

# The Holy Edicule

The Holy Edicule, which is raised over the place of Christ's tomb, is on the west side of the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection and encompasses part of the west side of the Rotunda. The original sepulchre had obviously the Jewish burial carved stone monument form. Following its discovery by St. Helen, this rock was accordingly reconstructed and the tomb remained uncovered. Eusevius informs us that the Holy Sepulchre was decorated with beautiful pillars but does not mention anything about an enclosed edifice. In contrast, according to Aetherian, the Holy Sepulchre was already in an enclosed edifice while later testimonies indicate that in its original form, it was an uncovered monument with an octagonal roof carved in rock.

From the descriptions of an anonymous pilgrim from Placentia (570 A.D.) and Arcoulfos (679-688) it is inferred that the Holy Sepulchre, was originally carved from a monolith surrounded by a circular wall, and was covered by a ciborium which was supported by pillars. It remained in this form until the destruction of the Church by Al Hakim (1009-1012 AD) when the rock was leveled and the enclosing edifice was completely destroyed. Following the restoration of the Church by Constantinos VII Monomachos (1042-1048 AD) the Holy Sepulcher was finally enclosed inside a new building. Then it took the form of an elongated mausoleum which widened in the west to a polygonal semicircle and was surrounded by pillars attached to the surrounding walls. The Holy Edicule took its present form in 1810 as an engraved inscription on the façade declares:

THE EDICULE OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER WAS RECONSTRUCTED COMPLETELY FROM ITS FOUNDATIONS THROUGH THE CHARITY OF THE ORTHODOX ROMANS (Byzantine Greeks) DURING THE PATRIARCHATE OF POLYKARPOS IN THE YEAR 1810 AND MONTH OF MARCH.

This construction replaced an earlier one, which was destroyed in the fire of 1808, when the monument was covered with tiles

of reddish-white stone. The whole edifice is enclosed by pillars and pseudo columns which form the corresponding arches with simple decorative elements with richly engraved decor, as much outside as inside.

The facade of the holy Edicule faces the east, where there is also the single entrance. The earlier entrance used to have a wooden door, ornate with mother-of-pearl, which after having been saved from the great fire of 1808 was moved to the museum of the Patriarchate where it is kept to this day. The new door has silver handles on which is engraved with small letters: Lord, open us the door of your mercy (on the right) and do watch over us from your holy dwelling (on the left). On the threshold (door-step) of the door there is an engraved inscription with the architect's name: BASILICA ARCHITECT H. KOMNENOS KALFA A...

On either side of the Edicule entrance there are two impressive marble candelabra, with the inscription: OWNED AND DEDICATED TO CHRIST BY THE ORTHODOX ROMANS (BYZANTINE GREEKS).

Obviously, this inscription does not refer only to the candelabra but it also comprises the declaration of the primacy of the Greek Orthodox, the exclusive renovators and genuine masters of the shrine. At present, a pilgrim will observe a total of twelve candelabra, six large and six small ones, which belong equally to the Orthodox, Latin, and Armenians.

The façade of the holy Edicule is adorned with four monolithic pillars of reddish-white marble, with Corinthian style crowns. Above the entrance of the monument, a silver/gold plated relief of Christ's resurrection is depicted. Above this depiction there is an open scroll with the inscription: STANDING IN FRONT OF YOUR LIFE GIVING SEPULCHRE, WE THE WORTHLESS ONES, OFFER PRAISE TO YOUR UNFATHOMABLE MERCY, CHRIST OUR GOD. A similar scroll of smaller dimension was carved below the above depiction with the inscription: HAVING

WITNESSED CHRIST'S RESURRECTION WE WORSHIP THE HOLY LORD JESUS, THE ONLY SINLESS ONE. In front of this relief of the resurrection, burn twelve hanging oil lamps which are under the care and responsibility of the Orthodox, to whom also belong an additional larger one that burns in front of the whole monument.

In the middle of the holy Edicule façade and above the hanging oil lamps is a royal crown, which is held by two angelic forms. At the same level, from right and from left, uniform orthogonal forms are depicted which carry the inscription: WE THE FAITHFUL WORSHIP YOUR LIFE-GIVING TOMB FOR YOU WERE BURIED IN IT AND RESURRECTED, CHRIST YOU ARE INDEED OUR GOD. THOSE WHO DENY THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, COMING TO CHRIST'S SEPULCHER, LEARN THAT THE BODY OF THE LIFE GIVER DIED AND ROSE AGAIN IN CONFIRMATION OF THE LAST RESURRECTION, WHICH WE BELIEVE IN. On the other three sides of the Edicule there are uniform orthogonal forms depicted in which an inscription, in capital letters, runs the length of them: NATIONS AND PEOPLES PRAISE CHRIST OUR GOD WHO WILLINGLY ENDURED THE CROSS FOR US, AND DWELT IN HADES FOR THREE DAYS AND WORSHIP HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD THROUGH WHICH EVERYTHING WAS ILLUMINED TO THE END OF THE WORLD.

