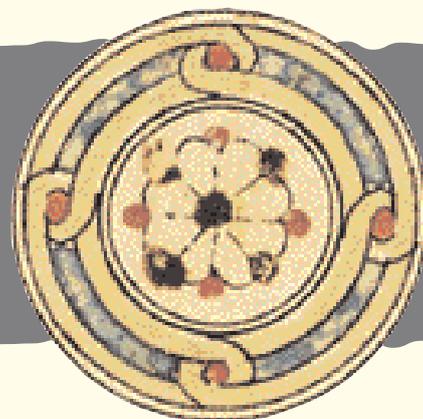


NEWSLETTER *of* THE LEVANTINE FOUNDATION

No. 2 September, 2007



Stepping into the Future

The last ten months have been not only incredibly rewarding and exciting for The Levantine Foundation, but they have also seen us take a crucial decision and a major step forward in our planning for the future.

In the autumn of 2006 we embarked upon the most important phase of the current five-year programme to build a new library. This immensely exciting project, which was only agreed after rigorous deliberation, will provide a purpose-built, eco-friendly building for the priceless Deir al-Surian collection, together with education and training facilities for conservation and care of books and manuscripts.

The site has been allocated by His Grace Bishop Mattaos in the south-east corner of the monastery, where a dilapidated 1960s building will be demolished to make space for the new library. Since awareness and interest in energy saving is growing, we are planning to create the first ever 'green' building in Egypt, setting an example for sustainable climate control on the African continent. The idea is to create a vernacular building compatible with the surroundings of the ancient monastery. To achieve this, traditional materials will be used, the systems will be powered by natural sources such as sun, wind and water, while the position of the building and the thickness of its walls will help maintain the correct level of temperature and humidity.

The Arab Consulting Engineers (Moharram-Bakhoum), currently also involved in building the new Cairo Museum in Giza, have been appointed to carry out the engineering design and to manage the project. The London architect John Henry will act as adviser to TLF in order to assure smooth running of the project.

The environmental design of this building is being carried out by Benson Lau from the School of the Built Environment at the University of Nottingham. Benson, who has been analysing the climate in Wadi al-Natrun, as well as designing the environmental strategy, suggested a mixed mode approach, which will be mainly based on passive cooling.

Environmental conditions in the current library are far from perfect, being hugely affected by the close proximity of the nitrate lakes, which increase the humidity and high arid temperatures of the desert climate. The need for improvement has always been self-evident, principally because of the existing library's location on the top floor, lack of proper insulation and ventilation, and airborne dust. With a kitchen and self-contained guest rooms situated on the floor below, the risk of fire has been a constant concern and challenge to the safety of the collection.

After a trouble-free planning application, the Antiquities Council in Egypt approved the

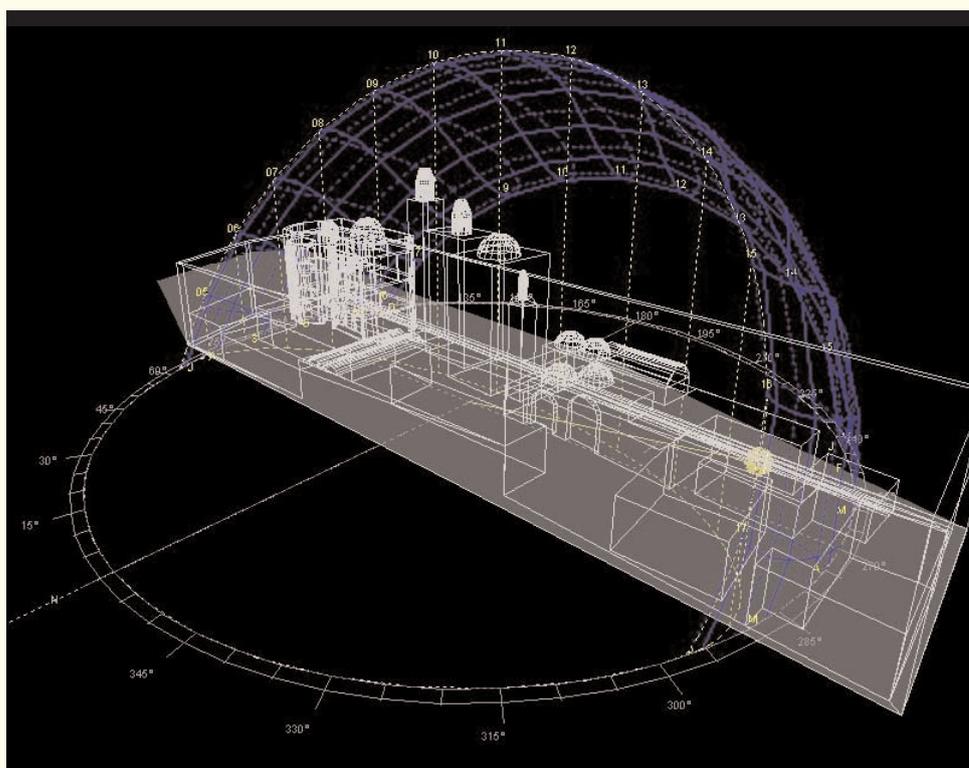
architectural plans in July and gave its consent to the construction of the new library.

Since our first Newsletter last November two further conservation field trips took place. The focus was on the conservation of four important Coptic codices from the New Testament, but the opportunity was also provided for studying and documenting the Syriac collection. We have continued the training of Egyptian conservators, five of whom participated in the November campaign. However, the present lack of space and inadequate facilities do not allow us to take on more students or to expand the programme. We are currently reviewing the situation, looking at possibilities for offering training courses for conservation professionals in partnership with other cultural organisations.

During the May campaign we welcomed some new conservators to the monastery: Ines Correia and Isabel Astigarraga from the National Archive Institute (IAN/TT) in Lisbon, Anna Thommee-Stachon and Daria Kordowska from Torun, and Chris Clarkson from Oxford. It was a great team to work with: experienced, knowledgeable and very professional, and I look forward to working with them in the future.

The April/May campaign overlapped with the visit of Dr Sebastian Brock and Professor Lucas van Rompay who returned to Deir al-Surian to complete their work on the catalogue. Towards the end of the visit Father Bigoul and Professor van Rompay digitised selected folia and fragments required for the catalogue. I was sad to bid them farewell, for during these past few years they have become close friends and valued colleagues. I shall miss their presence and advice very much, and so, I am sure, will all the monks. I would like to thank both Sebastian and Luk for their hard work in accomplishing such an enormous task and to say how much we look forward to seeing the catalogue next year.

