

NEWSLETTER *of* THE LEVANTINE FOUNDATION

No. 4 July, 2011



Major Conservation Success TLF completes preservation of two major treasures



Four Gospels' in 5th Century Syriac. Manuscript before.....



after conservation



Four Gospels' in 13th century Coptic. Manuscript before....



after conservation

Chief Executive Elizabeth Sobczynski - the conservation task...

It is with great satisfaction that the Foundation announces the completion of the preservation these two major treasures for world heritage. Following two substantial private donations we were able to employ a highly skilled international team from all over Europe. Here is the story of the meticulous conservation work undertaken: patience and perseverance are the essential qualities of a conservator!

MS. Deir al-Surian, Syr. 10 [MK6]; Four Gospels, 5th century, fls. 104, parchment, Dimensions: 28,2 cm x 23,5 cm

The 5th century Four Gospels is the earliest bound manuscript in the collection and "possibly the earliest existing gospel manuscript in the world" (Dr Sebastian Brock, *Deir al-Surian*, 2005). It was written in Syria or Mesopotamia and reached the Deir al Surian either in the ninth

century when Syrian monks established their community there or in the tenth century when Moses of Nisbis, Abbot of the Monastery, brought an accession of two hundred volumes from his trip to Baghdad.

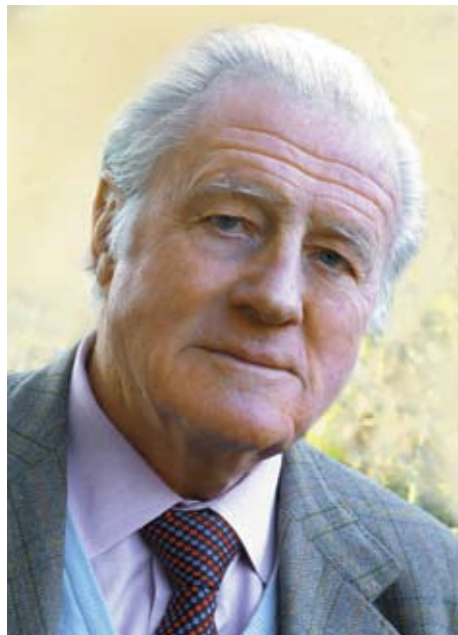
The Four Gospels is part of a composite manuscript which had been bound together probably in the 13th-14th centuries out of seven different manuscripts, the oldest of which is in a

5th or 6th century hand. It is on fine parchment support consisting of 104 folios. Just three quarters of the original book survived. Matthew's Gospel has been lost.

The text is written in two columns in a mixture of the carbon black and iron gall ink favoured by scribes for its blackness and lustre. One column of the text on the last page has been written in

continued on page 2

Portrait of a Patron: John Julius Norwich



John Julius, 2nd Viscount Norwich, recently joined our group of esteemed patrons. Now a full time writer, his many published works include

books on Mount Athos, The History of Venice, Byzantium and most recently The Papacy. He is also Co-Chairman of the World Monuments Fund.

“Since I was a very young man I have always had a fascination with the Eastern Mediterranean and the Orthodox world. It all began, I suppose, when I joined the Foreign Service and in January 1955 was sent to my first post, Belgrade. We were, it is true, a long way from the sea; but Orthodoxy was all around us, and we used to visit the glorious painted churches of South Serbia and Macedonia - Peć, Dečani, Ohrid, Nerezi, Sopoćani and many others. That summer we spent a fortnight in a caique, cruising the Aegean with (among others) Paddy Leigh Fermor, who has always been one of my oldest friends. He taught me more than anyone and effectively introduced me to Byzantine history (of which I was later to write three volumes of my own). It was he who introduced me to Robert Byron’s *The Byzantine Achievement*, which had a huge influence.

