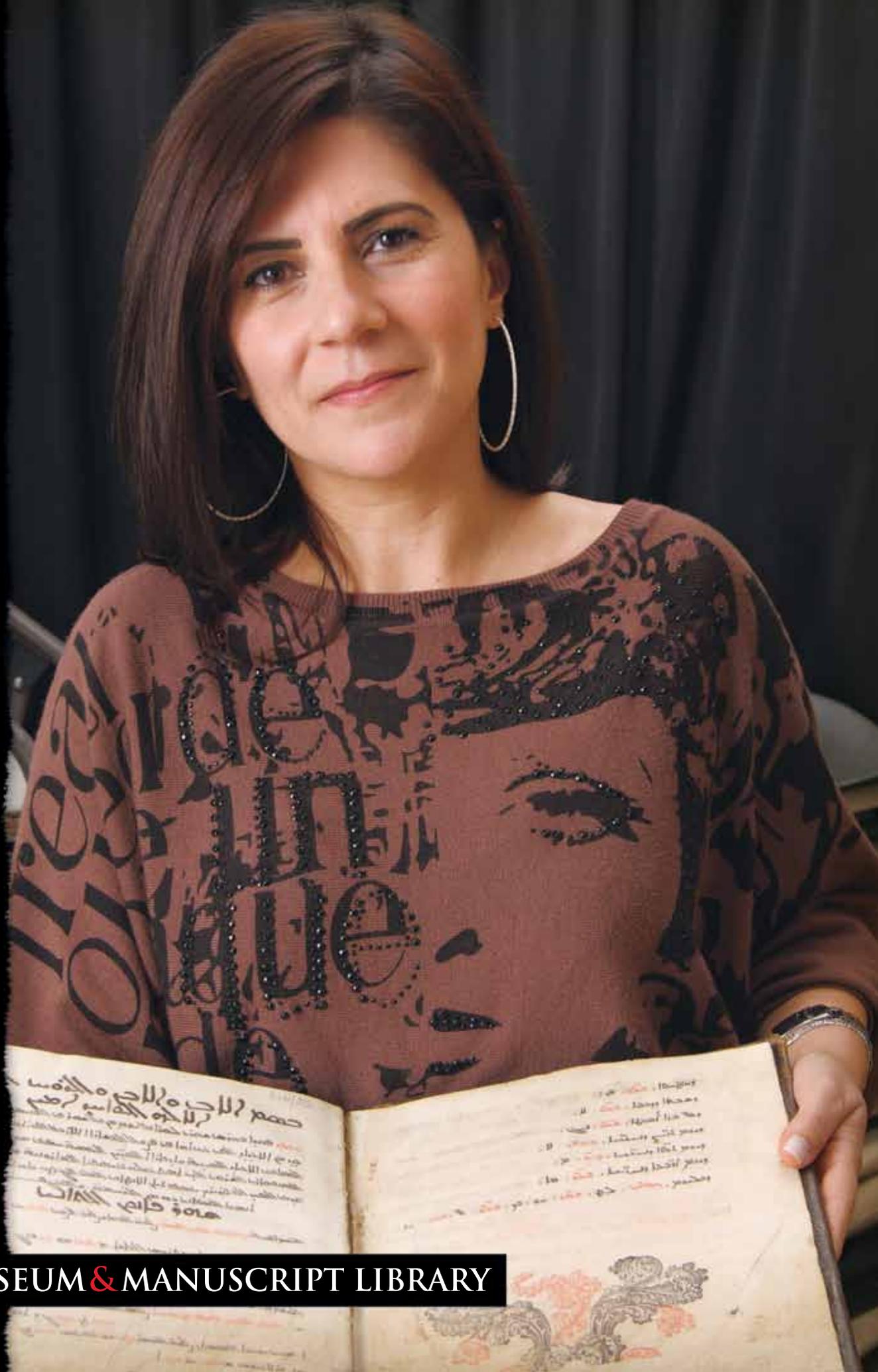


SPRING  
NEWSLETTER  
2011

# ILLUMINATIONS



HILL MUSEUM & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY



# Illuminations

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*Left: Digitization technician Ghada Khoury at the Greek Catholic Patriarchate in Damascus. She recently completed the preservation of nearly 200 manuscripts in the Patriarchate Library.*

*ON THE COVER: Talin Agob has digitized more manuscripts in more different places than any other HMML field technician. Here, she displays an early Syriac printed book in the imaging lab at Université du Saint-Esprit in Kaslik, Lebanon, a suburb of Beirut.*

## *Hill Museum & Manuscript Library*

In the Benedictine tradition of reverence for human thought and creativity, the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML) preserves manuscripts, printed books and art at Saint John's University and undertakes photographic projects in regions throughout the world.