Before the end of the campaign, on 12 May, we welcomed donors, patrons and supporters at the Deir al-Surian library. The event was organised as a mark of gratitude for their support and it also provided an opportunity to see the collection and the conservation work. Nearly thirty guests including Sir Derek and Lady Plumbly, Dr Khalil Nougaim, Mr & Mrs Zainul Rahim Mohd Zain, Mr & Mrs Nagwa Shoeb, Mohammed el Hamansy, Lyn Younes, Hala Hashem and Dr Mohammed Goma were greeted by His Grace Bishop Mattaos, the abbot of the monastery, who expressed his personal thanks for their support in preserving the library. He emphasised the need for building a new library to



Solar analysis of the new library

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Abbot Mushe and the Poll Tax

Sebastian Brock

(This is an edited version of a talk given by Dr Brock at the Residency of the British Ambassador, in Cairo, in May 2006)

In this talk I should like to consider two particular questions. Firstly, why are the Syriac manuscripts first collected by the monks of Deir al-Surian and now housed between three main libraries, Deir al-Surian, the Vatican Library, and the British Library, of such significance? And secondly, how did these Syriac manuscripts first come to be preserved in a Coptic Orthodox monastery?

This collection is important not just for those concerned with Syriac literature, but for everyone with an interest in Biblical studies, the writings of the Church Fathers, the history in general of Late Antiquity, and the transmission of Greek philosophy, medicine and science to the Arab world.

Whereas Christianity spread west in the more familiar Greek and Latin, it spread eastwards largely in Syriac, which is simply a dialect of Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus. In the course of time it produced a very extensive literature, and a large number of translations made from Greek originals. Deir al-Surian's Syriac manuscripts preserve a number of very early manuscripts of this literature, going back to the fifth century. Thus the monastery's collection can claim a number of important 'firsts', for it includes the earliest dated biblical manuscripts in any language for both the Old Testament and the New Testament: part of Isaiah, dated AD 459/60, and a Gospel manuscript dated 510. Although there are, indeed, older biblical manuscripts than these, none of them is dated. Even older than these two dated manuscripts is the earliest Christian literary text in any language, consisting of a collection of translations from Greek, written in Edessa (modern Sianliurfa, south-east Turkey) in November AD 411.

The many early biblical manuscripts from Deir al-Surian are particularly important for Biblical studies in view of their great antiquity. One of the only two surviving manuscripts of the earliest Syriac translation of the Gospels, known as the 'Old Syriac' version, comes from Deir al-Surian: the translation itself may be as old as circa 200, and it is certainly one of the earliest biblical translations of the Gospels; the manuscript itself can be dated to the fifth century and is today divided between the British Library (where most of it is), Berlin, and - happily! - the monastery itself. (The other Old Syriac manuscript is preserved at St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai). Deir al-Surian is also the source for our best surviving evidence for an even earlier translation of the Gospels, in the form of a single narrative, harmonised from the four Gospels. This work, known as the Diatessaron ('through Four') is lost in its original form, but one of the most important witnesses to it is a Commentary on it by the great fourth-century Syriac author, Ephrem; the only known Syriac manuscript of this work by Ephrem, now in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, once formed part of the monastery's collection.

Ephrem also happened to be a poet and theologian of outstanding stature, and the seventeenth centenary of his birth was celebrated in 2006 with conferences in Syria (Aleppo), France, India (Kottayam, in Kerala), and Sweden. The only manuscripts which contain his poems in their complete form have all been preserved through the centuries by the monks of Deir al-Surian: the most important of these manuscripts go back to the sixth century, and four of them are precisely dated within that century, oldest having been copied in 519.



Lucas van Rompay and Sebastian Brock

Although St Ephrem has always enjoyed a very great reputation in all the Syriac Churches, after about the eighth or ninth century his poems were no longer copied out in full: instead, a selection of verses was made. This means that, although we have a large number of medieval manuscripts with poems attributed to Ephrem, these poems are never in their complete form, and so it is only in these very early manuscripts from Deir al-Surian that we can fully appreciate Ephrem's poetic genius.

The same situation applies with a number of other early Syriac authors: indeed, sometimes the situation is even more dramatic in that we would have had no trace left at all of their works if the early manuscripts from Deir al-Surian had not preserved them. This also applies to many of the early translations from Greek into Syriac. Some of these are of great interest for students of Greek literature, since Syriac translations sometimes preserve writings whose original Greek text has been lost. This applies especially to the several important writings by Greek Church Fathers, such as the Festal Letters of St Athanasius.

It is the combination of two main factors which lends such great significance to the Syriac manuscripts preserved through the centuries by the monastery. First, the dry Egyptian climate, which has contributed to the preservation of such a considerable quantity of manuscripts belonging to the fifth to seventh centuries. By contrast, elsewhere in the Middle East it is very rare for Syriac manuscripts earlier than about the eleventh century to be preserved up to the present day. Secondly, the fact that the texts of many early authors were no longer copied out in their complete form after about the eighth or ninth century has meant that it is only where we have earlier manuscripts available that the full texts are accessible to us today; in practice, this means that in most cases the manuscripts are from Deir al-Surian.

How, then, did these ancient Syriac manuscripts come to be in an Egyptian monastery? On the surface, it seems surprising that it should be a Coptic Orthodox monastery which has preserved such an important collection of Syriac manuscripts. A glance back at history, however, will reveal that the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church have always had close relations - and at certain periods in history these relations have been very close indeed: several patriarchs of the Coptic Orthodox Church, for example, have been of Syrian origin. Furthermore, the prestige of the Egyptian monastic tradition has always attracted monks from other parts of the Christian world to settle there.

Recent discoveries of inscriptions and wall paintings in the main church of Deir al-Surian have shed a

good deal of new light on the beginnings of the Syriac connection with the monastery. The earliest evidence for the presence there of Syrian Orthodox monks takes us back to the first half of the ninth century. Perhaps they were attracted by the tradition linking the monastery with St Ephrem, who is said to have travelled to Egypt to visit Anba Bishoi; Deir al-Surian still has a tree which is said to have sprouted from St Ephrem's staff. A few Syriac manuscripts of the ninth century were actually written in the monastery, rather than brought from outside; thus a colophon, or end note, of a manuscript dated 887/8 reads as follows:

This book of collected (monastic) texts was completed in the year 1199 of the Greek reckoning (= AD 887/8) in the desert of Skete, in the monastery of the God-Bearer (Mary), of the Syrians. Joseph, from the town of Harran [in Turkey], wrote it for his own benefit and for that of those who come across it.

Other monks are known to have come from Tagrit in Iraq, and for quite a long period there seem to have been close connections between the Syrian Orthodox monks at the monastery and merchants from Tagrit settled in Fostat (Old Cairo).

What the new wall paintings and inscriptions indicate very clearly is the fact that the monastery must have had a mixed community of both Coptic and Syriac monks, the proportions varying at different periods. It was only in the early seventeenth century that the supply of Syrian Orthodox monks finally dried up, and so - apart from the manuscripts - the Syriac presence in the monastery came to an end.