From Belgrade I was sent to Beirut, another great crossroads of north and south, east and west, Christian and Muslim. For six months we went through a sort of dress rehearsal for the dreadful civil war which was to rage through the seventies

- during which I got shot in the head - but peace was eventually restored and we travelled widely through the Middle East, much of which I got to know reasonably well. It was from Beirut, in January 1960, that we got a wonderful invitation to travel as guests of the Egyptian government up the Nile as far as Wadi Halfa, to look at the dozen-odd temples that were due to be flooded by the new Aswan High Dam.

Two years after my return to London in 1960, I left the Foreign Service in order to write history, which is what I have been doing for the past half-century. My first book was on Mount Athos; six years later, after a long east-west desert crossing, I wrote another on the Sahara. Most of the rest have been straight history, first that of the Norman Kingdom in South Italy and Sicily, then of the Venetian Republic, then of the Byzantine Empire, and more recently of the Mediterranean and the Papacy. (This last is published this year)

I think all this should explain why I was so delighted to be a Patron of the Levantine Foundation. I love Egypt, I love the Eastern religions (though I know relatively little about the Copts) and I love the idea of monasticism.”

continued from page 1



caption caption xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

vermillion, usually used for titles, headings and important parts of the text.

One of the most alarming aspects before conservation was the lack of any protection to the text block exposing the delicate ancient substrate to mechanical damage. Over the centuries, parchment and writing ink have been subjected to fluctuating temperatures and humidity resulting in dimensional changes, curling of the edges, brittleness and flaking and losses to the text. Evidence of inappropriate handling, the use of candle light and overall neglect were manifest in the widespread wax staining, finger dirt, grime and grease accumulation to the margins, water and glue staining and general parchment degradation. A team of conservation experts including Christopher Clarkson, a specialist in medieval bindings, and John Mumford, a book conservator formerly at the British Library, were consulted as to the best approach, method, technique and materials to be used to conserve this manuscript. Flavio Marzo, a book conservator at the British Library was responsible for the conservation treatment and for the making of a protective case (binding) to guard the text block against damage. On completion,

the manuscript has been placed in a temporary custom made conservation box. Ultimately the manuscript will be stored in a stainless steel box that is immune to environmental conditions and offers protection against fire and water.

MS. Deir al-Surian, Coptic. 21; Four Gospels, 13th century, f1s324, paper

Dimensions: 32,4 cm x 28,5 cm

The 13th century Four Gospels is one of the most important manuscripts in the Coptic collection. It was written by the scribe Simon Ibn Peter in 1220 A.D. in the Deir al Surian scriptorium where it has remained for the last eight hundred years. Little is known about the history of the monastery in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. However, the production of such a rich manuscript leads us to assume that the monks were well versed in art and literature. The MS. 21 is written in Boharic, the ancient Coptic dialect used in Lower Egypt from the third until the thirteenth century when Arabic began gradually to replace it. It is an outstanding work of art adorned with a full page, beautifully designed cross and the four Evangelists in yellow imitating gold and rich pigments. The richly decorated margins full of stylised images of birds

and vegetation are present throughout the book.

The text has been written in one column in a mixture of carbon and iron-gall ink which was also used to outline most of the decorations. With the exception of the first section where Western paper was used the book was executed on a beautifully burnished Eastern paper.

The overriding damage to this object was chemical caused by ink and corrosive copper green pigment resulting in cracks and heavy losses to the paper. In addition adhesive used for the old repairs caused heavy discolouration and planar distortions to the substrate. The book was unskillfully restored and rebound in the 1940s during which the right margin has been severely trimmed, disfiguring border decorations. The leather cover used for binding was too small exposing the text block to mechanical damage. A team of four to five book conservators from Italy, Poland and Spain worked tirelessly for over twenty four weeks in total to conserve the text block. Finally, a new leather cover fit for purpose was made and the manuscript bound in the autumn 2010.

