

29/09/2022

Museum of the Bible Delegation Received by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew



PHANAR — After nearly a year of preparations, “Kosinitza Manuscript 220” will return to the Patriarchal and Stavropegial Monastery of Theotokos Eikosiphoinissa in Drama, Greece. The manuscript, which was most recently purchased from Christie’s in 2011 and entered the collection of Washington D.C.’s Museum of the Bible in 2014, was among hundreds of priceless objects looted from the Monastery by Bulgarian troops in 1917. Following the discovery of its origins by curator Brian Hyland, the Museum of the Bible began working in collaboration with the His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew for the repatriation of the manuscript to the monastery from which it was stolen.

As final preparations are underway for the official event marking the occasion of the manuscript’s repatriation, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew received the Museum’s official delegation at the Phanar on Tuesday, September 27, 2022. Representing the Museum were Founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors Mr. Steve Green, Chief Curator Dr. Jeffrey Kloha, Dr. Brian Hyland, Assistant Curator of the museum’s Medieval Manuscripts Collection, as well as Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou, member of the museum’s Advisory Council. Also joining the meeting were His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America—who will be the official representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch at the formal repatriation event—and the Very Reverend Archimandrite Agathangelos Siskos, Chief Archivist of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Both Archimandrite Agathangelos and Dr. Prodromou have been appointed by His All-Holiness as Patriarchal liaisons responsible for coordinating the collaboration between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Museum of the Bible.

During the meeting, His All-Holiness thanked the leadership of the Museum of the Bible for their productive cooperation with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, praising it, once again, for the return of the manuscript, noting that their act is an example worthy of imitation and contributes to the repatriation of the other “orphan” manuscripts and ecclesiastical relics to their “natural mother, that is, the Monastery.”

The official event marking the occasion of the return of the manuscript to the monastery will take place on Thursday, September 29, 2022 and will be dedicated to the memory of the late Metropolitan Pavlos of Drama.

The History of the Repatriation of the Manuscript

The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Museum of the Bible signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on January 31, 2020, which provides for the creation of a permanent exhibition of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the fourth floor of the Museum. Within the context of this cooperation, the provenance of “Kosinitza Manuscript 220” was traced to the looting of the Monastery in 1917. After the identification, Dr. Jeffrey Kloha addressed a letter to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on June 20, 2020, in which he informed him of the Museum of the Bible’s decision to return the manuscript to the Monastery.

In response, His All-Holiness sent an official Patriarchal letter on August 31, 2020, expressing his thanks for this action, stating that it is an act of restoration of the legal and cultural heritage of the Patriarchal and Stavropegial Monastery of Panagia Eikosiphoinissa. Among other things, he stressed that, “it is a true blessing for the monastic brotherhood and the Christian world, to see the religious treasures, which were removed from the Monastery, to officially return to their natural space and to be used for the spiritual edification of the faithful, as well as by the scholars of history and art.”

Subsequently, on October 16, 2020, the Museum of the Bible officially announced the decision to return the manuscript. Before its repatriation, the important manuscript was displayed as part of a temporary exhibition on the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which opened on October 25, 2021.

On May 14, 2022, the Ecumenical Patriarch signed the deed issued by the Museum of the Bible which officially transferred ownership of the manuscript to the Holy Patriarchal and Stavropegial Monastery, to which it was returned on August 31, 2022, and where it is now kept.

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