

## **HIS BEATITUDE AT THE ANNIVERSARY FUNCTION OF THE ZERVOUDAKIOS MANSION**

**On the afternoon of 27<sup>th</sup> October 2009, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa,** attended the Anniversary ceremony of the completion of one hundred years following the building of the Zervoudakios Mansion, on the grounds of which the Averof High School of Alexandria is situated.

Speaking at the event, His Beatitude stated:

**“Today, our Greek community celebrates.** The Greek Schools of Alexandria celebrate. The anniversary of the one hundred years of life and activity gives us the pleasant reason to speak of the glorious history of the establishment of the Hellenic community of Alexandria, which was the most significant point in the history of newer Hellenism of Egypt. George Averof, essentially a national benefactor, contributed much to the Hellenic Community and the Schools through his large donations. It was a splendid journey by Averof, whose bust was set in the grounds of the Tositsas School, a work by G. Vitalis. When he died, his funeral was attended by thousands of people, representing all the Communities of Egypt.

Mention must be made of the harmonious co-operation and relations with the Patriarchate at the time of the moderate Patriarch Sophronios. Looking back on older times, always according to the undisputed historical sources, we deem the first Greek School in Alexandria to be that established by the great Patriarch Meletios Pegas who was also the first teacher. An even though that school which was situated inside the monastery of St Savvas, was destined for the education of the clergy, there is no doubt that the few children of the Greek families would also have been welcome. It is also certain that Patriarch Meletios Pegas sent educators overseas to receive further education. As needs multiplied, the Tositsaa School was not enough for the community needs. At that time, men such as Rallis, Averof, Zervoudakis, Salvagos and Benakis were in charge of community issues.

The “Averof Girls’ Primary School” has its prehistory. The first Grekk school for girls, it was situated in the cells of the Church of the Annunciation. The girls’ school was maintained by money paid by Patriarch Ierotheos II, and Ioannis Anastasis, as is shown by a “note of expenses” of the Patriarch during the first years of his Patriarchate. It was then moved to the “Tositsas School”. Ultimately, the “Averof School” took on the form of a complete Primary School around 1912, and the Zervakios School of Secondary Education began operating. They came to know heydays and decline. The Greek Schools in Egypt were not only strongholds of patriotism but a measure of the rise and decline of every Community. It has been said by great historians that the Communities of the Diaspora congregated around the nucleus of Church-School. The Church, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate played a decisive role for many centuries as a starting point and an essential incentive. Often the Church was also synonymous with School, as it was the Church that established it and maintained it.

Taking a look at the past, turning the eye to the present that we are living through and staring at the future with speculation, concentration and cautious optimism, we can be proud of the entirety of the creative path of the educational institutes of the Ancient Greek Community of Alexandria. Today, our historical schools continue to operate despite the adversities and the changes and dwindling of numbers over time.

**Today our community schools** receive Greek children, those of the few

remaining Greek families and offer them the teaching programme and the education which the Greek Ministry of Education foresees. They are schools that have a purely Greek character and with the promise of further organization and prospects.

Our Patriarchate as a loving mother and spiritual caregiver, was always the protector and willing supporter of the journey of the Greek Schools of Alexandria.

In closing today's brief interpolation. To wish the willing teachers with all my heart, that they have health and strength for the continuation of their multifaceted mission.

We, as the Patriarchate, will pray for this, we will strengthen them in all ways, we will be close to them all, pupils, parents and teachers, and we will promote their struggle, for it is a struggle, so that we can keep the flame of Hellenic Orthodox tradition and heritage received from our glorious ancestors alive. We all have a part in this responsibility against history, our Nation, our children, future generations and our beloved homeland. We must maintain the "Greek language", for which the Alexandrian poet Cavafis fought so hard.

I will end with a few lines from the unforgettable Man. Yialourakis: "Those who experienced in Egypt the charm of a lost era, know well, that life goes on, they look ahead, they do not look back ... the seasons are confused within them, they stand on the ashes of their predecessor, pass over the entrance of the school which still echoes the voices of the hundreds of children who were just like them, they are momentarily melancholic, they think, dream, smile knowingly, even shed a tear...and then they leave life to continue on its way, they return to the necessities of the present, carry on with things and God is our helper..." Many years to all! May God be with you!"

**His Beatitude ended by giving** a precious icon of the Theotokos to the Chairman of the Hellenic Community of Alexandria, Mr. Ioannis Siokas.

Later, His Beatitude together with Mr. Adel Abid, Governor of Alexandria, Their Excellencies Messrs Ioannis Alexios Zepos and Konstantinos Leontiou, the Ambassadors of Greece and Cyprus in Egypt, the Honourable Mr. George Diakofotakis, Consul General of Greece in Alexandria, Mrs. Sophia Daskalaki-Mytilinaiou, the Deputy Mayor of Athens, Mr. Ioannis Siokas Chairman of the Hellenic Community of Alexandria, and Mr. Vasilios Vagis Chairman of the Society of Graduates of the Averofian School, performed the inauguration of the renovated Zervoudakios Mansion and unveiled the commemorative plaque in his name.