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The Newsletter of *Antioch*:

A Center for Antiochian Orthodox Christian Studies and Research

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The Work of Antioch Centre

Fr. Elia continues to catalogue the thousands of manuscripts which he is locating from around the world, documenting where they are, and what can be found in each of them. Work of a great variety still needs to be done, including entering the catalogue on a computer database, compiling a full bibliography of all published books, articles, and materials relating to the Patriarchate of Antioch, as well as many other projects yet to commence. At the moment funding is still needed for many of these projects, but some of them are going forward with what funding is available.



*The Church of Antioch, Mtskheta River.
The Church of the Cross (Jvari) is seen in the back.*

Georgia: A Journey to the Past

Fr. Elia spent the month of October in Georgia, establishing a link with Georgian Church scholars. The Georgian Patriarchate has a long history of contacts with Antioch, and preserves a number of manuscripts in Georgian relating to the Antiochian Church. Georgians regard Antioch as their “Mother Church”, and

their tradition is that 13 Antiochian Fathers were instrumental in establishing Christian monasticism in Georgia in the 6th century.

His journey led him to see first hand how early Christian monks lived. Many of the monks of Georgia, due to limited resources, still live a deeply ascetical life with few luxuries that many monasteries in other parts of the world by now have acquired. Georgia is still largely unpaved, and travel by 4x4 was crucial for visiting a number of sites.

The love, simplicity, hospitality, and generosity with which many still live in Georgia is something Fr. Elia felt is being lost in many parts of the world, where modern conveniences are often taken for granted. To give just one example, there are many places where monks live without electricity or running water. In such an environment, Fr. Elia could see that the monks were truly grateful for what God had given them. When asked to summarize his experience there, Fr. Elia said, “There are so many wonderful people in Georgia, seeking the face of Christ.”



*The Lavra of St. David, one of the Antiochian Fathers, in
Gareji Desert.*

An Historical Word St. Maximus the Confessor (+662)

On his trip to Georgia, Fr. Elia presented a paper on Maximus the Confessor, one of the most important saints for the Georgians, who keep a tradition of where the saint was buried in Tsageri in north-eastern Georgia. Recently, there has been some discussion in scholarly circles regarding where Maximus was originally from. A Biography of Maximus was written in Greek in the 10th century, four centuries after the saint lived. The *Greek Life* says that Maximus was born in Constantinople. But some evidence has been brought forth by Dr. Sebastian Brock that Maximus was actually from Khisfin in the occupied part of the Syrian Golan Heights. Fr. Elia has gradually been uncovering more and more evidence to support that view, and presented his findings from manuscripts for the first time at the conference. As any scholar who works with manuscripts will say, it is very easy for any scribe to accidentally make even the smallest mistake which would lead him to the wrong conclusion regarding something very important, such as where a saint was from. Then, until new evidence is found, that small mistake can often lead scholars for hundreds of years down various wrong paths in their research. Uncovering the truth then becomes extremely difficult, as the prejudice toward one view can be hard to overcome.



*The Church of St. Maximus, Tsageri.
Georgian tradition has it that Maximus' tomb is here.*

A Word on Terminology The “Greek” Fathers

We often hear of the ‘Greek’ East, and the ‘Latin’ West, or the ‘Greek’ Fathers and ‘Latin’ Fathers when learning about the Orthodox Church, but this is a bit of a misnomer. The identification of ‘Greek’ and ‘Latin’ has largely been made along linguistic lines, and by modern Western Scholars. Eastern Christians have always identified themselves with their local Church, and not by what language they spoke, or by what nation or empire they were a citizen of. True, many Christians were members of the Roman Empire, whose language in the ‘east’ was primarily Greek, but this does not mean that Christians would have identified themselves as ‘Greeks’. Further, while they would certainly have identified as Romans, their primary allegiance was always to their own church, first locally, and then with their bishopric and patriarchate.

It has always been the problem of the Church to communicate the uncreated truth in created words, and for that reason it is never the ‘word’ itself which is wrong, but only the way it is used, understood, and spoken. Thus, to say ‘Greek’ Fathers is not ‘wrong’, but can be misleading. In a way it would be more accurate to speak of the ‘Constantinopolitan’ Fathers, the ‘Alexandrian’ Fathers, the ‘Antiochian’ Fathers, etc. St. John of Damascus, for example, wrote entirely in Greek, but would have identified himself first with the Church of Antioch, just as did the Fathers of the Antiochian Church who wrote in Syriac, Greek, and Arabic before and after his time. Each Church had its own unique expression of Christ in the world, and its own unique witness to the Truth, just as it does today. Appreciating this fact will lead one to realize that a particular person’s origins, such as St. Maximus, or any Father, can tell us a lot about that person, the Church from which he came, and his own way to witness to the one true Way, who is Jesus Christ.

A Spiritual Word

St. Maximus as a Model

Under the pain of torture and threat of death, Maximus confessed the Orthodox Faith, refusing to give into the heresies supported by so many hierarchs of the Church. He was told that all five patriarchs were opposed to him, and his torturers questioned him with regard to what ‘Church’ he belonged. Maximus replied, “Christ the Lord called that Church the Orthodox Church which maintains the true and saving confession of the Faith.” In this way he showed that while a Christian should be obedient in all things, he is responsible for keeping the Orthodox Faith, even against bishops, should they ever fall into heresy.

Maximus eventually died for his beliefs, and was later canonized for his faith. Some might want to see him as an early Protestant, but he was not. He wanted nothing more than to remain in the Church, and he stayed obedient to the Orthodox authorities of the Church in all things, save false teaching on the person of Christ.

As St. Maximus himself said, “I have no dogma of my own, but only those which are common to the whole Orthodox Church; I have not introduced into my confession a single new word which would justify it being called my own.”

But Maximus condemned no one, and refused to judge any person’s salvation. Asked if his position led him to condemn the bishops and all who held opinions contrary to his, he refused. Instead, he cited the three holy youths from the book of Daniel, who refused to condemn anyone despite the fact that others around them were worshipping idols. He went on to recall to his accusers Daniel himself, who, although pushed into the lions den, never passed judgment on his persecutors, but only spoke against their sin. In all these trials, Maximus is a model for us in our times, preserving the faith, and judging no one.

Antioch Centre (Oxford, UK)

www.AntiochCentre.net

- * 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.