It is not surprising that the Syrian Orthodox monks who joined the monastery in the ninth century should have brought with them a supply of liturgical books in Syriac, together with some manuscripts with spiritual reading (similar to the one dated 888, whose colophon was quoted above). What is surprising is that the monastery came to acquire a very large collection of manuscripts covering virtually all aspects of Syriac literature. For this, we have to thank a particular individual, the Abbot Mushe, or Moses, from Nisibis (modern Nusaybin, in south-east Turkey).

Even before he became Abbot at some time before 914, Mushe had been active in copying out manuscripts himself. One of the manuscripts still remaining in Deir al-Surian was copied by him in 903/4; appropriately, this contains some lives of Egyptian Desert saints which had just been translated from Coptic into Syriac by the Abbot of the monastery, John, son of Makari. Furthermore, we know from a note dated 906/7 which Mushe appended to a sixth- or seventh-century manuscript of Ecclesiasticus that he was already interested in acquiring old manuscripts for the monastery library, since he here records that he was the intermediary for the gift of this manuscript, by the sons of a prominent merchant from Tagrit, to the monastery.

However, it was during the course of his period of office as abbot that outside events provided Mushe with the unexpected possibility of acquiring large quantities of ancient Syriac manuscripts. In 925 the monasteries of Egypt were suddenly faced with a terrible crisis: up till then the monks had been exempted from paying the poll tax, but a new vizier sent to Egypt by the Caliph al-Muqtadir demanded that from now on the monks, too, should pay this tax. Faced with what was a crippling new tax assessment, the various monasteries decided to send a delegation to Baghdad to try and get the decision reversed. Abbot Mushe was the man who

was chosen to undertake this delicate task. He set off in 927, and it was only five years later, in 932, that he was able to return, with a successful outcome to his original mission concerning the tax assessment. Mushe was not a man to waste time while waiting for responses from tax officials: instead, he evidently went around buying up old Syriac manuscripts wherever he could, and by the time that he finally returned to his monastery he had managed to amass no less than 250 manuscripts. We learn of the number from a note at the end of one of the manuscripts he brought back with him: 'To the honour and glory and magnificence of this Syrian Orthodox monastery of the Mother of God in the Desert of Sketis, Mushe, known as "of Nisibis", an insignificant sinner and abbot, strove to acquire this book, together with 250 others (many of them he himself bought, while others were given to him as a present), when he went to Baghdad on behalf of this holy Desert and the monks dwelling in it. May God, for whose glory, and for the benefit of those who read these books, grant forgiveness to him and to his departed ones, and to everyone who has shared them with him. By the living word of God, no one is permitted to cause harm to any of them in any way; nor to appropriate them to himself. Nor should anyone delete this commemorative notice, or make any erasure, or cut anything out - or order anyone else to do so; nor may they be given away from the monastery. If anyone dares to do so, let him realise that he is under an anathema.'

These books arrived with the above-mentioned Abbot Mushe in the year 1243 of the Greeks [= AD 932].

As it happens, the manuscript on which Mushe wrote this note had been written exactly four hundred years earlier, in 532, probably in the vicinity of Edessa; the text it contains is the Biblical Book of Daniel. This manuscript also has the distinction of being the earliest dated witness in any language to the text of this Book of the Bible.

Not surprisingly, Abbot Mushe evidently felt quite possessive about the precious manuscripts which he had acquired for the monastery. This is already clear from the notice just quoted, but he also took care to have similar notes of ownership added to other manuscripts as well; usually these are accompanied by imprecations against anyone who removes the manuscript from the monastery. One such note, in Mushe's own hand, reads as follows:

'This book belongs to the monastery of the Mother of God, of the Syrians, in the Desert of Sketis. Abbot Mushe of Nisibis acquired it for the monastery. I have laid an anathema by the word of God on anyone who erases this note or effaces it, or who removes this book from the monastery for whatever reason. In the case of anyone who dares to do so, let God's anathema, wrath and curse be upon him. But in the case of anyone who guards the word of God and does not act against it, may God show mercy to him and to his departed - and to me, Mushe, a sinner - through the prayers of the Mother of God and of the saints, amen.'

It might be added that this anathema on abusers of library regulations is quite mild compared with some that were inserted into certain of the monastery's manuscripts a few centuries later. We learn from a later note appended to one of the manuscripts written by Mushe himself that Mushe's anathema did not deter the Patriarch Michael I who, in the late twelfth century, 'borrowed' a large number of manuscripts in order to have them copied in his monastery of St Barsauma, situated near Malatya (in modern Turkey); according to the note, not all of these were returned.

Before leaving Abbot Mushe, mention should also be

made of a further aspect of the man. Ancient manuscripts were not his only passion, for we know from inscriptions that he also saw to the embellishment of the monastery church, providing among other things the wonderful inlaid wooden doors that one can still see there. These were made in 926/7, only just before he set off for Baghdad; on them Mushe had the following inscription included:

'To the praise and glory of the holy Trinity, these doors were made in the year 1238 [of the Greeks, = AD 926/7], during the time of the holy patriarchs Mar Cosmas [of the Coptic Orthodox Church] and Mar Basil [of the Syrian Orthodox Church], by the care and at the expense of Abbot Mushe of the town of Nisibis. May God, in whose honour he had them made, reward him and those who partook in the work with him.'

It is indicative of the bicultural character of the monastery in Mushe's time that the inscriptions identifying the saints portrayed on the doors had the Coptic definite article, Pi-Agios Markos, 'the holy Mark', etc.

We do not know when Abbot Mushe died; he was still alive in 943, when the copyist of a manuscript described him as 'Mar Mushe, our glory and the ornament of all the Church, and head of this monastery'.

The monastery's library continued to grow after Mushe's death, either through donations, or through the addition of manuscripts copied in the monastery itself. Although some of these are individually of importance, there was never again a case of a bulk acquisition of ancient manuscripts, such as that made by Mushe. Accordingly it is primarily thanks to the initiative of Abbot Mushe of Nisibis in the early tenth century that Deir al-Surian came to possess a collection of Syriac manuscripts of such great importance and renown.

