

Holy Land
The journal of a traveler
Author Sofia Kioroglou

Copyright Sofia Kioroglou

(CC-BY-NC-SA) Sofia Kioroglou

Digital copy June 2019

A Few words about this digital book

This year has seen the publication of two Holy Land books as I would like to call them, namely “Literary Journeys to the Holy Land” and “Mystical Experiences in the Holy Land” in a Greek printed edition. They were critically acclaimed books that prompted the digital English version of the book you are holding in a rather revamped fashion. Due to lack of funds, the English version in print will take a little longer than anticipated so I have decided to bring it out in its digital form for all to read and enjoy!

Introduction

The book you are holding is a fusion of poetry and narrative. The book is inspired by my pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Sinai and reads more like a travelogue than anything else. If you enjoy books with a religious subject-matter, then this is the ideal book for you.

The book sprang out of my need to communicate to others my personal life-transforming experiences which will surely raise eyebrows by some more rationalist minds but I am in there for the long haul as the truth must not be concealed. The truth opens doors to cross so many barriers and lead to the one and only true faith. I sincerely hope that my writings will speak to your heart and this edition will be the jumping-off point for a better acquaintance with the Holy Pilgrimage places of Sinai and The Holy Land. May the Grace of The Holy Spirit visit upon you and kindle your interest to walk where our Lord Jesus Christ walked , worked miracles, was crucified, resurrected and ascended. Amen.

This book is dedicated to Fr Ignaty the Russian of Hebron

Igoumen Ignaty was a humble monk who was bestowed with many gifts of the Holy Spirit. Hebrews, Muslims and Orthodox Christians came all this way to meet this saint man. The present writer remembers how, in the 1970s, the superior of the Hebron monastery, Igumen Ignaty, neither allowed members of the Moscow Patriarchate on the territory of the monastery (he drove them away with a stick!) nor commemorated the Patriarch of Jerusalem (although he had friendly relations with some members of that patriarchate). A former member of the Catacomb Church and a close friend of St. John Maximovich, Fr. Ignaty had the gifts of tears and prophecy and was revered as a saint even by the Muslims. He feared God alone, and therefore even the enemies of the faith, sensing his spiritual power, sought to kiss the hem of his garment as he walked the streets of Jerusalem.

Liturgy in Hebron with Fr. Ignatius the Russian.

Archimandrite Chrysostom(Tavulareas), Abbot of the Monastery of St. Gerasim of the Jordan talks to Alexandra Nikiforova about the great monastic figure of Father Ignaty of Hebron



—It was a great blessing for me to know holy people—Russians, Romanians, and Greeks. The older fathers told me how in former times, Russian pilgrims would come to the Holy Land on foot.

There was a certain Fr. Ignatius in Hebron. A saint. A Russian. He died in deep old age. At that time I was serving as a deacon in Bethlehem and in 1975, on the feast of St. George, I set out in the evening for Hebron and spent the night there. At 2:00 in the morning, the bells would ring there for services. At three, the prayer “Blessed is our God...” would be intoned and

Matins would begin. Monk George read the Six Psalms in Church Slavonic, and then Fr. Ignatius began the Proskomedia. I did not know Russian, but I simply assisted him as a deacon. At the moment he took the prosphoron for the Eucharist in his hands to cut out the particles for the chalice, tears would stream from his eyes. I and other priests complete the Proskomedia in fifteen to twenty minutes. He would take an entire hour! When he cut out the particles in remembrance of the Archangels, the Honorable Forerunner, the saint of the day, and a thousand(!) saints, tears fell from his eyes. He was seeing something! He was a saint.

The metochion of the Russian Orthodox Mission in the Holy Land, dedicated to the Holy Forefathers in Hebron.

The metochion of the Russian Orthodox Mission in the Holy Land, dedicated to the Holy Forefathers in Hebron.

We usually serve the Liturgy beginning after the prayer, “Blessed is the Kingdom...” in an hour and a half. But no matter what prayers he pronounced, Fr. Ignatius would bend his knee, and tears would stream endlessly from his eyes! We began the services at three in the morning and ended at 11:30 in the morning. His whole being was immersed in the prayers. His arms would be raised. When he prayed he never allowed himself to be distracted with any conversation. We received Communion and pronounced the dismissal. It was close to noon! I had stood on my feet for eight or nine hours! Then we went into the house by the church; Fr. Ignatius took out some dried bread, some sweet red wine that he made himself, and some olives. We drank the wine, in which we soaked the dried bread, and ate the olives.

I have been a priest for thirty-five years, but I will never forget such reverence and such a Liturgy (not the fatigue, but the Liturgy itself)! After I became an abbot, they would bring me his wine for the Liturgy—it was red, sweet, and without any additives.

Fr. Ignatius was a holy man! He reposed in the 1980s—I can’t remember exactly when—in Hebron where he served all his life, and was buried there. He never washed! He went around in worn-out shoes without socks. His hair was tangled like threads. His black nylon ryassa was oil-soaked, because as I recall he would light 150 lamps himself. At 2:00 a.m. he rang the bell and for an entire hour afterwards he would light a lamp before every saint—here, there, and everywhere—and make prostrations. Oil dripped down his hands and onto his ryassa... He had a purse in which he kept an icon of the Mother of God of Kazan, and when you wanted to kiss his hand he would

take out this icon. There was simply a fragrance coming from him! He was a real saint. I have never known any other person like him in my life!

What the Holy Land means to me

Since I was a toddler, I had always been fascinated by the icons of saints and angels. The lives of the saints had always held a fascination for me and for some reason I felt their impalpable presence wafting throughout the house especially when I stood in front of the iconostasis to make sure that the kandili (the vigil lamp) was kept alight at all times in front of our icons as a reminder that Jesus Christ is the light of the world and He illumines all. The oil used symbolises the infinite mercy of God and is derived from the Greek word for oil - έλαιον - meaning mercy. Sunday school had always been a treat and I have always felt serene and at the right place. Without ever realizing it, my life had been a preordained journey that would lead me to the other side of the world where worldly matters bow out gracefully to give way to the glorious transcendental world of the Lord. Guided by God, in 2010 I travelled to the Holy Land, more by God's providence than by personal drive. I didn't know at the time that I would be going to what my heart had longed for, the most holy places of the birth, passion, and resurrection of the Lord. . . .

As I literally followed the footsteps of Jesus, I found the journey a way to get closer to Jesus or to discover the roots of my Christian faith. I felt I was going not only from this world to other worldliness, but as if I were traveling from the world of sin and death to the world of resurrection and transfiguration; as if I were swimming a spiritual and psychological sea in order to arrive, finally, at the safe and all-bright harbor of our Lord and God's Resurrection, Pascha. I visited a number of Orthodox churches including Panagia's Tomb, St Stephen's church (the first martyr) as well as Gethsemane and the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives. From this latter vantage point one can take in the city's breathtaking beauty. In the Old City itself, I walked the dark, stone, alley-like streets which were barely wide enough for carts to pass. The smell of spices and perspiration intertwined. Walking through the Old City of Jerusalem, over cobblestones slick with rain, I drank in the sensory rush. In its tumults, I heaved and rolled like a ship; the echoes of the wind reverberating more like a Swiss milkmaid than a strangled cat. I savored the drumming of the winter rain, that deep chord of familiarity stirring a welter of emotions indefinable. On

the Via Dolorosa, I stood and closed my eyes for a second only to be before a revelation. Images of excruciating pain and relentless mocking started flashing through my mind. On the way to Golgotha, I saw Simon of Cyrene, returning from his fields to the city. The soldiers having removed the cloak from Jesus Christ and dressed Him in His habitual raiment wanted the thing of crucifixion over and done with. Simon was forced to carry Christ's cross! I was that Simon...Oh, God, I surely felt the inhuman torture...

Poetry by Sofia Kioroglou

O, beautiful Ir ha-Kodesh
The land of my fathers
The burning sun,the Calvary, the ululation
no master wordsmith
could capture in verbal form,
no painter could accurately paint
on canvas with oil colors so vivid
and glorious as its past.

El Tor, Egypt (The Land of Fruits)

El Tor (Arabic: الطور at-Ṭūr / et-Ṭūr Egyptian Arabic pronunciation: [et'tʰu:r]), also romanized as Al-Tur and At-Tur and known as Tur Sinai, formerly Raithu, is a small city in, and the seat of government of, South Sinai Governorate of Egypt. The name of the city comes from the Arabic term for the mountain where the prophet Moses received the Tables of the Law from God; this mountain is designated Jabal Al Tor.

The El Tor strain of cholera was discovered there in 1905. It was a quarantine camp for Muslim pilgrims returning from Hajj (the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca).

The Raithu desert is situated around El Tor, between Saint Catherine and

the Red Sea. It is part of the Archdiocese of Mount Sinai and Raithu of the Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The "Martyrs of Raithu" were 43 anchorites (sort of early Christian hermits) murdered by bedouins (desert dwellers) during the reign of Emperor Diocletian (284-305CE). Christian monks fleeing persecutions had been present since the 3rd century, and the Raithu monastery (or Rutho) was commissioned in the 6th century by Byzantine emperor Justinian. The latter was proposed as a UNESCO World Heritage site on November 1, 1994, in the Cultural category

The Holy fathers slain at Sinai and Raithu are saints venerated together on January 14 by the Eastern Orthodox Church and Eastern Catholic Churches.

The Holy Monastic Fathers Slain at Sinai and Raithu. There were two occasions when the monks and hermits were murdered by the barbarians. The first took place in the fourth century when forty Fathers were killed at Mt. Sinai, and thirty-nine were slain at Raithu on the same day.

Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments had been given to Moses, was also the site of another miracle. Ammonios, an Egyptian monk, witnessed the murder of the forty holy Fathers at Sinai. He tells of how the Saracens attacked the monastery and would have killed them all, if God had not intervened. A fire appeared on the summit of the peak, and the whole mountain smoked. The barbarians were terrified, and fled, while the surviving monks thanked God for sparing them.

That day, the Blemmyes (an Arab tribe) killed thirty-nine Fathers at Raithu (on the shores of the Red Sea). Igumen Paul of Raithu exhorted his monks to endure their suffering with courage and a pure heart.

The second massacres occurred nearly a hundred years later, and were also recorded by an eyewitness who miraculously escaped: Saint Nilus the Faster (November 12). The Arabs permitted some of the monks to run for their lives. They crossed the valley and climbed up a mountain. From this vantage point, they saw the bedouin kill the monks and ransack their cells.

The Sinai and Raithu ascetics lived a particularly strict life: they spent the whole week praying in their cells. On Saturday they gathered for the all-night Vigil, and on Sunday they received the Holy Mysteries. Their only food was dates and water. Many of the ascetics of the desert were glorified by the gift of wonderworking: the Elders Moses, Joseph and others. Mentioned in the service to these monastic Fathers are: Isaiah, Sava, Moses and his disciple Moses, Jeremiah, Paul, Adam, Sergius, Domnus, Proclus, Hypatius, Isaac, Macarius, Mark, Benjamin, Eusebius and Elias.

Troparion – Tone 4

Your holy martyrs, O Lord, / Through their sufferings have received an incorruptible crown from You, our God. / For having Your strength, they laid low their adversaries, / And shattered the powerless boldness of demons. / Through their intercessions, save our souls!

The Greek Orthodox Monastery with the Church of St. George, is a medieval rebuilding of an earlier church located near the sea on adjacent land now part of the El-Kelany archaeological site. Within the Church of St. George are the incorrupt relics of “the second founder of the monastery”, Monk Gregory Skevofylax of Zakynthos. Monk Gregory helped re-establish the Monastery at Raithou with Monk Porphyrios in 1827. Recently his relics were discovered to be incorrupt. The Church of St. George was founded by Monk Gregory in 1885. There have been many appearances of Monk Gregory to devout Christians in Raitho, working many miracles. Upon seeing the incorrupt myrrh-giving relics of Monk Gregory of Raitou, I felt an inexpressible need to write about him as not much about him is known. It is my fervent wish to write a book about this Father as well as the other hermits who were massacred by the Blemmyes of Africa and who are believed to be like the invisible hermits of Mount Athos.

HOREB - POETRY BY SOFIA KIOROGLOU

At the foot of Mount Horeb
I have searched for internal Peace
In earthly paradises, elusive like time
Its duration flimsy like gossamer fabric

I, the wretched man, struck out on the arid land
To cleanse myself of the passions that my malignant self
was strewing along my way to redemption, an invisible ambush
To set me up poisoning my mind with tantalizing inducements

The persecution was relentless and merciless
A struggle eternal, fighting with my worst inner self
At the foot of Mount Horeb
I took off my sandals, evidence of a contrite heart

I worshipped the Burning bush,
lo and behold, the arid Land rejoiced
The desert quenched its thirst triumphantly
The lilies of the valley bloomed and gave glory to God

O Death, where is your sting - Poetry by Sofia Kioroglou

O Death, where is your sting?
O Hades, where is your glory?
You are crushed and ground to dust
Embittered, you are held captive
Your arrows bounce back, Adam was lost and found

Like the prodigal son, Adam you are restored
Sin is mortifyingly abashed and virtue now your crown
Christ is risen, and nowhere shall I see the Devil's throne
Descending into Hades, Jesus triumphantly delivered all the souls

I love and worship you my God
Your ways always wise and fair
Remember me Lord when you shall come in your Glory
Grant me humility to fight all my demons

The miracle of the Holy Light

The most amazing and most transformational moment in my life was when I attended the Holy Light Ceremony in 2012. You may not believe it until you see it. But when you do, your whole life is changes.

