

THE TRACES OF 2000 YEARS ATTEST TO THE VITAL ARMENIAN PRESENCE IN JERUSALEM

Visit of Patriarch Torkom is a Reminder of the Continuing Armenian Legacy in the Holy City

With the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, presently visiting the United States, many Armenians have been inspired to learn more about, or renew their acquaintance with, the story of the Armenian legacy in the Holy City.

It is a story which dates back to before the time of Christ, and which has continued, without interruption, through Jerusalem's many political and social incarnations. Indeed, the importance of the Holy City to Armenians—and its vital influence on Armenian history—continues into the present.

Since ancient times, Armenians have maintained close military, commercial, political and cultural ties with the Holy Land. The invasion of Palestine by the Armenian king Tigran the Great in c. 75 B.C., and the settlement of thousands of Jews in the cities of Armenia, established permanent channels of communication between Jerusalem and Armenia. Due to these channels, Christianity penetrated Armenia at a very early date.

At the inception of the Christian church in the 1st century, there were Armenian travelers in Jerusalem. According to the 2nd-century church father Tertullian, the Apostles of Christ preached to people from Armenia right after the Pentecost.

Other ancient sources refer to 4th and 5th-century Armenian clergymen who went on pilgrimages and dwelt in the Holy Land. In the early 20th century, archaeologists unearthed in Jerusalem a series of mosaics with Armenian inscriptions. The script used in the inscriptions resembles the type developed by St. Mesrob Mashdots, the 5th-century creator of the Armenian alphabet. The largest of the mosaics, which covers the floor of a hall, is a cherished tourist site today.

The church of Jerusalem was chronologically the first Christian church in history, and the first bishop of that church was St. James, called "the Brother of our Lord" in the gospels. In A.D. 38 the Ecumenical Council of

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Constantinople accorded honor to the See of Jerusalem equal to that of Rome and Constantinople, so that the occupants of the See were called "patriarchs."

Despite the theological disputes that rent Christendom asunder, the line of bishops continued throughout the Byzantine period. When the Arabs occupied Palestine in the mid-7th century, the Armenians—disputing the orthodoxy of the Byzantine bishop—set up a new bishop of Armenian faith as the true successor to St. James, a claim supported by the fact that the body of St. James is buried under the patriarchal throne located in the St. James Cathedral of the Armenian Patriarchate. The first Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem was Abraham, who served from 638 to 669 A.D.

Home to Pilgrims and Monasteries

According to the Armenian tradition, a practicing Christian would go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem at least once in his or her lifetime. Despite political and economic turmoil, thousands of Armenians flocked to the Holy Land every year. It is said that in past times, the St. James Monastery could accommodate as many as eight thousand pilgrims at a given time. Pilgrimage brought to the Holy City renowned Armenian clergymen and statesmen, kings and princes, all of whom presented gifts and left their mark.

One can still see carved on the walls of churches groups of very small Armenian crosses. Local tradition holds that these were inscribed by pilgrims, and the clusters represent the number of people in the family of each pilgrim. In Armenian society it was a great honor for someone to have gone on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Such an act secured for the pilgrim a special social status, and he or she was referred thereafter as *Mahdesi*—"One who saw death"—a reference to the Tomb of Christ.

By the second half of the 7th century, there were more than seventy Armenian monasteries in the Holy Land. The present-day "Armenian Quarter" in Jerusalem—home to a closely-knit community of hundreds of Armenian families—occupies the sites of some of these ancient monasteries. Enclosed within the present quarter are the St. James Monastery, the Monastery of the Holy Archangels, and the Holy Saviour Monastery.

Outside of the Armenian Quarter, the Armenian Church enjoys equal rights with the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches at sacred sites such as the Holy Sepulcher, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Grave of the Holy Virgin Mary, the Nativity site in Bethlehem and other places. Armenians also have a historic monastery in Jaffa right on the sea front, and possess lands and buildings in various places in Israel.

Under Muslim rule, the Armenian patriarchs of Jerusalem and the members of the St. James Brotherhood succeeded in protecting the rights of the Armenian Church—frequently at the cost of their lives. The Patriarchate

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has remained a haven for Armenian refugees throughout its history; during the mass extermination of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey in 1915 which has come to be known as the Armenian Genocide, thousands of refugees and orphans were taken in by the Patriarchate.

During the past several centuries, the Brotherhood, headed by able and talented patriarchs, has preserved intact the Armenian sites and turned Jerusalem into a major center of learning. Besides the sites, which are open museums, the Patriarchate houses the second largest Armenian manuscript library in the world. It also maintains an extensive collection of vestments and vessels, inscriptions, paintings, a library, a bookstore and two printing plants. The St. James Press, founded in 1833, is the oldest in Jerusalem.

The Armenian Patriarchate is renowned for the Patriarchal Seminary, founded in 1843. Many of the Armenian clergymen serving in parishes throughout the United States are graduates of this seminary, which is still functioning.

The lure of attending the seminary in the Holy City has attracted some of the finest teachers and students of modern times. The present patriarch, His Beatitude Archbishop Torkom Manoogian—formerly Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America—is a graduate of the seminary and its former dean.

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