

NEWSLETTER *of* THE LEVANTINE FOUNDATION

No. 3 August, 2009



Notes from Elizabeth Sobczynski

It gives me great pleasure formally to welcome Sir Derek Plumbly, who, last autumn, became president of the Foundation. I first met Sir Derek in Cairo in 2005, during his term as Her Majesty's Ambassador to Egypt. Since then, he visited the Deir al-Surian on many occasions, taking great interest in the preservation of the collection, and offering his patronage and support. His initiatives and generosity have contributed greatly to our achievements and successes to date and I look forward to sharing the Foundation's future successes with him.

The Foundation has been very fortunate to have gained two new distinguished patrons: Lord Norwich and Lord Portman, whose patronage and interest in the aims of our organisation are very valuable. It is through such interest and support that we are able to fulfil our goals. I welcome them both warmly.



Fr Bigoul, Lucas Van Rompay and Sir Derek Plumbly, Deir al-Surian Library, May 2005

I would also like to welcome the Foundation's new trustees: Peter Chapman, who takes over as Chairman from John Beale, and Nigel Pilkington, our new Treasurer, who promises to bring even better order to our financial management. I am confident that they will prove to be excellent trustees and I look forward to working with them.

The last eighteen months have brought several important developments.

Work on the new Deir al-Surian library, which I described in our last Newsletter (No. 2 September 2007), began in January 2009. The first stage of the building programme is nearing completion. This hugely important first step has been achieved thanks to the support of His Grace Bishop Mattaos and the Monastic Council, who raised the majority of funds towards this project. The Foundation's contribution went towards the purchase of steel, materials and labour. The cost of the first stage exceeded 820,000 Egyptian pounds. It is estimated that the cost of the second stage will be 1,850,000 Egyptian pounds. We are currently in the process of raising money towards this goal.

During the past year, we have established and nurtured links with other organisations and universities, in particular Leiden University. Following my research on educational opportunities in the Middle Eastern region in 2008 and 2009, we have embarked on a conservation training programme in collaboration with Museum & Art Advisory LLC and the Coptic Museum in Cairo.

The aim of the project is to provide training and technical support to conservators and museologists working in the leading Egyptian museums and, to create opportunities for exchange of knowledge between the West and the Near East. Helping us to create a sustainable programme is an international Board of Advisors from Europe, Egypt and the USA. You can read more about a very successful March 2009 Pilot project in the Review of Activities.

In 2008, the Foundation said goodbye to three trustees: Dinah Bradac, John Beale and Euan Cameron. Dinah, who is a personal friend, has been with the Foundation since its conception, providing continuity and huge support to me. She will be deeply missed. John, whose fundraising knowledge benefited us significantly, and Euan, who has edited our Newsletters so perfectly, will also be greatly missed. I have very much enjoyed working with them. I should like to thank all three for their dedication and hard work in enhancing the Foundation, and I hope to be able to call upon their expertise in the future.

We acknowledge with much gratitude the financial support provided by many individuals, trusts and companies in Egypt, Great Britain and the USA. We are particularly indebted to Ms. S. Sawiris, Mr. Mohamed El Hamamsy and Noha Saad of Vodafone Egypt, The Foyle Foundation, The Mercers' Company, The Association for Cultural Exchange (ACE) and the American Foundation.

I am immensely privileged to be working with a particularly strong board of trustees, colleagues and volunteers. There is a sense of achievement and real enthusiasm in the air, and I believe this communicates itself to all those who come across our Foundation. I now spend a considerable amount of time in Egypt, and it is due to trustees such as Philippa Dodds John and volunteers such as Malcolm Wood, who advised us on the new library, and Michal Sofer, who helps with field campaigns in Egypt, that our work has been running smoothly. I am most grateful to them.

Finally, our new TLF website is now on line. It replaces our old website and provides extensive up to date information about our activities and achievements. I would like to thank Nigel Pilkington for his sterling efforts in getting it off the ground. ■



Impressions of a New Chairman

I became Chairman of the Foundation last September and quickly realised how much had been achieved under my predecessor, John Beale, who I am pleased to say has now joined our distinguished list of patrons.

Already planned were an Autumn conservation campaign at Deir al-Surian and the 26 November reception at the Society of Antiquaries, both of which were very successful and are mentioned in detail elsewhere in this Newsletter.

I have been impressed by the extent of achievements so far, by the range of our activities, and by the loyalty of our supporters. The latest innovation was our first training programme in Museology and Conservation held in Cairo in March, which is also discussed in this Newsletter.

The achievements are all the more impressive if one bears in mind that the Foundation has no full-time staff. Inevitably, this puts great pressure on our founder and Chief Executive, Elizabeth Sobczynski, and also on my fellow Trustees, Philippa Dodds John and Nigel Pilkington.

Being Chairman of the Foundation also involves a hands-on role for me, rather different from another charity and a consultancy company that I also chair, both of which have full-time Chief Executives and at least a couple of dozen staff. I do, however, find the Foundation post extremely stimulating.

The lack of staff does mean, of course, that we need to be very focussed and careful not to take on more than we can deliver. So far we have managed this very successfully, as this and previous Newsletters demonstrate.

Having said that, we are starting to discuss our future strategy in some depth. We have many more opportunities open to us – ventures that tie in well with our objectives - than we have resources to pursue.

