

# The Antiochian - N° 3 (2010)

The Newsletter of *Antioch*:

A Center for Antiochian Orthodox Christian Studies and Research

## The Work of *Antioch Centre*

*Antioch Centre* continues its work to catalogue all existing manuscripts in the world that relate to the Antiochian Orthodox Church, and place them in a comprehensive database. Alongside this crucial work, the *Centre* continues to work on new and surprising aspects of Antiochian history heretofore unknown or poorly studied, and found in the Church's icons, manuscripts, and other artefacts. In this issue of *The Antiochian*, we will present some of the *Centre's* latest work on these, and inform you about efforts to coordinate our academic endeavours with other work being undertaken at research institutions in the United States, which is immediately relevant to our own work and research.



Ornamented Cross. The Syriac inscription says,  
“Through you we conquered our opponents, and in Your name we trampled down those who rose up against us.”  
(Psalm 43(44):5)  
(Illuminated folio from an Orthodox lectionary in Syriac,  
Mt. Lebanon, 15th c. - Private Collection)

## Visit to the United States

Recently, Fr. Elia had the opportunity to visit the United States. While there, he toured the Antiochian Archdiocese Headquarters in New York, Antiochian Village in Pennsylvania, and a number of Antiochian parishes. He and the *Centre's* Secretary, Peter Schadler, also met with Professor Irfan Shahid at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C. to discuss the *Centre's* work and exchange information on some of the latest academic work affecting our understanding of the Antiochian Church and its history. Prof. Shahid was very pleased to meet Fr. Elia, and offered him his full encouragement in pursuing the *Centre's* work. After spending some time at the library at Dumbarton Oaks, they then met with scholars at the Catholic University of America where they further exchanged ideas about how the *Centre's* work should progress. In addition, they visited universities and academic institutions and conferred with scholars in Boston, Pittsburgh and many other places. Christian scholars in the U.S. were generally very enthusiastic about the *Centre's* initiative to approach study of past Christian history by studying the corpus of one particular Church, the Antiochian Orthodox Church. From the foundation of *Antioch Centre*, one of its driving principles has been that the study of Christian history is best made by researching a particular Church's life and tradition without confusing that tradition with those of other Churches, often following their own particular traditions.

After leaving the Washington area, they travelled to Antiochian Village during the annual conference on Sacred Music. After first venerating the relics of St. Raphael of Brooklyn, meeting with both the Directors of the Village and its museum, they had ample time to tour the Village and study the library's contents. Fr. Elia also was able to examine all of the library's archive, manuscripts and rare books, and briefly catalogue their contents for future reference.



The Tomb of St. Raphael, Antiochian Village

Following their visit to the Village, Metropolitan Philip warmly received Fr. Elia and the Secretary at the Archdiocese Headquarters in New York. The Metropolitan was very pleased to hear of the *Centre's* work, with which he was already familiar, and they discussed ways in which the work of the *Centre* could be further advanced. Metropolitan Philip agreed on the pressing need to reveal and preserve the Antiochian Church's Heritage for future generations. The Metropolitan then asked Fr. Elia to return to Antiochian Village, where he offered several talks on the history of the Antiochian Church in both the past and present, and on the projects the *Centre* is undertaking on Antioch's great heritage. These were gratefully received and drew large crowds from the House of Studies, which was in session during his visit. He was further able to meet with its Director, and discussed the work of the House and *Antioch Centre* with him.

During his time in the U.S., and with the blessing of Metropolitan Philip, Fr. Elia was welcomed by parishes in Massachusetts, New York, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Florida. He spoke to many communities about the great and rich heritage of the Antiochian Church, and the work the *Centre* is undertaking to bring that great heritage into further public light. He was pleased to become acquainted with the Antiochian Orthodox living in America, and expressed his hope that new discoveries and further study of the Antiochian Church will help to enrich the experience people have of

their Church and aid them in their preservation of the Light of Christ in this world.