The ceremony, which awes the souls of Christians, takes place in the Church of Resurrection in Jerusalem. The date of Pascha is determined anew for every year. It must be a first Sunday after the spring equinox and Jewish Passover. Therefore, most of the time it differs from the date of Catholic and Protestant Easter, which is determined using different criteria. The Holy

Fire is the most renowned miracle in the world of Eastern Orthodoxy. It has taken place at the same time, in the same manner, in the same place every single year for centuries. No other miracle is known to occur so regularly and so steadily over time. No other miracle is known to occur so regularly and so steadily over time. It happens in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the holiest place on earth, where Christ was crucified, entombed, and where He finally rose from the dead.

The Ceremony of Holy Light

In order to be as close to the Sepulchre as possible, pilgrims camp next to it. The Sepulchre is located in the small chapel called Holy Ciborium, which is inside the Church of the Resurrection. Typically they wait from the afternoon of Holy Friday in anticipation of the miracle on Holy Saturday. Beginning at around 11:00 in the morning the Christian Arabs chant traditional hymns in a loud voice. These chants date back to the Turkish occupation of Jerusalem in the 13th century, a period in which the Christians were not allowed to chant anywhere but in the churches. "We are the Christians, we have been Christians for centuries, and we shall be forever and ever. Amen!" - they chant at the top of their voices accompanied by the sound of drums. The drummers sit on the shoulders of others who dance vigorously around the Holy Ciborium. But at 1:00 pm the chants fade out, and then there is a silence. A tense silence, charged from the anticipation of the great demonstration of God's power for all to witness.

Shortly thereafter, a delegation from the local authorities elbows its way through the crowd. At the time of the Turkish occupation of Palestine they were Muslim Turks; today they are Israelis. Their function is to represent the Romans at the time of Jesus. The Gospels speak of the Romans that went to seal the tomb of Jesus, so that his disciples would not steal his body and claim he had risen. In the same way the Israeli authorities on this Holy Saturday come and seal the tomb with wax. Before they seal the door, they follow a custom to enter the tomb, and to check for any hidden source of fire, which would make a fraud of the miracle.

An answer to those questioning the authenticity of the miracle

As with any other miracle there are people who believe it is a fraud and nothing but a masterpiece of Orthodox propaganda. They believe the Patriarch has a lighter inside of the tomb. These critics, however, are confronted with a number of problems. Matches and other means of ignition are recent inventions. Only a few hundred years ago lighting a fire was an undertaking that lasted much longer than the few minutes during which the Patriarch is inside the tomb. One then could perhaps say, he had an oil lamp

burning inside, from which he kindled the candles, but the local authorities confirmed that they had checked the tomb and found no light inside it.

The best arguments against a fraud, however, are not the testimonies of the shifting Patriarchs. The biggest challenges confronting the critics are the thousands of independent testimonies by pilgrims whose candles were lit spontaneously in front of their eyes without any possible explanation.

According to our investigations, it has never been possible to film any of the candles or oil lamps igniting by themselves. However, I am in the possession of a video filmed by a young engineer from Bethlehem, Souhel Nabdiel. Mr. Nabdiel has been present at the ceremony of the Holy Fire since his early childhood. In 1996 he was asked to film the ceremony from the balcony of the dome of the Church. Present with him on the balcony were a nun and four other believers. The nun stood at the right hand of Nabdiel. On the video one can see how he films down on the crowds. At a certain point all lights are turned off - it is time for the Patriarch to enter the tomb and receive the Holy Fire. While he is still inside the tomb one suddenly hears a scream of surprise and wonder originating from the nun standing next to Nabdiel. The camera begins to shake, as one hears the excited voices of the other people present on the balcony. The camera now turns to the right, whereby it is possible to contemplate the cause of the commotion. A big candle, held in the hand of the Russian nun, takes fire in front of all the people present before the patriarch comes out of the tomb. She holds the candle with shaking hands while making the sign of the Cross over and over again in awe of the miracle she has witnessed. This video appears to be the closest one gets to an actual filming of the miracle

How the miracle occurs

"I enter the tomb and kneel in holy fear in front of the place where Christ lay after His death and where He rose again from the dead... (narrates Orthodox Patriarch Diodor - ed.). I find my way through the darkness towards the inner chamber in which I fall on my knees. Here I say certain prayers that have been handed down to us through the centuries and, having said them, I wait. Sometimes I may wait a few minutes, but normally the miracle happens immediately after I have said the prayers. From the core of the very stone on which Jesus lay an indefinable light pours forth. It usually has a blue tint, but the colour may change and take many different hues. It cannot be described in human terms. The light rises out of the stone as mist may rise out of a lake – it almost looks as if the stone is covered by a moist cloud, but it is light. This light each year behaves differently. Sometimes it covers just the stone, while other times it gives light to the whole sepulchre, so that people who stand outside the tomb and look into it will see it filled with light. The light does not burn – I have never had my beard burnt in all the sixteen years I have been Patriarch in

Jerusalem and have received the Holy Fire. The light is of a different consistency than normal fire that burns in an oil lamp... At a certain point the light rises and forms a column in which the fire is of a different nature, so that I am able to light my candles from it. When I thus have received the flame on my candles, I go out and give the fire first to the Armenian Patriarch and then to the Coptic. Hereafter I give the flame to all people present in the Church."

While the patriarch is inside the chapel kneeling in front of the stone, there is darkness but far from the silence outside. One hears a rather loud mumbling, and the atmosphere is very tense. When the Patriarch comes out with the two candles lit and shining brightly in the darkness, a roar of jubilee resounds in the Church.

The Holy Light is not only distributed by the Archbishop, but operates also by itself. It is emitted from the Holy Sepulchre with a hue completely different from that of natural light. It sparkles, it flashes like lightning, it flies like a dove around the tabernacle of the Holy Sepulchre, and lights up the unlit lamps of olive oil hanging in front of it. It whirls from one side of the church to the other. It enters some of the chapels inside the church, as for instance the chapel of the Calvary (at a higher level than the Holy Sepulchre) and lights up the little lamps. It lights up also the candles of certain pilgrims. In fact there are some very pious pilgrims who, every time they attended this ceremony, noticed that their candles lit up on their own accord!his divine light also presents some peculiarities: As soon as it appears it has a bluish hue and does not burn. At the first moments of its appearance, if it touches the face, or the mouth, or the hands, it does not burn. This is proof of its divine and supernatural origin. We must also take into consideration that the Holy Light appears only by the invocation of an Orthodox Archbishop.

The miracle is not confined to what actually happens inside the little tomb, where the Patriarch prays. What may be even more significant, is that the blue light is reported to appear and be active outside the tomb. Every year many believers claim that this miraculous light ignites candles, which they hold in their hands, of its own initiative. All in the church wait with candles in the hope that they may ignite spontaneously. Often unlit oil lamps catch light by themselves before the eyes of the pilgrims. The blue flame is seen to move in different places in the Church. A number of signed testimonies by pilgrims, whose candles lit spontaneously, attest to the validity of these ignitions. The person who experiences the miracle from close up by having the fire on the candle or seeing the blue light usually leaves Jerusalem changed, and for everyone having attended the ceremony, there is always a "before and after" the miracle of the Holy Fire in Jerusalem.

How old is the wonder?

The first written naccount of the Holy Fire dates from the fourth century, but authors write about events that occurred in the first century. So Ss. John Damascene and Gregory of Nissa narrate how the Apostle Peter saw the Holy Light in the Holy Sepulchre after Christ's resurrection. "One can trace the miracle throughout the centuries in the many itineraries of the Holy Land." The Russian abbot Daniel, in his itinerary written in the years 1106-07, presents the "Miracle of the Holy Light" and the ceremonies that frame it in a very detailed manner. He recalls how the Patriarch goes into the Sepulchre-chapel (the Anastasis) with two candles. The Patriarch kneels in front of the stone on which Christ was laid after his death and says certain prayers, at which point the miracle occurs. Light proceeds from the core of the stone - a blue, indefinable light which after some time kindles unlit oil lamps as well as the Patriarch's two candles. This light is "The Holy Fire", and it spreads to all people present in the Church. The ceremony surrounding "The Miracle of the Holy Fire" may be the oldest unbroken Christian ceremony in the world. From the fourth century A.D. all the way up to our own time, sources recall this awe-inspiring event. From these sources it becomes clear that the miracle has been celebrated on the same spot, on the same feast day, and in the same liturgical frame throughout all these centuries.

Every time heterodox have tried to obtain the Holy Fire they have failed. Three such attempts are known. Two occured in the twelfth century when priests of the Roman church tried to force out the Orthodox church but by their own confession these ended with God's punishment. But the most miraculous event occured in the year 1579, the year when God clearly testified to whom alone may be given His miracle.

"Once the Armenians (monophysites) paid the Turks, who then occupied the Holy Land, in order to obtain permission for their Patriarch to enter the Holy Sepulchre, the Orthodox Patriarch was standing sorrowfully with his flock at the exit of the church, near the left column, when the Holy Light split this column vertically and flashed near the Orthodox Patriarch.

A Muslim Muezzin, called Tounom, who saw the miraculous event from an adjacent mosque, immediately abandoned the Muslim religion and became an Orthodox Christian. This event took place in 1579 under Sultan Mourad IV, when the Patriarch of Jerusalem was Sophrony IV. (The above mentioned split column still exists. It dates from the twelfth century. The Orthodox pilgrims embrace it at the "place of the split" as they enter the church).

Turkish warriors stood on the wall of a building close to the gate and lightning-struck column . When he saw this striking miracle he cried that Christ is truly God and leaped down from a height of about ten meters. But he was not killed-the stones under him became as soft as wax and his footprint was left upon them. The Turks tried to scrape away these prints but they could not destroy them; so they remain as witnesses [5].

He was burned by the Turks near the Church. His remains, gathered by the Greeks, lay in the monastery of Panagia until the 19th century shedding chrism.

Muslims, who deny the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ, tried to put obstacles in the way of the miracle. Well known Muslim historian Al Biruni wrote: "... a (note: Muslim) governor brought a copper wire instead of a wick (note: for the self lighting oil lamps), in order that it wouldn't ignite and the whole thing would fail to occur. But as the fire descended, the copper burned." [6]

This was not the only attempt. The report written by the English chronicler, Gautier Vinisauf, describes what happened in the year 1192.

"In 1187, the Saracens under the direction of Sultan Salah ad-Din took Jerusalem. In that year, the Sultan desired to be present at the celebration, even though he was not a Christian. Gautier Vinisauf tells us what happened: "On his arrival, the celestial fire descended suddenly, and the assistants were deeply moved...the Saracens... said that the fire which they had seen to come down was produced by fraudulent means. Salah ad-Din, wishing to expose the imposter, caused the lamp, which the fire from Heaven had lighted, to be extinguished, but the lamp relit immediately. He caused it to be extinguished a second time and a third time, but it relit as of itself. Thereupon, the Sultan, confounded, cried out in prophetic transport: 'Yes, soon shall I die, or I shall lose Jerusalem.'"

A few words about why the Armenian Church separated from the Eastern Orthodox Church in AD 506, after the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451).

Historically, the Armenian church has been labeled monophysite because it (just as the Coptic Orthodox Church) rejected the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon, which condemned monophysitism. The Armenian Church officially severed ties with the West in 554, during the second Council of Dvin where the dyophysite formula of the Council of Chalcedon was rejected.

However, the Armenian Orthodox Church argues that this is a wrong description of its position, as it considers Monophysitism, as taught by Eutyches and condemned at Chalcedon, a heresy and only disagrees with the formula defined by that council. The Armenian church instead adheres to the doctrine defined by Cyril of Alexandria, considered as a saint by the Chalcedonian churches as well, who described Christ as being of one incarnate nature, where both divine and human nature are united. To distinguish this from Eutychian and other versions of Monophysitism this position is called miaphysitism.

In recent times, both Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian churches have

developed a deeper understanding for each other's positions, recognizing the substantial agreement while maintaining their respective theological language. Hence, the Monophysite label is avoided when describing the Armenians' or Copts' belief regarding the Nature of Christ. It should be noted that the Armenian Church was not represented by its Supreme Patriarch—the Catholicos during the Council of Chalcedon, because the country was in war at the time, so instead a delegation of clergymen was sent.

Why the miracle of the Holy Fire is unknown in the West

One can ask the question of why the miracle of the Holy Fire is almost unknown in Western Europe. In Protestant areas it may, to a certain extent, be explained by the fact that there is no real tradition of miracles; people don't really know in which box to place the miracles, and they rarely feature in newspapers. But in the Catholic tradition there is vast interest in miracles. Thus, why is it not more well known? For this only one explanation suffices: Church politics. Only the Orthodox Churches attend the ceremony which is centered on the miracle. It only occurs on the Orthodox date of Easter and without the presence of any Catholic authorities.

The Church of the Resurrection

Catholicon

In the Church of Resurrection "Catholicon is called the holy place which is exactly opposite and to the east of the holy Ciborium and it belongs to the Orthodox's . The Catholicon, as a church in the church, the middle part of the whole construction of the church of Resurrection. It is a long and big room which has got imposing cupola, its height 29 meters, supported by 4 columns with Corinthian capitals. The arches, the domes and the cupola are older constructions, while the side walls, the niche of the holy altar and the marble chancel screen are new additions which were made during the renovation of the church, in 1870, by Komnenos the architect from Mytilini.

Originally, the Catholicon is the central klitos of the triklitos Basilica Romanic style. It was built by crusaders in 1130 and it was in a room of trikamaro which connected, in the past, the Rotunda with the Basilica of Constantine.

You enter the Catholicon from the entrance which is opposite to the holy Ciborium and it is called "Royal arch" which has on the top a stone frieze with the engraving: HAIL AND AE PLEASED THE BRIDE OF THE GREAT KING BEING SAME TO THE BEAUTY OF YOUR BRIDEGROOM AND WITH YOUR PEOPLE WE WORSHIP YOU THE LIFE GIVER.

