

Paris and Berlin Conventions

Without a doubt, the international treaties of Paris in 1856 and Berlin in 1878 had put an end to the problematic situation that kept both the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood in captivity. Until then, the entire Orthodox clergy had had to be alert in a multi-faceted struggle against illegal claimants to the holy shrines. Their struggle was fought on several levels: by travelling to the Orthodox faithful in distant countries for material and moral support, as well as by impeding the issue or implementation of decrees by the Sultan that would favour the Latins and Armenians, whilst at the same time promoting decrees to the benefit of the Orthodox. On a personal level, clerics ran the risk of becoming victims of assault.

Therefore, once the pilgrimage status had been settled, the clergy could look into other matters of importance. After Timotheos' sudden death, Archimandrite Photios was elected Patriarch in 1882, only to be rejected by the Sublime Porte, that went on to impose a new round of elections. The Holy Synod chose Nicodemus, then representative of the Holy Sepulchre to Russia, as the new Patriarch. His engagement both in imposing order amidst the ranks of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, but also in safekeeping the Holy Shrines, had been remarkable indeed. Patriarch Nicodemus would take an interest in running schools for the people, in the Theological School of the Holy Cross, in recording and transferring all valuable codices from the library of the Monastery of the Holy Cross and of St Savva Lavra, to the library of the Hieron Koinon. However, in spite of his efforts to defend the rights of the Orthodox in the Holy Shrines, he was accused of having led the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood to a debt impasse. Finally, in the wake of an assassination attempt against him, he resigned. Nicodemus was replaced by Patriarch Gerasimus (1891-1897) a man of remarkable zeal and determination. Not

only was he faced with very acute financial problems, he also came up against the notorious question of pilgrimage brought on first by the Latins and later by the Armenians in the Church of Bethlehem as regards the passing of the Orthodox priest from the Northern Gate of the Holy Cavern, the distribution of the *antidoron* and other relevant issues. Patriarch Gerasimus also worked towards the development and improvement of education with the reopening of the Theological School of the Holy Cross by the subvention of Sacristan Euthymius.

Patriarch Gerasimus was succeeded by Archbishop Damian of Philadelphia (1897-1931). His prelacy was replete with events and struggles caused by both external factors and disagreeing members of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood. His ability to deal with men of heterodox opinions, his political acuteness and persistence helped preserved the nation's rights on the holy shrines. He also worked for the reparation of churches, schools, hospitals and other charitable institutions. Approximately four years after the death of Damian, Timotheos, then Archbishop of Jordan, was elected Patriarch of Jerusalem (1935-1955); he was an erudite prelate and earnest man of letters. His diplomacy and profound knowledge of patriarchal matters would lead him to engage in manifold activities, e.g. erecting building and restoring the great basilica on the Mount of Olives. He also contributed to repairing the historical Monastery of St Savva, whilst inaugurating a new press at the Patriarchate's printing house. Patriarch Timotheos had also been an unyielding defender of the pilgrimage status. He was succeeded by Archbishop Benedict of Tiberias (1957-1980) who, during his long prelacy, would deal successfully with the unruly situation that threatened the Patriarchate's privileges and the position of the Orthodox in the Holy Land. By means of a personal appeal to the king of Jordan, he secured in 1958 the issue of a law recognizing the sovereignty of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and the safeguarding of the Patriarchate's assets. At the same time,

he organized the Patriarchate's internal administration system and contributed to the preservation of the shrines. Benedict was succeeded to the Patriarchal Throne by Archbishop Diodorus of Hierapolis (1981-2000) who went on to pay special attention to the construction and restoration of churches and buildings, as well as to putting the patriarchal property to use. Patriarch Diodorus also contributed to the roofing of the basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the continuation of restoration works at the Church of the Resurrection.

On the central road that connects Jerusalem to Bethlehem stands the Monastery of the Prophet Elias. According to tradition, this is where the Prophet had sought refuge from Jezebel's wrath; according to others, this is the site where the Magi saw the Nativity Star again, after meeting king Herod in Jerusalem. It is also said that on this very site Mary and Joseph sat down to rest on their way to Bethlehem. The "Seat" as the shrine is known, was located in this area; a church and monastery was built upon it during the 5th century.