

HISTORIAN KRIKORIAN NO LONGER WITH US

Posted on October 17, 2011 by Keghart



Category: [Opinions](#)



Historian and friend of Keghart.com Haig Aram Krikorian, the author of the magisterial "Lives & Times of the Armenian Patriarchs of Jerusalem" passed away in Van Nuys on October 5 2011, following long illness. He was born in Baghdad and moved to Jerusalem, Palestine in 1936, graduating from the St. James Theological Seminary there in 1941. Krikorian dedicated ten years to the writing of his opus about the nearly 1,400 years of the St. James Patriarchate's turbulent history. While praising the dedication of the remarkable patriarchs who were responsible for the creation, expansion and maintenance of the Armenian presence in the holy city, Krikorian was unflinching in his criticism of patriarchs who were irresponsible, incompetent or corrupt. The 821-page book was reviewed in Keghart in April 2011.-Editor



Historian and friend of Keghart.com Haig Aram Krikorian, the author of the magisterial "Lives & Times of the Armenian Patriarchs of Jerusalem" passed away in Van Nuys on October 5 2011, following long illness. He was born in Baghdad and moved to Jerusalem, Palestine in 1936, graduating from the St. James Theological Seminary there in 1941. Krikorian dedicated ten years to the writing of his opus about the nearly 1,400 years of the St. James Patriarchate's turbulent history. While praising the dedication of the remarkable patriarchs who were responsible for the creation, expansion and maintenance of the Armenian presence in the holy city, Krikorian was unflinching in his criticism of patriarchs who were irresponsible, incompetent or corrupt. The 821-page book was reviewed in Keghart in April 2011.-Editor



Epic of the Jerusalem Patriarchs

Times of the Armenian Patriarchs of Jerusalem

By Haig Aram Krikorian

Reviewed by Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto,

27 April 2011

Other than Tigranes the Great's conquest of Jerusalem, about 60 years before the birth of Christ, the history of the Armenians in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land is mostly the history of the St. James Patriarchs and the Brotherhood. Armenian Jerusalem's history is closely linked to Christianity, the religion which drew Armenians to Palestine.

Even before the conversion of Armenia to Christianity in 301 AD, Armenian pilgrims were already making the long trek to the Holy Land to see where Christ lived, preached, was crucified, and rose from the dead. By the 5th century, the Holy Land was studded with churches, convents, hermitages, often with a significant number of Armenian monks. Soon, there were some 70 Armenian religious

buildings in Palestine. But despite their strong presence in the Holy Land, Armenians didn't have a Patriarch until Abraham I (638-669).

✘ In his magisterial opus ("Lives and Times of the Armenian Patriarchs of Jerusalem"), Krikorian tells about the often-remarkable men who have headed the St. James Patriarchate since then. The 821-page book took ten years to write, and every page, every line, every word shows the magnificent dedication and effort of Krikorian--a graduate of the St. James Armenian Theological Seminary in Jerusalem and resident in Jerusalem during the British Mandate years from 1936 to 1948.

Krikorian, a long-time resident in California, tells, with a sharp eye for detail, of the vicissitudes of the Patriarchate in the past 1,400 years, about the great and not-so-great Patriarchs, and the numerous anonymous monks who dedicated their lives to the Armenian Church in the Holy Land. He brings to life the dedicated Armenian religious leaders who toiled endlessly to establish and expand the Armenian presence in the Holy City. The challenges they faced were countless and diverse. They navigated through the regimes of Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, Memeluks, Turks, the British, Jordanians, and now the Israelis and the Palestinians. They had to survive in often violent and mostly corrupt times. They had to be deft diplomats, politicians, administrators, exude charisma yet be spiritually embued... to carry on their variegated and difficult duties.

While surviving under the rule of dubious governments, the number-one nemesis of the Patriarchs continued to be the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. Because Palestine was ruled by Byzantium in the early days of Christianity, the Greek Church was the first to establish a foothold in the land and own real estate, including, of course, religious buildings. Even after the Arab and other conquests, the Greek Patriarchate liked to maintain "first right" privileges and regarded the other Churches as Johnny-come-lately to its "turf." At every step of Armenian Church development in Palestine, the Greeks harrassed Armenians, resorting to bribes, to forgery and even violence. The Armenian Patriarchs have had to fight every inch of the way to establish a presence in the Holy City. This is true now as it was true in the 7th century. Despite Greek and sometimes Roman Catholic Church shenanigans, Armenians managed to retain equal rights to the Holy Sites.

Another recurring threat to the Patriarchate has been internal strife, rivalry, corruption, incompetence, and selfish clergymen who again and again put their ambitions ahead that of Church interests.

Because records were not kept or were lost, it's difficult to determine the exact number of Armenian Patriarchs in Jerusalem. Depending on the source, it ranges from 75 to nearly 100 Patriarchs.

Most Armenian Church scholars, including Krikorian, pick Abraham I, Krikor V, Kantsagetis (1613-1645), known as Krikor Baronder, and Krikor VI, Shirvantsi (1715-1749), known as Krikor Shughtayagir as the three greatest Armenian Patriarchs of Jerusalem.

Among other reasons, Abraham makes the list of the Greatest Patriarchs for establishing a solid and permanent Armenian Church presence in Jerusalem. The Patriarch even travelled to Mecca to obtain guarantees that Armenian Church property and rights would be protected. Baronder became Patriarch at a time when the St. James Brotherhood was bankrupt and its religious properties threatened by debtors. He, with the help of Diaspora Armenians, raised funds which not only rescued the Church's real estate holdings, but restored existing buildings and launched an amazing reconstruction and expansion program. In many ways, the circumstances and achievements of Krikor Shughtayagir, in the first half of the 18th century, were similar to that Baronder. He too inherited a bankrupt Patriarchate. He too raised the money to save the St. James Brotherhood properties from decimation. He too undertook a huge revitalization plan which restored and increased Armenian Church properties.

Krikorian is unflinching in his account of internal strife up to and including the 20th century. As eye witness, he tellingly describes the destructive Patriarchate rivalries in the '40s and the '50s. He pulls no punches about the Yeghishe/Diran debacle.

One of the many bonuses of the book is the parallel history of the Armenian Church in Constantinople, Armenia, Cilicia, and the Cilician See in Lebanon. As well, Krikorian's account offers the readers a dramatic narrative of the ups and downs of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, its relationship with the Crusaders, and of the three Jerusalem queens who were Armenian—Arda, Morphia, and the remarkable Melisend, who ruled Jerusalem as a regent, after the early death of her husband. She built St. Anne's Church in Jerusalem—the best preserved and best example of Crusader architecture in the city. She is buried near Armenian Church-owned Gethsemane Garden, in the underground Gouysn Mariam Church, which owned by the Armenian and Greek Churches.

Lives and Times of the Armenian Patriarchs of Jerusalem

By Haig Aram Krikorian

Hardcover, 821 pp. \$35

To order contact lkrik**AT**sbcglobal.net