The Arab speaking calls the Catholicon "nousoul-tinia" which means "the middle of the world". This name is obviously connected with the marble

sphere, the Omphalus, which is on a special base exactly after the entrance. There is already a connotation in the psalm 74. 12 that "God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth" According to this meaning the historian Iasipos uses the Greek term "omphalus of the Earth" to characterize Jerusalem and especially its church. This is a tradition to the Christians who consider the church of Resurrection as the "omphalus of the earth», the spiritual center of the whole Christian World. On the side walls, right and left, there are stalls and shrines and two wooden carved Episcopal thrones. The right throne is used by the Patriarch while the left one by the archbishop who represents the absent Patriarch in the ceremonies. In the main church there is an impressive cupola which is called "cupola of the Catholicon" or "the small cupola opposing to the big one of the holy Ciborium.

In the interior the dome is decorated with a modern mosaic which is made according to the orthodox tradition. In the middle of it, the Pantocrator accepts the bene of Theotocos, Prodromos, the Angels and the prophets while on orbicular spandrels there are the four Evangelists with their allegorical symbols on this figuration.

On the eastern side of the Catholicon there is an imposing marble chancel screen, which has got seven arches in two lines. The two side ones lead to side altars and the central one, which is the holy portal, leads to the altar. On the top of the five arches there is a marble epistyle with an engraving in capital letters: BE HAPPY ZION, HOLY MOTHER OF THE CHURCHES, GOD'S HOME, YOU FIRSTLY TOOK FORGIVENESS OF THE SINS AFTER THE RESURRECTION.

The holy altar is about one meter above the floor of the Catholicon and in the middle there is the big chancel table, appropriate to the place, covered with valuable clothing. In the semicircular arch of the altar there are marble thrones, the one in the centre is for the Patriarch. In the sides there are steps on which the clergy sit in solemn ceremonies. On the right and left of the holy altar there are two stairs. The right one leads to the Golgotha and the left one to the archways behind the big chancel screen.

The Holy Courtyard

A square area which lies in front of the entrance to the Holy Church of the Resurrection, its sides measuring 20 m. each. The Holy Courtyard used to operate as a market where products and memorabilia were available for sale. Today it is used only by the Orthodox on Holy Thursday for the Service of the Washing of the Disciples' Feet [the Service of the "Niptiras"] - and on Holy Friday, as the procession representing the Lord's martyrdom begins from the Praetorium and ends here.

To the east of the Holy Courtyard stands the Monastery of Abraham. At the

southeast corner of the Courtyard, a set of steps lead to the Golgotha. By means of these steps, Heraclius carried the Holy Cross in 629 AD, on his return from the successful campaign against the Persians. A small church dedicated to St Mary of Egypt stands at the entrance to the steps, commemorating the fact that she was stopped from entering the Church by an invisible power, on account of her sins. To the west of the Holy Courtyard stands the Church of St James the Brother of God, first Bishop of Jerusalem. Near the Church of St James lies the chapel of the Myrophorae, and further north the chapel of the Forty Martyrs, wherein the relics of the Patriarchs of Jerusalem are kept. To the south of the Holy Courtyard stands the Dependency of Gethsemane with the icon of the Epitaph of Theotokos.

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 VIII 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.

The Holy Light

It symbolizes but also magnificently attests the Great Mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ Resurrection from death. It fills us with feelings of spiritual and religious exaltation. All hearts beat full of faith, admiration and hope for the Great Mystery of life. It is about a real miracle that leaves no room for doubt.

On the day of Great Saturday, from the morning hours, thousands of believers and pilgrims from all over the world flock to the Church of the Resurrection to take part in the ceremony of the Holy Light.

At 12 noon, the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, accompanied by Holy Hierarchs and other clergy, arrive at the Patriarchate. The Patriarch enters the Holy Step (Vema) of the Catholicon and the heterodox are then granted permission to take part in the Ceremony of the Holy Light. Then the Hierarchs and Clergy put on their vestments and the Patriarch his full Hierarchal vestments. The Patriarch then heads the procession, which starts from the Holy Step of the Catholicon and walks three times around the Holy Edicule while the choir chants the familiar troparion: "Your Resurrection Christ Saviour...".

It is necessary to note that the heterodox have already carefully examined the interior of the Holy Edicule, to ensure there are no lit oil lamps or any other source of light. Following the Holy litany the Patriarch stands in front of the door of the Holy Edicule, removes his ceremonial vestments and waits with his sticharion (white robe), epitrahilion (stole) and his belt. The heterodox examine the Patriarch to ensure he has nothing on Him that could arouse or draw suspicion. When they complete the search, the guards remove the seal on the door of the Edicule and the Patriarch, holding two bunches of unlit candles, enters the Holy Edicule. With him enter the Armenian Patriarch and the Dragoman who then wait at the ante-room of the Edicule. Great emotion and anxiety takes over the whole Church.

The Patriarch kneeling in front of Christ's Holy Sepulchre prays to the Crucified holding two unlit candles, and with humility and piety pronounces the following prayer: "Despota Lord Jesus Christ, the original wisdom of the without beginning Father, oh unapproachable Light, who said that Light will proceed from darkness, who said let it be Light and there was Light. Oh Lord provider of Light who took us out of the delusion of darkness and led us to the miraculous Light of Your awareness. You fully illumined the whole earth through Your incarnate presence while the underworld through Your descent to Hades brought the light and joy and after these through Your Apostles gave the light to all nations that walked in darkness. We thank You because through pious faith, you brought us from darkness to light and we became sons through holy baptism, seeing your glory full of grace and truth. However, oh light-giver Lord, oh great light who called the people who were

in darkness. Despota, Lord, the true light that illumines every man who comes in the world. The only light of the world and light whose glory filled the universe, you brought the light to the world through Your economy of incarnation even though people loved the darkness rather than the light. You Lord, giver of light, listen to us sinners and unworthy servants who, at this moment stand by this Your Most Holy and light bearing Tomb, and receive us who honour Your Holy Passion, Your most holy Crucifixion, Your voluntary death, the laying of Your divine body in this holy tomb, Your burial and Your resurrection after three days, which we joyfully have already started celebrating, remembering Your descent to Hades, by which the souls of the righteous You despotically freed, the lightning of Your divine light filled the underworld. So with happy heart and spiritual joy, on this most blessed Saturday, Your most salvific mysteries which You divinely executed on earth and under the earth we celebrate, and we remember You, the exhilarating and appealing light which You divinely shone in the underworld, we celebrate the appearance of the light, Your congenial divine appearance to us . Because during the salvific and bright night everything was filled with light, the heaven , the earth and the underworld through the supernatural mystery of Your descent to Hades and Your resurrection from the tomb after three days. By this, having received with piety, from this, Your light-bearing Tomb we offer it to those believing in You, the true light and ask and supplicate Most Holy Despota that You make this a gift of sanctification and full of Your every divine grace through the grace of your Most Holy and light- bearing Tomb. And those who touch it with piety, bless and sanctify them, free them from the darkness of passions and make them worthy of Your brightest dwellings, where the light of Your unsetting divinity shines. Lord, grant them health and good life and fill their homes with everything good.

Yes, Lord, the Light-giver, listen to me the sinner at this moment, and grant to me and to them to walk in Your light and remain in it as long as we have the light of this temporary life. Lord grant us that the light of our good works shine in front of the people together with Your without beginning Father and the Holy Spirit. You appointed us to be the light to the nations that we shine to those walking in the darkness. But we have loved the darkness rather than the light, committing evil works. Anyone who does evil works hates the light according to Your faultless word. For this we stumble every day due to our sinning because we walk in the darkness. But make us worthy to live the rest of our life with enlightened eyes and minds. Grant us to live as sons of light and walk in the light of Your commandments. The bright garment of our baptism which we have blackened by our evil works, whiten it like the light, transforming the light into garment. Grant us to dress ourselves with the weapons of light, that we may overcome the lord of darkness, who transforms himself into an angel of light. Yes, Lord, as You shone the light to those who are in darkness and under the shadow of

death, likewise, today, shine in our hearts with Your pure light, so that becoming illumined and warmed up in faith, glorify You the one and only original light, exhilarating light to everlasting ages. Amen”.

After this blessing he places a piece of cotton on the Holy Tomb and miraculously it lights up. With it the Patriarch lights the candles and exits the Holy Edicule. The amazing thing is that the holy light for a few minutes does not burn. Namely, if someone touches his hands with the holy light he will not get burnt. Truly this is one of the greatest Miracles of Christianity that repeats every year on Great Saturday.

The Chapels

1. Adam's Chapel

Under the northern side of Golgotha, there is a small shrine which today, is called "Adam's Chapel", while in the past it was known as the "Place of the skull" or the "holy skull" or the “Chapel of Melchizedek or of the Holy Forerunner”. According to tradition, in this place Adam's skull and bones were laid, which were cleansed from the original sin with the blood of Christ at the crucifixion. Thus the first Adam is connected to the second one, an event symbolized conjecturally in the scene of the crucifixion depicting a small cave at the base of the Cross with Adams bones.

In the back and behind the Holy Altar over the rock there is a small alcove formed where a fissure which starts at the base of the Cross at Golgotha ends. The Chapel bore an impressive mosaic decor which was destroyed in the fire of 1808, after which it was replaced with murals. In the same fire, the so called "The tomb of Melchizedek" was also completely destroyed. In the past, near the entrance of the Chapel there were the tombs of Baldwin of Flanders and of Gottfried de Bouillon, which were pillaged during the Islamic recapture of Jerusalem in 1244. At present in this place is saved the tomb of an English Crusader.

2. The Chapel of the Crown of Thorns

North-east of Adam's Chapel there is "a holy archway" which runs along the vault of the Catholicon. In this archway there are three chapels, the first one, named "The Crown of Thorns" which belongs exclusively to the Orthodox. In the vault and below the Holy Altar there is a part of the granite pillar which was originally at the Praetorium and it was transferred by the Christians to this place when the area passed under Muslim rule and where it is guarded to day.

According to the gospels, while Christ was at the Praetorium, the Roman soldiers dressed Him in a red robe. "and having woven a crown of thorns they placed it on His head" {Matt. 27: 28-31, Mark 15: 16-20, John 19: 2-3}.

So, in remembrance to this event, in a special container there is a crown made of the hardest thorns in Palestine. This container was placed to the right of the Holy Altar, being similar to the corresponding one at Golgotha and bears the ungrammatical inscription:

"AND HAVING WOVEN CROWNS OF THORN THEY PLACED IT ON HIS HEAD AND PUT A REED IN HIS RIGHT HAND".

3. The Chapel of the discovery of the Holy Cross

After the chapel of the Crown of Thorns, the pilgrim comes to a gate which leads to the basement of the church. The first twenty nine steps down a staircase lead to a square chapel dedicated to St. Helen, which has a cupola and an ornate mosaic floor. In the past this chapel belonged to the Ethiopians, who, because of financial difficulties, were forced to sell it to the Armenians, who possess it to this day and perform services on a small altar which is located on the eastern side. Near it and to the north there is an equivalent altar dedicated to St. Gregory Photistis (the Enlightener) the most important saint of the Armenian Church. In the southern side of the chapel, there is an opening to the cave of discovery from which, according to tradition, St. Helen supervised the work of the discovery of the Holy Cross and today it is called "the Seat of St. Helen".

From the southern side of St. Helen Chapel, a second staircase with thirteen steps ends at the cave where they discovered the Holy Cross, the nails and the crosses of the two robbers. The whole place is divided in two places of different heights, to the south where according to tradition, Christ's as well as the crosses of the robbers were discovered and to the north where the nails were found.

On the eastern side of the floor of the south cave there is a reddish-white engraved plaque which has been placed to indicate the spot of the discovery of the Holy Cross: J{ESUS} C{HRIST} WINS A QI . As the inscription testifies, this plaque was installed there during the great restoration of the Church of 1810 by the Greek orthodox to whom this holy place belongs. Later, this jurisdiction was contested by the Latin and until now it remains unresolved. In contrast, the small altar in the north cave, where a bronze statue of St. Helen with the holy cross was erected, belongs to the Latin.

4. The chapel of "Diemerisando" {Divided}

North to the place of discovery, there is the chapel of "Diemerisando"(of the Divided) which belongs to the Armenians. Its name derives from the narratives in the gospels, according which the Roman soldiers after having crucified Christ "divided his garments" {Mark 27: 35}. However, because Christ's tunic was without seam, and woven from top to bottom, it was

impossible to divide it, so they decided to cast lots. Thus, the Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled, "they parted {divided} my garments among them, and for my clothing {raiment} they cast lots" {Psalm 22: 18 and John 19: 24}.

In the vault of the chapel a Holy Altar is provided and icons were mounted, which depict the division of Christ's garments.

5. The chapel of St. Logginus

In the third vault of the holy archway, there is a chapel dedicated to Logginus, the Centurion which belongs exclusively to the Orthodox. In this place there is a Holy Altar and behind it there is an icon depicting St. Logginus raising his hand to the Crucified, confessing "Truly He is the Son of God" {Matt. 27: 54}.

6. The chapel of the Klapes (Pillory Boards)

To the north-west of the chapel of St. Logginus, there is "the chapel of the Klapes" which belongs to the Greek orthodox. Klapes is a (hinged double) board with two holes used as an instrument of torture. The erection of the chapel is due to a very ancient tradition, according which Christ's torturers before the Crucifixion, immobilized His feet in the holes of the klapes.

The board of klapes was earlier in the council room, but the Christians transported it to this chapel after the capture of Jerusalem by the Ottoman. The board was placed under a small Holy Altar and is protected with a railing. In the rear wall of the chapel, an icon was mounted depicting the event.