Conservation is a multifaceted on-going process requiring the taking of difficult decisions, great technical skill and vast financial resources. It is an immense achievement to realize successfully projects of this calibre taking into account the unsuitable working conditions in the current library, and the limited duration of campaigns. The Levantine Foundation would like to thank and remains grateful to the donors: Mr John Osborn and Mr & Mrs Robert John and the conservators: Marzena Szczerkowska, Anna Thommee, Laura Ridoni, Maria Chiara Brancalonei, Isabel Zarazua, Monty Kamel, Neill McManus and Roderick Lane whose help and perseverance made completion of these precious manuscripts possible.

£100K Training Grant from Sawiris Foundation



The Trustees are delighted to report that TLF has been awarded a grant of LE1,000,000 (approximately GB£100,000) for training by the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development and Al Ahram Beverages Company. This follows a highly successful pilot programme run by TLF in March 2009 which was reported in our previous newsletter.

The purpose of the grant was to deliver two training courses in 2010-2011 to staff in the leading museums in Cairo, monastic and church collections, postgraduate students and jobseekers in the relevant professions. The objective is to establish a better understanding of the practices of conservation, protection and maintenance of collections, the development of skills and the creation of a safer environment for both employees and museum collections alike. The aim is to increase the number of qualified museum and collection personnel and also employment opportunities and thus support the preservation of Egyptian heritage for future generations.

This major training opportunity is consistent with the educational aims of the Levantine



Foundation as well as assisting with our primary goal of preserving cultural heritage on paper in the region. The Board of TLF recognises there is a global shortage of skilled conservators with the expertise to preserve paper-based heritage of the age found in Egypt. Training such as this will provide the infrastructure of preservation for the region in the future.

The main partners in the programme, which was managed and designed by TLF Chief Executive Elizabeth Sobczynski, are the National Museum and Archives, the Coptic Museum, the Supreme Council of Antiquities, who provided logistics and venues, and Leiden University which led an international team of tutors expert in their various fields. TLF is advised by an international Board of Advisers from major museums.

Despite the impact of the volcanic dust cloud preventing leading contributors Dr Mat Immerzeel and Professor Bas ter Haar Romeny from participating, their sessions were replaced by other tutors to whom we are indebted. These included the following topics which indicate the breadth of the programme as well as providing a historic and cultural framework for the practical workshop sessions: “The Treasures of The Egyptian Museum” by Dr. Mohamed el Halwagy; “The Coptic Manuscript Tradition” by Drs. Ezzat Salib and Kamillia Makram; “Illumination of Islamic Manuscripts” by Professor Aby el Hamd Mahmoud Faarghaly; “Illumination of the Holy Quraan” by Professor Shadia el



Deswqy abd el Aziz; and “Conservation: Past and Present” by Elizabeth Sobczynski.

It was very encouraging to see the positive way in which relationships with our partners have developed. The level of cooperation and support was commendable. Partners hosted courses in their venues, provided access to necessary equipment and materials, offered assistants, translators, security and day-to-day advice.

Consequently, relationships between TLF and its partners deepened substantially. As a result of the study visits new contacts have also been made between museum authorities, restoration departments and representatives from public and private (monastic and church) institutions. In particular, contact and dialogue has been opened between TLF and Cairo University which we hope will lead to a working relationship and educational exchange. Furthermore, as a result of publicity generated by the course in the UK, TLF has been approached by the University of the Arts, Book and Art Conservation Department in London, to consider a formal collaboration which would lead to the exchange of knowledge, placement of postgraduate students and other mutual benefits.

The main outcomes of the first programme make interesting reading. 106 participants enrolled on the course and attendance was consistently high. Practical workshops were able to accommodate between 50-55 people successfully with appropriate Arabic language support. Feedback has been excellent with strong demand for a second programme. This will be for the same participants and will deepen their understanding and build on their initial practical skills. Although attendance of monks and nuns from church collections could be subject to other constraints a special outcome of the course was the joint participation of Muslim and Christian participants working together for the first time. Interest has been expressed from similar institutions in Syria to transfer the courses to their own region. This will be considered by the Board when the Cairo project is completed.