In our next Newsletter, if not before, I will share our future plans with you all. Meanwhile, we are starting to prepare for this Autumn's conservation campaign at Deir al-Surian.

Peter Chapman

Early Monasticism in Egypt: The World of the Sons of St. Anthony

Lukas Amadeus Schachner

In the early fourth century, Egyptian papyri began to record the existence of *monachoi* – literally, “singular people” – who had abandoned their homes for the sake of a new life in the desert, free of social, sexual and financial entanglements. Barely a hundred years later, many of these *monachoi* were famous across the Roman Empire as the pioneers of monasticism, a lifestyle that had come to be seen as the true path to moral perfection in the world of Christianity. Often supported by the Christian élites, this material and spiritual commitment – a commitment to live out Christian precepts to the full – soon made monasticism one of the foundations for Byzantine and European civilization. The *monachoi* of the Egyptian desert were not only among the earliest representatives of that movement; alongside the Cappadocian St. Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-379) they were also the most influential ones.

Several names – only to mention a few – stand out in the history of early monasticism in the land of the Pharaohs: Saint Anthony “the Great” (251?-356), the Father of All Monks of Egypt, whose place of ascetic retreat is still marked by the impressive, homonymous monastery. In the texts of his period, Anthony’s abode near the Red Sea was considered to be located in the Innermost Desert, adopting the perspective of someone who travelled – like Anthony himself – up from the Nile. Anthony’s biography, written by Athanasius, another luminary in fourth-century Egypt and patriarch of Alexandria, quickly helped to spread the fame of this holy man: composed in Greek and translated into Latin, Anthony’s *Life* had a strong impact on the development of monasticism as far as the western Mediterranean. Considered a model, the biography became one of the best-known works of Christian literature in the late Roman period, a status it would hold through medieval times.

Certainly, there were other athletes of Christ worthy of similar fame: Paul of Thebes [1], the First Hermit dwelling in the Innermost Desert; Paul died, aged over 110, in c. 340. Further west, there was Makarios “the Great” (c. 300-c. 390), one of the pioneers moving into the Inner Desert of Skethis, nowadays known as Wadi al-Natron (the so-called Natron Valley, where Dayr al-Suryani [or Deir al-Surian], the Monastery of the Syrians, is based). Anthony, Paul, Makarios and many others eulogised in a famous compilation of texts entitled the *Sayings*



[Fig. 1] Monastery of St. Paul, Eastern Desert: Paul of Thebes (d. 340), the First Hermit, shown in an early 18th-century wall painting

of the Desert Fathers: these men (plus a few women, the Desert Mothers) represent the monastic ideal of anchoritism (the Greek term means, literally, “going up [to the escarpment, the desert]”), that is the physical withdrawal from society and from “Egypt”, the settled land on the Nile. At the same time that Paul, Anthony and Makarios were putting their commitments to the test through deprivation and self-mortification, another realisation of the ideal of “monastic” life is first attested in Middle Egypt: that of cenobitism (the term means “living a *koinos bios*, a communal life”). The origins of cenobitism are widely associated with the ideas of a certain Pachomius (c. 290-346), the founder of a monastery near Tabennisi, an abandoned village some 300 miles further south on the Nile. For Pachomius, a former soldier, the true path to perfection was to be found in living together, under the guidance of *Rules*, in a communal establishment. Pachomius’ monasteries, soon organised as a confederation (*koinonia*) and with an important outpost in Alexandria, were characterised by a high degree of organisation and discipline. The Pachomian model, later also taken up by Shenoute (d. prob. 466) was highly successful: many of the *coenobia* of the late Roman period, organised on similar models, became

centres of literary production, others got involved in the local economies. A unique example of such an economic engagement of the monks can be found in the Monastery of Anba Samuel, situated in Wadi Muwaylih, a Western Desert depression south of the Fayyum: by extracting salt from the pans surrounding its centre (the pans are still being exploited, commercially, today), its community, numbering 120 brothers, could gain considerable economic income and financial autonomy. Sometimes, however, if we believe the literary sources, such an enterprise could also put the “true” monastic lifestyle at risk. Despite such concerns both “paths to moral perfection” – anchoritism and cenobitism – had and still have their particular merits; one complementing the other (rather than opposing each other), they have persistently nourished the vitality of Christianity in Egypt for the last 1,700 years. The same is also manifest in the impressive, late twentieth-century revival of monasticism in Egypt, a movement that, almost nostalgically, often looks back at those earliest days.

To reconstruct this early world of the monks and the Fathers, scholars have been looking into the literary accounts (the texts are written in Greek, Coptic and Latin, but also in Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic *et al.*), the living tradition and the evidence brought to light by modern archaeology. As to the texts, a typical passage taken from the late fourth-century *History of the Monks in Egypt* introduces the reader to the different stages of life in the desert in a region called Kellia [2], situated west of the Delta between present-day Cairo and Alexandria: “... beyond this there is another place, the Inner Desert, about ten miles away. This is called Kellia because of the number of cells there, scattered about the desert. Those who have already begun their training there (that is, in Nitria, another, less remote monastic settlement close to the Nile) and want to live a more remote life, stripped of external things, withdraw there. For this (Kellia) is the Utter Desert and the cells are divided from one another by so great a distance that no one can see his neighbour nor can any voice be heard. They live alone in their cells and there is a huge silence and a great quiet there. Only on Saturday and Sunday do they meet in church”. The lasting legacy of such a tradition can still be found in the biography of Shenouda III, the present-day 117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Apostolic See of Saint Mark. Given the name Father Antonios al-Suryani (Anthony the Syrian) after joining the Monastery of Syrians, for six years – from 1956 to 1962 – the young monk lived in a cave about seven miles away from the monastery, where he dedicated his time to meditation, prayer and ascetic practices.

