

The Horrendous Golgotha

The most gut wrenching experience of every pilgrim, who enters the Church of the Resurrection, is when he ascends up to the place, called "The Place of the Skull" which in Hebrew is called "Golgotha" (John 19, 17), where the mystery of divine economy was accomplished and where the New Testament was sealed with the blood of the Theanthropos (Godman) which cleansed humanity from the evils of sin and death.

Originally, the hill of Golgotha was in the southern corner of the interior atrium of the complex, constructed by Constantine the Great where a large golden cross was installed in remembrance of this world salvific event. This cross, according to sources, was an offering of Emperor Theodosios II (420). However, according to the testimony of an anonymous pilgrim from Placentia, this Cross, in 570, stood on an open rock and was fenced around with a silver-gold railing. During the restoration of the holy shrines by Patriarch Modestos, a shelter was built above the Golgotha for the first time, and remained so until the 11th century, when a wall was built on its eastern side. During the period of the Crusaders, an entrance was opened to the south, which at present has been converted into a window. At that time, two long, parallel running arched chapels with cruciform copulas were built, of which one of them, to the north, belongs to the Orthodox, while the other one to the south belongs to the Latin.

The rock of the horrible Golgotha, which at present is covered with marble, is situated in the south east side of the catholicon, east to the "Apocathilosis" (the Deposition of Christ) and rises four and a half meters above the ground floor of the Church. Four staircases lead to this place, the first one to the east of the Holy Gate, the second one is through the entrance of the southern side of the Catholicon, the third one starts from the holy Step of the Catholicon and the last one from the south-east flats of the complex.

The Orthodox chapel is distinguished by its exceptional external decor and imposing appearance. To the eastern side and under the Altar, a circular opening in the rock can be seen, where the cross of the martyrdom was erected. This opening is covered with a silver disc in the form of a shield, on which five scenes of Christ's passion were etched. Above the opening a Holy Altar made of marble has been installed with the inscription: DESPOTA CHRIST, WITH THE HOLY BLOOD POURING FROM YOUR HOLY SIDE AND YOUR LIFE GIVING SACRIFICE, ON THE ONE HAND HAS STOPPED THE IDOLS, AND ON THE OTHER THE WHOLE EARTH INVOKES YOUR SACRIFICE WITH PRAISE.

Behind the Holy Altar a large Cross has been installed on which hangs the Crucified with the Theotokos and John on either side. To the north of the Holy Altar there is a Prothesis like a ciborium supported on pillars with the inscription: CHRIST OUR GOD YOU WORKED THE SALVATION ON THE EARTH, EXTENDING YOUR HOLY ARMS ON THE CROSS.

The chapel of the Latin, according to tradition, is the place of Christ's crucifixion. On its eastern side there is a silver altarium, behind which a mosaic depicts the horrible event. There is a smaller altarium, on the left of the centre with a relief icon of the Theotokos in which She receives the stab of the sword, according to the gospel: "and a sword will pierce through your own soul" {Luke, 5}.

To the east side, between the Orthodox and the Latin shrine there is a crack in the rock of Golgotha, which according to the tradition resulted from the earthquake during the Crucifixion.