

EASTERN CHURCHES NEWS - LETTER

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EASTER IN GREECE

By GEORGIA TARSOULI

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Easter is considered as the biggest religious holiday of the Greek Orthodox Church. During Holy Week, every day in the week a morning and evening service are held in the church. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are devoted to the parts of the gospels telling the facts which preceded the trial, and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. On Good Friday about noon, in a solemn ceremony, the Sacred Icon of Christ is laid out on a bier in the centre of the church. The bier is adorned with flowers in garlands prepared by the young girls of the parish. Worshippers come and go all day long paying homage, as they would to a King lying in State. At about nine o'clock in the evening the bier with the Sacred Icon is removed from the church and is borne through the streets of the parish accompanied by the chanting priests and choir, the whole congregation following, each person carrying a lighted yellow candle. From a high vantage point affording a good view of the city this procession is most impressive as one watches the flicker of the candles as the various parishes proceed through the streets.

At Easter, as at Christmas and the New Year, wooden stands are built in every street at which open-air vendors sell candles for Good Friday's processions, small paper lanterns, and also white candles for the Easter Sunday service. Many

of these candles are adorned with ribbons and small artificial flowers and silver threads. These are meant for the children and each godfather or godmother is supposed to send such a candle to his godson for Easter.

About 11 o'clock on Saturday night the bells ring, summoning everyone to church. At about 11.45, as the priest and choir sing the appropriate parts of the service, all the lights and candles of the church are extinguished, symbolising the darkness of the grave, except for the oil lamp that burns perpetually on the high altar. About a minute later the priest with a newly lighted white candle comes from behind the altar chanting "Come ye and take light from the eternal light." All those who are near the door crowd around him to light their candles, the one lights his candle from the other, and in a few moments all the members of the congregation hold a lighted candle in their hand. After that the priest goes outdoors to read the gospel in the open air, and as the Angels' words "He is not here—He is risen" are said, the church bells ring joyously, fireworks are set off and the greeting "Christ is risen" is exchanged by the members of the congregation.

Shortly after everyone leaves and returns home with the lighted chandle. It is considered as a good omen to bring the "new light" home, and if the weather is windy many a trick is used.

The first thing to do with this "new light" is to light the oil lamp before the little home altar. This is the housewife's duty.

Afterwards the family sits down to a supper composed of Easter eggs (hard boiled and dyed red) and a very tasty stew called mayeritsa. However the traditional Greek dish for Easter is lamb roasted on a spit. All friends and parents form a group in the backyard of the house, gathered round a charcoal fire over which the lamb is roasted. In the meantime wine and red eggs are served. Egg cracking is a Greek custom very widely observed. A red egg is held in the hand in an upright position while the other person tries to break the shell by knocking the top of it with the end of his own. By knocking the eggs both exchange the greeting "Christ is risen—He is risen indeed."

ETHIOPIA AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

The sixth issue of the "Ethiopia Observer," published monthly by Mrs. Sylvia Pankhurst and Richard K. P. Pankhurst, is a particularly interesting special issue on the Queen of Sheba. The present Menelik dynasty of Ethiopia was restored to the throne in the thirteenth century. It

traces its descent from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Although scholars find it difficult to accept Ethiopian tradition in its entirety on this matter, such is the strength of belief and feeling among the Ethiopian people, and so strongly is the attribution rooted in their cultural and religious life, that place must be made for it. There was, as far as is known, no Ethiopian kingdom in the time of Solomon on the African side of the Red Sea, and certainly the capital Aksum did not exist. But there is a great possibility that the ancestors of the modern Ethiopians came from southern Arabia (Saba or Sheba), whence a queen may indeed have journeyed to the court of Solomon. Thus the historical basis is laid.

We know that at the beginning of the Christian era there was a flourishing state, that of Aksum, well-established in the northern highlands of Ethiopia, and a dynasty of rulers that were in contact with the civilised world of the day. They represent a glorious era in the history of the people. Christianity was officially adopted by the country about the middle of the fourth century, and dependence on the Church of Alexandria established by the first consecration of a Bishop. This connection still exists, and up to the present time, the Abuna or Chief Bishop is chosen from one of the Coptic monasteries of Alexandria. In medieval times, a particular romance and glory shone about the King and his people, and many stories of Prester John began to find their place in common legend. The collection of such stories that we know as the Travels of Sir John Mandeville has a good deal to say of a fantastic character on the subject. The later history of the country is well enough known.

There are however two matters of importance that are not so generally understood. The first is the high prestige of the rulers of Ethiopia throughout both negro and Bantu Africa. In the mysterious way in which news is disseminated among Africans, what goes on in Ethiopia is common knowledge. The African is very proud of the Emperor and his people. He looks to him as a natural leader. The treatment of Ethiopia by the Italians during the last war was a disturbing element in Africa generally, and the country's fortunes are followed with close interest. The other matter is the character and prestige of the present Ruler Haile Salassie. His Imperial Majesty is in many ways the Augustus of his people in modern times. He has established a Pax Ethiopica for them, and is deeply concerned with the opening up and civilisation of his kingdom. Under him the capital Addis Ababa has taken on the appearance of a real centre of government and cultural and economic life. Fine buildings have arisen, and the imperial palace is a splendid and stately

building. A recent article in the London "Times" is of great interest in this connection.