The Prison of Christ

On the left and behind the chapel of Klapon, there is a small three room flat with a low ceiling, the Prison of Christ. This place owes its name to a tradition according which Christ and the criminals were kept in this prison before they were led to the cross. A second tradition however, mentions that in this place the Theotokos had fainted when she beheld her only son on the cross. So the prophecy of elder Symeon was fulfilled: "And a sword will pierce through your own soul" (Luke 2: 35)

7. The Chapel of the Latin and the pillar of the whipping

To the west and after the seven arches, there is the chapel of the Latin. According to Franciscan tradition, Christ revealed Himself to the Theotokos

in this place, immediately after His Resurrection. That's why it is called "the Chapel of the Appearance".

This holy place relates with a later tradition, according to which, immediately after the discovery of the three crosses by St. Helen, a dead man was raised when he was taken to the tomb and in this way the life giving Cross of Christ was recognized.

This chapel has three small altars, in the right one they keep a part of the pillar on which they tied and whipped the Lord {Matt. 27: 26, and Mark 15: 15}. From this event the names "the pillar of whipping" and "the column of beating" were derived. In the past, the pillar was kept under the care of the Armenians at their monastery in Holy Sion, however at present it belongs to the Franciscan Order.

8. The chapel of "Do not touch Me" or of Mary Magdalene

To the south of the chapel of the Latin and to the north of the holy Edicule there is a round marble slab, which according to Latin tradition, is the slab upon which Christ revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene after His Resurrection and told her: " Do not touch me"{John 20: 17} This shrine belongs to the Latin and it is called "Do not touch me" after Christ's utterance, but also "the chapel of Mary Magdalene". In this place there is a small altar on which a relief depicts the event.

The Place where the Holy Women stood during the Crucifixion

To the west of the deposition Christ and towards the holy Edicule there is a marble Ciborium which belongs to the Armenians. This place is associated with the martyric death of the Theanthropos (Godman) and it is believed that is where the Holy Women and John stood during the Crucifixion, in fact according to the gospel of Saint Luke "it is there where all His acquaintances and the Women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance and saw these things."

The Tomb of Joseph of Arimathea

West to the Holy Edicule, behind the chapel of the Copts, there is a dark place, in the middle of which rises a small tomb. In this place close to the Holy Sepulchre, Joseph from Arimathea was buried. This is the only place of the Holy Sepulchre, which belongs to the Abyssinian religious community.

Miracles always happen
I have lived a miracle
I have seen the Holy Fire
At noon, on Holy Saturday
descending like a sword,
swirling like a smoky coil
before lighting the candle
of the girl next to me.

Miracles always happen
Some minds deny the truth
Others cling to concreteness
But Jesus is always there
it is a mere cowardice
to seek safety in negations
“Logic is like the sword-
those who appeal to it shall perish by it.”

Bowing down to an angel - Poetry by Sofia Kioroglou

An old hermit has come to the door to greet me
In long hair and a loincloth of leaves, he beckons me in
“Seventy years in the desert and the only visitor an angel
Delivering communion bread every Sunday” he says

Entering the monastery in Akaldema, he invites me to his cell
To talk until sunset and burn incense before praying to God
before I tell him I am starving to death, like manna from heaven
Bread and water appear miraculously, him bowing down to an angel

At the far end of Gai Ben Hinnom, Judas Iscariot hanged himself
A hermit bidding the pilgrims goodbye, with a crown at his feet
wearing a loincloth of leaves, blesses the travelers and prays
the wild figure standing at the porch invisible to the naked eye.

Holy Shrines in Galilee

Galilee is a province on north Israel. The Lord spent most of his time on earth traversing Galilee. “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom...”(Matthew 4:3). In Galilee are; the town of the Annunciation Nazareth, Cana - where He worked the first miracle, and the sea of Tiberias or Galilee where a

multitude of events of His earthly life emanated. That was prophesized by Isaiah, who wrote 800 years before the presence of the Lord: "...the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali....by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isaiah 9:1-2). In Galilee and especially around Gennesaret there are holy shrines where marvellous gospel incidents took place. Amongst them are the Holy Monastery of the Apostles in Tiberias, where the third appearance of the Lord happened after His Resurrection, Bethsaida, Magdala and ancient Capernaum.

Lake Tiberias

A multitude of occurrences have been related to the Holy Land, as its natural beauty makes it a much travelled holy shrine. Lake Tiberias is on the south part of Galilee. It is a small interior sea with salted water, 212 metres below the surface of the Mediterranean. The river Jordan estuary crosses Palestine through the lake and concludes in the Dead Sea. Capernaum, Bethsaida and Magdala were some of the thriving towns surrounding the lake during the Lord's epoch. The name of the lake in Hebrew and in the Old Testament is Kineret stemming from the word Kinor (violin) because its shape from a sky view looks like a violin. In the Gospels it is called Lake Gennesaret. Churches and monasteries have been built around the lake since the Byzantine era. Of interest to the pilgrims are not only the original sites of gospel related wonders, but also ruins of monuments of the Christian antiquity.

Magdala

As referenced in the New Testament, the name of the town is related to Mary Magdalene. It is possible that Magdala is equivalent to Evangelist Mark's village Dalmanutha where Jesus went after the miracle of feeding the five thousand people. In Greek historical writings, especially according to Iosippos Flavius, Magdala is known as Turiha. The town was famous then for the parched fish made there, from which it got the name Turiha. Archaeological excavations brought to light ruins of a synagogue of the time of Jesus and ruins of an old Byzantine Monastery. Monk Epiphanius who visited Magdala in mid 19th century found a church built over the place that used to be Mary Magdalene's house.

Nazareth

Nazareth is Joseph and Theotokos' birthplace and the small village where Jesus lived in his childhood. It used to be a small village with few inhabitants but it became a holy shrine after the 4th century with the spreading of Christianity. During the Byzantine years there were churches or chapels over four holy shrines: The Spring of the Annunciation, Joseph's cave - workshop, the synagogue in which Christ preached and the cliff over

which the Jews wanted to kill Christ (Luke 4:29). These shrines are preserved to this day.

At the Annunciation Spring there is the Greek Orthodox Church of Archangel Gabriel, while at the synagogue of Nazareth there is the Greek-Catholic church-synagogue. At the site where Theotokos' house and Joseph's workshop used to be, there is the impressive Latin Church of the Annunciation where the pilgrim can see Byzantine artefacts. A chapel at the site of the Cliff hosts in its premises the ruins of an older Byzantine church and monastery.

The Holy Monastery in Cana of Galilee

Cana is located near Nazareth. It is the place of Christ's first miracle, when He and His mother were guests at Nathanael's wedding and He turned the water into wine. Tradition has it that the church in Cana is built over the former house of Simon the Cananite, one of the twelve Apostles. Inside the church there are two of the stone vessels that were used at the first miracle and a part of Simon the Cananite's holy relics.

The Holy Monastery of the Apostles in Capernaum

The Church of the Apostles is on the shore of the lake. It is built on the place of the house that Jesus was preaching and healed the paralyzed man who was lowered down from the roof in front of Him (Luke 5:18-25). Capernaum was the central place of the Lord's teaching and where he worked a multitude of miracles; He healed the two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31), the woman that "was bowed together and could in no wise lift herself up" (Luke 13:11), Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13), the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25-34), He resurrected Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21-43), etc. There used to be a synagogue in this area where the Lord would go on Saturdays to fulfil his religious obligations. The house of Saint Peter's mother-in-law was nearby. Today in Capernaum only the ruins of the synagogue and the Church of the Apostles by the lake are preserved.

Capernaum

Ancient Capernaum was built on the west of Galilee. During the Roman epoch Capernaum was a big customs centre and among other people eminent publicans inhabited the city. During the Byzantine era, Capernaum was an established Christian shrine because it was related to the events of the New Testament. After the Arab occupation in the Holy Land, Capernaum fell in recession and it was completely abandoned after an annihilating earthquake in the 11th century. Today Capernaum stands in ruins near the shore of Gennesaret. On the east side of the ancient town there is a Byzantine Church of the Apostles with exquisite wall paintings. It is built at the place where the paralyzed man was lowered down from the roof with

his mat in front of Christ. When the Lord saw him He healed him saying at first “Friend, your sins are forgiven” and then “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home” (Luke 5:18-25). The Lord had made Capernaum the centre of his mission and teaching. The Evangelist Matthew writes accordingly: “Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtal” (Matthew 4:13). Many of the Apostles were born in Capernaum. It was there that the Holy mystery of Eucharist was taught and where the Lord gave the marvellous “Sermon of the Mount”. Among the many miracles Jesus performed in the surrounding area are also the healing of the Demon-possessed man (Mark 5:1-20) and Peter’s mother-in-law as “he touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him” (Matthew 8:15).

The Holy Church of the Twelve Apostles in Tiberias

The Holy Church of the Apostles on the west shore of Tiberias was initially built by Saint Helen when she came to Jerusalem and found the Sacred Cross. She then built the Holy Church of the Resurrection and many other churches in places that witnessed incidents from the Lord’s life. In Tiberias the Lord appeared for the third time after His Resurrection and Saint Helen built a church there in honour of the Apostles. The church was destroyed by war raids and rebuilt by Justinian in the 6th century. It was a three-aisled church. The middle aisle was dedicated to the Gathering of the Holy Apostles, the north to Saints Peter and Paul and the south to the equal to the Apostles Saint Mary Magdalene. Justinian’s Church was also destroyed and reconstructed by Markinianos in 650 A.D. When the Crusaders came in 1200 A.D. they seized the church and demolished it. The present church stands over the ruins of Markinianos’ church. In 1978 refurbishment brought the church to its initial form. The construction site encompasses parts of the medieval walls of the city. On the south-east side there is Saint Nikolaos chapel. The lake’s water level has been rising making an embankment fill necessary for the church, as well as a dam at the outlet of the water towards the river Jordan so that the water is used for irrigation purposes. The Church belongs to the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood.

The area of the village of Capernaum is located at the north corner of the Sea of Galilee, on the side of the ancient road from Tiberias to the east of the sea of Galilee: Golan, Gamla and Jordan.

The Orthodox church is located on the eastern side of the ruined village, the home town of Jesus.

Background:

Capernaum was the center of Jesus activities in the Galilee and his town during that time. Jesus taught in the local synagogue. It was also the home of the apostles Peter, James, Andrew and John, and the tax collector Matthew.

History:

The Orthodox church is built in the middle of the ruins of the ancient Roman village of Kfar-Nahum (Capernaum). Around the church the remains of the village have not yet been excavated, unlike the synagogue of Capernaum and the buildings around it. The area under the control of the Orthodox church is 1/3 of the entire ruins, which covers about 60 dunams (6 Hectares).

The village was established in the Hellenistic period, and was designed according to that period's urban design of straight lines. Capernaum prospered in the Roman and Byzantine periods. It was destroyed in the Persian conquest in the 7th C AD.

A TRIBUTE TO SAINT PHILOUMENOS OF OROUNTA

Life

Saint Philoumenos came from the village of Orounta in the province of Morphou, Cyprus. The neomartyr was born in 1913 to George and Magdalene Hasapis, along with his twin brother Archimandrite Elpidios. Even though his parents came from the village of Orounta, they lived at the parish of St. Savvas in Nicosia, since his father had his own inn and bakery there.[4]

From a young age, he and his brother Elpidios showed a special zeal for the sacred Scriptures of Christ, being inspired in particular by their grandmother Loxantra, who aside from their mother, influenced them in learning the ways of the Church and developing a truly Orthodox conscience.[4]

Together with his brother Elpidios, they showed a strong enthusiasm for prayer, read the lives of the Saints, and learned the hymns of the Church. In particular they were touched by the life of Saint John the "Kalyvitis", who in some way made an impact on them, to the point of inspiring them to want to follow the life of monks.

At the age of 14, the two brothers left for the ancient Monastery of

Stavrovouni, founded by the Empress St. Helen, and stayed there for five years.

In the Holy Land

New Martyr Archimandrite Philoumenos (+1979), keeper of the Greek Orthodox monastery of Jacob's Well in Samaria (Nablus, West Bank).

Afterwards, they both left for Jerusalem, where they attended High School. Upon finishing High School in 1939, Father Elpidios served as a priest in different places, eventually leaving for Mount Athos,[note 3], while Father Philoumenos joined the monastic Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

His spiritual son, the Monk Yeghia wrote these reminiscences of his father in Christ:

Father Philoumenos used to tell me about his years in Bethlehem, where the bishop disapproved of education for monks lest they be tempted to the priesthood. But because of his zeal for the neglected souls of the Palestinian faithful, Father Philoumenos studied to become fluent in Arabic, both literary and conversational, chanting the Holy Gospel more easily than many Arabs, and preaching the Orthodox faith not only in their language but in his Orthodox manner of life. What a good shepherd he was, more worthy than some of the episcopate! Yet the policies and needs of the patriarchate saw Father Philoumenos assigned to other positions. Whenever Palestinian faithful were scandalized by some unworthy priest, whenever Orthodox neglect or European money drove the faithful to wonder whether they would not receive better pastoral care from Uniates, it was Father Philoumenos that the Patriarch of Jerusalem sent as the true defender of the Faith, a man of more than blameless life, a man from whom no one could even imagine any immodest or improper word, a man whose faith and integrity were a model for all.