The training team is currently at an advanced stage in planning the second programme to be held in Cairo in 2012. All enquiries should be directed to Elizabeth Sobczynski at es.aicp@btinternet.com or 106 St George’s Square, London SW1V 3QY

Dr Michelle Brown joins TLF as Academic Adviser



Dr. Michelle Brown with the Lindisfarne Gospels at the tomb of St. Cuthbert, Durham Cathedral

The Levantine Foundation is delighted to announce that Dr Michelle Brown has accepted an invitation to become Academic Adviser to the Board. Dr. Brown has been a supporter of our work since the establishment of the Foundation and would like to facilitate new links and relationships which will allow us to broaden our activities into scholarship as well as training and conferences, all part of the Foundation's charitable objectives.

Currently Dr Brown is Professor of Medieval Manuscript Studies and Course Tutor in the History of the Book at the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London. Her research interests are extremely wide within the overall subject of the role of the book as a cultural medium. These include the palaeography, codicology, art history and socio-historical context of medieval manuscripts; late antique and early medieval history and the material culture of Europe and the Levant; and lastly art and spirituality, both historic and contemporary.

Dr. Brown was Curator of Illuminated Manuscripts at the British Library for eighteen years until 2004 and continues her involvement at the BL as Project Officer as well as advising British Library Publications. She has chaired and organised numerous conferences and seminars as well as delivering keynote speeches in all these fields. She has also published vastly on these research areas and especially on the subject of the Lindisfarne Gospels coinciding with a major exhibition at the BL in 2003 called *The Painted Labyrinth: the world of the Lindisfarne Gospels* which was attended by over 141,440 people.

There is not space here to show the full extent of her published works. It is sufficient to say that the Board of TLF is delighted to have her on board and look forward to developing our activities with her eminent support.

Links between Egypt and Britain in 7th century?

What is the evidence?

Dr. Michelle Brown, Professor of Medieval Manuscript Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London and also digital advisor at the British Library.

We set out early one morning from the (in)famous Windsor Hotel in Cairo, at one stage in its life the British Officers' Club, now owned by Copts, for an interminably long and dusty taxi ride to the Wadi al-Natrun. Several staff of the hotel asked me to pray for them at the shrines there. The mud brick walls of the monastery rise, fortress-like, from the flat wastes that stretch beyond, into infinity.

A cautious, yet essentially cheery, gatekeeper-monk enquires of your purpose and grants you entry through an aperture in the sturdy wooden gate. There we were greeted by Father Bigoul, the monastic librarian – a black-clad, heavily bearded, tall ascetic figure, with a wicked twinkle in his eye. We were shown the church, with its stunning paintings, the early adobe tower wherein the monks defended themselves and undertook their domestic tasks of pressing oil and cooking and also the site of the notorious cellar. We then progressed past the papier mache life-size reconstruction of the Nativity, with camel – surprisingly untacky and comically whimsical.

Then began the ascent to the conservation studio, at the top of a modern tower, not too different from its sixth-century counterpart. The first problem facing the conservator in an environment such as this is how to get a water supply and how to establish a temperature which is more in line with the controlled environmental conditions available in many western libraries.



6th century church Deir al-Surian, Wadi al-Natrun

A tower room with windows placed to maximise the cooling benefit of whatever breezes might be out there was the best on offer. A workable studio was painstakingly created – nonetheless presenting a challenging environment for the volunteers who staff the project with more, from other libraries and partners, being encouraged to travel there to gain experience working on such materials. In turn, Father Bigoul has made several visits to the British Library, to gain instruction in conservation techniques and so that I can instruct him in the essentials of cataloguing manuscripts in an electronic database.

Was St. Cuthbert embalmed with nitron using Egyptian techniques?