HMML is the home of the world's largest collection of manuscript images and of *The Saint John's Bible*, a handwritten, illuminated Bible in modern English.

Hill Museum & Manuscript Library  
Saint John's University  
PO Box 7300  
Collegeville, MN 56321-7300  
320.363.3514 (phone)  
320.363.3222 (fax)  
[www.hmml.org](http://www.hmml.org)

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Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB,  
executive director and contributing writer  
Wayne Torborg & Erin Lonergan, editors  
Wayne Torborg, imaging  
Lori Gnahn, graphic designer  
Spectrum Printing, printer



## *Dear Friends,*

Since early January I have been traveling extensively to visit HMML's current projects and to scout for new opportunities in manuscript preservation. We have begun our first project in Jerusalem, at the Syriac Orthodox Monastery of Saint Mark, established a partnership with a unique collection of Islamic manuscripts in Harar, Ethiopia, spoken to audiences in Ethiopia, Lebanon, and India about HMML's work, and had audiences with patriarchs of several churches to discuss ways in which HMML might help them preserve their manuscript collections for centuries to come. It is clear to me that our work of the past several years has created an awareness and trust of HMML's role as the world's leading guardian of humankind's manuscript heritage. Our unique position of having great breadth in both western and eastern Christian manuscripts, and manuscripts from places where Christians, Muslims, and Jews have interacted for centuries, makes HMML a natural place for those studying cultural relations across boundaries of language and religion.

My travels through these regions have coincided with unprecedented turmoil across the Middle East. The ultimate result of these many revolutions is uncertain, as is their impact on religious minorities. Making sure that fragile manuscripts have been photographically preserved has become correspondingly more urgent. Places where we have worked quietly and safely these past years are now in the daily news for civil unrest. What this means for future digitization projects is unknown, but we can certainly be grateful that we started our work in the Middle East in 2003.

We are currently allocating resources to intensified effort in Iraq, and to negotiating access to the remaining significant manuscript collections in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iran, India, and Ethiopia. We are also trying to gain our first foothold in Egypt. The global economic crisis has reduced our endowment income and made foundation grants ever more difficult to obtain. As HMML's wave of opportunity has been building, our resources have been shrinking. We are actively pursuing new grant opportunities and promoting our work to new audiences, but we rely on the help of our committed supporters like you.

Sincerely yours,

*Columba Stewart, OSB*

Columba Stewart, OSB  
Executive Director

*Above: Father Columba Stewart, OSB at the  
Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem*

# On HMML's Front Lines

*HMML's field technicians parlay their background and skills into a one-of-a kind job*



*Walid Mourad has been the field director for HMML's Middle East digitization projects for seven years. He is pictured here with his wife Berthe, daughters Vivienne and Yara, and son Marc.*

Growing up in a suburb of Beirut, Lebanon, Walid Nabih Mourad expected to become a businessman. When he earned degrees in computer science and business he never imagined that his career would involve photographing some of the oldest manuscripts in the world. However, since Mourad became the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library's (HMML) director of field operations for the Middle East in 2004, he has used his combination of talents to oversee the photographic preservation of millions of manuscript pages that bear witness to Eastern Christianity's rich heritage.

Fluent in three languages, conversant in information technology, a skilled diplomat and negotiator, and well-connected to leaders in the many religious communities of Lebanon, Mourad was a natural to take on this very unusual challenge. Having worked with a pioneering digital project in Lebanon sponsored by Brigham Young University, Mourad had a solid background in the technical issues he would face in HMML's larger-scale project. As a Maronite Christian with a Greek

Orthodox wife, and both Greek-Catholic and Syriac-Orthodox brothers-in-law, he navigated the complex terrain of Christianity in Lebanon on a daily basis.