Although one might regret the fact that the monastery's collection of Syriac manuscripts no longer remains in the monastery in its entirety, it is important to remember that it was only when these manuscripts came to be studied in Europe that the significance and importance of the monastery's collection came to be realised. Indeed, it was the arrival in Europe of these manuscripts from Deir al-Surian, and the challenge



Fragment 38 – with part of Psalm 55, in what could be a 7th/8th-century hand (thus it will be amongst the earliest mss of the Psalms)

and stimulus which they provided for scholars, that has led to the development of Syriac studies in modern times, quite apart from the fact that it has been responsible for the publication and translation of a very large and wonderful body of early Christian literature which, had it not been for the monks of Deir al-Surian, would not have survived the Middle Ages. In any case, quite a number of Syriac manuscripts and fragments still remain at Deir al-Surian, and many of these are of great antiquity, going back to the sixth and even fifth century. They include several works, or parts of works which are not preserved elsewhere; in some cases these are parts of manuscripts, the rest of which are today in the British Library. This applies, for example, to St Cyril of Alexandria's Homilies on the Gospel according to St Luke: since the Greek original of this work is lost, the Homilies are known only from the Syriac translation. Part of an old manuscript containing them was among the manuscripts acquired by the British Museum in the nineteenth century, and its importance was quickly realised: within a few years of its acquisition the text and an English translation had been published by Robert Payne Smith, who is chiefly famous as the compiler of the finest of all Syriac dictionaries, the massive *Thesaurus Syriacus* (1879-1901). A further part of this same manuscript turns out to be among the fragments still remaining in Deir al-Surian, thus providing some more of St Cyril's Homilies which would otherwise have been lost. Some other important 'joins' between manuscripts at Deir al-Surian and manuscripts in the British Library concern works by the great Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Severus, who died in 538. Severus wrote in Greek, but his works usually survive only in Syriac translation, and among the manuscripts and fragments still at Deir al-Surian are some hitherto unknown Homilies and Letters (Severus was a hugely prolific letter writer).

Even the smallest of fragments can sometimes be of great interest: this applies to three diminutive pieces of parchment; the fragmentary bits of text on it are written in a beautiful calligraphic hand, which could at once be identified as that of the scribe of the oldest dated Christian literary manuscript in any language, copied in Edessa in November 411. Although the rest of the manuscript, today in the British Library, contains texts translated into Syriac from Greek, the last few folios have a list of martyrs from the Persian Empire, who had been put to death during the persecutions of the mid fourth century. It is very likely that a list of their names had been brought back from the Persian Empire shortly before November 411 by Bishop Marutha, who had been sent by the Roman Emperor as an ambassador to the Persian Shah. The fragments still at Deir al-Surian now provide us with several further names, including those of several women martyrs; a few of these names turn out to be of men and women who are already known from later accounts of their martyrdoms.

The fact that such a magnificent collection of ancient Syriac manuscripts should have been preserved up to this day is thanks to the care taken of them over the course of the centuries by the Coptic Orthodox monks of Deir al-Surian. This care is exemplified today by the provision of excellent library facilities (soon to be expanded, I am delighted to learn) and conditions for conservation work, thanks to the initiative of the Librarian, Father Bigoul, and the support of the Abbot, Bishop Mattaos. Since the texts which these manuscripts preserve constitute a wonderful spiritual resource that is of relevance and value to all the Christian Churches, there is every reason to be extremely grateful to the monastic community of Deir al-Surian.

Greek Fathers in the Egyptian Desert

Lucas van Rompay

This article is based on a talk given by Lucas van Rompay to guests of the Levantine Foundation at the Arts Club in London on 7th June 2006.

The Coptic Monastery of Deir al-Surian owes its precious collection of Syriac manuscripts in the first place to monks from Syria and Mesopotamia, who settled in the Egyptian desert and brought their manuscripts with them. In collaboration with their Egyptian brothers they set up a library in Deir al-Surian. Throughout the centuries, the ancient manuscripts continued to be read, and new ones were added, either copied from earlier Syriac manuscripts or newly written, sometimes translated from Coptic models.

For many of the manuscripts, Deir al-Surian was not their final destination. Starting in the early eighteenth century, Syriac manuscripts began to be transferred to European libraries. The Vatican Library in Rome and the British Library in London received large numbers that emanated from Deir al-Surian, while much smaller amounts found their way to other collections in Europe and North-America, in particular to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, to the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg, to the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, to the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, to the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, and to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Fortunately, a small, but important collection of Syriac manuscripts is still kept in the Monastery. These are the manuscripts Sebastian Brock and I have been working on in the last few years, with a view to compiling a full catalogue. These are also the manuscripts that – along with the most valuable Coptic, Christian-Arabic, and Ethiopic manuscripts – receive priority treatment from the team of conservators working for the Levantine Foundation

In addition to the already quite impressive list of languages to be found in the manuscripts at Deir al-Surian – Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic – I would like to add one more language: Greek. Even though Greek is found only very exceptionally in the Deir al-Surian manuscripts, I will argue in the present contribution that texts originally composed in Greek played a very important role in the creation of the collection, and, moreover, that several of these manuscripts are very important in our present-day study of Greek Christian literature.

Greek was the main language of the early Church in the Eastern Mediterranean, the language of the Church Fathers, and of the early Councils. Along with Greek, however, other languages



(Fig. 1) Ms. Deir al-Surian, Syr.28: 'Demonstrations from the Holy Fathers', 6th or 7th century.

were used as well, such as Coptic in Egypt, and Syriac in Syria and Mesopotamia. From the sixth century onwards, these languages became the expression of independent Christian communities, as we still know them today, namely the Coptic-Orthodox and the Syrian-Orthodox churches, which have their own church structure and their own traditions. But we should not forget that in the early Christian world they were all part of the universal, or catholic, or ecumenical church.

These preliminary observations should explain why the Greek Christian heritage of the first centuries is directly relevant to the Copts and to the Syrians. Much of the Greek Christian literature was translated into Coptic and Syriac and in fact became the heritage of the Copts and the Syrians as well, just as an admittedly much smaller number of Coptic and Syriac texts were translated into Greek and became part of the Greek-Orthodox tradition. The background to this process of migration of texts from one linguistic community to the other was the widespread bilingualism, or even multilingualism, that existed in the Eastern Mediterranean in the early Christian and pre-Islamic periods. When, in the seventh century, Byzantium lost Syria to the Arabs, knowledge of the Greek language in Syria continued to exist for some time. In fact, one of the best Hellenists of Syriac Christianity is Jacob of Edessa, who died in AD 708. He was personally involved in much translation work from Greek into Syriac as well as in the revision and correction of existing earlier translations of Greek works. At the same time, in several of his works he complains about the decline of the knowledge of Greek in his day, when Arabic was on its way to becoming the main language of the Middle East. Many of Jacob's works exist in Deir al-Surian manuscripts.

There still is evidence of correctly written Greek in Syriac manuscripts of the early eighth century. By way of example, we may refer to ms. London, British Library, Add. 14,429, a biblical manuscript, dated to AD 719, which contains the First Book of Kings (originally translated into Syriac from Hebrew). The scribe added in the margin the Greek names of the main biblical characters. The Greek writing is elegant and natural. This points to the authoritative status of Greek in the eyes of the makers and users of this manuscript.