After the obligatory mint tea, we climbed with Father Bigoul to the ramparts of the monastery and gazed out on the surrounding landscape. Forget images of desert dunes culled from films such as 'Lawrence of Arabia' and the 'English Patient'. This desert is a lunar landscape of



Two seated clerics flanking a palm tree on an 8th-century Pictish slab from Fowlis Wester

sharp white shale, the nitron of which was used by the ancient Egyptians as part of the embalming process. The early hermits' sketes, or cells, themselves can be as basic as dug-outs within this harsh ground – a living-tomb within which there is little respite from the blistering sun and no escape from your God – or yourself. The backdrop is intensely different, but it immediately put me in mind of the 'deserts' of the Atlantic seaboard with which the Celt in me was familiar – the harsh, inhospitable rock of Skellig Michael off the Kerry Coast in SW Ireland, or the Inner Farne hermitage, an island near Lindisfarne in NE England where St Cuthbert did battle with his demons of behalf of all Creation in the late seventh century. St Cuthbert's body was found to be incorrupt when exhumed in 698, eleven years after his death – the ultimate sign of holiness, which ensured his efficacy as a rallying point for cultural reconciliation and ecumenical collaboration within the early English and Celtic churches.

It is fascinating to recall that at exactly this period a parallel phenomenon is experienced in the Wadi al-Natrun. Pilgrims visiting the shrine of St Bishoi in the neighbouring monastery to Deir al-Surian can still prod him to ensure that his body is intact and imperishable within his cladding of vestments. Without in any way intending to cast doubt upon the power of such focuses of cumulative holiness, it is tempting

to speculate whether ancient embalming techniques had been revived in the Wadi al-Natrun and transmitted to Britain.

St. Cuthbert's Gospel of St. John

Other evidence of contact between the areas survive. St Cuthbert was buried with a little copy of St John's Gospel – the little Gospel that speaks of the things that work of love – which he had studied with his master, Boisil, at Melrose in Scotland. It survives, and is exhibited next to the Lindisfarne Gospels which were made in St Cuthbert's honour as part of his shrine around 720. The St Cuthbert Gospel of John carries the oldest surviving binding from the West, made at Bede's monastery of Monkwearmouth / Jarrow around 700. It is made not in conventional early western fashion but entirely and proficiently in an eastern-Mediterranean method of unsupported sewing (in which the gatherings of the book are sewn together with thread, rather than sewn onto leather support cords). The technique has been learned, probably via direct contact.

Bede, the Pilgrims and a Guide to Jerusalem

This was a much bigger, and smaller, world than we imagine. Bede had access to a pilgrim's guide to Jerusalem, Palestine and Egypt which was brought back by one of the many pilgrims who travelled there – a Frankish bishop who



Coptic style binding of the Gospel of St John deposited in St Cuthbert's coffin, made at Wearmouth / Jarrow in Northumbria c.698

took a wrong turn as he sailed back via the Straits of Gibraltar and ended up going the wrong way around Cornwall, getting shipwrecked on Iona, the site of a famous Celtic monastery from which Irish monks had established the monastery of Lindisfarne in northern England.

The Lindisfarne Gospels: Carpet Pages and Prayer Mats

The pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels, made there, recall the contribution of the Coptic Church among the plethora of visual cultural references which are blended together to form the first distinct statement of what it meant to be British, in the wake of the world of Antiquity, and to be part of an ecumen which stretched from the westernmost coast of Ireland – the end of the known world – to the deserts of Syria, Palestine and Egypt. The famous cross carpet-pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels resemble the prayer mats which I have discovered were used liturgically in northern Europe at the time and which were known to Bede (if you were attending Good Friday services at Lindisfarne in the early 8th century you would have spent much of the day on your prayer mat, praying in an easterly direction).

World Religions: a Shared Heritage

The cultural implications for an understanding of shared heritage between the world religions,

as well as of their distinctive differences is manifest. The stylistic influence of Coptic manuscripts and textiles can be observed alongside those from Celtdom, the Germanic areas, Rome and Byzantium, within the Lindisfarne Gospels, and on the end of St Cuthbert's coffin, made in 698, is the earliest western depiction of the Virgin and Child – a direct visual quote of Isis and Horus – when the early Copts moved into the Pharaonic temples they did not stop to redecorate, they gave many of the images they found new labels. Personally, I find such indications of international cultural continuity fascinating, and reassuring.

