

*Watani (My Homeland)* is a national Egyptian newspaper that comes out every Sunday. Together with its predecessor it is over 150 years old. The Board of Editors are Coptic. It has an English and French International section. This article does appear in the Arabic section though they may ask me for it!

## Watani International

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14 June 2009

### Second annual Coptic Studies Symposium

# In Toronto: Celebrating Coptic Creativity

Helene Moussa

On Saturday 21 March, 100 participants gathered for a full day of lively discussions and interaction at the second annual Coptic Studies Symposium at the University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The symposium was co-sponsored by the department of Near and Middle Civilisations of the University of Toronto (NMC), St Mark's Coptic Museum, Scarborough, and the University of Toronto Centre of Art (UTCA). A special feature of this year's symposium was the exhibition of Coptic artefacts specially mounted for the Symposium by the University of Toronto Art Centre. The exhibition included: tapestry fragments (6th-10th century), bronze and clay lamps (8th-9th century), an incised ivory panel (8th century), a pyx cylindrical box from a single piece of bone (4-5th century), a head of a young boy carved in limestone with polychrome (late 3rd century), crosses (10th-11th century), and a relief limestone late that goes back to the 4th-5th century and was featured on the symposium poster.

Professor Linda Northrup, Chair, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations (NMC) welcomed the participants and reported on the progress of Coptic Studies at the NMC: in the past three years four courses on Coptic Language were offered and this year Dr Ramez Boutros taught two courses: Introduction to Coptic Studies and Coptic Art and Archaeology. Dr Northrup announced that academic year 2009-2010, Dr Ramez will be teaching courses on "History and Sources of Egyptian Monasticism" and "Archi-



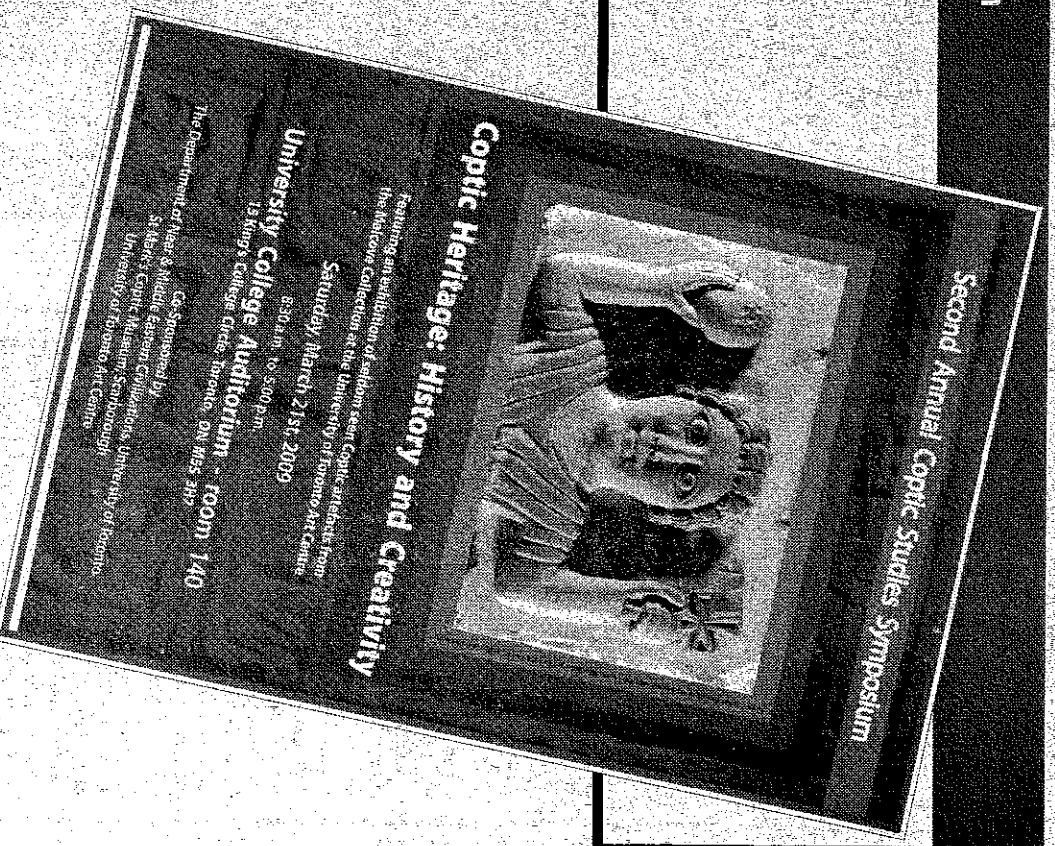
ecture and Archaeology of Egyptian Monasteries". Dr Northrup expressed gratitude to St Mark's Church for its donations and the role it has played to raise the funds for these courses. NMC has also endorsed the plans that are underway to establish a Canadian Society for Coptic Studies. Fr. Marcos Marcos, Protopriest, St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church in Scarborough, followed with a paper titled "Envisioning St Mark's Coptic Museum in the Coptic Canadian Village (CCV)". He traced the history of the Museum and elaborated on the plans for a building to house the Museum's growing collection on the CCV site in the city of Markham.

