

## **Museum & Patriarchate Develop Partnership after Discovery of Lost Manuscript**



WASHINGTON, DC – A Museum of the Bible curator conducting routine provenance research on a late 10th to early 11th-century Greek liturgical manuscript of the four Gospels discovered it was one of many items looted from the Eikosiphoinissa (also known as Kosinitza) Patriarchal and Stavropegial Monastery in northern Greece by Bulgarian soldiers during World War I. Upon this discovery, the museum began deaccessioning the item and contacted His All-Holiness Bartholomew I, Archbishop of Constantinople — New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch, to coordinate its return. The Patriarch thanked the museum for the promised return and offered to allow the museum to display the item until His visit to the United States in October 2021. Additionally, the church will loan three additional sacred items to the museum for exhibition, Museum of the Bible announced on October 16.

“We would like to express our thanks for your diligent efforts to restore the rightful inheritance of the Holy Patriarchal and Stavropegial Monastery of Theotokos Eikosiphoinissa,” Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I stated in a letter to Museum of the Bible’s chief curatorial officer, Dr. Jeffrey Kloha. “It is thus a true blessing to

the monastic community and to the Christian world to see the religious treasures that were removed from the monastery formally and ceremoniously returned to their rightful place and used once again for the spiritual edification of the faithful residing therein, as well as the scholars of history and art.”

In March 1917, Bulgarian soldiers looted the monastery, located near the town of Drama in northern Greece. The Bulgarian soldiers removed the entire monastic library, which included over 430 manuscripts and 470 other religious objects. Many were sold in the 1920s and made their way into collections in Europe and the United States. This Eikosiphoinissa manuscript was previously sold in New York in 1958. Museum of the Bible acquired it from Christie’s in June 2011. In doing research on the item, museum curator Brian Hyland identified notations in the manuscript that confirmed that it belonged to those looted from the monastery in 1917. Subsequent research confirmed its identity as Eikosiphoinissa Manuscript 220. The museum immediately began efforts to return the manuscript to the monastery.

“We, therefore, commend this apt and honorable decision of the Museum of the Bible, which decision was taken in the framework of the signed Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the aforementioned institution, for the repatriation of other orphaned manuscripts and ecclesiastical relics to their natural home, i.e., the Holy Monastery,” said His All-Holiness Bartholomew I, the Spiritual Leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians.

“We deem it to be perfectly permissible for the manuscript to be exhibited in your museum until the Official Patriarchal Visit to the United States in the Fall of 2021,” also wrote His All-Holiness. “In so doing, the manuscript’s origins and history of both it and the other stolen items of the Eikosiphoinissa Monastery may be made known to as many as possible.”

As a part of a collaborative agreement, to include the exhibition of the history of the Greek Bible and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the museum will be loaned the following items from the Zavorda Patriarchal and Stavropegial Monastery of St. Nikanor in northwestern Greece: an 11th-century Psalter, a 12th-century manuscript of the four Gospels, and a 12th-century parchment manuscript of Acts and the Epistles.

“Uncovering this manuscript’s history was not easy. It required an intense investigation on the part of our curator, Mr. Hyland, to trace its sad past, to confirm its identity and determine its whereabouts prior to 1958,” said Kloha. “We are grateful to His All-Holiness for his blessing to display this manuscript along with

other sacred texts from the church's treasury, and we look forward to further collaboration in the days to come."

More information about Eikosiphoinissa Manuscript 220 and the research that identified it is available online: <https://www.museumofthebible.org/eikosiphoinissa-manuscript-220>.

[thenationalherald.com](https://thenationalherald.com)