The "Seven Monks of Egypt"

Next time I visit the simple, moving seventh-century grave of the 'Seven Monks of Egypt' on Inishmore in the Aran Isles, off of the western Irish coast, I shall think of the Wadi al-Natrun and of the enquiring spirit which led people, both men and women, from both areas to travel across the world in order to better understand one another in this traumatic, tumultuous but optimistic period of transition in the world order, and pray that we can continue to learn from them today.

© Dr. Michelle Brown



A senmurv, of Persian pedigree, adorning an initial in the Royal Prayerbook from Mercia, c.800 (BL, Royal MS 2.A.xx)



Conservation Campaigns 2009 and 2010

Eranda Foundation awards a grant of £11,000

The last eighteen months have demonstrated once again that conservation and preservation of the Deir al-Surian collection remain the focus of our attention. Four conservation campaigns took place over this period with eight – ten conservators from all over Europe participating in each campaign. Following two major private donations the conservation work focused on the conservation of the 5th century Four Gospels MS 10, [MK6] in Syriac, and the 13th century Four Gospels MS 21 in Coptic. Both manuscripts are unique in their own right and belong to the most treasured items in the collection. The books are a major resource for scholars working in a range of disciplines, particularly those studying the Christian scripture, the history of the Christian church, the history of the book, and codicology – the study of the structure of books. Further detail about these particular manuscripts is in the report on pages 1 & 2. The grant of £11,000 from the Eranda Foundation for work in 2010 allowed us to deepen and extend our conservation of the collection with additional manuscripts as well as refurbishing and stabilising a large number of items.

Report of the 2009 Campaigns

The aim of the campaigns was the conservation of the Coptic MS.21, “Four Gospels”, 324 folios, (see article page 2) which was dis-bound and documented during the previous campaign. The conservation work, which involved removing old unsuitable repairs, was proving to be extremely complex and time consuming due to the nature of the highly polished Islamic paper on which it was written. Also, the previously used adhesive proved very difficult to reverse. A team of five conservators participated in this work under the supervision of Elizabeth Sobczynski and in consultation with Fr. Bigoul, the librarian. They included: Laura Ridoni, Marzena Szczerkowska, Anna Thommee, Isabel Zarazua. Assisting with work was Monty Kamel. Neill McManus made a detailed documentation of the design of the existing cover of this manuscript as part of a condition survey as well as a record for the preparation of a replacement.

Parallel with the above an important new project began: the conservation of the fifth century Syriac MS. 10, “Four Gospels”, on parchment support (see article on front page). This manuscript was previously assessed by Christopher Clarkson in 2008 who advised on the conservation approach. Research regarding the most appropriate approach to the binding and the format of a new cover for the manuscript was carried out by Fr. Bigoul and Elizabeth Sobczynski.

The conservation of Coptic MS. 23, the Gospel of St. John, dated late 11th century and written on parchment was completed by Elizabeth Sobczynski. Coptic MS.28, “The Acts of the



Julie Somerfield refurbishing selected volumes in the collection

Apostles”, was also bound in a beautifully restored leather cover by Neill McManus.

Michal Sofer and Monika Stokowicz achieved an admirable result stabilising sixty codices as a part of the refurbishment programme of the main collection. Other activities included digitizing of selected folios before conservation treatment as well as documenting manuscripts selected for future conservation.

Continuing our efforts to share conservation knowledge a two day conservation workshop on the care of library collections was presented by Elizabeth Sobczynski to the nuns from a monastery in Cairo.