Professor Niamh O'Laoghaire, Director of the University of Toronto Art Centre (UTAC) invited all participants to view the seldom seen Coptic artefacts from the Malcove Collection at the UTAC. Dr Lillian Malcove, an avid art collector bequeathed her entire collection of 513 artefacts to the University of Toronto so that it could be used for teaching and research. Many pieces in the Collection come from Early Christian, Coptic, Byzantine and Post Byzantine contexts.

Dr James M. Robinson, Professor Emeritus, Department of Religious Studies, Claremont University, chaired the first session titled "Early Church Sources". Professor Robinson also welcomed the forthcoming Canadian Society for Coptic Studies to the family of the International Association for Coptic Studies. Dr Anne Moore, Senior Instructor, Department of Religious Studies, University of Calgary titled her paper "Locating the Kingdom of God within the Writings of Clement of Alexandria and Origen". She examined the confluence of ideas from the Gospels, Philo of Alexandria and other Alexandrian philosophical texts that influenced and shared the idea of the Kingdom of God within Alexandrian Christianity. Dr Pablo Argente, Associate Professor of Patristic and Historical Theology at the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto followed with a paper titled "Fourth-Century Pneumatological Controversy in Alexandria: Athanasius' *Epistulae ad Serapionem*". Professor Argente discussed the answers St Athanasius gave to Bishop Serapion's letters asking for information on how to respond to the theological position taken by the Alexandrian Church regarding the role of the Holy Spirit.

The following two papers focussed on "Coptic Collections" in Egypt and Canada. Father Bigoul el-Suriay, Curator of al-Surian Monastery Library gave a detailed historical overview of the acquisition of the collection of more than two thousand volumes and other five hundred fragments on papyrus, parchments and paper and illuminated manuscripts—all of which he noted are available for scholarly research on Coptic heritage. Heather Pigat, Collections Manager at the UTAC described initial steps she took for a feasibility study to create a catalogue tentatively titled "Catalogue of Coptic Material in Canadian Collections". The project was welcomed as it will enrich research and inter-museum collaboration.

Recent discoveries from ancient sites were the topics of two other papers. Dr Hise Dijkstra, Assistant Professor and Head of Classics at the Department of Classics and Religious Studies, University of Ottawa, read a paper titled "New Evidence about the Fall of Bishop Macedonius of Constantinople (511 CE) from a Coptic Ostrakon". He discussed the text on the ostrakon discovered in the Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes during excavations by the Metropolitan



left to right:  
Professor  
Linda  
Northrup,  
Abouna  
Bigoul  
el-Suriay,  
Abouna  
Marcos  
Marcos  
and  
Professor  
James  
James  
M. Robinson

Museum, New York, in 1910. Despite Walter Ewing Curn's two publications in 1920 and 1926, this text was not included in any historical accounts of the 511 events. Professor Dijkstra's paper placed the scene described in the letter for the first time in historical context. Dr Ramez Boutros, NMC and Research Fellow, Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies' paper "Recent Excavations in the Monastery of Bawit: Outcome and Perspectives" elaborated on the successive excavations conducted on the site of Bawit since 1901. He illustrated the results of the excavations of a joint team from the Musée du Louvre in Paris and the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Cairo since 2003. The most recent excavations in 2008 included the discovery of an icon of the Archangel Michael on wood. The icon is now in the Coptic Museum, Cairo.

The two final papers focussed on art and liturgy. Dr Amir Harrak, Professor of Aramaic and Syriac languages at NMC paper spoke about "The Church of Mar Behnam in Cairo and its Treasures". The Church is dedicated to Mar Behnam, a Mesopotamian martyr of the 5th century. It may be dated to that period and was built by Takrit traders. Dr Harrak discussed the icon that was executed and signed by "Hanna son of Artin of Karabid of Jerusalem" in 1786. The Church also owns a silver processional cross bearing Syriac inscriptions but is not dated. Such crosses, Dr Harrak noted were however in vogue in Mesopotamia between the 15th-18th centuries. Dr Helene Moussa, Volunteer Curator, St Mark's Museum, followed with a paper titled "The Synergy of Coptic Spirituality and Liturgy—13th Century wall Paintings, St Anthony's Old Church, Monastery of St Anthony, Red Sea". Dr Moussa "walked" through the church pointing to the relationship of the paintings to sections of the Liturgies of St Basil, Gregory and Cyril and monastic spirituality. The conclusion was that this relationship was very likely conceptualised in the design of the programme of these paintings.

After the closing remarks by Dr Ramez Boutros, Coordinator of the Symposium, participants were invited to hear a report on steps that have been taken to establish a Canadian Society for Coptic Studies (CSCS). Dr Moussa outlined the process of incorporation of the Society that is underway, with the Canadian Federal Government and outlined some of the main features of the proposed by-laws. Dr Ramez also added that it is hoped that membership fees will enable the publication of the First and Second Symposium papers and that a publisher has already been contacted. Participants greeted these steps with enthusiasm and offered to become the founding members.

Helene Moussa is Volunteer Curator of St. Mark's Coptic Museum  
www.copticmuseum-canada.org