Other monks, we read, were highly trained in theological matters and deeply involved in the shaping of the Christian doctrine and orthodoxy (and, ultimately, in the creation of an independent Egyptian or Coptic Church). Other texts preserved from that period deal with liturgy, others with practical issues, of how and when, for example, to perform duties related to the economy. The picture drawn by these literary accounts reflects a wide spectrum of approaches to moral perfection and, characteristic of oriental thinking, of flexibility.

Recent archaeological work has further brightened our understanding of what had stereotypically been coined “life in the desert” or “monastic life”. The projects in question include the large-scale Swiss-French-Egyptian archaeological excavations in



[Fig. 2] Kellia: remaining monastic complex previously excavated (2008)

From Waste to Wealth

Lucas Van Rompay

Kellia, the vast area of "Cells" referred to in the *History of the Monks in Egypt* in an earlier paragraph [2]: hundreds of cells have been discovered, with their liturgical niches, colourful crosses, graffiti, ovens, gardens etc. The Kelliote monks, we learn from these studies, used to live singly, in pairs (often in a spiritual relationship between an Elder and his disciple), in threes and more. Life in the desert – Kellia is situated half-way between the Delta and Wadi al-Natrun – would not have been possible had there not also been a certain amount of infrastructure: through the evidence of guesthouses and communal structures (including churches) we learn about the hospitality in the desert (a virtue well attested in the literary sources), the changing climate in the Islamic period (graffiti referring to moments of fear) and Kellia's demographic developments. Further excavations are currently being carried out in other Egyptian areas, such as in the ruined Monastery of John the Little, not far from the Monastery of the Romans (Dayr al-Baramus). These excavations may yield important information about life in the Inner Desert during the earliest days of its monastic settlement.



[Fig. 3] Monastery at al-Bawit, Middle Egypt: icon showing haloed monk at the side of Jesus Christ (image online: Coptic Museum, Egypt)

At Dayr al-Bakhit, on the westbank near Thebes (present-day Luxor), thousands of inscribed shards have recently been discovered and exciting archaeology is on its way: not only can the complex be dated (the community continued to function well into the 8th century), we also learn about daily life in the region and there is the unique evidence of an undisturbed cemetery. In Middle Egypt, work is currently being resumed in one of the most important monasteries of the early period, near al-Bawit [3], remains of which – including marvellous paintings, wood and architectural sculpture – are being exhibited at the Coptic Museum, Cairo, after work at al-Bawit had been suspended for little less than a century. Vital to the understanding of monasticism and Christian art in this period, the scholarly community is awaiting exciting discoveries. Finally, such discoveries are presently being made at Dayr al-Naqlun, a semi-anchoretic monastic settlement in the Fayyum depression, with dozens of individual cells dispersed in the mountain and a small, central communal establishment. Even today, the present-day Monastery of the Archangel Gabriel, built around its ancient foundations (and the church with its marvellous Medieval painting), is a place of extraordinary beauty and unimaginable hospitality. ■

Beginning in December 2004, Sebastian Brock and I paid a number of visits together to Deir al-Surian in order to prepare a first description of the Syriac manuscript collection (for which I had done some preliminary work during two previous visits). Our work, which is now coming to a close, has led to all sorts of interesting discoveries. Some manuscripts turned out to contain unknown Syriac texts; others provided important new witnesses to texts already known. Since many of the Deir al-Surian manuscripts are very old – a number of them dating back to the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries – each manuscript is a treasure trove in its own right.

Our catalogue will contain the description of 48 manuscripts and about 150 fragments. Some of these fragments are tiny and contain only a few Syriac characters or words, while others contain larger portions of text, sometimes even covering a few folios. The manuscripts are also quite different from one another. While some survived as just one single manuscript, often stripped of their cover or of initial or final folios, others are made up of parts of very different manuscripts, bound together by medieval binders. We know that during certain periods in its history Deir al-Surian had a small number of monks and that the library was neglected, and it must have been in such periods that manuscripts were not handled well and fell apart. When later monks arrived subsequently, they did their best to put the library back in order, which would have included rebinding dispersed and dismembered manuscripts.

Medieval binders and librarians not only put incomplete manuscripts or sections of manuscripts together; sometimes they needed a leaf of parchment to separate different texts or for additional protection between the manuscript and its cover. Manuscript covers were often missing or damaged, and when it was impossible to replace them properly with a new cover of wood and leather, they sometimes decided to sew or glue a few leaves together in order to provide some protection to the newly bound manuscript, as a substitute for a proper cover. Rather than using precious new parchment for such purposes, they found waste leaves from manuscripts that had become obsolete or damaged beyond any possible repair. Such re-used leaves are found in most rebound manuscripts. They are normally in poor condition and are often folded or trimmed, and they have been worn so heavily that whatever text is left on them cannot easily be read. Their presence is recorded in our catalogue, but the information we have been able to extract from them is frustratingly scanty in most cases. Not in all, however! Here I would like to report on one particular case in which initial frustration eventually turned into excitement.