Nor could Talin Agob ever have imagined that she would spend several years preserving historic Armenian manuscripts. Growing up in Beirut, she earned a degree in Armenian literature and history at the Hamazkayin Higher Institute for Armenian Studies. She was teaching literature, history and classical Armenian at Hagopian College in Beirut in 2004 when she received a call from Archbishop Yeprem Tabakian, the director of the Cilicia Museum at the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias, a suburb of Beirut. The Catholicosate had just partnered with HMML to digitally photograph and preserve their manuscripts, and he needed someone with her academic background to carry out the project. Agob immediately understood the profound significance of preserving manuscripts that had been brought from the city of Sis in south-central Turkey when its ancient Armenian community fled to Lebanon for refuge in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

“I was thrilled by the prospect of helping to preserve this piece of Armenian cultural heritage—particularly when the people who saved the manuscripts did so at great personal sacrifice,” Agob says. Her first manuscript was a daunting 1500 pages long. After two days training with Mourad, she began photographing the delicate pages containing the heritage of now-vanished Armenian communities. Mourad quickly recognized that she had an aptitude for the intricate work. He was even more impressed by her reverence for the manuscripts she was photographing. “Talin handled the Armenian manuscripts with great care and deep respect,” says Mourad, “she could read and fully appreciate them: she knew just what she held in her hands.” In 2004 he offered her a full-time position digitizing other collections for HMML.

Since her first preservation project at the Armenian Catholicosate, Agob has helped to digitize 1800 Armenian manuscripts at the Armenian Catholic Clergy Institute in Bzommar, Lebanon, 550 Syriac and Christian Arabic manuscripts from Deir el-Kreim belonging to the Lebanese Maronite Missionary Order, and more than 300 manuscripts at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. Working with these collections has given her a sense of how a manuscript can present both an overview and a microcosm of each culture: “Even the physical condition of a manuscript collection can illustrate the human drama that many of these manuscripts have endured,” says Agob. “For example, some manuscripts are partially burned; some are damaged beyond recognition by water, or half-devoured by bookworms. Each manuscript contains its own history, from the front to back cover.”

While local technicians are usually employed for HMML’s projects, Agob’s expertise is often called upon for the more challenging situations. Because the manuscripts HMML digitizes never leave the premises of the owning library, she must go where the manuscripts are. In the fall of 2008, Mourad asked Agob to supervise an urgent and dangerous project in Turkey’s Tur Abdin region, an area located at the heart of the

ongoing conflict between the Turkish government and Kurdish nationalists claiming this ancestral Christian homeland as part of Greater Kurdistan. “I knew I could trust Talin to get it done and done well,” says Mourad. Agob and her three technicians worked around the clock in twelve-hour shifts to complete the project. Mourad admits that, “This project wouldn’t have been feasible without Talin’s experience and management skills.” With this test behind her, Talin worked solo at other important HMML project sites.

The challenges of manuscript preservation begin long before technicians arrive on the scene. First comes the relationship-building required to gain access to a collection. HMML’s executive director, Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB and Mourad must employ adroit diplomacy. Monasteries and churches are often guarded about opening their collections to outsiders. Building trust with the guardians of manuscripts often takes multiple visits by Stewart and Mourad over many years. “It’s often a waiting game,” says Mourad. “But with so much at stake, it’s vital that the owners of these collections and HMML come to agreement on the terms of the project. Then a written contract can be drawn up and signed, and the project begun.”