But knowledge of Greek within the Syrian-Orthodox tradition declined rapidly in the eighth and ninth centuries. Ms. London, British Library, Add. 14,486, which was written in Harran, in North-Mesopotamia, in AD 824, and contains the Lessons for the Sunday liturgy for the whole year, conveys a somewhat ambiguous message. At the end of the manuscript, there is a note written on behalf of the binder, the monk Isaac, first in Syriac, and then, in a shorter form, in Greek. From this, it is clear that there was still some prestige involved in including some Greek in the manuscript. Unfortunately the writer (either Isaac himself or someone else writing for him) lacked the skills to do it properly; the Greek is written clumsily and contains several grammatical mistakes.

Another illustration of the loss of interest in the Greek language may be found in ms. Deir al-



(Fig. 2) Ms. Deir al-Surian, Syr 28: Folio showing the Syriac translation of a work by John Chrysostom.

Surian, Syr. 28 – a very important manuscript, to which we will return later. It dates from the sixth or possibly early seventh century (Fig. 1). When, a few centuries later – we don't know exactly when – it needed to be repaired, pieces of a Greek biblical manuscript, which may be dated to the eighth or ninth century, were used to fix damaged spots (Fig. 3). This does not necessarily prove lack of appreciation, or ignorance, of the Greek, as the manuscript may just have been in bad condition and for that reason was dismantled, but there are many other indications of a general decline in the knowledge of Greek in the ninth century, and in fact a number of the British Library manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries are palimpsest and have Greek in the earlier layer, which does indicate a loss of interest in that language.

If we want to see Syriac and Greek co-existing in Syria, naturally interacting, and mutually enriching each other, we have to turn to the earlier period, and to the earliest manuscripts. Before discussing the Greek Fathers, let us briefly consider the Syriac translation of the New Testament. Prior to the early fifth century, when one translation of the Gospels became universally accepted by Syriac Christians, there was an earlier recension, known by scholars as the 'Old Syriac'. This 'Old Syriac' almost completely disappeared, with the exception of two manuscripts, each of them associated with an Egyptian monastery. One manuscript is from the Monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai; it is incomplete and only parts can be read, since it is palimpsest, overwritten in the eighth century with hagiographical texts dealing with holy women. The other, possibly slightly older than the Sinaitic one, from around 400, is from Deir al-Surian; the larger part of it presently is in the British Library, known as the 'Codex Curetonianus', after William Cureton (d. 1864), one of the famous nineteenth-century keepers in the Manuscript Department of the British Museum. A few folios are in Berlin, and one folio remains in the Monastery. In spite of its poor condition, it is one of the treasures of the Library, and possibly its earliest manuscript. The 'Old Syriac', with its two manuscript witnesses, is referred to on every single page of the modern critical editions of the Greek Gospels.

The earliest dated Syriac manuscript from Deir al-Surian, and the earliest dated Christian manuscript written in any language, is one that is now in the British Library (ms. Add. 12,150). It was written in Edessa in the year 411. Its content

is very telling. Most of it was translated from Greek. The main authors are Titus of Bostra, whose refutation of the Manichean religion is only very imperfectly known in Greek, whereas here we have a complete Syriac translation, and Eusebius of Caesarea. Two major works of Eusebius are preserved here, the 'Theophany', and the 'Martyrs of Palestine'.

Of the 'Theophany' only a few Greek fragments are known, whereas – again – the Syriac text is complete. Imagine a work by Shakespeare, lost in English and preserved in an early French translation! That is almost inconceivable, but it is exactly what happens with Eusebius of Caesarea and the Syriac transmission of his works. The 'Martyrs of Palestine' is largely incorporated into the Greek transmission of another of Eusebius's works, the 'Ecclesiastical History', whereas in Syriac it is an independent work. In all these cases, the importance of the Syriac is obvious, as it preserves texts that either do not exist in Greek or are preserved only very imperfectly in that language. The manuscript from 411 came to the British Museum in two parts, in 1838 and in 1841. With these two parts it is nearly complete; only the last folio, which lists the names of Christian martyrs in Persia, was very damaged and only very partly preserved. We have been lucky enough – more than 160 years after the manuscript left the monastery! – to discover a few additional pieces of that same folio. Three of them could be joined together; the fourth fragment belongs to the lower section of the folio. We still don't have the full folio, but we are considerably closer. Details of this discovery were provided in the first issue of the Newsletter. Eusebius's most popular work, the "Ecclesiastical History", is not included in the 411 manuscript. It is preserved, however, in another very ancient manuscript of Deir al-Surian, which ended up, not in the British Library this time, but in the National Library of Russia, in St. Petersburg. The date of the manuscript is 462, while the translation itself may safely be attributed to around 400. In this case, of course, the work is preserved in the Greek original. Why, then, is the Syriac important? The reason is that the Syriac manuscript from Deir al-Surian is several centuries older than the earliest Greek manuscript, which is from the eleventh century. Although it is 'only' a translation, it still tells us a great deal about an early layer in the textual transmission that is not reflected in the much later Greek manuscripts. The editor of the critical edition (Leipzig, 1908), the German scholar Eduard Schwartz, used the Syriac translation as one of his important sources. In addition to the manuscript from St Petersburg, he also used another sixth-century manuscript, again from Deir al-Surian, which is preserved in the British Library. The Syriac manuscripts are referred to in the critical apparatus of every page of the edition.

What we have observed where Eusebius is concerned may equally well apply to a number of other Greek authors. A few names may be singled out. There are several works by Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, and John Chrysostom, as well as various anonymous works related to the Egyptian

desert fathers, where the Syriac transmission is extremely important and exists mostly in manuscripts that are much older than the Greek witnesses. Many of these works became classics of Syriac literature and were incorporated into the canon of the Syrian-Orthodox Church. Even in the later period, when knowledge of Greek faded among Syrians, the Syriac translations of these works continued to play a central role in the Syrian-Orthodox tradition. In this respect the Syrian-Orthodox Christians never rejected their Greek legacy. Over the centuries the Syriac translations, which were later translated into Christian Arabic, came to embody the Syrians' fidelity to the Christianity which they shared with the Greek-Orthodox, the Coptic-Orthodox, and other traditions.

We do not have in the Syrian-Orthodox tradition, or in the Deir al-Surian manuscripts, the writings of Maximus Confessor (Homologitis) or John of Damascus, authors that belong to seventh-century Byzantine Christianity. At that point in time, the Syrian-Orthodox, not unlike the Coptic-Orthodox, felt disconnected from the Byzantine Imperial Church as a result of the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which they rejected. The anti-Chalcedonian position of the Syrian-Orthodox and the Coptic-Orthodox should not be explained – as is sometimes done – as a reaction against Greek-dominated Christianity. The anti-Chalcedonians, or the Miaphysites – as they are called due to their adherence to the "one-nature" (or *mia fysis*) Christology – had the very strong conviction that it was they who remained faithful to the theology of the fourth- and fifth-century Greek fathers, and that the Byzantines, by accepting the two natures in Christ, were straying into heresy.

