

Return of rare handwritten Gospel to Holy Monastery of Eikosiphoinissa this month



A rare, handwritten Gospel stolen during the First World War from the Holy Monastery of Eikosiphoinissa, in northern Greece, will officially be repatriated later this month, with a hand-over and reception ceremony set for Thursday, Sept. 29. The date was not chosen at random, but coincides with the day of remembrance for victims killed during the war in and around the city of Drama.

The Archbishop of America, His Eminence Elpidophoros, will be on hand for the ceremony, whereby the Gospel will be returned from the Museum of the Bible in Washington D.C.

The artifact is considered one of the oldest handwritten Gospels in the world, written in Greek sometime between the end of the 10th century and beginning of the 11th century.

The founders of the US museum had acquired the Gospel at a Christie's auction in 2011.

The artifact was stolen in 1917 by the occupying Bulgarian army from the historic

monastery, which in Greek means the “The Luminous Red One”, and is located along Mt. Paggeon.

According to Church officials, Bulgarian soldiers raided the monastery in March of 1917 and removed all the items from the monastic library, including more than 430 manuscripts and 470 rare objects.

Included in the looted artifacts were many icons and Orthodox liturgical objects. Many were sold in the 1920s and eventually found their way into collections in western Europe and the United States.

The 10th-century gospel was sold in New York City in 1958 before resurfacing at the Christie’s auction in 2011.

During research, curator Brian Hyland identified the manuscript, known as “Manuscript Eikosiphoinissa 220,” through the notations contained in it, a painstaking effort detailed to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, His All Holiness Bartholomew I, by museum representatives, who visited him in the Bosphorus metropolis to inform him of the discovery.