

THE VENERABLE HIEROMARTYR¹ JACOB OF HAMATOURA

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Saint Jacob struggled in asceticism at the Monastery of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos of Hamatoura in Lebanon's sacred Qadisha Valley in the 15th century, the time of the Mameluke² occupation. His heroic spiritual labors made him shine forth to all and he thus strengthened monastic life throughout the region. Having rebuilt his monastery's buildings, Saint Jacob also renewed and revived its monastic life. His renown soon brought him to the attention of the Mameluke authorities who, being jealous of his fame, determined to convert him from his faith in Jesus Christ to Islam.

Despite the various pressures which were put upon him, Saint Jacob remained steadfast in his refusal to renounce Christ. Finally the Mamelukes, who were infamous for punishing their enemies with unspeakable tortures, seized him while he was praying in seclusion at the hermitage of the Greatmartyr George – located on the very top of the mountain above Hamatoura.³ After binding his hands and tying him to their horses, the Mameluke guards dragged Saint Jacob to the city of Tripoli to stand trial before the governor. At the trial the governor attempted by various means to lure him to renounce Christ, first using flattery and promises of fame and fortune, and, when that tactic failed, he threatened him with punishment and subjected him to gruesome tortures. Despite the many sufferings which he patiently endured, Saint Jacob refused to submit to the governor's demands, and, in the end, on the thirteenth day October in the year 1450, he was beheaded. His murderers, fearing that the Christians would come and remove Saint Jacob's body to the church to be enshrined and venerated as relics of a martyr, committed another injustice against him when they cast his body into the fire, guarding it until nothing but ashes remained. Though these men had treated Saint Jacob with such derision and barbaric cruelty during his life and after his repose, God, who crowned Saint Jacob with the unwithering wreath of martyrdom, blessed him with honor and divine consolation, for the Christians spontaneously proclaimed him a Saint, zealously venerated his memory and sought his powerful intercessions.

Over the course of time, as a result of the spiritual poverty and lack of knowledge among Christians during the Mameluke and Ottoman occupations, remembrance of Saint Jacob was lost. However, for centuries pilgrims to his monastery often reported seeing apparitions of an unknown Saint who worked healings and other wonders for them to the glory of God. Saint Jacob's name and life remained hidden until our own days when a clear reference to him was miraculously discovered in a manuscript preserved at the nearby Balamand Monastery (#149). During the summer of 2002 many faithful came to the Hamatoura Monastery to report healings and other miracles worked through the intercessions of the newly-revealed Saint Jacob. As a result, his feast day was celebrated

¹ A Hieromartyr is a bishop, priest or deacon who suffered martyrdom. St Jacob was a priest.

² An Egyptian military class, originally slaves, which controlled much of the Middle East from 1250 to 1517, and remained influential under Ottoman (Turkish) rule until destroyed by Mohammed Ali in 1811.

³ The monastery itself is located midway up the mountain, with its katholikon and cells clinging precariously to the steep mountainside and extending into its caves.

for the first time at Hamatoura on October 13, 2002. An All-night Vigil (which consists of 9th Hour, Little Vespers, Compline, Great Vespers with Lita and Artoklasia, Orthros, 1st, 3rd and 6th Hours and Divine Liturgy) was concelebrated by many priests and deacons, and attended by numerous monastics and other pious Christians who, for the first time, chanted the sacred hymns⁴ for Saint Jacob of Hamatoura who remains alive in his monastery, and visits his faithful people through his many miracles.

O Holy Hieromartyr Jacob of Hamatoura, pray unto God for us!

THE SYNAXARION

On the thirteenth of October we commemorate the struggles of the Venerable Hieromartyr Jacob of Hamatoura, who, being beheaded and incinerated by the Mamelukes in the city of Tripoli, Lebanon, was translated to the mercy of his Lord.

THE APOLYTIKION IN TONE 3*

*(*Special Melody: "Θείας πίστεως ...")*

As a cedar of Lebanon groweth without fear of martyrdom and death,
Thou didst become a victor, O Father Jacob.
Thou didst conquer death in thy body when by humility thou didst control the passions
And when thou wast burnt like incense as a sacrifice.
Intercede with Christ to grant us great mercy.

THE KONTAKION IN TONE 8*

*(*Special Melody Tone 8: "Τῇ Ὑπερμάχῳ ...")*

With a pure heart thou didst live the ascetic life in Hamatoura
And didst leave behind all earthly pleasures,
O all-blessed and most venerable Father Jacob.
But when thy love became known and manifest
Thy life became a challenge to the envious.
Therefore, thou didst cry out to Christ:
"Come and take me to Thyself, O Master!"

THE MEGALYNARIA IN TONE 8*

*(*Special Melody: "Τὴν ὑψηλοτέραν τῶν οὐρανῶν ...")*

Come, ye faithful, and with great fervor praise
Jacob who hath been revealed unto us in these latter days,
For he lived with love of the Lord in Hamatoura
And, longing to be joined with Him, bravely suffered martyrdom.

Manly Martyr Jacob, be unto us
A fervent intercessor at all times and in every need.
Bless thy sons, the monks of Hamatoura,
And all the faithful who revere thy holy struggles.

⁴ The Akolouthia for Saint Jacob of Hamatoura was composed by the abbot of the Monastery, Archimandrite Panteleimon (Farah).