### **The Trilingual Icon of Kaftun**

Just as a single icon can reveal the whole Gospel to us today, if we can understand it, so can perhaps the whole value and importance of *Antioch Centre's* work can be seen in one icon. The icon to which we refer is from the ancient Monastery of the Dormition of the Theotokos in Kaftun, Northern Mount Lebanon. This icon demonstrates how the three languages of Greek, Syriac, and Arabic have been used, sometimes simultaneously, in the Antiochian Orthodox Church's long history. It is painted by unknown iconographers on both sides, and makes use of all three languages.

On one side is a very beautiful icon of the Theotokos Hodegetria dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and on the other side we find an icon of the Theophany from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This side of the icon is truly marvellous, as it is inscribed using Greek, Syriac, and Arabic.



The Theotokos, Kaftun





The Theophany, Kaftun

In **Greek** we read the names of the figures Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, and the Prophets Isaiah and David, along with the words ‘The Baptism’. In **Syriac** on the open scroll that the Prophet Isaiah holds (top right), we read a liturgical composite text taken from Isaiah that reads, *“Thus the Lord says: wash yourselves, make yourselves clean and put away the evil of your acts from before my eyes. And all who thirst, go and draw water from the spring of salvation.”* (1:16, 55:1, and 12:3). Finally, in **Arabic** on the scroll held by the Prophet David (top left) we find another composite liturgical text taken from the Psalms proclaiming, *“The sea saw it and fled, and the Jordan turned back. The mountains feared like deer, and the hills like lambs. What ails you O sea that you fled, and you O Jordan that you turned back? The waters saw you O God, the waters saw you and were afraid.”* (113[114]:3-5 and 76[77]:16).

This use of all three languages on the icon suggests to us the strong possibility that the residents and monks of Kaftun were

familiar with each of these languages enough to understand such an icon. When one considers just how difficult each one of these languages is, to imagine that all three of them were used at the same time and in the same place is truly remarkable, and witnesses to the great heritage of the Antiochian Church and the work still required to uncover that heritage. [For more, see Elia Khalife, ‘A Project on the Antiochian Chalcedonian Orthodox Manuscripts’; in IX Symposium Syriacum (2004). *Parole de l’Orient* 31 (2006) 423-431].



The Monastery of the Theotokos (left), and the Basilica of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus (right), Kaftun

### A Spiritual Word The Manuscript ‘Tradition’

Today we are accustomed to computers and printing presses and the ability for us to reproduce a text word for word without mistakes, but prior to these inventions this was not so. When Fr. Elia works on manuscripts he often finds marginal notes or colophon notes left by the scribe saying something like, “Please pray for me. No one is perfect; if you find a mistake, please correct it without blaming my weakness.” When Fr. Elia reads something like that, he prays for them, and tries to put into practice what Archimandrite Vasileios, the current Abbot of the Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos, has written: “What is required in the study of the Fathers, in order to remain faithful to the Fathers’ spirit of freedom and worthy of their spiritual nobility and freshness, is to approach their holy texts with the fear in which we approach and venerate their holy

relics and holy icons.” [*Hymn of Entry*. (NY: SVS Press, 1984) 34]. The scribe who added such a note in a colophon, or a later reader, did so in humility, not being certain if he had possibly copied a section of the Bible or one of the Liturgical services incorrectly. Likewise, the scribe who would alter a text did so often because he believed his correction more accurately reflected the *Orthodox Tradition*.

With the advent of the printing press, we can easily forget the need for Christian witness to be ‘in the Spirit’, and not just a mindless repetition of what has been stated by either the Holy Book or the Holy Fathers. Many modern scholars working in the tradition of Biblical Criticism and Hermeneutics have lost the understanding of why various manuscript traditions for the Bible or the Liturgy exist or how they came into being in the first place. However, these days when Fr. Elia finds such notes in manuscripts in universities, libraries or museums, he does not make additional corrections, since these institutions believe that honouring an old document means not altering it under any circumstance.