Nothing shows this more clearly than Deir al-Surian ms. Syr. 28, whose repair work with fragments from a Greek Bible we have already considered. The title is 'Demonstrations from the Holy Fathers'. It is in fact a huge collection of hundreds of extracts from mainly Greek Fathers, which focus on questions of doctrine as well as of church discipline, and Christian life in general. One may call it a historical handbook of the Syrian-Orthodox faith. A few similar florilegia exist in British Library manuscripts, but as far as I



(Fig. 3) Ms. Deir al-Surian, Syr. 28: Detail, showing repair work with the help of fragments from a Greek biblical manuscript.

know this is the most elaborate one, and at the same time one of the earliest. Some extracts are quite long and they are sometimes taken from works not otherwise known, either in Greek, or in Syriac. The repaired folio that we have already mentioned shows us a long extract – several folios long – from a well-known work by John Chrysostom, his "Letter to Olympias the deaconess" (Fig. 2).

The three most frequently quoted authors in this manuscript are Gregory of Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, and Severus of Antioch. Only the last of these is not commonly known in the Greek-Orthodox tradition, although he was the legitimate patriarch of Antioch between 512 and 518. In 518, at the beginning of the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Justin I, he was deposed because of his refusal to accept the Council of Chalcedon. Severus was not a Syrian and he wrote all his works in Greek, but his numerous works were condemned by the Greek-Orthodox Church and consequently did not survive in Greek. They did survive, however, in early Syriac as well as in Coptic and Arabic translations. In fact Severus became the leading theologian of the non-Chalcedonian churches in Syria, Egypt, and Ethiopia, and he still is commemorated every day in the liturgy of these churches. He had a profound knowledge of the earlier Greek Fathers and he saw himself as being in full agreement with them, while in his view the Chalcedonians were not. It is important for us to note that in the works of Severus of Antioch – and in this particular Deir al-Surian manuscript – the non-Chalcedonian faith is not seen as a departure from the heritage of the earlier Greek fathers, but as a continuation and a consolidation of it. This view explains the important role of the Greek Fathers in the non-Chalcedonian traditions, a role that the schism did not challenge, but rather reinforced.

We are well beyond the fifth and the sixth centuries now – the period when the division over the Council of Chalcedon erupted and developed. Somewhat artificially, present-day scholars and church people use the phrase "Eastern Orthodox" for the Chalcedonian churches and traditions, and "Oriental Orthodox" for their non-Chalcedonian counterparts. At the same time, conversations between these churches have now transcended the language of polemics and condemnation, and they focus on what these different traditions have in common rather than on what divides them. What they do have in common is their being rooted in the early Christianity of the East-Roman Empire, of which the Greek Church Fathers were the first and foremost interpreters. The works of the Greek Church Fathers, in their diverse incarnations – Greek, Syriac, and Coptic – provide us with the necessary framework within which both the historian and the theologian will attempt to understand the complexities of the multilingual and multicultural matrix from which the later forms of Christianity emerged. The contribution of Deir al-Surian and its precious manuscript collection to this process of understanding is crucial.



Review of activities

In January 2006 steps were taken to establish and register a branch of The Levantine Foundation in Egypt. An important agreement was also signed between the Monastic Council of the al-Surian Monastery and the Levantine Foundation to create the appropriate environment for the storage of the manuscript collection of the Monastery to ensure its long term preservation.

Two conservation field campaigns were undertaken in November 2006 and May 2007 by a team of conservators from the UK led by the Chief Executive, Elizabeth Sobczynski.

Great emphasis was put on the training of Egyptian conservators in conservation methods and techniques. Elizabeth also gave two lectures, at Leiden University in the Netherlands, and at the Institute of Paper Conservation in London, on behalf of the Foundation, describing its work.

As a result, a number of scholars and conservators have offered to commit time to help further the objectives of the Deir al-Surian library project.

On 12 May 2007 a visit to the library at Deir al-Surian was organised for our Egyptian donors. They met the conservators and were shown the manuscripts as well as the proposed site of the new library, the cost of which will be £390,000.

The May 2006 Tour

The first Egyptian tour to be organised by the Levantine Foundation took place in May 2006 and was judged such a success that another, similar tour is being arranged for October 2007. The group of twelve (four trustees and six valued supporters) who joined the tour were privileged to be shown some of the rich and varied treasures of Egypt.

The first morning was spent exploring the Pyramids and the Sphinx at Giza. In the afternoon the group visited the magnificent Mosque of Ibn Tulun, then the Church of the Virgin Mary (more commonly known as Al Muallaqa, the Hanging Church) and, finally, the Egyptian Museum.

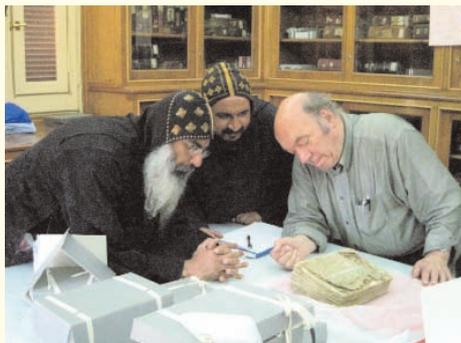
A two hour drive the following day took us to Wadi al Natrun to visit Deir Amba Bishoi, the monastery adjoining Deir al Surian, and Deir al Surian itself, where we were able to see the collection of priceless manuscripts and fragments that were in various stages of preservation.

A visit to the Coptic Museum of Cairo, which houses Coptic Art from the Graeco Roman times to the Islamic era, was the programme for the third day, while early on the morning of the fourth day, we set off for Alexandria, where we were shown around the Catacombs, the Serapium, built on the site of the former acropolis, and the magnificent new Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

Those who chose to stay in Egypt for the extended tour were taken to the Red Sea and to the monasteries of St Anthony and St Paul.

Report of the November 2006 Conservation Campaign

The aim of this campaign was to continue the conservation of manuscripts from the Deir al-Surian collection, focusing specifically on five manuscripts dating from the eleventh to the seventeenth century, and to provide training in conservation methods and techniques for the Egyptian conservators. The participants included the Chief Executive, Elizabeth Sobczynski, Theresa Cho, an MA student from the Camberwell College of Art, England, Richard Farleigh from Cambridge, England and Jacek Tomaszewski from the Academy of Fine Art in Warsaw Poland, as well as four Egyptian students. Mina Aziz Shehata and Mina Samuel Frag, who joined the project for the first time, were taught rudimentary techniques which included surface cleaning and simple support of damaged edges. Monty Atef Kamel and Michael Joseph, who have participated in four earlier campaigns, were involved in more complex tasks such as text support and infilling of losses to paper.



