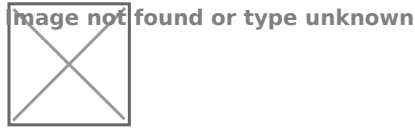


02/05/2023

## **Archbishop Elpidophoros Remarks at the Official Repatriation Event of Three Manuscripts to the Panagia Eikosiphoinissa Patriarchal and Stavropegial Monastery**



Your Grace, Bishop Irinej and Protopresbyter Andreas, Archiepiscopal Vicar of the Saint Nicholas National Shrine,

Colonel Matthew Bogdanos, Assistant District Attorney for the City of New York and Head of the Antiquities Trafficking Unit,

Ms. Devon Eastland, Senior Specialist of Early Printed Books at Swann Galleries,

General Counsel of our Sacred Archdiocese, George Tsougarakis,

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!

Christ is Risen!

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!

Today, I rejoice to represent the Spiritual Father of the worldwide Orthodox Church, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, as we receive, in this transmission of manuscripts, an extraordinary example of honesty and responsibility. Truly, we are humbled by the openness and receptivity of our guests, here within the Pentelic Walls of the Saint Nicholas National Shrine.

I wish to express my deepest appreciation and thanks to Swann Auction Galleries, and personally to Ms. Devon Eastland, Senior Specialist of Early Printed Books at the Galleries, for their forthright and genuine interest in seeing these precious manuscripts be returned to their rightful institution, the Patriarchal and Stavropegial Monastery, Panagia Eikosiphoinissa.

I do not say, "owner," for these manuscripts possess a value that cannot be

purchased by any amount of silver or gold. They abide in the memory of the Church, as prized evidence of the truth of the Gospel. As His All Holiness has said of such texts:

As the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, we represent the memory of the Church, not only from the doctrinal and constitutional side of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, but from that which bears witness through Sacred Scripture. All of the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse are within our sphere. Furthermore, our continuous memory has allowed us to share with the world the Scripture as it was used in worship – in liturgy, and in the original language.

The public reading of these lectionary texts created a centripetal, binding force, that shaped the texts of the New Testament in particular. The lection pulls them together, because as the Apostle Paul says: “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”\*

These manuscripts found their way through history to Panagia Eikosiphoinissa, where they have been treasured as part of the witness of the Sacred Text of the New Testament. The confusion and violence surrounding the First World War found these treasures and many others looted from the Monastery. Their travels have led them to this point of recognition of their rightful place.

Swann Auction Galleries has set an example for others to follow, including academic institutions. The fact that, the oldest continually operating specialist auction house in New York has demonstrated such leadership in this regard, speaks volumes of its integrity, and we thank them.

We also want to recognize our dear friend, Colonel Matthew Bogdanos, Assistant District Attorney for the City of New York, and Head of the Antiquities Trafficking Unit, for his incomparable service to the recovery of cultural and historical treasures. Knowing of his distinguished military service, especially after September Eleventh, it is deeply gratifying to have him standing in this Church, which pays tribute to the Heroes of 9/11. And I might add, the site of the original Church of Saint Nicholas lies directly beneath the monument to the first American Troops into Afghanistan just a few yards across Liberty Park. Colonel Bogdanos also served there with distinction and honor, being awarded the Bronze Star for his heroic service. We deeply appreciate, and are very proud of his accomplishments in every field of endeavor in which he has excelled, and we thank him for his presence and remarks today.

And, it would be remiss of me not to mention the inimitable George Tsougarakis,

the General Counsel of our Sacred Archdiocese. Long before George made his commitment to work directly for our National Church, he provided inestimable service to the Church, and particularly to the interests of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. His dedication to the patrimony of the Church is one of the reasons that we possess the sensitivity to the provenance and appropriate dispensation of matters such as these we watch over today.

Finally, the setting for our exchange of good will could not be more apropos. The Saint Nicholas National Shrine stands once more as a sign to the world, that we have a responsibility to history – a duty to tell the story of our human events with honesty, even when the tale is filled with pain and sadness.

But today is not a day filled with such dire sentiments. We rejoice in the integrity of all involved in this repatriation of these precious reliquaries of memory and narrative of the Gospel.

On behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople – the Mother Church of Orthodox Christianity – and as Exarch of the Throne in America, I receive these treasures with profound gratitude, and I will convey them to the Great Church of Christ in the coming days, to the joy and gladness of His All Holiness, and the Beloved Sisterhood in Christ, at the Panagia Eikosiphoinissa Monastery.

Thank you, and may God bless you all.

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