept in the Holy Sepulchre's sacristy.

Patriarch Nectarios in 1664 displayed a particular interest for the decorum and order of the sacristy. Knowing that the Brotherhood Fathers were giving the holy relics away as a blessing, he arranged and labelled the most attested designated relics in crystal casings, securing them with silver bindings. In the centre of one casing he placed a big silver and gold cross, while he adorned part of the Sacred Cross with gold and precious stones, adding other holy vessels in it. He ordered the priests to hold the holy relics preceding the Sacred Cross at the Big Entrance of the Sacred Gifts in the Liturgy.

Patriarch Dositheos also provided the Church of the Resurrection with luxurious vestments and holy vessels, arriving in Jerusalem in 1671 with one gold and forty silver canticles, and a gold censer. However he notes that in 1683 all holy items of the Holy Sepulchre were pledged to lenders due to the financial disability of the Brotherhood.

Many remarkable holy items were offered in the sacristy of the Holy Sepulchre by Hagiotaphite Fathers, pious Sovereign Lords and faithful pilgrims in the 18th century. Nevertheless, during the Armenian arson in the Church of the Resurrection in 1808, all holy vestments and items were burned or destroyed and only the big sacristy was saved with the holy items and relics in it. Despite the above, when in the years 1819-1825 the Hagiotaphite Fathers suffered atrocious afflictions by the Muslims, the Brotherhood was forced to unlace and melt all silver and gold items from the Church of the Resurrection and the rest of the monasteries. Ever since, the holy sacristy of the Holy Sepulchre is constantly being enriched with valuable offerings which are devoutly kept along with the other holy items and reveal the deep faith of the multitude of pilgrims who gather to the Holy Land from all over the world.

The Elder Sacristan is solely concerned about the security and preservation of the holy items, and is also responsible for the order of the Holy Altars, the Priests' vestments, and all organizational Church-related matters. The Sacristan's office is of prime importance in the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and this post (Offikion) is used in many ways in other monasteries, especially though in the Church of the Resurrection in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

The enrichment and preservation of the holy items of the sacristy of the Holy Sepulchre are the fruit of the long-lasting striving of each of the Patriarchs, Elder Sacristans and the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood.

Catalogue of Sacristans			
Praylios	336	Porfyrios	1511
Saint Porfyrios	394	Polykarpos	1540
Anastasios	461	Savvas	1575
Cosmas	476	Antony	1577
Chryssipos	479	Cosmas	1598

Kyrikos	491	Kyriakos	1630
John iii	513-524	Theodosius	1655
Azarias	578-602	Theoctistos	1668
Anastasios	602-632	Zackheos	1677
Dorotheos	632-634	Joachim, monk	1714
Agathias	1050	David	1729
Joseph	1118	Sophrony	1755
George	1122	Cosmas	1826
Nicodemus	1140	Abramios	1827-1840
Anastasios	1185	Amvrosios	1848-1858
Antiohos	1208	Seraphim	1858-1895
Eustathios	1240	Euthymios	1895-1917
Hilarion	1251	Gerasimos	1917-1927
Euthymios	1281	Kyriakos	1927-1960
John	1320	Germanos	1960-1965
Leontios	1332	Daniel	1965-1981
Jonah	1360	Kyriakos	1981-1985
Symeon	1399	Nikephoros	1985-1988
Isaiah	1435	Daniel	1988-2001
Philotheos	1460	Theophylactos	2001-2002
Ephrem	1482	Theophilos	2002-2005