Three things were most remarkable about the blessed martyr. The first might have been partly from nature, but assuredly aided by Grace: this was his soft sweet voice, which I can still hear today. The second was a meticulous fidelity to small things, but specifically to the Divine Service. He never omitted one word of any day's service. When we were alone in some remote monastery, particularly for Matins, he slowly and carefully chanted each word of every psalm and canon. Not even at the Monastery of St. Sabba was the reading done so well. But when there were pilgrims for the Divine Liturgy and vespers, he made the usual abridgements lest the service be too long and some be tempted to leave. Later on, privately, he would read every word that had not been chanted in the church. Those who stayed with him for some time saw the copies of the menaion, horologion, synaxarion, etc. and noticed that the markers were always in place and the

volumes never dusty, which earned the Divine Promise, Well done thou good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over little things, I will set thee over great things Enter thou into the joy of the Lord (Matt. 25:21). Third, and as unobtrusive, almost secret, was his humility.[5]

In 1979 Saint Philoumenos was appointed guardian of the Monastery of Saint Jacob's Well.

Death

St. Philoumenos was murdered on 29 November 1979. His assailant, Asher Raby (spelled "Rabi" in some newspaper accounts), a mentally ill 37-year-old resident of Tel Aviv, had intruded the monastery, threw a hand grenade inside, which caused substantial damage. Philoumenos is said by investigators to have been fleeing the explosion and fire caused by the grenade when he was pursued by Raby and hit multiple times with an axe. Investigators stated that Philoumenos appeared to have been trying to protect his face with his hands when a blow to his face or head severed the one finger on each hand. Raby escaped the scene of the crime undetected. Raby was subsequently found to have acted alone, "without any connection to a religious or political entity."

The body of the Saint was handed over to the Orthodox 6 days after his massacre, but retained its flexibility and was buried in the cemetery of Mount Zion. Saint Philoumenos served in the Holy Land for 46 years (1933-1979).

Glorification

After four years his body was exhumed, as is customary among Greek monks. It was found to be substantially incorrupt and had the smell of a beautiful scent. Then the tomb was closed and was reopened during the Christmas season of 1984.

The Relics of New Hieromartyr Philoumenos of Jacob's Well.

On November 17/30, Patriarch Diodorus of Jerusalem, accompanied by various Greek bishops, archimandrites, clergymen and monastics, opened the grave. The coffin was reverently removed from its grave in the cemetery of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher on Mount Sion, and, when the shroud was lifted off, the relics were found to be substantially incorrupt. The remains were rinsed with wine, and then wrapped in a sheet. A short requiem service was then chanted.[13] His body was then placed in

a glass shrine in the northern part of the sacred Holy Altar in Mount Zion.

Hieromartyr Philoumenos was ranked among the Saint of the Church of Jerusalem on August 17/30, 2008, and from that time, his incorrupt body was transferred to the pilgrimage site of Saint Jacob's Well where he had found martyrdom for the love of Christ.

His memory is honored on November 29, especially in the Holy Metropolis of Morphou of the Church of Cyprus, and the community of Orounta, which observes an all-night long church service in memory of the martyr Saint Philoumenos the New.

The Lord has seen fit to allow our generation of Christians to have martyrs of its own. It is without a doubt that the blood of murdered Orthodox Christians such as Archimandrite Philoumenos in the Holy Land, Hieromonk Vasily and the two Optina monks in Russia and Brother Jose Munoz in the West, is today's "seed", which is ripening and will produce a harvest in Christ's Vineyard.

Troparia

St. Philoumenos, Newmartyr of Jacob's well, November 29.

TROPARION (Tone 3)

Vanquisher of daemons,
dispeller of the powers of darkness,
by thy meekness thou hast inherited the earth
and reignest in the Heavens;
intercede, therefore, with our Merciful God,
that our souls may be saved.

TROPARION (Tone 4)

At Jacob's well you were proved well named:
loving Christ, confessing Him, pouring out your sacred blood.
Being faithful in small things you were set over great.
Worshipping in Spirit and in Truth,
you are now Guardian of the Holy Places forever.

Tribute to a New Martyr - Our Holy Father Philoumenos of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher

Martyred at Jacob's Well, 16/29 November, 1979

Dispeller of the powers of evil

You vanquished the serpent

Well done thou good and faithful servant

Because you have been faithful over little things

At the hands of your extremist assailants,

You suffered a martyric death, tortured and massacred

You have inherited the Earth and reigned in the heavens

Amongst the elders offering incense before the throne of the Lamb

At Jacob's Well" by Sofia Kioroglou

It was about the sixth hour

In Nablus, in the West bank

A wayworn traveler hungry and thirsty

resting upon a well-curb

Asks to be given some water

Sitting next to the winch and the bucket

at Jacob's well, at the Well of Sychar

at a deep well hewn of solid rock

near the site of biblical Sechem

Bowing down to an angel - Poetry by Sofia Kioroglou

An old hermit has come to the door to greet me

In long hair and a loincloth of leaves, he beckons me in

"Seventy years in the desert and the only visitor an angel

Delivering communion bread every Sunday" he says

Entering the monastery in Akaldema, he invites me to his cell

To talk until sunset and burn incense before praying to God

before I tell him I am starving to death, like manna from heaven

Bread and water appear miraculously, him bowing down to an angel

At the far end of Gai Ben Hinnom, Judas Iscariot hanged himself

A hermit bidding the pilgrims goodbye, with a crown at his feet
wearing a loincloth of leaves, blesses the travelers and prays
the wild figure standing at the porch invisible to the naked eye.

A TRIBUTE TO A GREAT ASCETIC

The Life of St Onuphrius

The sole source for St Onuphrius's life is 'Paphnutius Cephalas. St Paphnutius tells how he went into the 'further desert' to see 'the servants of God' who live there (Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt & the Life of Onnophrius. He writes:

Now suddenly I looked and I saw a man in the distance; he was very terrifying because his hair was spread out over his body like a leopard's. Indeed, he was naked, and leaves covered his male member. When he came up close to me I was afraid and I climbed up on a ledge of the mountain, thinking that perhaps it was a wild donkey He raised his eyes to the mountain ledge; he saw me and called, 'Come down to me, holy man. I too am a man of the desert, like yourself. I live in this desert on account of my sins.' He said to me, 'You too are a friend of God'. So I sat down in front of him and I asked him to tell me his name.

After giving his name (sometimes Anglicised as 'Humphrey', the name is believed to derive from the Wnn-nfr meaning 'he-who-is-continuingly-good', in Arabic he is called Abū Nufar, which also means 'herbivore'), St Onuphrius explains that sixty years ago he was a monk at a monastery 'on the mountain of Shmoun in the Thebaid' called 'Eretē'. According to St Onuphrius:

We were all of one mind and lived in accord with one another, and peace dwelled in our midst. We lived together a life of quiet contemplation, glorifying God. Now I would spend the night in vigil with them, and I learned from them the rules of God. The great ones were perfect as the angels of the Lord are perfect.

When he hears the elders speaking about the desert-dwelling of the Prophet Elijah, or St John the Forerunner, St Onuphrius asks whether such desert-dwellers have not outdone the cœnobitic monks, due to the greater asceticism of their way of life (poluteia). The reply he receives is that indeed, such anchorites receive greater rewards and consolations from the Lord because of the greater difficulties and temptations they endure, for, 'God gives to each person according to what he has suffered. Blessed is he who will do the will of God on earth! I say to you that the angels will serve him from the moment of his birth and they will continue to comfort him at all times in his

need'

St Onuphrius says that he heard the words of the elders 'like honey sweet to my soul and I was filled within with complete understanding: I became like those whose minds travel to another world' . He got up 'immediately', took enough bread for four days, and left for the desert. He saw a light before him, which turned out to be an angel who said, 'Do not be afraid. I am the angel who has dwelled with you and walked with you since you were a child. You will carry through to its completion this stewardship which the Lord has appointed for you' (p. 154).

St Onuphrius tells how, after a walk of six or seven miles, he saw a 'great saint of God . . . handsome in appearance because his face shone with a great grace' coming out of a cave to greet him . He stayed with the hermit a few days and 'learned from him about God and . . . how to do the works of the desert', until they walked for four days to 'a desolate place'—'the place which the Lord has appointed for you to live in'. There the hermit stayed with St Onuphrius another month 'until I knew how to do the good work which was right for me to do. Afterwards he let me and we did not see each other for a year until he laid down his body and I buried him where he had lived' .

At this point, St Paphnutius asks how much St Onuphrius had suffered from the elements. The great hermit explains his experience in terms that seem the very fulfillment of what he had heard from the elders' lips at Eretē. At first he suffered a great deal. But then he says:

Now when God saw that I patiently endured in the good fight of fasting and that I devoted myself completely to ascetic practices, he had his holy angels serve me with my daily food; he gave it to me at night and strengthened my body. And the palm tree produced for me twelve bunches of dates each year, and I would eat one bunch each month [St Paul of Thebes was similarly aided by a palm tree]. And he also made the plants that grow in the desert sweet as honey in my mouth. For it is written, 'A person shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God shall a person live' (Mt 4:4; Lk 4:4).

St Paphnutius then inquires as to how St Onuphrius managed to receive the Mysteries. St Onuphrius replies:

My holy father, an angel of God comes and give me the eucharist on the Sabbath and the Lord's day; and to everyone in the desert who lives there on account of God and sees no human being, the angel comes and gives the eucharist and comforts them. What's more, if they desire to see anyone, they are taken up into the heavenly places where they see all the saints and greet them, and their hearts are filled with light; they rejoice and are glad with God in these good things. Now when they are seen they are comforted and they completely forget that they have suffered. Afterwards, they return

to their bodies and they continue to feel comforted for a long time. If they travel to another world through the joy which they have seen, they do not even remember that this world exists. (p. 156)

St Paphnutius is comforted and invigorated by St Onuphrius's tale, and responds, 'Blessed am I that I have been worthy to see your holy face and hear your sweet words' (p. 157). The two monks then walk a few more miles to a hut, where they sit and eat together, before spending 'the whole night praying to God until morning' (p. 157). Then St Paphnutius writes:

Now when morning came I saw that his face had changed and been transformed as though he had become a different person: it had turned completely into fire and his appearance greatly frightened me. But he said to me, 'Do not be afraid, my brother in God, for the Lord has sent you to care for my body and bury it. Indeed, this very day I shall complete my stewardship and go to the place of everlasting rest.'

St Onuphrius promises his intercessions to anyone that will offer some incense on his behalf, but St Paphnutius points out that not all can afford incense on account of their poverty, beseeching him to 'let your grace rest upon us all'. St Onuphrius says, 'Let him stand and say his prayers three times to God in my name and the Lord Jesus will bring him to the thousand years and he will receive an inheritance with all the saints' He then blesses St Paphnutius and bids him return to Egypt 'to comfort the holy brothers who live in the desert, to proclaim their sweet fragrance among the brethren who worship God as a benefit to those who listen to you'. St Paphnutius concludes his account of the great anchorite:

When he had finished saying these things, he rose and prayed to God with sighs and many tears. Afterwards he lay down on the ground and completed his stewardship of God, and he gave up his spirit into the hands of God on the sixteenth of Paone. And I heard the voices of angels singing hymns before the blessed Abba Onnophrius and there was great gladness when he came to meet God.

St Paphnutius buried the elder himself in a cleft in the rock, using part of his cloak as a shroud. He adds, 'I said my prayer over him and I rolled several stones over him. I stood up and prayed a second time and immediately the palm tree fell down'

No part of this publication may be reproduced either in full or in part.

Mount Tabor

Mount Tabor (Hebrew: Har Tavor) is a hill rising above the Jezreel Valley in the region of Galilee. It is the place where the Transfiguration of Christ occurred. The Church of Transfiguration has the rock where Jesus stood, identified by Christians in the 4th century AD.

The miraculous Holy Cloud of Mount Tabor

Following the All-night Vigil, the Holy Cloud descends upon the Orthodox Monastery on Mount Tabor and not on other Heterodox Churches on the mountain at the same time every year, at approximately 4:00 AM with the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, much as the Holy Light appears every year at the Holy Sepulchre at Easter. When the Holy Cloud descends, it brightens the area with a fragrant reddish-white (I personally saw it in orange) colour in the midst of the night. The fragrance suffuses the whole area like incense but not quite that. The cloud is so thick that you sometimes catch it with your hands like flakes evanescent but rather tangible. When I had the film of my camera developed, I saw flashes of light like fireflies jumping out of the pictures. Really amazing! I am in tears every time, I think about it and cherish these moments dearly.

Mount Tabor - Poetry by Sofia Kioroglou

When Moses and Elijah appeared
on that Day, I saw Jesus in their midst
and I rejoiced like Peter, James and John

On the navel of the World,
I stood and I saw you in all Your Glory
Your Light effulgent, You shone like the Sun

You let me in to share in the joy
to get a foretaste of meeting You
after my worldly departure

You came like an orange cloud
in the middle of the dawning hours of my existence
You took me up into the heavenly places to see your angels

"Remember me Lord " Sofia Kioroglou

Remember me, Lord, when you come
A Humble and unworthy servant I was
A most execrable superintendent

I hope in you Lord that you shall be my redemption
Do not let my darkness engulf me
but enlighten my mind to understand You

I am burning incense to placate your wrath
Woe betide me, the unwary and unscrupulous
Don't let me sink in my trespasses

Help me your ways to understand,
the inconceivable of Your wisdom to penetrate
The noetic puzzle to crack

Save me from the abominable serpent
He stings me with thoughts of pride
His cycle circadian, the now a sempiternal torture

The Lance of Kentarch

Piercing its way into creation
The godly kairos, sliced through chronos
The cry of a baby in a manger
The fulfillment of promises past

A cosmic collision of the sacred and secular

An intersection of the Holy will of God and the stubborn ways of man
The Lance of Kentarch, the liturgical spear
The spilled blood and water, divine mercy and baptismal waters

The Monastery of the Shepherds in Beit Sahour

This is where tradition indicates the spot where the "Shepherds kept watch" (Luke 2: 8). On the night that Christ was born, Archangel Gabriel spoke to them and they heard the angelic proclamation "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and good will toward men" (Luke 2: 14). The site is also well known for its ancient Olive Trees that date back to the time before Jesus's birth; tradition holds that two of these trees mark the location where King David wrote many of his Psalms.