Report of the 2010 Campaign

Work throughout 2010 continued that begun the previous year: to complete the conservation and to bind both Coptic MS.21 and Syriac MS.10 ; to bind a selection of other manuscripts treated during the past four campaigns; and to continue refurbishing of the collection. The campaign was planned and supervised by Elizabeth Sobczynski and lead by Marzena Szczerkowska. A team of seven conservators spent three weeks at the monastery focusing on different projects. Marzena Szczerkowska attended to the finishing of the Coptic MS. 21 (see pages 1 & 2), as well as jointly with Anna Thommee working on the conservation of the Coptic MS.22. Flavio Marzo continued and completed the conservation of the Syriac MS. 10 text block together with the making of a binding case and a temporary conservation box. Roderick Lane carried out the binding of the 10th century Syriac MS.25, the 11th century Coptic MS.23 and the 13th century Coptic MS. 21.

We welcomed three new conservators into the



Deir al-Surian team: Theresa Lupi from Malta, Julie Somerfield a recent MA graduate from the West Dean College, UK, and Antonios Petras from Greece. Theresa and Antonios carried out jointly the conservation of the 12th century Coptic codex “The Consecration of Churches” Cat. 647 on parchment which included full documentation, disbanding, selected surface cleaning, reducing planar distortions to parchment and compensating losses. Julie was given the task of continuing refurbishment of the collection during which she stabilised seventeen volumes.

Laura Ridoni expresses the feelings of the conservation team upon the completion of the massive task of preserving Coptic MS 21.

“Working on such a beautiful artefact with such a degree of difficulty has been a very interesting experience that taught us a lot. The whole group was happy and proud when the text block was put together ready to be bound, eventually to be used during the services of the Coptic community and regaining a new working life. We would like to thank the Levantine Foundation for the fantastic opportunity to work here and Deir al Surian for the accommodation and hospitality they provided.”

Deir al-Surian: New Library Update

Headley Trust awards grant of £30,0000

We are pleased to report that great progress has been made on the construction of the new library building at Deir al Surian, so vital to the long term preservation of the manuscript collection. This is thanks to the generous grant of GB£30,000 awarded by the Headley Trust, one of the Sainsbury family charities.

Stage 1, the foundations and skeleton of the building have been completed with funding provided by the Monastic Council and TLF. The Headley Trust money has allowed the completion of the first part of stage 2 of construction: the completion of external and internal structural walls as well as the preparatory ducting necessary prior to the installation of air conditioning and heating systems. The photographs shown below show how far the building has developed in a short period of time.

Readers will recall that one of the conditions imposed on the planning consent was that the building design should be sympathetic to the ancient surroundings of the monastic community. It has certainly been successful in this regard judging by the water colour painted by artist Albany Wiseman (right) which was based on the architectural drawings.

The building itself is deceptively modest in scale, appearing to be of two storeys and no higher than the ancient 6th century wall that bounds it. However, it is in fact a 3 storey structure, including a basement level which provides an ideal location for the book store which will have a sophisticated temperature and humidity control system for the long term preservation of the delicate books and manuscripts. The two storeys above ground level will contain a larger conservation studio as well as public access areas and a reading room for visiting scholars and members of the public.

Funds still needed

However, the really expensive part (the purchase & installation of these engineering systems as well as the fitting out) still awaits funds. As much of



A watercolour realisation by Albany Wiseman of the planned new library building at Deir al Surian

this equipment has to be imported from abroad the budget is very sensitive to variable foreign exchange rates. Nevertheless we estimate that a further GB£287,200 will be required to complete the building. Any potential donors should contact our honorary treasurer Nigel Pilkington (email: niggelpilkington@googlemail.com) or visit our newly updated website where donation forms can be printed off and forwarded to him.

Please help us complete this important building for the sake of preserving these treasures – not just for Egypt but for world heritage. Contact details for the Foundation are on the back cover of the newsletter if you wish further information about this and our other projects.



Main entrance to the new library accommodating the ancient tree!



Juxtaposition of new with the old



Lighting the stairs!



From Little Things Big Things Grow

Mother Antonia St Demiana

This expression has indeed held true for the Levantine Foundation's outstanding work in preserving cultural heritage in the Near East. The Foundation has been a pioneer of sorts, being the first organisation to launch training in Egypt with a focus on educating librarians and custodians of manuscripts in Egyptian museums and monasteries.