Ms. Deir al-Surian no. 1 (formerly Murad Kamil no. 21) is a composite manuscript consisting of a small portion of the biblical Second Book of Samuel and the complete Book of Exodus, each written in a 6th-century hand. Between these two parts one waste leaf was added, and another leaf taken from the same manuscript was added at the very end of the manuscript. These leaves must originally have been too big and were trimmed to fit the new manuscript. This resulted in loss of



The last folio of ms. Deir al-Surian, no. 9, one of the waste leaves. The text is upside down and was turned 180 degrees clockwise

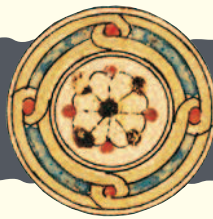
text. But what remained was enough to convince me that we were dealing with a well-trained 9th-century hand. The content appeared to be ascetic; the vocabulary struck me as rich and quite sophisticated. When I first saw the manuscript, I took some notes and was determined to find out the origin of these two waste leaves.

Another manuscript, no. 9 (formerly Murad Kamil no. 27) provided four more waste leaves. Here again, we are dealing with a very important composite manuscript, which has in its first part a long extract from Flavius Josephus's "Jewish War", the Third book of Maccabees, and the biblical Books of Ruth and Susanna. The second part, taken from a different manuscript contains the biblical Books of Esther, Judith, and Tobit, along with the (apocryphal) Acts of Thecla. Both parts may be attributed to the 8th century. When they were bound together – much later – two leaves were added for protection at the beginning and two more at the end. These leaves turned out to be from the same recycled manuscript that we had already encountered in ms. no. 1, even though the text does not follow. Here again, they were trimmed, and there is some additional damage. But in spite of its poor state, there is an important new piece of information. In two cases rather long quotations are marked in the margins as quotations. It thus became likely that the text on the waste leaves was some sort of commentary on a different (non-biblical) text, from which extracts were quoted.

One additional double leaf (or bifolio) from the same manuscript could be located in ms. no. 31 (formerly Murad Kamil no. 9), another composite manuscript. This one consists of parts taken from six different manuscripts, datable to between the 7th and the 10th centuries and containing writings by Jacob of Edessa, Jacob of Serug, Abba Isaiah, as well as apostolic and ecclesiastical canons. Even though the front cover of this manuscript (leather on wood) is preserved, a bifolio was added at the very beginning, along with another leaf from a different manuscript. This latter leaf is from a liturgical manuscript and its script does not seem to be older than the 13th century. With its explicit reference to the liturgy of Jerusalem and Damascus, it probably did not

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The Levantine Foundation



Review of Activities

The period from 2007 to 2009 has been very active, with a significant array of programmes which included the new Deir al-Surian library, training, research projects, lectures, conservation field campaigns and fundraising.

Elizabeth Sobczynski continued to exert every effort to publicise and to draw public attention to the goals and the needs of the Foundation. Over the past year, she has given papers on the preservation of the Deir al-Surian collection at the Art Workers Guild, London; The Fifth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Cairo; the Ethnographical Museum, Warsaw; the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, and the Coptic Museum, Cairo. With our new Levantine Foundation website, which went on line last May, we are planning to keep you up to date with all our activities: www.thelevantinefoundation.org



New Library under construction, April 2009

The New Library

The beginning of 2009 saw the start of the building of the new library, which will provide a world-class storage facility for the ancient manuscripts, a modern library and education and conservation facilities to enable the monastery's priceless collection to be properly cared for.

The building, measuring 390 square meters, will consist of two storeys, a basement library and an archive area within the walled grounds of the monastery. The architectural firm of Morad Bebawy & Meleka Farah has been appointed by the Monastic Council to lead and to oversee the architectural design. The building works are being carried out by a local contractor, and the engineering design is by Arab Consulting Engineers in Cairo. The first stage of the building, the skeleton shell, which has been financed by the Monastic Council with the Foundation's assistance, is almost complete, standing proud amid the ancient walls and a tamarind tree, whose survival is as important to the monks as the collection itself.

The second stage will include the development of the building, including internal partitions, flooring and wall finishes, electrical and mechanical services including service lift, security/alarms and telecom installations.

To complete the library project we need to raise nearly £200,000 sterling, which in the current economical situation is proving difficult. We are currently awaiting a decision from a major British trust regarding this appeal.

How can you help?

You can help by making a financial contribution now. Every donation, large and small, will help us complete this amazing project and will inscribe your name in its history.

To find out more please contact Elizabeth Sobczynski on es.aicp@btinternet.com. Please support us.

Training

A great deal has happened in the realm of training since we published our last Newsletter. In March 2008, I travelled with Susan Day to Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Jerusalem to research educational opportunities in conservation and care of collections. Over a three-week trip, we visited the leading public collections and libraries in the region, looking at manuscripts and interviewing custodians and experts in conservation and museology. The aim was intended to produce a feasibility study centred on the availability of training in conservation and the need to set up further training for the continued development of skilled practitioners. The research highlighted the need to increase awareness of archival principals and practices amongst those working in public collections. This demand has also been substantiated by a similar report from the monastic collections in these countries.

July 2008 saw the beginning of our collaboration with the Coptic Museum, Museum & Art



New Library under construction, May 2009

Advisory, LLC and the establishment of international Advisory Boards from Europe, Egypt and the USA. Two months later, the advisors met in London to establish objectives, outline the strategy and advise on creating a sustainable programme. Discussions centred on the proposed training pilot project; future plans will involve the organisation of a wide range of workshops on preservation, conservation and care of collections, funding, and the importance of international partnership.

