

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem

In the history of the shrines at the Holy Land, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate plays a primary role. Its formation is traced back to the day of Pentecost. According to the testimony of Apostolic authors, the first bishop of the Church of Jerusalem was James the Brother of the Lord, who systematized the divine liturgy and contributed significantly to the Apostolic Synod, which met in Jerusalem around 50-51AD, which proclaimed the self-containment of Christianity and its freedom from the Law of Moses. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70AD had tragic repercussions. In 251 during the persecution of the Christians by Decius, but also during the persecutions which followed until 313, Christianity offered a multitude of martyrs.

From the 4th century, Jerusalem became the focus of the byzantine emperors and the Church rediscovered its magnificence and its radiance with the discovery of the Holy Cross by Saint Helen and the construction of magnificent churches at the Most Holy Shrines.

The rebuilding of the Church of the Resurrection and of the rest of the holy edifices at Golgotha and at the place of discovery proved Jerusalem to be the centre of Pan-Christianity. The emperor Iracleus also showed interest who with his victorious wars cast out the Persians, raised the Holy Cross and continued the reconstruction of the sacred edifices. Famous is the Theological teaching of John Damascene.

In 1099 the Crusaders entered Jerusalem. The Greek monks were thrust aside. On the 14th century the Franciscans managed to penetrate the shrines. The decline of Byzantium and the fall

of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453 worsened even more the position of the Jerusalem Patriarchate. The intensification of the struggle abated in the middle of the 19th century with the signing of the "Treaty of the Shrines" Status Quo.

The whole second half of the 19th century, the Patriarchate entered a bright period of rehabilitation and renaissance. The entire Orthodox Christian world with the by now free Greek Nation in charge, contributed with gifts and considerable financial help towards the struggle of reconstruction. Moreover, monks and benefactors, members of the Patriarchate, purchased vast expanses, built churches, restored and rebuilt the ruined monasteries, thus producing the necessary economic base for the upkeep of the Patriarchate. Today with the responsibilities, its extensive history and its huge inheritance, it rises bright and proud in the entire Christian world, cognizant that it must continue in the future its sacred destiny.