Fr Bigoul, Fr Aziz and Christopher Clarkson

Report of the April/May 2007 Conservation Campaign

Elizabeth Sobczynski and Christopher Clarkson spent a week researching and assessing the Syriac collection in preparation for continuing conservation treatment, with particular attention to the fifth-century manuscript, the earliest of the collection. The work focused on studying and documenting the MS' archaeology, discussing the most appropriate methods for parchment conservation and new binding, to determining the most suitable materials, and to digitising selected folios and book structure for documentation purposes. A team of four book conservators from Poland and Portugal joined the campaign for the two following weeks. The participants included: Isabel Astigarraga, Ines Correia, Anna Thommee-Stachon and Daria Kordowska. The work focused on the conservation of the thirteenth-century Coptic MS.28 'The Acts of the Apostles'.

Dr Sebastian Brock and Professor Lucas van Rompay completed cataloguing the Syriac collection and the catalogue will be sent to print in the coming winter.

Stepping into the Future continued...

re-house the collection in a safe and suitable environment.

In the last Newsletter we reported pledged donations of some £300,000 and we are delighted to confirm that £220,000 of this has now been received. We have also had considerable success with our recent applications to trusts and foundations, and we are most grateful to the following for their generous support: £10,000 from the Mercers Foundation over two years, £10,000 from The Association for Cultural Exchange, and £15,000 from the Foyle Foundation.

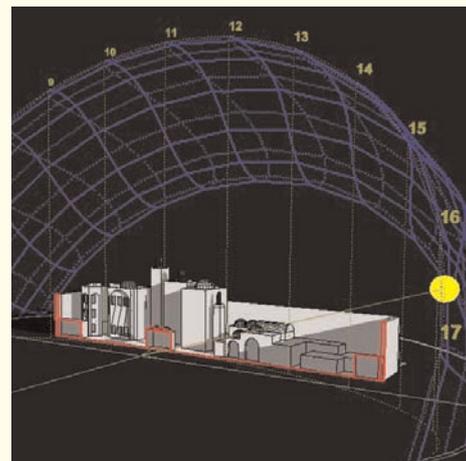
We are most grateful to Mr John Osborn for donating £ 15,000 for conservation of the fifth-century Four Gospels manuscript, probably the earliest surviving gospel manuscript in the world. The original Greek texts have been lost, but they were written in either Syria or Mesopotamia and reached the monastery in the ninth or tenth century. Thanks to Mr Osborn's generosity, we are delighted to report that we can start the conservation work and plan to complete it in the next eighteen months.

We are enormously grateful to His Excellency Sir Derek Plumbly, the British Ambassador to Egypt, and Lady Plumbly for their continued support in awakening awareness of the Deir al-Surian heritage, and for their help in raising funds to support the conservation work.

Our thanks and gratitude also go to Dr Khalil Nougaim, patron and LF Executive Director, whose help in the running of the Foundation has been invaluable and who last May so generously pledged £10,000 sterling towards the building of the new library. We are also grateful to Hala Hashem and Dr Mohamed Gomaa of Zaki Hashem & Partners for their legal advice in registering the Foundation in Egypt.

Finally, more than ever before is being achieved thanks to support from individuals, trusts, foundations and corporations and to all of them we owe a great debt of gratitude. It has always been our goal to build the new library to ensure the long term safety of the collection once the conservation work has been completed, and to help to educate the conservators of the future. To achieve this we are obliged to redouble our fundraising efforts, as we still need to raise a further £600,000. We hope that you will help us in this endeavour through your contribution to the new building. Thank you again to all those who have supported us over the past year - quite simply, we could not do any of this without your help.

E.S.



Solar analysis of the new library

Bespoke Tour to Egypt

with an exclusive visit to the Deir al-Surian Library

25th - 31st October 2007

I am delighted to invite you to our second tour to Egypt, a highlight of which will be the visit to the Deir al-Surian library and the seventh-century Church of the Holy Virgin, which houses the finest wall paintings to be seen in a Coptic church in Egypt.

Following the success of last year's tour, the Deir al-Surian library will re-open its door to show you the ancient collection of Christian manuscripts including the fifth-century Syriac Gospel.

The fame of its collection of manuscripts extends back to the seventeenth-century, and it was here that a century ago, Robert Curzon persuaded the abbot to sell many Coptic and Syriac manuscripts which now adorn the British Library. A visit to Deir al-Surian will offer a rare opportunity to see a display of the earliest codices some of which are the only surviving examples in the world.

The tour is offered by Tresor Travel, a reputable Cairo travel agent. The company will donate proceeds to help fund the new library to re-house this extraordinary collection. We hope that you will join the Fathers and the Levantine Foundation in supporting this worthy endeavour and look forward to seeing you in the Surian Monastery.

Elizabeth Sobczynski
Chief Executive, TLF



The Annunciation, the 8th-century wall painting in the Church of the Holy Virgin, Deir al-Surian

ITINERARY

October 25th – London to Cairo

Fly Heathrow to Cairo with BA or Egypt Air. Transfer to the five-star Shepheard Hotel in Garden City in the centre of Cairo overlooking the Nile.

October 26th – The Pyramids in Giza and the Egyptian Museum

A comprehensive half-day tour of the Giza pyramids, including a visit to the Solar Boat Museum, finishing with the enigmatic Sphinx. You will be invited to travel through areas of the plateau in horse-drawn carriages, which will make the visit effortless.

In the afternoon our expert guide will take you around the Egyptian Museum where you will see the famous Tutankhamun collection, the el Fayum funerary portraits and rooms of wonderful old Kingdom statuary.

October 27th - Old Cairo and transfer to Alexandria

A morning tour of Coptic Cairo, starting with the Coptic Museum, which contains an amazing collection of early Christian art. Then to The Hanging Church (El Mualalaqa) and Ben Ezra

Synagogue, which incorporates a church sold by the Copts to pay the taxes raised to build a Mosque.

A fast train will take you to Alexandria, Egypt's second city, in the afternoon where you will spend two nights in the Renaissance Alexandria Hotel.

October 28th – The City of Alexander

A full day in Alexandria during which you will visit the second-century Roman catacombs, the amphitheatre, the fortress of Qayt Bey, Pompey's Pillar and the new Bibliotheca Alexandrina, which was inaugurated in 2003, recreating the tradition of the classical library of Alexandria.

After lunch at a fish restaurant overlooking the Mediterranean you will visit the Alexandria National Museum, which houses one of the finest collections of antiquities and early Christian art in Egypt.

October 29th – The Wadi el-Natrun - visit to the Deir al-Surian and St Macarius Monastery.

After breakfast you will drive to the Wadi el Natrun, ancient Scetis where St Macarius founded the first semi-communal settlement in about AD330. You will first visit Deir al-Surian, the Monastery of the Syrians, where you will be welcomed by Bishop Mattaos, Abbot of Deir al Surian, Fr Bigoul the librarian, and Elizabeth Sobczynski, Director of the Foundation, and given rare access to the ancient collection of Christian manuscripts and the exceptional wall paintings in the seventh-century Church of the Holy Virgin.