Training Pilot Project, Cairo, March 2009

The two-week symposium, which was hosted by the Coptic Museum, was divided into two parts; museology and conservation. It attracted professionals from the major museums as well as the keepers and librarians of monastic collections. The sessions covered an overview



Coptic Museum, Cairo

of the historical connections and artistic interaction between Christians and Muslims, Western museum practices, and a conservation workshop. We did not seek to deliver all the necessary skills during the pilot, but rather to raise issues, provide historical background and provoke thoughts about the differences between Oriental and Western conservation methods, and to cover the most important areas so as to ensure that the collections would survive and could be used. A training pack, which included workbooks with Power Point presentations, was compiled to complement the sessions. The workbooks were used to make notes and to ask questions that would provide further explanation and information. An evaluation form completed by delegates has given us a very useful insight into the issues and priorities covered during the pilot project. These mostly relate to paper and book conservation, book making and storage. Today, steps are being taken to secure funding for future programmes that we hope will encourage a consistently high level of courses for those in the profession.



Members of the Advisory Board: Michal Sofer, Bas ter Haar Romeny, Mat Immerzeel, Lyn Younes, Elizabeth Sobczynski, Lucia Scalisi, The Art Workers Guild, London, October 2008



Dr. Ezzat Salib, Mother Martyria, Christopher Clarkson, Lyn Younes, Elizabeth Sobczynski, Training Pilot Project, Coptic Museum, Cairo, March 2009

Report of the November/December 2007 Conservation Campaign

The focus of the campaign was to document and re-house the eighty-three Syriac fragments on papyrus that were found in 1998, during renovation of the 9th-century keep, where the ancient library was housed. In 2000, Prof. Lucas Van Rompay identified the fragments as remnants of a 9th-century papyrus codex.

When found, the fragments were stuck together into a block of approximately 11cm (h) x 8/9cm (w) and less than 1 cm thick. They were subsequently separated and placed between glass plates. The canvas strips used to secure the glass became detached with time, putting the fragments at risk of slipping out.

To safeguard the collection, a decision was taken to re-place inadequate housing with new glass plates and to place it in a specially designed mounts in conservation boxes. The re-housing of the fragments was carried out by Daria Kordowska, PPKZ SA, Torun, Poland.

Two students, Michael Joseph and Mina Azis, assisted with mount preparation, which involved

laminating conservation board to achieve the required thickness.

The work was managed by Elizabeth Sobczynski, ACR MIPC, Chief Executive, The Levantine Foundation.

Martin Bailey from *The Art Newspaper*, London visited the monastery to gather material for an article about the oldest Christian manuscript, dated AD 411, found under the rubble of the same room where the papyrus fragments were discovered. The article was published in February 2008. Further articles were published during the winter by *Independent on Sunday* and *The Manuscript Society News*, Vol. XXIV No 1, 2008.

All articles can be seen on the Levantine Foundation website.

Report of the May 2008 Conservation Campaign

The objective of the campaign was to complete the conservation of the 13th-century Coptic MS. 28, "The Acts of the Apostles" begun in 2007.

In addition to completing the conservation of the MS. 28, a detailed written and digital documentation of the 13th-century Coptic MS. 21 "Four Gospels" was prepared in anticipation of the conservation work starting during the next campaign. Furthermore, three new leather bindings were applied to codices: Coptic, MS. 590, ID76, "Katamarous of the Holy Lent" 17th century; Coptic-Arabic, MS. 471, "The Service of the Mass" 16th century; Coptic-Arabic, MS. 611, "Water Mass" (Iaqan), 17th century.

The work was again managed by Elizabeth Sobczynski, who also advised on appropriate methods and treatments. The international team of conservators included Isabel Zarazua Astigarraga, Monty Kamel, Daria Kordowska, Neill McManus and Anna Thommee.

Report of the April/ May 2009 Conservation Campaign

The aim of this campaign was to start work on the conservation of the 13th-century Coptic MS. 21 "Four Gospels", which has been generously sponsored by Mr & Mrs Robert John in memory in their daughter Angharad Dodds John (1978-1980).

Additional work included digitising the thirty-three sections (324 fols) of the MS. 21, the conservation of four leaves from the 11th-century Coptic MS. 23 and the 6th-century fragmentary manuscripts on parchment.

The work was managed by Elizabeth Sobczynski. The conservation team included: Laura Ridoni; Michal Sofer; Marzena Szczerkowska and Anna Thommee.



Conservation team, Deir al-Surian Library, May 2008

Acknowledgments

We could not have accomplished any of our goals had it not been for the support of those individuals who worked with us or supported us by giving their time and sharing their expertise. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Khalil Nougaim; Ms. Hala Hashem of Zaki Hashem & Partners; Prof. Andrew Ciechanowiecki; Dr. Mat Immerzeel and Mrs. Susan Day. ■

Summary of Museology and Conservation Training Project

The Foundation's principal objects include education and dissemination of knowledge. It is therefore with enthusiasm that we can report that our first training programme, on Museology and Conservation, was held at the Coptic Museum in Cairo in March 2009, in collaboration with Museum & Art Advisory LLC.