It is important for us to remember that we are part of the *Living Tradition*, and that our witness is for the person Christ Jesus, rather than a specific text. While we must always try to repeat the *letter* of the text, we must also remember what Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul have said, that the letter kills, while the Spirit gives life (John 6:63 and 2 Cor. 3:6). Similarly, *how* we read is just as important as *what* we read and write. When Christ asked the lawyer, ‘How do you read?’ (Luke 10:26), He showed us that the Law is written in hearts and minds, as much as in words and books. The reader today must similarly discern the *Living Word* in what he reads, by separating the chaff from the wheat, and absorbing what is most beneficial for life. While the altering of even one small word or phrase may reveal to someone the true and living Gospel, or hide it from them, the ‘purified’ reader will benefit from even texts that appear to most of us as unrelated to Christianity.

As we have already seen in this *Newsletter*, the Kaftun Icon is a perfect example of this, as the painter of the icon did not quote the Bible word for word, but creatively and artistically combined different Bible verses to communicate Jesus Christ to those looking on the icon in prayer. We must similarly familiarize ourselves with the Bible and works of the Fathers in order to *both* remain faithful to the *Holy Tradition*, and reproduce that *Tradition* in each unique circumstance that presents itself to us in our own lives.



Fragment from an Orthodox lectionary in Syriac (Mt. Lebanon, 15th c. - Private Collection)

Fr. Elia reconstructed this fragment from six pieces that he found and rescued.

### Antioch Centre

- \* To advance the education of the public in the history, culture and society of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch
- \* To facilitate and enhance the study of Antiochian history, demography, hagiography, spirituality, theology, liturgy, biography, archaeology, and linguistics
- \* To publish and disseminate information on the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch that is otherwise unavailable to the general public

*The following announcement about Antioch Centre has appeared in a number of academic journals and periodicals.*

**‘Antioch’: A New Initiative for the Study of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch**  
*by Dr. Sebastian Brock*  
(Oxford University, UK)

In 2006 a new charity, named ‘Antioch’, was set up and registered with the aim of promoting research on the cultural heritage of the Rum Orthodox (Chalcedonian) Patriarchate of Antioch. Although the early period, up to the time of the Arab conquests, is comparatively well known, the subsequent centuries have been very little studied, despite their importance, both for the history of the Orthodox Church as a whole, and for that of the Middle East in general. Discoveries in recent years of medieval wall paintings in Syria and Lebanon, as well as of hitherto unknown manuscripts, forgotten saints, and the identification of new Christian archaeological sites, are just one indication of some of the new and unexpected aspects that are coming to light. At present, however, ‘Antioch’ is concentrating its attention on the very large number of manuscripts of Antiochian Orthodox provenance, written in four different languages, Greek, Syriac, Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Arabic. At the end of many of these, the copyist has provided a colophon with notes stating where, when and for whom the manuscript was written; quite often, further information of a historical or topographical nature is also given. Work on these manuscripts has already brought to light a forgotten saint, besides providing a lot of new and valuable historical information. Once all this information has been collected together, it will make it possible to write a much more authoritative and reliable history of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch than is at present available.

At the present time ‘Antioch’ is supporting the research of Monk Elia Khalife, an Orthodox monk from Lebanon who is currently residing in Oxford, where he is able to benefit from the resources of the University’s libraries, above all from its manuscripts and its collection of microfilms from St Catherine’s Monastery, Sinai. He has already made an inventory of several thousand manuscripts in Syriac, Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Arabic, and is in the process of entering all the varied information contained in their colophons into a carefully designed database. The aim of ‘Antioch’ is eventually to be able to make all this information available to scholars in the form of a fully searchable database, as well as to support and publish research on the Antiochian Orthodox heritage in general. In due course it is hoped that it will also be possible to organize conferences on the Antiochian Orthodox tradition, and, ideally, to establish a physical Centre to further promote research and to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge about this neglected and little-known tradition to a wider public.

Needless to say, the future success and development of ‘Antioch’ depends on financial support for its work. Further information about ‘Antioch’ in general, and about how to support it, can be found on its website, [www.AntiochCentre.net](http://www.AntiochCentre.net).

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