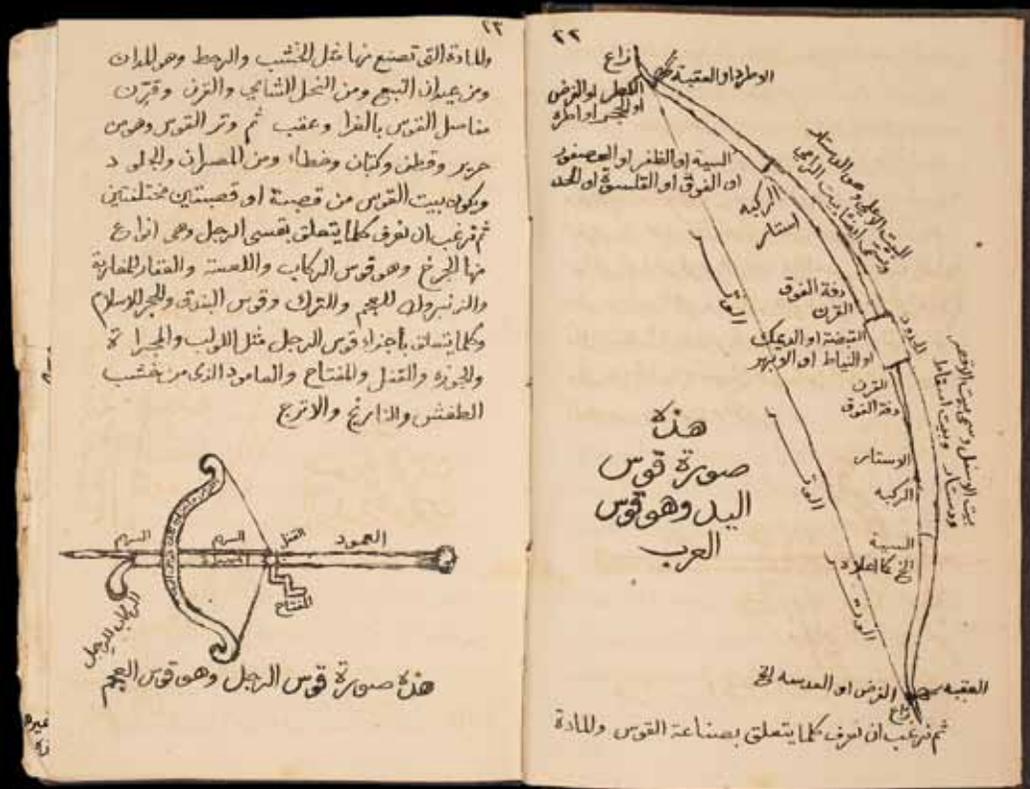
*Continued on page 7*



*Bundled against the bitter cold of the eastern Anatolian winter, field director Walid Mourad photographs manuscripts at the Chaldean Church of Mar Petyun in Diyarbakir, Turkey. HMML’s technicians face a wide variety of working conditions in their preservation efforts.*

# Where We're Working

Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon



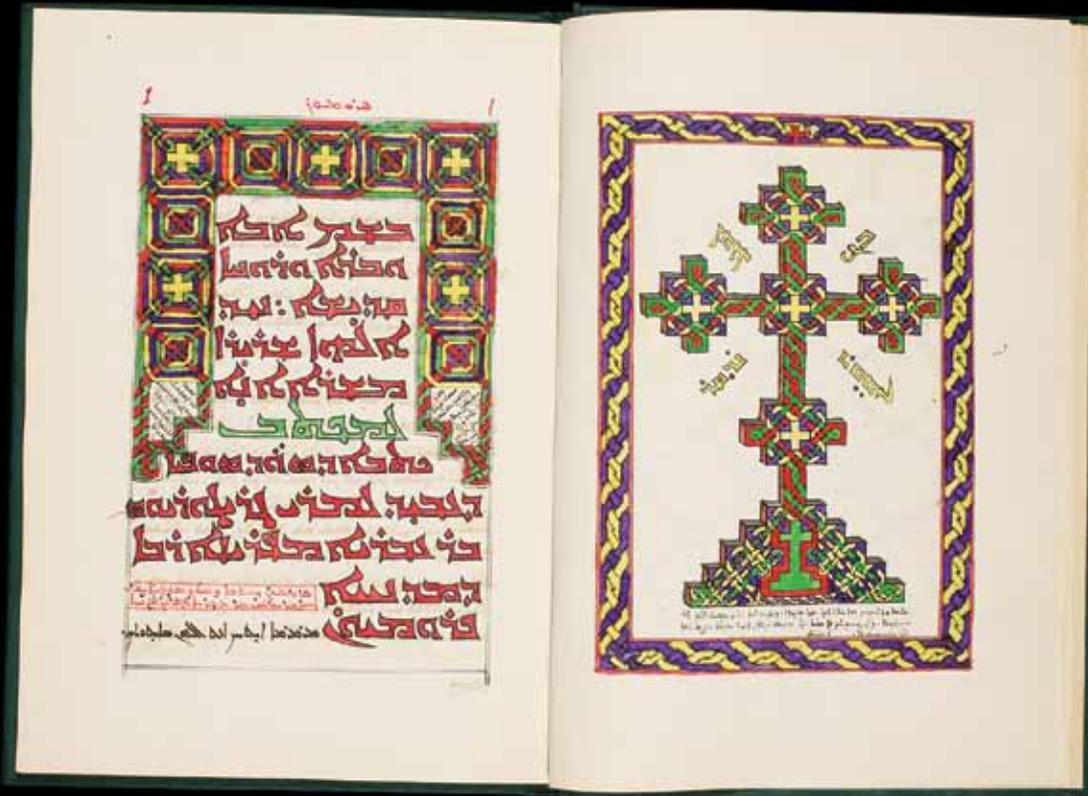
The Near East School of Theology (NEST) was founded in Beirut in 1932 but traces its roots to the establishment in 1835 of the first Protestant seminary in the region. Shortly after its foundation, this seminary was directed by Cornelius Van Dyck (1818-1895), who is known especially for his