The "Ethiopian Observer" in its treatment of the subject-matter of the Queen of Sheba leaves hardly any aspect of it untouched. There is the "Glory of Kings," the Kebra Nagast, a collection of traditional literature that has gathered about her name. It includes the Old Testament narrative and the later Rabbinic writings, as well as Ethiopian, Egyptian and Arabic manuscripts, and has been translated into English by Sir E. A. Wallis Budge. There is also the Koran.

According to "Kebra Nagast" the visit of Queen Makeda was preceded and inspired by that of one of her merchants who brought back to her the fame of Jerusalem and Solomon's kingdom. Accompanied by him, she herself set out on her journey and after a stay of some length returned to her capital, having borne a son to Solomon, who became the first of the Menelik line. In explanation of certain ritual characteristics of Ethiopian worship, the account goes on to say that the Queen's son David or Menelik returned to Israel, was taught the true faith and actually took with him on his return to his kingdom the Ark of the Covenant. War followed when Solomon learnt of the theft, but the Ark remained with Menelik.

The especial interest for us in the West is the rich artistic treasure that has clustered round the Queen of Sheba's name. The glorious doors of the Cathedral Baptistery at Florence by Lorenzo Ghiberti of the quattrocento, so admired of Michelangelo, has a panel of her visit to Solomon. It figures again in Piero della Francesca's frescoes, his chief claim to immortality, in the Church of St. Francis at Arezzo. Paolo Caliari, known better as Veronese, the painter of the glory of Venice in the next century, has another version of the same subject, while we here in London can see Claude Lorrain's splendid picture of the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba in the National Gallery, painted in the 17th century. The tradition will no doubt go on, and quite recently the Emperor of Ethiopia has commissioned a native Ethiopian, Afewerk Tekle, to paint a series of panels for the Cathedral at Addis Ababa.

The "Ethiopian Observer," an illustrated monthly magazine that has taken the place of a weekly publication, is to be congratulated for its interpretation of the people and country of Ethiopia to English readers, and for its steadfast championing of the Ethiopian cause.

THE ENTHRONEMENT OF HIS BEATITUDE BENEDICTOS I, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

On March 1st of this year the one hundred and thirty-eighth successor of St. James, the Brother of the Lord (Adelphotheos) and the ninety-sixth Patriarch of Jerusalem, was enthroned as Patriarch and Bishop of Jerusalem in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (more rightly known as the Church of the Resurrection) in Jerusalem. The election to the patriarchal throne after the death of the late Patriarch Timotheos had been delayed for a year owing to long-standing disputes between the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre and the Arab-Orthodox laity. These have not yet been settled, but the Government of Jordan (in whose jurisdiction the Old City of Jerusalem lies) proceeded with the issuing of the formal "berat", as in the old days of the Ottoman empire, a month after the election of a new Patriarch had been announced by the Holy Synod.

The new Patriarch was educated first in Jerusalem and after receiving deacon's orders in the monastic community of the Holy Sepulchre, studied law in Athens University, and was for eighteen years the official representative of the Jerusalem Patriarchate there. He then in 1947 became the legal adviser of the Patriarchate, and in 1951 was consecrated to the Episcopate as titular Bishop of Tiberias.

The enthronement in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre took the form of the new Patriarch being ceremonially seated by the attendant bishops on a chair placed near the mediæval "Centre of the World." The instrument of election, signed by King Hussein of Jordan, was read in Arabic and Greek, and after the singing by the choir of the three-fold "Axios," "He is worthy," the Great Doxology was sung and prayers for the Patriarch, the Church and those in civil authority were offered. Representatives of almost all the Christian bodies in Jerusalem were present, as well as those of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Moscow, and officials of the Government and members of the diplomatic and consular corps.

The Patriarch succeeds to the throne of Jerusalem at a very troubled and critical time. The events of the last few weeks have greatly increased the problems of the Kingdom of Jordan, and it must be remembered that the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Patriarch lies on both sides of the Armistice line between Jordan and Israel. He and his Christian people need our earnest prayers.

NEWS FROM ISRAEL

Much material of interest to readers of the News-Letter is to be found in the last issue of that excellent publication "Christian News from Israel," published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Government of Israel. Of particular interest is the account of the activities of the Israel Government when Gaza (for what turned out to be a comparatively short period) fell under its jurisdiction. Gaza, as an area, includes two Christian Holy Places, the town and district of Gaza itself with the 4th century tomb of St. Porphyrius (in its time in a Crusading Church, then in a mosque) and a large Orthodox community; and much more important, the Monastery of St. Catherine of Sinai, an autocephalous Church of Orthodoxy on the Sinai Peninsula. A group of fifteen Hebrew University scholars left Jerusalem last November to examine the unique library of St. Catherine's Monastery, to photograph manuscripts, to inspect the monastic buildings and the Church, to make a geographical survey of the area, and to examine the remains of the ancient Settlement of Paran.