The aim of the project was to provide training and technical support to conservators and museologists working in the leading Egyptian museums. The fifteen participants in the programme came from the Coptic Museum, the Egyptian Museum, the Grand Egyptian Museum, the Manyal Palace Museum and the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

There were three main themes: art historical background to early Christian and Islamic Art, museology, and managing conservation.

Participants were fortunate enough to have distinguished Egyptian and international presenters and tutors, who led on these themes

over a three day period. The presenters were: Professor Jonathan Ashley-Smith, Visiting Professor, Conservation Department, Royal College of Art, London; Dr Helen C. Evans, Curator for Byzantine Art, Department of Medieval Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Dr Kamilia Makram, Director of the Manuscript Section at the Coptic Museum, Cairo; Dr Mat Immerzeel, Professor at the Faculty of Art, Leiden University, specialising in Christian Art in the Middle East, and Director of the Paul van Moorsel Centre; Dr Ezzat H. Salib, General Director of Conservation and Restoration at the Coptic Museum, Cairo; Elizabeth Sobczynski, Chief Executive of the Levantine Foundation.

There followed a five-day practical workshop on conservation of parchment and on the history of medieval bindings. The tutor was Christopher Clarkson, the conservation consultant and winner of the Plowden Gold Medal for his contributions to the History of the Book and for services to the conservation of books and manuscripts.

Evaluation of workshops

We felt it was very important to receive feedback from participants on each workshop. So Elizabeth Sobczynski devised a detailed questionnaire which covered the following areas: content, design, quality of presenter/tutor, results, pace of delivery, and suggestions for improvement.

We have now analysed all of the questionnaires, which were collected at the end of each day's session. They show that the training programme was a great success. The vast majority of participants considered that the workshops lived up to their expectations, that the content was relevant to their job, and that they would be able to make use of what they learnt in the workshop. Indeed, most participants said that they were interested in receiving further education material and information about the Museology and Conservation programme, and in attending future workshops.

Participants were also asked for any suggestions on how the workshops might be improved in future programmes. A wide range of helpful ideas were put forward, including greater use of video. It was also clear that the level of the participants' expertise and technical knowledge varied quite considerably, as did their command of English. We will take all this feedback carefully into account when planning our future programmes. Meanwhile, the full twenty-page "Evaluation Report on Workshops" is available on request from the Foundation. One of the participants was Mother Antonia, whose article in this issue of the Newsletter makes for fascinating reading.

Finally, we would like to record our especial thanks to our partner in this training programme, Lyn Younes, Chairman of Museum & Art Advisory LLC, without whose tireless efforts and excellent organisational skills we could not have carried out this successful project. ■



Participants in the Training Pilot Project, Coptic Museum, Cairo, March 2009

Reception at the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, London, 26 November 2008

Our reception at the Society of Antiquaries on 26 November last year in aid of the Deir al-Surian Library project was a great success. Nearly 100 guests admired the elegant surroundings and clearly much enjoyed the presentations in the Lecture Theatre.

Our Chairman, Peter Chapman, gave a particular welcome to our host, His Grace Bishop Angaelos, and to our distinguished new patron Viscount Norwich (John Julius Norwich), who was in the audience. He also was pleased to announce two other new patrons, Viscount Portman and John Beale, the latter having made a very significant contribution to the Foundation as our first Chairman.

Finally, he was delighted to inform guests that Sir Derek Plumbly, the former HM Ambassador to Egypt, had agreed to be the Foundation's first President. Sir Derek is currently Chairman of the

Assessment and Valuation Commission, which monitors the peace between North and South Sudan.

A warm and supportive opening address was then made by His Grace Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

He was followed by Dr Sebastian Brock, former Reader in Syriac Studies at the University of Oxford's Oriental Institute, where he holds an Emeritus position, and who is also a Patron of the Foundation. As a distinguished Syriac scholar who has studied and transcribed the Deir al-Surian's Syriac collection, no one was better qualified to talk to guests about its importance.

Professor Brian Ford of the School of Built Environment, Nottingham University, and his colleague Benson Lau then spoke about the new Library proposed at Deir al-Surian, and the Chairman said how pleased he was that Dr. Mourad Michael Bahoum and his colleague Mohsen Kamal Massoud from Arab Consulting Engineers, responsible for the Library's detailed design, building services and project management were also present at the Reception.

Elizabeth Sobczynski, the Chief Executive and founder of the Foundation, and a leading UK

conservation consultant, gave an illuminating talk on preservation and training in conservation.

Lady Plumbly, who very kindly hosted the Foundation's successful fundraising event in May 2006 at the then British Ambassador's (Sir Derek's) residence in Cairo, then spoke on behalf of the Patrons, highlighting the success of that fundraising campaign which raised the equivalent of £173,000 sterling.

Peter Chapman then introduced the new fundraising appeal, whose target is £1,000,000, of which £250,000 has already been raised.

The funds were required for the new Library, digitalisation, cataloguing and publications, conservation equipment and storage facilities and for the Foundation's forthcoming conservation and training programmes.

As a result of the reception at the Society of Antiquaries, a further £9,000 has been raised towards our target.

Finally, the Chairman thanked all the speakers and organisers, with a special mention of his fellow Trustee, Philippa Dodds John, who had worked tirelessly on all the arrangements.

All in all, the event was well attended, enjoyable and successful. ■

come to Deir al-Surian prior to the late 15th century, when Syrian Orthodox dignitaries and monks from the Jerusalem and Damascus area started visiting the Monastery and spending time there.