completion of an Arabic translation of the entire Bible that was begun by Eli Smith (1801-1857). The manuscript of this work, which would become a standard Arabic version of the Bible in the modern period, is among the few hundred manuscripts that are now kept in a modern library at the

Above: This image comes from a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century manuscript. The drawings of the bow and crossbow are accompanied by definitions of the parts of each. The bow is called “hand bow” and said to be the one used by Arabs, while the crossbow is called “foot bow” (because it was drawn and cocked with the foot in a stirrup at the front) and said to be used by Persians or non-Arabs. The text on the left hand page continues a discussion of a bow’s construction. The rest of the book also deals with warfare in the Middle East, along with additional drawings.

NEST campus in Beirut. A number of the Arabic manuscripts are grammatical, lexicographical, or scientific works, which Smith and Van Dyck used in preparation of the Arabic Bible translation. In addition to 446 Arabic manuscripts, there is a single Persian manuscript, four Turkish manuscripts, twenty-one in Armenian, one in Kurdish with Armenian script, eight Syriac manuscripts, and three Garshuni (Arabic written with Syriac script).

The HMML digitization project was active at NEST from late 2008-March 2010. Today the Near East School of Theology serves students of several traditions of the Reformation represented in the Middle East, and its unique manuscript collection makes an important addition to HMML's work of preservation and making these texts more accessible for study.



*This image from a late manuscript (dated 1952) demonstrates how artful and colorful decoration could continue even to the past century of manuscript culture in the Middle East. Crosses and decorative titles such as these are typically more common in lectionaries, but this text is Gregory Bar Ebraya's (1225/6-1286) Book of the Conversation of Wisdom (Ktaba dawwad sofia). Syriac copies of the work are rather plentiful, and an Arabic version (called Kitab ḥadiṯ al-ḥikma) also exists and was sometimes copied alongside the Syriac in manuscripts. The lettering exhibited on the left-hand page is decorative Estrangela, the earliest kind of Syriac script; the main text itself is written in the usual west Syriac script known as Serto.*

## On HMML's Front Lines *continued from page 4*

These contracts specify that the owning institution will retain commercial and publication rights, while allowing HMML access to all of its collections and the right to make copies of the digital surrogates for qualified researchers. HMML provides equipment, supplies, salaries for technicians, and a complete set of digital images for the owning library. Mourad is responsible for on-site technical training, ongoing technical support and overall supervision of HMML's projects in the Middle East.

Keeping the cameras clicking, budgets in the black and technical problems at bay are crucial to managing the output of each project. "You have to be very flexible in this job because things can change pretty quickly," Mourad said. In one instance, HMML might be assembling a studio in a state-of-the-art university setting. The next project could be in an unheated church basement in the dead of winter in the Turkish mountains. Electrical power fluctuations can damage lighting equipment, cameras can break down and need repairs, and terabytes of manuscript images will need to be organized and run through quality control procedures.