The Monastery of St. Catherine is built at the centre of the Sinai peninsula and at the foot of Mount Sinai. The investigators found the original Justinian (6th century) enclosing-wall intact, and the Church still in its basilican form of the same age. The Chapel of the Burning Bush is considered to be a later addition. The whole area of St. Catherine's is an oasis in the desert, made by a spring, a very rare phenomenon in the peninsula, and by tradition the water that was struck out of the rock by Moses. Wherever water penetrates, is rich vegetation, vegetable gardens, and many trees and fruit trees. High up on the rocky sides of the Mountain are the tiny white hermitages and sanctuaries built on almost inaccessible heights.

We know of the Library mainly because of the discovery there in the last century of the great Codex Sinaiticus by von Tischendorf. If one remembers rightly, it was more than merely 'discovered' but actually in great part rescued from dismemberment and household uses. Taken to St. Petersburg to show to the Emperor, it remained there and was finally bought by the British Museum authority from the Soviet State. It contains in splendid uncials the Greek Septuagint, the New Testament, as well as other early Christian writings. Along with the Vatican Codex and the Alexandrian (given to our King Charles I by Cyril Lukaris when Pope of Alexandria) it is the main textual basis of the New Testament. The Hebrew scholars found much of interest and importance in the Convent Library. In the nineties two

learned English ladies (how did they manage to get there? one wonders) mainly interested in Syriac and Arabic MSS found a palimpsest of a very early Syriac translation of the Gospels. This is now known as the Lewis Text or Syrus Sinaïticus and is still in the Library. But apparently no workable catalogue of the books in it has yet been made, and without that the work of scholars is much hampered. The visitors, however, mention the care taken of the Library, its adequate and up-to-date housing and accessibility. It is to be hoped that when a more settled political condition is established, that the work of making its treasures known to the world will go on. Meanwhile the Israeli visit was one of great courtesy and understanding, and much appreciated by the monastic community.

WHAT ARE THE EASTERN CHURCHES?

They are those organised bodies of Christians which formed the original nucleus of Eastern Christendom in Apostolic times, together with those Churches which owed their foundation directly to that nucleus and have not since broken their communion with it.

They consist of a number of independent and self-governing Churches, and constitute the second largest organised body of Christians in the world.

THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH

1. *The ancient Patriarchates of Eastern Christendom.*

Constantinople. The Oecumenical Patriarchate, with jurisdiction over Greek Orthodox in Turkey, the Monastic Republic of Mt. Athos, Northern Greece, and Greek Orthodox in the Diaspora.
Alexandria. Greek Orthodox in Egypt, and all Africa.
Antioch. Orthodox Christians in Syria and the Lebanon, mostly of Arab nationality.
Jerusalem. Greek and Arab Orthodox in all Palestine, together with the custody of the Holy Places.

2. *The National autokephalous Churches.*

Russia, Cyprus, Greece, Serbia (Yugoslavia), Roumania, Bulgaria, Georgia (U.S.S.R.), Poland, Albania.
Besides these there are also organised groups of Orthodox Christians throughout Western Europe, America, Japan, China, S. America, Australia and elsewhere.

OTHER NATIONAL EASTERN CHURCHES

These separated from the rest of Eastern Christendom during the fifth century as a result of controversies concerning the Person of Christ.

1. *The Churches sometimes called Monophysite.*

The Armenian Church.

The Coptic Church of Egypt.

The Ethiopian Church.

The Syrian Church of Antioch (Jacobite).

The Syrian Church of Malabar (Jacobite).

2. *The Church of the East (Assyrian).*

These Churches have maintained their ancient traditions. They are not in communion with Rome. All moreover have friendly relations with the Anglican Communion.

NOTE: There are also groups of Christians, which, while Eastern in Rite, are in communion with Rome. These are known as 'Uniate' and are of little immediate concern to us.

THE ANGLICAN AND EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES ASSOCIATION, which was founded in 1864, exists to unite members of the Anglican and Eastern Orthodox Churches for the following objects:

To promote mutual knowledge, sympathy and intercourse.

To encourage the study of Eastern Christendom.

To pray and work for the restoration of the visible unity of the Church.

The normal annual subscription is 10/-, but none will be excluded from membership solely on account of inability to pay this amount, while it is hoped that those who can afford to pay more will do so. All members are entitled to receive the *Eastern Churches News-Letter*, which is published quarterly.

Please note that all correspondence, subscriptions, etc., should be addressed to the Reverend H. R. Stringer, St. Stephen's Vicarage, 25, Talbot Road, London, W.2.