The Pilot Programme at the Coptic Museum in March 2009 was successful in its own right, however, the Spring programme of 2010 by far outclassed its predecessor.

It was at the Museology and Conservation Pilot Programme when I first came to learn of the Levantine Foundation, and its work and goals. It was then also that I first met Elizabeth Sobczynski who has since become a close friend and mentor. This year's Spring Programme was conducted by the Levantine Foundation in partnership with Leiden University in the Netherlands, the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, and the National Library and Archives of Egypt; and was supported by the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development and Al Ahram Beverages Company. Needless to say, when such great forces unite, success is predictably guaranteed.

The three-week programme was attended by over 120 conservators, librarians, custodians, employees, and students from a diversity of museums and colleges across Egypt. Also in attendance were Coptic monks and nuns who manage collections in Egyptian Coptic monasteries. I attended the programme with Mother Nardin who is another nun from my monastery – the Monastery of Saint Demiana in Egypt's Northern Delta region. The course comprised of a fast-paced programme filled with informative lectures, fascinating excursions, and practical hands-on training through which we all learned immensely about the study, preservation, and restoration of Christian and Islamic collections.

In the first week, the cancellation of flights from Europe due to the ash cloud from the volcano eruption in Iceland meant that Professor Bas ter Haar Romney and Dr Mat Immerzeel could not attend. But this obstacle paved the way for rare opportunities to visit the conservation studios of selected Egyptian museums. Of the museums visited, the new National Museum and Archives was the highlight. Without a doubt, this place is an institution of national pride and we were fortunate to have been given a guided tour through its breathtaking interior. In the conservation studio there, the conservators generously shared their expertise and provided thorough information about the conservation techniques and materials which they use to restore manuscripts. This was also the case at the Grand Egyptian Museum.

The lectures throughout the program were also great sources of learning. Professor Jan Just Witkam's lectures about the history of codicology and the architecture of the handwritten Middle Eastern book were particularly informative. So too were Dr Luitgrad Hols' lectures on how to catalogue and make physical descriptions of manuscripts. Robert Child's lectures taught us about the importance of monitoring the museum environment in which manuscripts are stored, and how to minimise the causes and effects



of deterioration of historical materials. Freda Matassa and Mark Hunt provided valuable information about the fundamentals of collection management. And finally, Bridget Mitchell discussed the aspects of ensuring safe housing for manuscripts and archival materials.

Apart from being meticulous in the knowledge of their topics, the lecturers were all so pleasant and patiently answered all of our questions. On a humorous note, just as Egyptian names are not easy on western tongues, so too are western names difficult for Egyptians to pronounce. So it was not long before Professor Whitkam became Professor Victim, Freda became Dr Farida (a common Egyptian name), Mark became Mr Mark, and Bridget became Dr Bridge!

In the third and final week of the programme, there were separate workshops for conservators and librarians. This was to ensure that we received specialised training in our specific areas of work. In the workshops for conservators, Bridget taught us how to make our own phase boxes and archival envelopes. This is a very important skill to have in Egypt since archival boxes and envelopes are not available here. In Dr Luit's workshops, we learned how to prepare an exhibition by setting up our own virtual exhibition of Middle Eastern objects. In Mark's workshop we examined packaging materials and were taught how to make paper nests in which to transport delicate pieces.

I have presented only the highlights of the Spring Programme, since I would probably require several more pages to mention everything else. But as is evident from my humble report, the course was a tremendous success. As conservators, I believe it is important to fully understand every aspect of the manuscripts in our collections and know how to adequately care and preserve them for posterity. This second training programme has provided us with the knowledge to continue to do just that. I extend my sincere thanks to the Levantine Foundation for the invitation to attend the course, and I eagerly look forward to acquiring more skills and knowledge in the coming programme.

Mother Antonia was one of a group of monks and nuns attending the May 2010 training course.

The newsletter is a publication of The Levantine Foundation

Editor Philippa Dodds John
Email: philippa.john@rlj.com

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Advisor
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