"There are cultural challenges too," says Mourad. "The word 'deadline' means different things in different

cultures; even so, HMML's technicians are generally hard-working." Mourad supervises as many as 14 studios at a time, and provides HMML with regular updates on progress and problems. He manages the payroll, maintenance of equipment, and shipment of data to HMML. In addition to his HMML fieldwork responsibilities, he is a part-time faculty member in the computer science department at Notre Dame University in Zouk Mosbeh, Lebanon. HMML's executive director Fr. Columba observes, "Walid has been absolutely essential to our success in the Middle East. His tact, deep knowledge of the cultural complexities of the region, and amazing list of contacts have made our work possible. Over the years of our collaboration, I have grown close to Lebanon through Walid and his family, helping me to understand the cultural and religious context of our work."

While fulfilling HMML's mission is challenging, both Agob and Mourad agree that it is a rewarding one. Agob believes that "all manuscripts contain pieces of the world's human story. It's important to have a digital copy of every manuscript because no one knows what the future holds for them." "The wonderful variety of people I've met is what makes this job so extraordinary for me," says Mourad, "Many of the people I've met have become close friends. I hope our projects never end."

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# HMML News

## Father Columba Stewart Lectures at Arizona State University's Melikian Center

On Friday, February 25, 2011, HMML Executive Director, Father Columba Stewart, OSB presented a lecture entitled "Preserving the World's Historic Written Cultures," at Arizona State University's Melikian Center. His lecture chronicled HMML's manuscript preservation work in the Middle East from 2003 to the present and included photos and descriptions of the collections HMML is currently digitizing at 15 field locations in the Middle East.

The Melikian Center is a comprehensive research and training center that has implemented research and educational programs for the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Department of Education, and the Department of Defense.

The lecture was open to ASU students and faculty and the public. The Center at ASU is named in recognition of the generous support of Phoenix civic leaders and philanthropists Gregory and Emma Melikian.

## HMML Featured in the Holiday Issue of

**The  
Economist**

HMML and Father Columba were featured in a sidebar story as part of an article titled, "Illuminating a Dark Age: The History of Manuscripts" in the December 16, 2010 issue of *The Economist*. A link to the article can be found on HMML's homepage, [www.hmml.org](http://www.hmml.org). To receive a copy of the article, contact HMML Development Director, Erin Lonergan, 320-363-2095 or [elonergan@csbsju.edu](mailto:elonergan@csbsju.edu).



*Left to right: Fr. Eric Hollas, OSB, Josephine B. Carpenter, DM, John Bycraft, KM, Lucy Jones, Honorary Consul General of Malta in Saint Paul, Minnesota Joseph S. Micallef, Ambassador Robert L. Shafer, KM, Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, Theresa Vann, Ph.D., Thomas R. Joyce, Robert M. Weyerhaeuser*

## Friends of the Malta Study Center Meet

The second annual meeting of the Friends of the Malta Study Center took place on Monday, April 18, 2011 on Saint John's University campus. The Friends of the Malta Study Center is an advisory board of eight individuals who provide advice and strategic direction for the Center. The group was formed in early 2010 after the successful completion of a Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for which HMML raised \$1.8 million. The \$450,000 match from the NEH created a \$2.25 million endowment for HMML's Malta Study Center.

Attending the Committee meeting were: Chairman, Joseph S. Micallef, KM, Honorary Consul General of Malta in Saint Paul, Minnesota; Ambassador Robert Shafer, KM, Permanent Observer to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to the United Nations; John Bycraft, KM, representing the American Association of the Order of Malta; Josephine B. Carpenter, DM; Lucy R. Jones; Robert M. Weyerhaeuser; Fr. Eric Hollas, OSB; Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, HMML Executive Director; Thomas Joyce, Chair of the HMML Board of Overseers; Theresa Vann, Ph.D., Curator of the Malta Study Center; and Erin Lonergan, HMML Development Director. Members Fra Elie de Comminges, Curator, Grand Magistral Archives and Libraries, Rome, and Dr. Philip Farrugia-Random, KM, President of the Malta Association in Malta, were not in attendance.

The American, Federal and Western Associations of the Order of Malta each sent messages of support for the historical and cultural preservation work the Center is undertaking.

Established in 1973, the Center's primary mission is to preserve and make accessible archival materials related to the history of the island of Malta and the Knights of Malta. The Center has photographically preserved more than 16,000 codices and documents from the Cathedral Museum of Mdina, the ecclesiastical archives of the dioceses of Malta and Gozo, and the Archives of the Knights of Malta in the National Library of Malta. These documents are cataloged, archived and made accessible on the Malta Study Center website. The programs and holdings of the Malta Study Center serve national and international researchers and students of the history of Western Europe, the Mediterranean and the island of Malta. Researchers in Rome and Malta use the Study Center as their primary resource. No other institution, even on the island of Malta, has the resources to make this catalog information available.