Pious traditions also associated the Shepherds' Fields with the place where Jacob pastured his flock and built the "Tower of Gader" (tower of the flock) referred to in Genesis 35: 21, after the death of his wife Rachel on the way to Efrata (means the fertile and indicates the Bethlehem area) while giving birth to their son Benjamin (Genesis 35: 16).

This cave was one of many churches built by Saint Helena in the year 325 A.D. when she came to the Holy Land to find the True Cross of our Lord, and converted the natural cave into a church, which still operates today. It has an arched roof and a mosaic floor. It is one of the very few Churches that contain the original building by Saint Helena.

The underground church is dedicated to the Synaxis of the Mother of God, to Joseph the Betrothed and the shepherds. Tradition states that three of the shepherds to whom the angel announced the birth of Christ were buried in the west side of the Cave Church and their tomb and bones are still visible to this day. Today, only the crypt of the church remains. This dark subterranean chapel contains an altar facing eastward with a number of icons and a small apse behind it.

The traditions also indicate that Saint Paula constructed a Church in the spot in the 5th century, but was destroyed by the Samaritans in the year 530 AD. Then the Emperor Justinian re-constructed the Church until it was destroyed by the Persians in the year 614 AD who killed all the monks that were there. Then the Emperor Hercules re-constructed it in the year 632 AD, but it was later destroyed again.

During the Islamic ruling of the region (638 - 1099 AD), the monastery was rebuilt surrounded with high walls, to provide asylum and protection to the

desert monks, and had a monastic brotherhood until the 11th century when the monastery was completely destroyed by the Crusaders, after which it was abandoned by the monks.

The monastery was deserted and only the cave Church remained, under the care of the Fathers Forefathers Orthodox Church' congregation and priests at that time as a devotional area for Christians residents of the area and those pilgrims who visited the holy land, until the year 1971, when the Patriarch of Jerusalem at that time, at the initiative and instigation of the late Elder Seraphim the Sabbaitis (the first, after many years, Abbot and founder of the current Monastery of the Shepherds), decided to build a new large Church at the traditional site, adjacent to the cave, and finished in the year 1989 AD.

The new Church was named "Glory to God in the Highest," and has three holy altars which are dedicated as follows: the main altar to the Mother of God, the altar on the right to the great martyr and healer - Saint Panteleimon, and the altar on the left side to the archangels Michael and Gabriel and all the heavenly hosts. Over the centuries the Monastery of the shepherds has also been known as the "Tower of Gader", "Property of Boaz", "Property of King David", "The land of Jacob and Rachael", "Property of Joachim and Anne", and "The fields of Virgin Mary".

Miracles of the Holy Monastery of the Shepherds

Many miracles have occurred over time at the Monastery of the Shepherds. the residents of the village witnessed so many wonderful miracles and events that it didn't seem strange to them to see Angels, Virgin Mary or Saint George advising them or correcting their mistakes. We will mention below some of the miraculous events that have occurred at the Holy Shrine of the Shepherds.

The pious Khalil al-Kasis, a resident of the village, a devout Christian who regularly attended the Matins and Liturgies at the Church of the cave, once set out to go to Church very early, under the impression it was early dawn. Upon arrival, he saw that the door was open and the church was full of people, unknown to him, who were attending the Holy Liturgy. He also attended the Holy Liturgy and upon completion, he partook of the Holy bread. In the morning when Father Nicholas opened the door of the church, mind you he was the only one who had the key to the door, he found Khalil al-Kasis Allen in a pew, holding tightly in his hand the Holy bread. Unbeknownst to him, he had participated in the Divine Liturgy held by heavenly angels who had opened the church, conducted the Divine Liturgy

and then locked the church, leaving him fast asleep in the pew.

Khalil Abufarha, a pious Greek Orthodox Arab, had taken the key from the priest to the cave church in order to light the oil lamps for the Matins. Being under the impression that it was five o'clock and being fooled by the full moon light, he stepped into the church which was suffused with wonderful chants unknown to him. The time was two o'clock after midnight when he decided to inch a step further despite his inhibitions. Wondering who could have opened the church at such an ungodly hour, he summoned up his courage only to find himself enveloped in a Divine Liturgy conducted by Angels

Beit Sahour

East of Bethlehem of Judea
pastors kept watch over their flock
peacefully tending their sheep
when dazzled by a light
luminous grotto
tidings of joy
An angel
would bring
God

Nahal Prat

In a deep and narrow gorge
the wadi winds its tortuous course
in a cliff face pocked with caves

monks ensconced in steep enclaves.

Elijah was fed by ravens
praised the Lord, beheld the heavens
Down a steep and winding path
What good is being a polymath?

Nahal Prat, a holy place
I feel God's serene embrace
past are now my life's transgressions
I embrace my sins as lessons.

The monastic community at St George Monastery of Hazeva

St. George Monastery of Hazeva from Judea, also called Wadi Kelt, is an ancient Orthodox monastery baring the relics of Saint John Jacob of Neamt (the Romanian), called also “the Hotzebite” and of Saint George the Hotzebite. The monastery is situated approximately 20 kilometers from Jerusalem taking the road to Jericho. The valley of “Wadi Kelt” occupies a large part of the Judea desert and runs parallel with the ancient Roman road that once connected Jerusalem to Jericho, a road with biblical connotations - where the Good Samaritan came to Christ (see Luke 10, 29-37). The monastery of Saint George is situated on the steep west bank of the valley.

The Orthodox Christian monks began to settle in the wilderness of Judea as early as the fourth century. Between the V and the VI centuries, the desert of Judea became a particularly strong monastic region, more than 70 monasteries and monastic hermitages were founded here, some of which are little accessible even today.

The first monks settled in this valley around the year 420. There are known as: Prono, Elijah Gannaïos, Ainan and Zenon. The small chapel built by these five hermits was later turned into a monastery by St. John the Thebes - a monk that came from Thebes, Egypt around 480 AD.

The monastic complex from Hazeva dating back to the late sixth century, still maintains its chapels and gardens, which are inhabited today by a group of Greek monks. The paved trail leading to the monastery begins near a gate - a stone portal in the form of three arcs baring its name, and crosses the desert valley of Judea.

The monastery of St. George the Hotzebite is carved into a rock wall on the site of an ancient monastic settlement started in the early fifth century. The monastery is located west of Jericho, in the stream valley named Horat

- or Cher in the Old Testament and called today Hazeva. It is also believed that the OT prophet Elijah has lived in this region during his persecution by King Ahab.

The Monastery of Saint George of Hazeva was founded in the fifth (or VI) century by John of Thebes. After been tonsured a monk, St. John left Thebes in Egypt and came to the wilderness of Judea, around 480. Here, in a cave, he lived as a hermit.

The monastery was later named “St. George of Hazeva” after its famous monk who dwelled here, George Coziba (Hazeva).

In the late sixth century, the monastery became very famous for its spiritual leader, St. George of Coziba, born in Cyprus, around 550.

Destroyed in 614 by the Persians, the monastery was later rebuilt by the Crusaders. During the Persians’ attack, 40 holy monks ended their life in martyrdom and the monastery was abandoned.

An inscription in Greek and Arabic, perched above the old entrance to the monastery, speaks about its restoration in 1179, by King Manuel the I (1143-1180). In 1483, the pilgrim Felix Fabri - found here only few ruins.

In 1878, a Greek monk named Kalinik, settled in the old monastic walls of the wilderness of Judea, fully restoring the monastery. The repair works were completed in 1901. The oldest part of the monastery preserves a mosaic floor dated back to the late sixth century.

In its ancient time, the monastery church was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Today, however, after its reconstruction and renaissance, the church has as its patrons, Saint George and Saint John Jacob the Hotzebite.

The holy relics (skulls) of monks killed by the Persians are preserved in a chapel near the main church, where the complete holy relics of St. John Jacob the Romanian are also found along with the tomb of St. George the Hotzebite. According to the local tradition, this monastery bares the cave where Saint Elijah the Tishbite dwelled for three years and six months before ascending to the Mount Sinai. In the cave of St. Elijah an icon depicts the saint as being fed miraculously by ravens (see OT, Kings).

And the Lord said to Elijah: “Go away from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. It shall be that you will drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there. So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook. It happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “Arise, go to

Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.” (I Kings 17, 2-9)

In the local ancient tradition, it is also said that Joachim, the father of the Virgin Mary dwelled in these places, fasting and praying for 40 days, until an angel of God told him that his righteous wife Anna, will conceive and bear a daughter who will become the Mother of God.

St. George the Hotzebite

St. George of Hazeva is commemorated on January 8. Leaving his homeland and all the worldly delights, St. George came to Jerusalem to worship in the church of the Holy Sepulcher and other holy shrines in Jerusalem. On this occasion, he enters the monastery that will be called “Hazeva”.

The Saint had struggled for many years in prayer and hard labors in the Cave of St. Elijah. His relics can be honored/venerated in the monastery church and by the power of God, they work many miracles.

St. John Jacob of Neamt (the Romanian)

St. John Jacob the Romanian was born in 1913 and passed in the Lord on August 5th 1960 at the age of 47 years. Saint John arrived at the Holy Land and went to the Romanian monastic settlement of Jordan, where he became a spiritual advisor and leader. St. John however, considered his labors not to be sufficient for his salvation and desired a more severe struggle in the desert as once had the anchorite of the golden age of Christianity.

Father John went to the Monastery of St. George the Hotzebite, to the cave where the Holy Prophet Elijah (of Tishbite) lived for sometime and where thousands of monks dwelled in ancient times, many been martyred during the Persian invasion.

Perhaps that is why the pious ascetic John had chosen this monastery, where he lived but a short time. In 1953, St John retires in another cave - of St. Ann - nearby, where he remained until the end of life in the most severe asceticism.

In this cave - carved into the steep cliffs of the mountain, St. John spent his days in prayer and fasting, sleeping very little on a mat laid on a wooden board and eating little dry food. In this poor and lowly surrounding, St. John

prayed for eight years, enduring cold, hunger, thirst, heat, diseases, deprivations and temptations of all kinds.

His holy body was placed in a tomb where he had prepared ahead of time. At his death, multitudes of birds had miraculously gathered at the monastery of St. George during the memorial service. For twenty years, St. John's body rested in the tomb of Saint Ann's Cave. In August 1980, by divine providence when his grave was opened, his body was found whole, incorrupt and fragrant. His relics were translated in great procession into St. George Monastery chapel and placed in a glass casket.

For his holy life, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church at its meeting in June 20th 1992, proclaimed the canonization of Blessed John among the saints under the name "St. John the New," "St. John Jacob from Neamt" or "the Hotzebite", his commemoration takes place on August 5/18 each year

The Life of Father John (Iacob) the Romanian

An account of some of the miracles of St John

The Miracles of Saint John Jacob Performed During His Reverence life

Father Ioanichius Paraiala (his spiritual child), as a result of a strike at the right elbow, had got an infection, and after a few years of suffering had got a tuberculosis of the bones. He had an open wound at his elbow, and through the infected wound, at the same time with the matter that drained all the time, there began to come out chips and pieces of decomposed bones.

Then the abbot of the monastery took father Ioanichius to a hospital in Jerusalem where the doctors decided that the father's arm had to be cut, to which he said: 'If I am to die from this, I want to die with all my limbs complete', and he refused all medical intervention, running away from the hospital. When he arrived at the monastery, Saint John began to bandage him up, and to wash his wound with tea plants, and after a few washings the wound closed and healed.

Father Ioanichius said that as soon as Saint John put his hand on him, he felt a great quietness, the pains left him, and he was filled with a holy peace and joy, so that he felt no kind of pain any more.

His arm recovered, but in exchange, it became rigid from the elbow.

~~~~~

After the moving of Saint John at the cave of Saint Anna from Hazeva, father Ioanichius Paraiala carried with the donkey of the monastery some pieces of board, and some pieces of plate taken from some plate barrels, in

order to separate the cell of Saint John. While going on a narrow and winding path, the donkey was frightened by a bird that flew out of the bush, and it threw father in an abyss of almost 20 metres.

Then father Ioanichius broke the same arm also from the elbow, he hurt his head and legs, and he could hardly get out of the abyss, and he could hardly arrive at the cave of the Saint who, when he saw him, was frightened too, by the way he looked.

He washed him, he tied his wounds, and his right hand was hanging from his elbow because the bones that had been caught and blocked were now broken, and his arm

Then Saint John tore a shirt, and with some towels wrapped up around his neck, he tied his arm a little bent from the elbow, and in a short time it cured again, and his right arm remained that way a little bent and fixed, so that he couldn't even do the cross.

But the way he was, he worked in the garden, in the kitchen, he made bread and communion bread, he cleaned the church, he lit the icon lamps, and he did all the other obediences, because for a long time only he and father abbot Ambrose had been in the monastery.

So, this way, Saint John healed father Ioanichius twice.

When Saint John was at the Monastery of St. Sava, there came a lot of old Bedouins or pilgrims, that fell ill on the way to the monastery, and as soon as he put his hands on them, the pains relieved them, and in a short time they recovered. The Moslem Bedouins that had known him tell about these, and they used to call him the doctor of the monastery.

~~~~~

When Saint John was at the cave one night, right at midnight some Jews came with their lanterns lighting, searching the caves where once hundreds of hermits had lived there. These were raking and digging, looking for old patrimony objects.

Not far from the cell of the Saint it was a cave in which there were put tens of skulls, and hundreds of bones of the Holy Fathers that had ended their lives in the caves.