Before returning to Cairo you will visit St Macarius Monastery, closely associated with the life of one of the greatest desert fathers of the Coptic church: Abu Magar.

October 30th – Islamic Cairo

The day will be spent visiting Islamic Cairo, including the ninth-century Ahmed Ibn Tulun Mosque, the Gayer-Anderson House and Salah El Din Citadel.

Lunch in the Naguib Mahfouz restaurant in Khan el Khalili Bazaar established during the Ottoman period, famous for its jewellery, fabrics and alabaster vases. You will have a chance to browse through the bazaar and/or relax over mint tea in a beautiful tea house El Fishawy before returning to the hotel for dinner.

October 31st – Departure for London

After breakfast set out on the return journey to London



Fragment from the 8th-century wall painting from the Church of the Holy Virgin, Deir al-Surian

PRICE

£ sterling per person
Single supplement

£625
£115

THE PRICE INCLUDES

Hotels
Full board
Egyptian visa
All transfers (in air-conditioned coaches)
Entrance fees
English-speaking guide accompanying every trip

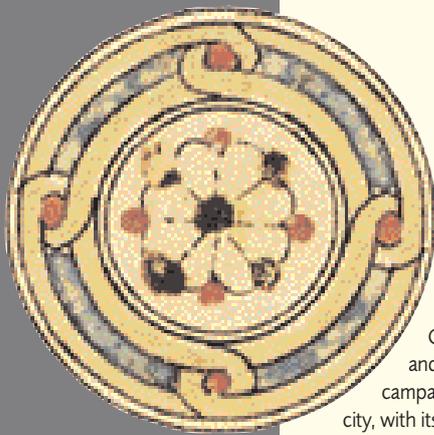
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Tips for guides and drivers
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Members of the 2006 Tour to Egypt outside the 7th-century Church of the Holy Virgin, Deir al-Surian



Our home in the desert

Richard Farleigh and Jacek Tomaszewski

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Cairo sparkled and looked enchanted by night as we banked and descended after our five-hour flight from London. Lights, colour, activity, mystery, and glimpses of Egypt's Nile - we had arrived. Escorted in fading evening warmth by Father Bigoul, our very own Coptic monk, who was calm, supportive and tirelessly helpful throughout the campaign, we taxied through the centre of the city, with its sea of people, mostly men, blending with cars - cars with horns, pushy yet courteous, and many without lights.



Richard Farleigh, with Giza pyramids in the background

The following morning, after being awoken by a loud and lyrical 'call to prayer' at about 5.00 a.m., we journeyed north-west for some hundred kilometres to our new home in the Wadi al-Natrun to partake in the autumn 2006 conservation campaign. There were greetings and uncertain exchanges in broken English, and we met our fellow Egyptian campaign conservators that evening over a monastic supper. Later we unpacked and settled into our rooms, which were located within the compound of an adjoining monastery, as residential guests of the Coptic Pope.

Next day we were briefed by Elizabeth on campaigns past and present. Monti and Michael, two Egyptian conservators, having had a close ongoing relationship with the Levantine work over recent years, were on hand to comment. Father Bigoul, the monastery's librarian, and Father Aziz, his assistant, were equally generous and good-natured with their time.

We bonded with pleasant ease day by day. Helping one another with conservation tasks, we made suggestions, discussed problems, chose alternatives, lent a hand and, most importantly, made sound practical headway. Specifics of 'paper conservation' appear to be lightly covered within the Egyptian conservation courses, and a clear, careful and measured approach to its implementation within the monastery is considered crucial. Campaigns such as these make it a priority to engage in discussions as to 'the why, the how and the wherefore', instilling sound and well-founded approaches and principles for the benefit of the objects themselves. Careful examination and documentation (including much photographic and planned digitisation) all form a significant part of this process. In addition, 'good housekeeping' within the library is equally evident: orderly shelves, labels, several neatly boxed folios, and strategically placed insect traps! Clearly printed notes, in both Arabic and English, guide potential readers in 'good handling practices', with suitable book cradles readily to hand.

We worked mainly on the conservation of two important manuscripts. Both were texts from the New Testament: a St John's Gospel from the end of the eleventh century, and an Acts of the Apostles from the thirteenth century. Characteristic damages typical of parchment books were present in the manuscript of the St John's Gospel, such as mechanical damages and

surface losses at the beginning and the end, and cockling and planar distortions throughout the whole text block. An additional problem was the losses and weakening of the parchment caused by copper-based pigment in the area of the border decoration. Following careful mechanical surface cleaning, the edges and spine area of the bifolia were repaired and areas of decoration of the manuscript were strengthened. After being humidified in the humidification chamber, the pages were gently straightened under tension until the parchment was dry to the touch, after which they were placed between pressing boards. The Acts of the Apostles posed different problems for conservation treatment. Incorrect modern binding, which did not allow the book to open properly, and previous unsuitable repairs, in the form of numerous strips of old manuscripts and fragments of quite heavy paper made during the last rebinding, were a threat to the folios and contributed to further damage of the text block. The old repairs and deposits of the vegetable glue were removed after detailed documentation and taking the book apart. Owing to the considerable volume of the manuscript, treatment included only one quire.

One day tended to merge into another. Our walks through the monastery gardens at either end of the day afforded the chance for quiet reflection. Sunny days, clear blue skies, morning warmth, a degree of pleasant routine, some surprises with intermittent power and water, a challenge, an obstacle or two, and significant space restrictions... We worked with what we had to hand - in many ways more than one would imagine, given the geographic and obvious logistical challenges. Communications weaved from country to country. English tended to prevail, with Arabic, Polish and Korean all given representation. We became familiar with the routines of monastic life around us: the Fathers, the bells for afternoon Matins, the chanting of Coptic prayer, the monastic cats, and a constant stream of visitors, generally on Fridays.

During breaks in conservation work we could not help but contemplate the raw architecture of the monasteries and churches in the Wadi al-Natrun. Their numerous domes, characteristic of Coptic style from this period, are evidence of the fusion of Byzantine and Muslim traditions in Egypt. The monasteries in their desert settings fully match the colour of the surroundings through the use of the light beige plaster, and it was hard not to be aware of the changes of colour on the raw walls of the monasteries at different times of the day as they glittered in the full sun and emanated warmth at sunset. It is clear that time past and time present harmonise here. However, it is not the material substance of this place that is most important. The fundamental value of the monastery is its abiding realm of spirituality, created by the monks over the centuries. It is they who, in this place full of the spirit of the first hermits, bring about the dominance of 'genius loci' over the changing and turbulent 'genius saeculi'. This special atmosphere can be sensed in the whole historic complex at Deir al-Surian, as well as in the library and the conservation workshop.



Jacek Tomaszewski in Giza