## New Documentary Chronicling HMML's Mission Debuts on Minnesota Public Television

A new documentary about HMML's work, "Saving the Sacred: Preserving the World's Ancient Libraries" produced by acclaimed journalists Fred de Sam Lazaro and Nicole See, debuted on Minnesota's four public television stations during Holy Week. A portion of the documentary was broadcast on the PBS program NewsHour on Friday, December 31, 2010. A link to the seven-minute NewsHour clip can be found on the HMML homepage: [www.hmml.org](http://www.hmml.org). Individuals wishing to receive a DVD copy of the 28-minute program may request one by contacting HMML Development Director, Erin Lonergan, 320-363-2095 or [elonergan@csbsju.edu](mailto:elonergan@csbsju.edu).

# *New Manuscript Preservation Initiatives*



## **Sherif Harar City Museum, Harar, Ethiopia**

HMML's microfilm and digital archives contain thousands of Islamic manuscripts from university and church libraries throughout the world, but until now HMML has not partnered with a library devoted exclusively to Islamic manuscripts.

In February, HMML executive director Father Columba Stewart, OSB signed a contract with the Sherif Harar City Museum in Harar, Ethiopia, for the digital preservation of more than 1400 Arabic manuscripts from its own collection and from the many mosques and shrines of the surrounding countryside. Harar, an ancient walled city in the eastern part of the country, has been the historic center of Ethiopian Islam.

Abdulahi Ali-Sherif, a leading figure in the community, has devoted his life to creating a museum that tells

Harar's story through manuscripts, art, and artifacts he has gathered over the decades. He learned about manuscript digitization from Prof. Stephen Delamarter of George Fox University in Portland, Oregon, who has learned HMML's techniques and taught them to Ethiopians eager to preserve their country's manuscript heritage. Mr. Ali-Sherif and his team had digitized about half of his collection before Fr. Columba's visit to Harar, but they needed help with long-term archiving, cataloging, and service to researchers. HMML will sponsor the digitization of the remaining manuscripts of Harar, as well as providing technological and scholarly services for the whole collection.

*Left: Abdulahi Ali-Sherif, founder of the Sherif Harar City Museum in Harar, Ethiopia, examines an Arabic manuscript at the Shrine of Sheikh Abadir Umar Ar-Rida, first Emir of Harar. Mr. Ali-Sherif has collected more than 1200 Harari Islamic manuscripts and is partnering with HMML for their digitization and cataloging.*

*Below: A page of prayers and blessings from a manuscript of the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, or *Waymarks of Benefits*, a very popular Islamic text by Al-Jazuli. Sherif Harar City Museum, Harar, Ethiopia.*





## Saint Mark's Monastery, Jerusalem

HMML has begun its first manuscript preservation project in Jerusalem. In January, work began at Dayro d-Mor Marqos, Saint Mark's Monastery, a Syrian Orthodox monastery located in the Armenian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. The site features a 12<sup>th</sup> century church and is by tradition believed to be the historic home of Mary, mother of Mark the Evangelist.

The library at Saint Mark's contains over 350 manuscripts. HMML set up a studio on the premises and trained a resident subdeacon to do the digitization work. The collection should be finished in a year or so.

The start of the Saint Mark's project gives HMML a valuable presence in a city containing many important manuscript collections. HMML has retained the services of David Dahdal, the co-owner of the local computer business that set up the computers for the Saint Mark's project, to act as HMML's field director in Jerusalem. He will be supervising the work at Saint Mark's and assisting HMML in expanding its work in Jerusalem as more preservation opportunities present themselves.



*After setting up the digitization project at St. Mark's Monastery, HMML staffers spent a day visiting significant sites near Jerusalem. Pictured is the view from the top of Masada, King Herod's ancient fortified palace complex overlooking the Dead Sea.*

*Above left: Mark Aasmari, a subdeacon at the Monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem, learns the digitization process by photographing the handwritten catalog for the manuscript collection.*

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