It is safe to assume that the rebinding of manuscripts nos. 1, 9, and 31 was part of one and the same restoration project that took place in the Deir al-Surian library. The one liturgical leaf allows us to date it after ca. 1300, and more likely around 1500 or even later. On that occasion the binder must have decided to designate the 9th-century ascetic manuscript as a waste manuscript and to use single leaves from it for his restoration work.

Gradually, I came to the conclusion that the pieces of text that I had gathered from the eight waste leaves – some ascetic commentary on an earlier ascetic text – were nowhere to be found among published Syriac texts. When we went to Deir al-Surian in May 2007, to finalise the work on our catalogue, I felt that this was my last opportunity to identify their content. Although at an earlier stage I had considered the ascetic writings of the 5th-century author Mark the Monk, to no avail, an after dinner conversation with Sebastian in the Monastery made me think about him again. At that point the Deir al-Surian library turned out to be more precious than any Western library (except perhaps the British Library), because it has two manuscripts with Mark's treatises on "Spiritual Law". These two treatises, originally written in Greek and translated into Syriac no later than around 500, have never been published in Syriac and received very little attention from Syriac scholars. With the waste leaves from the three manuscripts in front of me, I started reading Mark's Syriac treatises in mss. nos. 16 (10th century) and 29 (6th or 7th century), and I was able to locate in Mark the quotations found in the waste leaves. It could be established, therefore, that the mysterious manuscript that had been haunting me for several years contained a commentary on Mark's Syriac treatises!

Now, a Syriac commentary on Mark is known to exist in one of the British Library manuscripts, which came to London from Deir al-Surian in the autumn of 1847. The relationship between the waste leaves and the London commentary, therefore, became the next question to address. Were the waste leaves from the same commentary or were they unrelated?

It was only in May 2008 that I was able to travel to the British Library, with a couple of images of the waste leaves on my laptop. It did not take long to find out that the waste leaves from Egypt were not only from the same commentary, but actually were from the very same manuscript. What is now ms. British Library Add. 17,270 was in fact the manuscript that had eluded me for so long. This poor manuscript in its present form is but a shadow of its former self. There are only 42 folios left, which are all, in W. Wright's words, "more or less soiled, torn, and mutilated" (*Catalogue*, II, p. 482a). Their poor condition helps us understand why our bookbinder, around 1500 or later, decided not to repair or to rebind it, but to set it apart for recycling materials. Fortunately, on one of the damaged folios in London the title can be read: "Two treatises on Mark the Monk's *Spiritual Law*".

The new evidence of the eight Deir al-Surian folios, most of which is not too difficult to read, may be a further stimulus for Syriac scholars to study and publish this commentary. The commentary will be important not so much for what it tells us about Mark's original work (which we know both in Greek and in Syriac), but for the ways in which Mark's ideas were recontextualised and made relevant to the cultural environment of the commentator. The author of the commentary in all likelihood is Babai, an important East-Syrian theologian and monastic leader (c. 551-628). The presence of this commentary in the Syrian-Orthodox library of Deir al-Surian is, therefore, all the more interesting.

In the British Library reading room, the few Deir al-Surian folios – which had travelled on my laptop from Egypt to North Carolina, and now to London – were conceptually reunited with the manuscript to which they belong. Separated from one another in the Deir al-Surian library some five centuries ago, and having definitively parted company in 1847, these siblings had now found one another again. Just as they were coming together, Dr. Vrej Nersessian, Curator of the British Library Syriac manuscripts, walked by and became a witness to the reunion, thereby making it somehow official.

In the course of our work many more such unexpected combinations have been made, and more will be made in the future. While our descriptions have been based on a number of relatively short periods of work in Deir al-Surian and on additional research in our university libraries, we expect that future Syriac scholars will take up our descriptions on their own journey of study and discovery. The Deir al-Surian library is so exceptionally rich that even a piece of waste may lead to wealth! ■

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Watermarks, Klucel-G, and Methyl-Cellulose

Mother Antonia

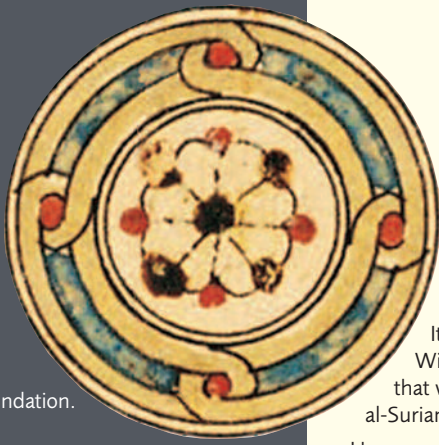


HG Bishop Mattaos and Mother Antonia, Deir al-Surian Library, May 2009

My introduction to the exciting world of book conservation came about when Mother Martyria and I were invited to attend the Levantine Foundation and Museum & Art Advisory *Museology and Conservation Symposium* at the Coptic Museum in Cairo last March. His Eminence Metropolitan Bishoy – Secretary General of the Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the abbot of our monastery – has always had a keen interest in manuscripts and their preservation, and our participation at the symposium was primarily due to his eminence's initiative. At that time, however, we never imagined that this very small beginning would amount to greater undertakings. It was at this symposium that we met Elizabeth Sobczynski, who afterwards visited our monastery and library. Elizabeth encouraged us to use our newly acquired knowledge to care for our monastery's collection of manuscripts. Being so eager to learn more, we were thrilled when Elizabeth invited us to observe professional conservators at work in the April/May 2009 Conservation Campaign at Deir al-Surian.

