

DUMBARTON OAKS

RESEARCH LIBRARY AND COLLECTION

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For Immediate Release
August 31, 2017

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Dumbarton Oaks Museum Acquires Rare Greek Manuscript

WASHINGTON – Dumbarton Oaks, with support from the B. H. Breslauer Foundation, has acquired an early tenth century Greek manuscript of historic and scholarly significance. Known as Minuscule 669 or the “Benton Gospels,” this Byzantine codex contains the partial text of the four Gospels of the New Testament. Transported to the United States in 1844 by Reverend George Benton, an Episcopal minister, this is likely the oldest Byzantine gospel book in the U.S.

This illuminated manuscript provides insight into practices of Byzantine illumination and calligraphy, such as the use of an unusual script known as “bouletée élançée.” Approximately thirty manuscripts written in “bouletée élançée” are known to survive. Scholar Nadezhda-Kavrus Hoffmann has written a detailed codicological and paleographic study of this important manuscript, which is planned for publication in an upcoming volume of the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*.

In addition to the “Benton Gospels,” the Dumbarton Oaks Museum holds five illuminated biblical and liturgical manuscripts dating from the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries that originated in Byzantium. Access to the “Benton Gospels” at Dumbarton Oaks will offer unparalleled opportunities to scholars conducting paleographic, iconographic, codicological, and biblical research by bringing this important manuscript into a research and teaching institution uniquely suited to conduct and facilitate specialized inquiry and interpretation.

Dumbarton Oaks holds the premiere collection of scholarly literature on the transmission of the Bible in Greek and seeks to further expand the scope of sources available for scholars. Byzantium’s role in preserving and transmitting early versions of New Testament texts continues to be a focus of ongoing research and scholarly discussion. The focused collecting of Dumbarton Oaks supports and seeks to advance the imperative idea of rigorous and detailed study of topics in the aid of understanding the complexity of human thought and activity.

ABOUT DUMBARTON OAKS

Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection is the legacy of Robert and Mildred Woods Bliss, collectors and patrons of art and scholarship in the humanities. The multiple aspects of the Blisses’ gift include historic gardens and buildings, world-class collections for researchers and the public to enjoy, and generous support for fellowships and scholarly endeavors on the local, national, and international

levels. Dumbarton Oaks is a research institute of Harvard University that exists to further and publish research in the three areas of study: Byzantine Studies, Pre-Columbian Studies, and Garden and Landscape Studies. Residential fellowships for an academic year, semester, or summer are awarded in all three areas of study to scholars from around the world. In addition, Dumbarton Oaks offers one-month non-residential awards to researchers and short-term pre-doctoral residencies to advanced graduate students. Each of the three programs of study supports and disseminates research in its relevant fields through an annual symposium; a program of public lectures, informal talks, and colloquia; and publications. The Dumbarton Oaks Museum contains the Byzantine Collection, one of the finest collections of artifacts from the Byzantine Empire with more than twelve hundred objects from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries. The Robert Woods Bliss Collection of Pre-Columbian Art is housed in the Pre-Columbian Pavilion, designed by architect Philip Johnson. This collection comprises objects from the ancient cultures of Mesoamerica, the Intermediate Area, and the Andes. The House Collection consists primarily of the historic interiors, Asian, European and American artworks, and interior furnishings. Ten acres of formal gardens surround the 1801 Federal-style house. Mildred Barnes Bliss worked closely with renowned landscape designer Beatrix Farrand to transform the land surrounding the house into terraced gardens and vistas. The Dumbarton Oaks Research Library has extensive holdings in our three dedicated areas of study and the Rare Book Collection is strong on works of landscape architecture, botany, and horticulture, while also reflecting the research focus of Dumbarton Oaks. The Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives (ICFA) documents and preserves material from fieldwork and the Dumbarton Oaks Archives inventories, conserves, stores, and makes accessible the institute's past, current, and future records and artifacts.