When the robbers came near that cave, the Saint saw their flash lights, and heard them talking what they were planning to do.

Then Saint John with his hands up to the sky cried: 'God, will you allow those outlaws break the quietness of your elected ones?' And a great miracle happened right on the spot because the mountain fell down covering the entrance mouth of the cave, and the robbers ran away frightened falling at the bottom of the abyss from where they could hardly get out wounded, and nobody could disturb the peace of those saints.

There it became real God's word that: if you have as faith as a mustard seed, you will move the mountains, too.

Here is how at Saint John's pray the mountain quaked, and it did not allow those outlaws to come nearer and to disturb the peace of His Saints.

~~~~~

When Saint John lived at the cave, a Greek monk called Mitrofan, who was a painter came from the Holy Mountain. When he saw the loneliness and the quietness of the desert, he told Saint John that he wanted to come there too, but that first he had to go home to put order into his problems, and then he would come, but the saint told him: 'If you want to come, come as you are now, and if you want to go to put order into your house, you will never come.'

Then father Mitrofan returned to the Holy Mountain, and he began to paint again some churches for two years with the thought of gaining some money, so that he won't be in need of anything when he came in the desert.

Father Mitrofan had an apprentice that worked with him at the paintings.

That one stole him some brushes, and other materials of great value, and the father scolded him, after which at night the apprentice waited for him on a path and killed him.

So the prediction of Saint John became real, that if he did not come the way he was, then he would never come.

Another miracle performed by Saint John through his word when he was alive, it is told by His Reverence himself in what follows. I express exactly the words and lines written by Saint John: 'Two years ago when father Sava came for the first time to the Jericho being very ill and disappointed, I wrote these lines to him and I asked him to keep his courage, and not to abandon us. Here is what I wrote to him then - here are the lines to father confessor Sava:

Keep the poverty of old age a little more,

Stop on the edge of life,

And first, think:

To whom do you leave your sons?

There where the Heavenly Height

Will see you, Holy Saint Sava,

He will ask you the question,

About the state of our souls.

So, prepare your disciple,

Which is worth taking your place,

Ahead the flock so poor,

And then you move in peace!

So, writing to him those lines, our old Father listened to me, and with God's gift he gained strength and he lived two years more.'

### **The Miracles Performed after He Passed Away to God**

After the Relics of Saint John were brought, and they were put into the church, the Patriarch Benedict and another two bishops, summoned the synod in order to bury back the Saint saying he was not a saint, and he was not a Greek. Others said that he should be put in the grave of the monastery that was under the church, having an entrance under the staircase that climbed up to the belfry and the monastery.

But there were deposited there wheelbarrows, spades, sacks of cement, and all kinds of tools because at that time it was made the way that descended from the road to the monastery; and so, the Saint was left into the church because they did not have where to put him.

After a while when the Patriarch and the two bishops saw that there were many pilgrimages, and many people talked about St. John from Hazeva, they summoned again the synod, and they decided to bury St. John.

Immediately after that decision, the Patriarch had an infarct and he died, one of the bishops had a kidney obstruction, and in a year, all the three of them that wanted to bury St. John, died.

~~~~~

There came a group of pilgrims from Greece to cross themselves at the Holy Places, and when they arrived at Hazeva, a woman believer among them, called Hellen, when coming near the holy coffin of the Saint, said: 'I'd better did not come to see this dead man which some consider to be a saint.'

When she arrived late at night to Jerusalem she couldn't sleep, and when at daybreak she fell into a light slumber, she dreamt St. John young, with a lighted face, handsome, and he said to her: 'Hellen! Why were you frightened by me, and what harm had I done to you?'

The following day Hellen wanted to come to Hazeva, and to pray the Saint to forgive her, but that wasn't possible because she had to go back to Greece together with the other pilgrims.

Since then, a headache and a fright had kept bothering her until the following year she came, and she crossed at the holy coffin of the Saint, and then she healed, and she asked father Ioanichius to give her an icon of the Saint. Father had no icon, but he gave her a photo she received with great gladness, and every time she came to Jerusalem from then on, she

said that the Saint helped her very much when she mentioned him in her prayers. That way she brought to the knowledge of many people from Greece the power of St. John Jacob the Romanian from Hazeva.

Another Christian woman from Australia dreamt a monk who told her to gather money for a holy coffin of a Saint with whole Saint Relics, but she was not told what was the name of the Saint. The following day she began to tell the dream to some more acquaintances, but nobody knew anything about that Saint.

After the Holy Relics of St. John were descended from the cave, and they were put into the church in a coffin, a group of orthodox pilgrims from Cyprus came. In that group there was a Christian woman called Cleopatra, who had seen in her dream St. John, who told her he hadn't where to stay, he hadn't a holy coffin. Then Cleopatra paid the money, so that the holy coffin of the Saint could be made, on which it was written it had been donated by Theodosius and Cleopatra Marcu from Cyprus.

~~~~~  
After father abbot Amfilohius had passed away to eternity, the monastery had been left without an abbot for four years.

During that time father Ioanichius was the only monk that kept the icon lamps burning, read daily the seven praises, received the pilgrims coming to pray, and took care of the whole monastery. Then there came a Serbian father monk from the Holy Mountain, called hiero-monk Gregory who served the Holy Liturgy on Sundays and on holidays, together with father Ioanichius and nun Magdalene, when they came to receive the Holy Eucharist.

When father Gregory went to incense, after he incensed the Holy Icons and the Holy Relics, he used to pass on, without incensing the holy coffin of St. John because he had no piety for the Saint, and he said that he knew from the Patriarchate that father John was not a Saint, but father Ioanichius made him a Saint. One morning when he came out with the censer, he saw St. John standing up near the holy coffin and he told him: 'You have incensed all the saints. Do you have anything against me? What wrong have I done to you that you don't incense me, and speak ill of me?' From then on, father Gregory had great piety, and he prayed a lot to St. John, and he said to many people what had happened at the holy coffin of the Saint.

~~~~~  
In 1988 the Patriarch Diodor of Jerusalem, named as an abbot at Hazeva hieromonk Sinesius, who had been before, the intendant of the Patriarch. Father abbot Sinesius was a young man of 24 when he came to Hazeva.

Like the other Greeks of the Greek Patriarchate neither that one had piety for St. John saying to father Ioanichius that he knew from other fathers and

bishops that father John was a Romanian monk, and because of some sins he hadn't putrefied, and that father Ioanichius cried up to all the pilgrims that came to Hazeva that he was a Saint, but in fact he was not.

In 1989 there came to Hazeva a Greek deacon from the Holy Mount, called Nichiforos.

That one was born in Germany. His father was a Turk that worked in a car factory, and his mother was a Greek from Greece, who had gone to Germany with her mother since childhood, and they had settled there.

Nichiforos's grandmother (his mother's mother) was of Macedonian origin, she had left Constanta in her youth with her parents, and she had gone to Greece where she had married a Greek, who had died after Nichiforos's mother had been born.

Nichiforos's grandmother grew him up in God's fright. She took him and she christened him when he was older, in Greece, without his father knowing it, because he was a Moslem. When he was 18 he went to the Holy Mount and turned a monk, then after two years he went to America where the metropolitan bishop Natanail ordained him a deacon.

After a short time he went again to the Holy Mount where he made himself a hermit. Then he came to Jerusalem, where he met father abbot Sinesius, and that took him to Hazeva because he was alone between two Romanians and a Serbian.

Now, there were two Greeks against St. John and the two Romanians. Although the hieromonk Gregory had great piety for St. John, he could not say anything because he was also a foreigner as we were.

One day father abbot Sinesius scolded father Ioanichius because he took some Romanians to pray to the holy coffin of the Saint, and he gave them some books with the poems and the learnings 'Spiritual Food', and he forbade him to write anything about St. John saying that, that buried corpse stank (had a fetid smell), and that he had to be buried.

Then father Ioanichius sighed deeply, and he told him in my presence: 'It won't be 40 days, and you'll see with your eyes, and your disciple too, if St. John is a Saint or not.'

The next morning I saw father abbot Sinesius entering the church with his beard out, and when father Ioanichie asked him why he had cut his beard he said: 'A monk came last night in my cell which beat me terribly, and set fire on me, but there was nothing that could be burnt in my cell except for my beard.'

Then every night, for 40 days, that monk would come and beat him the whole night, until he confessed his guilt and he prayed to the Saint to forgive him.

During that time Nichiforos contradicted us all the time with regard to St. John to whom father Ioanichius told: 'Never mind, St. John will take care of you, too.' After that, Nichiforos began to go to the Bedouins, to eat and to sleep with them in their huts. After 6 months Nichiforos went to the Jericho, he took off his monk clothes, he left the great hermit clothes, he baptized as a Moslem, he got the name of Mustafa, and he married an Arabian widow with two children.

During that time father abbot Sinesius was moved too, in his place the Patriarch of Jerusalem brought another father abbot from the Monastery of St. Sava, father Anthony.

But as the other father abbot, neither that one had too great a piety for St. John, he didn't treat us like Sinesius did, in exchange, for him, the Saint was father John, not the Saint.

After St. John was canonized by the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch Diodor of Jerusalem settled to send to Romania two Metropolitan bishops of the Jerusalem Patriarchate to a Pan-Orthodox Synod that was organized by the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia in Jassy.

The Patriarch of Jerusalem decided to send to Romania together with that two Metropolitan bishops, a piece from the Holy Relics of St. John.

Then, the Patriarch sent father abbot Antony to bring him a finger from the hand of the Saint to send it to Romania.

Father Abbot Anthony was in a hurry, he opened the holy coffin of the Saint, he broke in a hurry a finger from the right hand of the Saint, and that was all. He remained stiff with the Saint's finger in his hands, and he felt a mortal cold shiver from top to toe. He felt on his head a cold hand, then a stream as cold as ice began to flow down his spine, after which some hot waves suffocated him, trying to take his soul of his chest, his heart beat so hardly that he thought something was breaking in his head, and he had a terrible buzzing in his ears, and he could not hear or see anything.

He would have wanted to shout at St. John to ask for his forgiveness but he had no voice. But his mind was clear and he said in his thought: 'Saint John, I had sinned before you out of ignorance but now, please forgive me, and don't punish me for my ignorance and my sins.'

Then it was a great miracle, and father Anthony was set free from those terrible ties, after which he put the Saint's finger in his place, he fell down on his knees near the Saint's holy coffin, he prayed a lot, after which crying, he entered the altar, he dressed with all the priest's vestments, he burned the censer, he incensed the holy altar and the church, the holy coffin of St. John and for the first time a Greek priest sang to him the hymn of the Saint: 'Into you, father ... ' then he knelt again by the holy coffin of the Saint, he prayed a lot after which he opened the lid of the holy coffin,

he kissed the hands of St. John, he took with great care and shyness the Saint's finger, he put it in a silver box wrapped in a vestment, and he carried it to the Patriarchate. That miracle was performed in August 1992.

Since then, the father abbot had prayed much to St. John, he sang his hymn, and he mentioned him in all his prayers, and then he mentioned St. John with all the other Saints.

Not long after that, a group of worshippers from Greece entered the church, that left after they had prayed. Their guide saw that a woman was missing, so he went back to the monastery thinking she fell, and she had an accident on the stairs. He called for her, and he looked for her everywhere, and he found her by the Saint's holy coffin, crying and praying, on her knees.

At that time I was in the church, and I changed the candles left burning by the worshippers. When the guide entered the church, father abbot Anthony came with him. Then the guide shouted at the woman saying: 'Ela Maria. Let's go Maria, the coach is leaving, and it's a long way to go to the other monasteries, too.'

Maria stood up crying, she took the ring off her finger, she took off from her neck a golden chain with a medallion and a golden cross, she took her watch off her hand, and sobbing she said: 'Let everybody leave because I don't need anything from now on, and I don't go anywhere because now I healed here at the holy coffin of the Saint from a hard disease I had suffered for 15 years, after I had given birth to a boy called Ioannis (John).'

In April 1994 a group of worshippers from Greece came to Hazeva. There was in the group a woman with her daughter. The mother was almost 50 years old, and the daughter was almost 18 years old.

When the daughter tried to come near the holy coffin of St. John with a burning candle in her hands, a Greek monk Ghermanos stopped her because she was not dressed properly. Her mother being together with her daughter, making great noise, was down upon monk Ghermanos saying that her daughter, being a young lady, could dress as she liked. Monk Ghermanos replied: 'The church is a holy place, a place of praying. It IS not a place of entertainment, and not a beach where you can go no matter how, even undressed.'

The daughter felt uneasy, she went out on the balcony, and when her mother approached to kiss the holy coffin of St. John, the Saint turned his head to her he sighed deeply, and the Saint's face was covered all over by water drops.

The woman screamed, and she ran away down the stairs scared, descending towards the gate, where she fell down breaking both her legs.

All were frightened by that happening. The fathers of the monastery took a

litter, and they helped the woman to be carried to the coach.

The woman confessed in front of everybody that she was guilty because she hadn't brought up her daughter well, and when she came near to worship, she doubted the Saint, thinking he was a corpse, not a Saint.

Then asking father Ghermanos for forgiveness, she confessed that Saint John punished her for her sins.

Since then, St. John had remained with his head turned to the right, as if he reproved those who approach without piety, and dressed indecently.