For those readers who may be somewhat curious, Mother Martyria and I are Coptic Orthodox nuns of the Monastery of Saint Demiana, Barrary, Egypt. This saint, known as 'the Princess of Martyrs', lived at the very end of the 3rd century and is venerated as one of the greatest saints in the Coptic Church. She was the spiritual mother and abbess of forty virgins who dwelt communally in chastity, prayer, fasting, and silent contemplation. Saint Demiana is considered the first person in history to establish monastic life, as there is no historical record of this way of living before the time of Saint Anthony in the 4th century. Saint Demiana was tortured brutally for several years for her refusal to apostatise. She was beheaded with the Forty Virgins on the 13th of the Coptic month of Tubah (January 21) during the reign of the savage emperor Diocletian (AD 284-305). Adjacent to the site of their martyrdom, there now stands a church originally built by Helen, the mother of Constantine the Great. Buried inside the church in a modest tomb, are the relics of these pure brides of Christ. Saint Demiana's thriving present-day monastery is also situated here. The monastery complex includes churches, monastic cells, and buildings dating from the 4th, 6th, 8th and 10th centuries, as well as modern churches, bishopric, retreat and guest

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*Watermarks, Klucel-G,
and Methyl-Cellulose continued...*

houses, nuns' building with monastic cells, and deaconesses' convent. It is from here, in the humid Barrary Wilderness of the Upper Delta region that we departed temporarily for Deir al-Surian in the desert of Scetis.

Upon our arrival at Deir al-Surian, Elizabeth introduced us to four conservators: Michal Sofer, Anna Thommee, Laura Ridoni, and Marzena Szczerkowska, and later, Father Bigoul and Father Azer. Throughout the duration of our three-day visit, they all made us feel tremendously welcome and generously shared their expertise. Each day, Elizabeth sacrificed the time reserved for her own work to provide us with hands-on training in rudimentary techniques of manuscript conservation. On our first day, she gave us a detailed tour of the conservation studio and library which included rare access to important ancient manuscripts in the collection as well as the opportunity to see examples of ongoing preservation work. For the benefit of our own collection, she demonstrated how manuscripts should be placed individually in acid-free tissue and archival boxes to protect them from further damage. That afternoon, I thoroughly enjoyed observing Anna and Marzena working on the Coptic Bohairic manuscript of the Four Gospels, dated to AD 1220. As they worked, they explained what materials and tools were being utilised and why. I learned that methyl-cellulose should be applied to remove unsuitable repairs (such as strips of old manuscripts and deposits of vegetable glue) from folios. Though I know little about conservation, I was impressed by Anna's and Marzena's meticulousness and delicate handling of pieces.

At the outset, the terminology of book conservation seemed to us quite daunting, but as the days progressed Mother Martyria and I both started to become familiar with terms such as recto, verso, pasteboards, iron-gall ink, sewing stations, substrate, and the like. This was due to the definitions and explanations constantly provided by Elizabeth and the conservators.

Over the remaining two days, Elizabeth continued to work with us one-to-one. She taught Mother Martyria how to paginate



Mother Martyria, Mother Antonia, Fr Bigoul, Deir al-Surian Library, May 2009



Mother Martyria, Mother Antonia, Laura Ridoni, Deir al-Surian Library, May 2009

two manuscripts from our own monastery which we had taken with us to Deir al-Surian; and in addition, the technique for removing candle wax from selected folios. For one of our manuscripts, which had been seriously damaged by mould, Elizabeth explained how to remove dust from quires with a soft Japanese brush, and how to neutralise the mould with ethanol. I was then taught to lift off mould, wax and deposits from the leather binding with selected tools, and shown the method of applying Renoskor emulsion for cleaning and conserving the leather. Laura also demonstrated how to use methyl-cellulose to remove old labels which had been previously adhered to the cover and the process of applying a two per cent concentrate of Klucel-G in ethanol to conserve the binding's edges. Most importantly, we were trained to conduct a physical condition survey and assessment of manuscripts accurately. This included identifying watermarks, corrosion, inks used, and the types of damage incurred. Elizabeth also provided us with information and advice vital for the cataloging of our collection. Without a doubt, we both learned more than we had expected and have started to implement these new skills in the preservation of the library at Saint Demiana's Monastery.

Over meals, breaks, and each day at dusk as we walked from Deir al-Surian to the Papal Residence at Deir al-Anba Bishoy, we exchanged stories about conservation, our personal backgrounds and cultures. With Elizabeth and Michal from England, Laura from Italy, Anna and Marzena from Poland, Mother Martyria from Egypt, and myself from Australia, this resulted in quite interesting (and sometimes confusing!) conversation.

For me, visiting the Deir al-Surian library and conservation workshop was certainly a very special privilege. We are eternally indebted and grateful to His Grace Bishop Mattaos, Father Bigoul, Father Azer, Elizabeth, and the team of conservators for openly, willingly, and wholeheartedly dedicating their precious time and expertise to teach two humble beginners. We were sad to bid them farewell, particularly Elizabeth, who has become a close friend and valued mentor. To the Levantine Foundation and Deir al-Surian we extend our deepest thanks, and look forward to continuing our association with them. ■