The area above the Edicule is surrounded by a decorated parapet with small square supports and pillars. In the fold there is a relief depicting an eye with the inscription "He watches everything", while an impressive floral arrangement adorns its base. The parapet sits on a hoop which rests on the crowns of the pseudo-pillars depicted on a carved relief on the marble plating. The whole structure is covered by a double curvature lead cupola, which is supported by the parapet wall with pillars and pillar supports, while it rests on a high arched rim.

In the facade of the holy Edicule two new additions were incorporated by the Latin and the Armenians, who also have rights to the church. Above the relief icon of the

Resurrection, the Latin added a western-style oil-painting of the same theme, while the Armenians added a similar depiction below it. In front of these icons burn hanging oil-lamps which are under the care of the in house dogmas, seven large ones by the Latin and twelve smaller ones by the Armenians. These later additions occupy a large part of the surface of the Greek inscriptions.

The interior of the holy Edicule is divided in two sections, the ante-room, which is called the holy Stone or Chapel of the Angel, and the main burial chamber, the Most Holy Sepulchre. In the middle of the ante-room, on a small square table and in a special marble box, is kept a part of the stone on which the angel stood when he announced Christ's resurrection to the myrrh bearing women. Along the length of the four sides of the box and within special frames, runs an inscription describing the event: AN ANGEL OF THE LORD DECENDED FROM HEAVEN AND ROLLED BACK THE STONE FROM THE ENTRANCE OF THE TOMB.

Above the holy Stone and in the middle there is a small cupola for the ventilation of the area. From the ceiling hang fifteen oil-lamps, of which five belong to the Orthodox, five to the Latin, four to the Armenians and one to the Copts. Inside, the ante-room is plated with marble walls and the floor is laid with multi coloured marble. There are two oval openings in the walls of the chapel for the transfer of the holy Light.

A low entrance with a baroque relief decoration leads to the chamber of the Most Holy Sepulcher. On the top of the pillars and the door transom there is a depiction of the Stone with the myrrh-bearing women on the left, and the archangel Gabriel on the right. The holy name of each of these figures has been written: MARY OF JAMES/ SALOME/MARY MAGDALENE/ THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL, while there is an inscription engraved in a frilled band on the lower part of the door transom: MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN WHY DO YOU SEEK THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? The door covering is illustrated with Christ's resurrection. On the marble above this illustration two trumpeting angels are

depicted with a written scroll: COME AND SEE THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD LAY.

The Holy Sepulchre consists of a square room carved in the rock, which was covered with marble slabs during the last restoration. The actual tomb is to the north of this chamber and its main and upper sides are covered with two white marble slabs.

A relief of Christ's resurrection surrounded by four angels of which the two lower angels are worshipping Him and the other two at the top are holding a crown, dominates the monument. On either side there is an engraved inscription announcing the life giving Resurrection: WHO DO YOU SEEK? ARE YOU SEEKING JESUS OF NAZARETH, WHO WAS CRUCIFIED? HE HAS RISEN, HE IS NOT HERE; SEE THE PLACE WHERE THEY LAID HIM. Above the Holy Sepulcher there is a marble overhang on whose upper part there is a frieze running along it engraved with the troparion of Easter Sunday matins: YOUR RESURRECTION, CHRIST SAVIOUR, ANGELS WORSHIP IN HEAVEN AND US ON THE EARTH YOU MADE US WORTHY WITH CLEAN HEART TO WORSHIP YOU. On either sides of the relief icon of the Orthodox, two additional relief portable icons of the Resurrection were added, one by the Latin an embossed relief, and the other by the Armenians an oil painting, both of which partly cover the first depiction.

Under the rim of the cupola, an engraving runs along the room on the marble slabs with the troparion of John Damascene: AS LIFE-BEARING, AND AS EVEN MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN PARADISE, AND GLORIOUS THAN ANY ROYAL BRIDAL SUITE IS YOUR TOMB, CHRIST, THE WELLHEAD OF OUR RESURRECTION. Above the entrance it is written the architect's utterance: REMEMBER LORD, YOUR SERVANT VASILIKOS KALFA X. KOMNENOS FROM MYTILINI 1810.

The Holy Sepulchre is illuminated by continuously burning candles and forty three hanging oil-lamps, thirteen of which belong to the Orthodox, thirteen to the Latin, thirteen to the Armenians and four to the Copts.

In the Holy Edicule the Orthodox perform daily the Divine Service, during which the Holy Tomb is used as the Holy Prothesis and the Holy Stone as the Holy Altar. In this room there is always an alert Hagiotaphite monk (Monk from the Brotherhood of the Sepulchre monastic order) to guard the rights of the brotherhood in this holiest Shrine of the Christian world.