(Taken from "The Life, The Miracles and the Akathistos Hymn of St. John Jacob, from Hazeva)

Akathistos Hymn to Saint John Jacob the Romanian

(written by Saint John Jacob's disciple, father Ioanichius Paraiala)

Kontakion 1:

To thee, O great hermit of the Church of Christ, O pastoral adviser of the monks and offspring of Moldavia, come all ye faithful Christians to praise and cry out:

Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Ekos 1:

The Creator of Angels and of mankind, our Lord God Almighty has chosen thee from the beginning to leave all vanity of this world and with thy heart enflamed by divine love, thou ran to the salvation of reclusory, for which wondering we sing to thee:

Rejoice, thou who from childhood hast loved God;

Rejoice, for been burned by thine divine love, thou ran away from all vanity;

Rejoice, thou who rose from faithful parents Maxim and Katherine;

Rejoice, thou who didst receive the name of the Holy Prophet Elijah at thy baptism;

Rejoice, thou who wast left an orphan since childhood;

Rejoice, for Maria thy grandmother took care of thee;

Rejoice that for a while she was thy earthly protector;

Rejoice for she had taught thee in thine Holy Christian Faith since childhood;

Rejoice, for thy childhood had been difficult;

Rejoice, for it has helped thee to gain eternal life;

Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 2:

Having followed the schools of the time in thy village and alienated from thy acquaintances O father, thou hast kept in thy soul the yearning for the supreme serving of Christ, never taking part in childish games but always singing from thy heart to Thee: Alleluia!

Ekos 2:

When thou wert only 10 years old, thy grandmother and only earthly comforter dying, thou wert entrusted to see in the Holy Altar of the Church, a marvelous vision of Thy Resurrection of Christ our Savior, for which we sing to thee:

Rejoice, for having a pure heart thou saw Christ our God;

Rejoice for at the grave at thy parents, thou often used to go to burn candles;

Rejoice, for God has been thy only comfort, strengthening and hope;

Rejoice, thou who from early childhood didst show to be a fervent worker of the prayer of Jesus;

Rejoice, for thy heart was not attached to vain things;

Rejoice, for thou hast taken Christ's Pure Mother as thy protector;

Rejoice, for in thy loneliness, thou didst find quietness;

Rejoice, for in God's will thou hast entrusted thy life;

Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 3:

Having finished primary school in thy native village, the gymnasium then the secondary school, thou hast confessed thy thoughts to thy Elder - Abbot Eugene Laiu, wanting to become a monk and to sing unceasingly to Thee: Alleluia!

Ekos 3:

Giving up all the vanity for Christ's love and praying before the relics of the Holy Martyr John the New from Suceava, thou didst follow thy way to sacred Monastery of Neamt, for which we sing to thee:

Rejoice, Allhappy soul loved by God;

Rejoice, for bishop Nicodim Munteanu didst accept thee;

Rejoice, for thou wert given the obedience to the sick;

Rejoice, for thou didst help many by learning the physician's skills

Rejoice, thou who didst wonder at thine creation;

Rejoice, thou who day and night un-ceaselessly prayed to Thy Heavenly Father;

Rejoice, for thy great zeal in reading spiritual councils;

Rejoice, thou who greatly loved thine Holy Church, thine people and the spiritual writings;

Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 4:

After becoming a monk, thou took the name of the Great Baptist John, O pious father and sought God's care day and night, for thee wert to live the life of a hermit in places where thine great prophet dwellest and sung to God: Alleluia!

Ekos 4:

As once Abraham left thy country and thy relatives, o father so didst thee left Moldavia for thine Holy Places, for which we sing to thee:

Rejoice, thou follower in the faith of the Patriarchs;

Rejoice, for resembling the Saints with thy strive;

Rejoice, thou - obedient with Abraham;

Rejoice, with Jacob who saw God;

Rejoice, thou without wickedness like Moses;

Rejoice, like David in meekness;

Rejoice, for thou didst show the patience of Job;

Rejoice, thou who reprov'd errors, with the boldness of the Great Baptist;

Rejoice, foreseer of the future with the old prophets;

Rejoice thou who fervently prayed at thine Holy Places;

Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 5:

At the instruction of Holy Patriarch Damianos from thine Holy Church of Jerusalem, thou were accepted in the covenant of Saint Sava, singing to Thee: Alleluia!

Ekos 5:

Thy struggles in the monastic obedience were many, O pious father, but with the help of Thee, Whom you dearly held in thy heart, thou didst carry everything with love, for which we sing to thee:

Rejoice, O pious Father John;

Rejoice, follower of Saint Sava in virtues;
Rejoice, thou who resembled Anthony in holiness;
Rejoice, thou who didst strive as the Great Arsenius;
Rejoice, that all the badly sick fathers were seeking for thy help;
Rejoice, with the Great Sisoës in deeds;
Rejoice, consolation of the Christian's pilgrims seeking for thee;
Rejoice, that for thy great charity
"Physician of the monastery" all called thee;
Rejoice, that through the miracle of thine Holy Mother, thou were saved
from the Bedouins' attack;
Rejoice, thou who carrest for all as didst Christ thy Master;
Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 6:

Longing for the life of a hermit, O father, thou took the blessing of
hieromonk Sava to depart for Kumrran desert, singing to Thee: Alleluia!

Ekos 6:

Thy stay in Kumrran wast short, O Father, when the Bedouins rushed in with
their cattle so thou had to depart for the cave of Kalomana in the Valley of
Jordan, for which thee hear from us:

Rejoice, thou who searched for silence;
Rejoice, that from the attack of a wild beast, thou wast saved through a
great miracle;
Rejoice, that departing from passions, thou didst oppose evil;
Rejoice, thou who dwelled not far from the Monastery of Saint Gherassim
form Jordan;
Rejoice, for great harness thou didst endure there;
Rejoice, for having settled in Kalomonas cave, thou didst receive a disciple;
Rejoice, thou who wast consumed by the same zeal and love for Thee;
Rejoice, for in the Jordan Valley, thou sang praises;
Rejoice, thou who wast struck by a serious illness of the stomach;
Rejoice, for despite of thy illness, thou carried out the monastic law and
the canons;
Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 7:

This illness hast tormented thee for one-half year, O Father, and thee grew even weaker to a total exhaustion, but with joyful heart thou sang to Thee: Alleluia!

Ekos 7:

When the war burst in the Holy Land, thou wert put in the concentration camp with the Italians and the Germans for almost a year, for which hear from us these:

Rejoice, for these temptations didn't frighten thee;

Rejoice, thou who didst endure all for Christ's love;

Rejoice, for in the storms of life, thou grew stronger;

Rejoice, that in troubles and pain, thou hast run to God for help;

Rejoice, that weakened by the stomach pain, thy only hope was from Above;

Rejoice, that from the camp thou wast saved by the power of Jesus;

Rejoice, for once again, thou wast received in the Lavra of Saint Savas;

Rejoice, for thou wert ordered to the same obedience;

Rejoice, for thou went to the Monastery of Saint Theodosius;

Rejoice, thou who wast healed from Above'

Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 8:

Having being deemed worthy to be received into the holy order of the deaconate and then the priesthood at our Lord Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, thou wast longing to go to the desert, singing to Thee: Alleluia!

Ekos 8:

So great was thy joy when thou arrived at a quiet place, having becoming the Abbot of the Romanian Skete in Jordan, thou prayed for thy native country and for all thine people, for which hear from us these:

Rejoice, thou who served with great zeal at the Skete in Jordan;

Rejoice, for great were thy battles;

Rejoice, that for 5 years thou hast served at this Romanian Skete;

Rejoice, that from there thou hast travelled to the Hazeva Desert;

Rejoice, O father much longing for the desert;

Rejoice, for in the Monastery of Saint George from Hazeva, thou hast served for a year;

Rejoice, thou who didst seek for a complete silence;

Rejoice, for in the sweat of reclusory, thou put out the coals of thy passions;

Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 9:

Through God's grace and the care of thine Pure Mother, thou arrived at a place of quietness and total collectedness in the cave where Saint Anna hast lived the life of a recluse, singing to Thee: Alleluia!

Ekos 9:

Burnt by the desire to live the rest of the days in that blessed place, thou hast strived in great labors, for which hear from us these:

Rejoice, seer of God;

Rejoice, dwelling of heavenly light;

Rejoice, for been crucified to the world, thou offered thyself as a sacrifice to Thee;

Rejoice, model of salvation of the country Above;

Rejoice, firm ground of the hesychasts;

Rejoice, rare flower of the Jordan Valley,

Rejoice, great hermit and instructor of the monks;

Rejoice, elect guardian of chastity;

Rejoice, fervent servant of thine Most Pure Mother;

Rejoice, for been enlightened from Above, thou hast accepted the priesthood;

Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 10:

Having been difficult for many to reach that secluded place, thou didst receive at thy cave only those souls genuinely seeking salvation, urging them to unceaselessly sing to Thee: Alleluia!

Ekos 10:

Thou hast instructed all thy spiritual children to remember death, the Day of Judgment and the Holy Sacrifice of our Merciful Christ, for which we sing to thee:

Rejoice, father John pious thinker;

Rejoice, with Basil the Great teacher of the remembrance of death;

Rejoice, skillful instructor with John the Golden Mouth;

Rejoice, server of Liturgy with Saint Gregory;

Rejoice, O Father dwelling with thine angels;
Rejoice, bearer of Christ;
Rejoice, ardent guardian of the monastic promise;
Rejoice, dearest keeper of the Holy Cannons;
Rejoice, with Holy Nicodim defender of the Orthodox Faith;
Rejoice, preserver with great zeal of the Tradition of the Holy Fathers;
Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 11:

Seeing thy angelic life in the Cave of Saint Anna, it is proper for us to strive for a sinless life, asking Christ for a new beginning and to sing to Thee: Alleluia!

Ekos 11:

Great comfort has found all those wondering to the Holy places, thy Cave and the Romanian Skete from Jordan, O pious Father, for which you hear from us these:

Rejoice, precious treasure of the One Christian Church;
Rejoice, ardent intercessor for your kinsmen;
Rejoice, chosen jewel of the pious priests;
Rejoice, strength and help for the meek;
Rejoice, for a great heavenly vision wast revealed to thee before departing this life;
Rejoice, thou who wast rise to great heights for thy striving;
Rejoice, oil with sweet fragrance of Heavenly Grace;
Rejoice, one longing for the remembrance of thy kinsmen;
Rejoice, our protector before the Righteous Judge;
Rejoice, heavenly pearl and skylight of the Romanian nation;
Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 12:

Thy departure from this transient life was wondrous O father, when all thine saints whom thee honored and composed hymnody were awaiting thy soul to accompanying it into thine Heavenly Bliss, all crying with joy: Alleluia!

Ekos 12:

All pious Orthodox Christians rejoicing at thy holiness of life, O Pious Father John, and marveling at thy Holy Relics, they sing to thee:
Rejoice, angel in the body now rejoicing with them;

Rejoice, dweller with thine Saints,
Rejoice, intercessor with thine Apostles and Martyrs;
Rejoice, with the Righteous and Pious who left this life;
Rejoice, protector in times of danger;
Rejoice, shining star of the clergy;
Rejoice, for spiritual food thou left to us in thy writings;
Rejoice, comforter of the hopeless and despaired;
Rejoice, thou who hast work wonders though thy holy relics;
Rejoice, for venerating them, thou fillest our souls with endless yearnings;
Rejoice, O pious Father John the New from Hazeva!

Kontakion 13:

O Pious Father John pleasing Thee, receive from us this pious hymn and ardently pray to Allmerciful God for thy nation and all Orthodox faithful that we may be delivered from all snares, disgust, dangers and despair, and at the end of our lives intercede for us before thine Heavenly Throne, O father, so together with thee we may sing the angelic praise: Alleluia!

(This kontakion is read three times, then follow with the first ekos and the first kotakion).

The Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George in Burqin

Burqin is a Palestinian village five kilometers from Jenin, in the West Bank, where about seven thousand people reside. The vast majority are Muslims. Only about 70 Christians are left, after mass emigration. They are mainly all Greek Orthodox

The Greek Orthodox church of Saint George, also known as “the Church of the Ten Lepers,” is one of the oldest in Palestine and it is said to be one of the oldest in the world. It was built in the Byzantine era. The ceiling and walls made of rock that recall the style of the time are characteristic elements of the church. Some of the archaeological finds discovered inside include a wooden cross, some coins of various shapes made of metal and stone and also some graffiti on the walls. This cistern, in ancient times, welcomed the sick and contagious, who had to live in quarantine in order to avoid infecting other people. The stigma and isolation of these people was compounded by the fact that, according to Moses’ tradition, the disease to them was a tangible sign of their sins and of their fathers’. Here, according to tradition, Jesus healed the ten lepers in the episode mentioned in Chapter 17 of Luke’s Gospel.

The Ten Lepers by Sofia Kioroglou

Being a leper all my life
I search for some truth
I seek to be cleansed
Spiritual, not a word
in my vocabulary
Never heard of the notion actually
Leprosy does not allow time for soul-searching
A social pariah, a scourge, a despicable bane
I crave to forsake
My skin flaking off in scales
like that Serpent that led us
astray from our path
When Jesus came along
I was sick but now I am cleansed
I was forlorn but now I am hopeful
I wonder what has become of my mates?
Human ingratitude more
sinister than Satan's rage

Sofia Kioroglou ©

Epilogue

The miracle of the Holy Light, the life of the Saints in the desert and monastic settlements have been described in brush strokes. The experience of the pilgrim to the Holy Land, however, cannot be adumbrated nor can it be conveyed in verbal terms. This book is just a humble representation of the impressions that imbued my heart and soul with and why not a road map for future pilgrimages.

Bibliography

The Orthodox Church in America
[www. pravoslavie.ru](http://www.pravoslavie.ru)

Bio



Sofia Kioroglou is a Greek poet, writer and perennial traveller to the Holy Land and Egypt. She loves curling up with a good book on Sunday afternoons and sipping her coffee with her husband whom she met in the Holy Land in 2012.

HOLY LAND - THE JOURNAL OF A TRAVELER

ENGLISH EDITION 2019

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED