

The Libraries of the Byzantine World

Nigel G. Wilson

TO DISCUSS so large a subject as the libraries of the Byzantine world within the limits of a single paper may seem unduly ambitious. The chronological and geographical range of the topic is enormous. But despite the great advance of Byzantine studies in this century the amount of primary source material on this subject remains modest, one might well say disappointing, since the references are normally brief and difficult to interpret with any confidence. A short but reasonably comprehensive survey is not out of the question, especially if the scope of the essay is restricted in two ways. Unfortunately a chronological limitation is imposed by the nature of the sources: comparatively little is known of the earlier periods of the empire, and in consequence nearly all my material relates to the ninth century or later. The second restriction is that my concern will be the libraries of institutions, mostly monasteries, rather than those of private individuals; there were of course collectors who had the means to build up substantial private libraries, but the cost of collecting on this scale ensured that it was a hobby reserved for a few rich men, and with the one notable exception of Arethas the details of their activities cannot be traced.

This is of course not the first time that the topic has been discussed. There is a most useful and learned survey by Dr V. Burr in the *Milkau Handbuch der Bibliothekswissenschaft*, ed. 2 (Leipzig 1955), and part of the subject is covered by Dr O. Volk's 1955 Munich dissertation on the monastic libraries of the capital and Asia Minor, which I have been able to consult on microfilm (see note 31 *infra*). When such competent work exists already it may be thought that any addition to the literature requires justification. This I would offer by saying that the aim of the present essay is threefold: to ask certain general questions about the nature and functions of the leading libraries, matters that have perhaps received too little attention hitherto; to consider in more detail the implications of some individual pieces of evidence; to attempt a selection of the more relevant sections of the evidence, which entails leaving out of account a number of isolated facts about

small libraries, provided that they do not run counter to the general picture and would add nothing to the argument by being included here.

Major Libraries in Constantinople

To begin with the libraries of the capital: there were four major collections. First place must go to the emperors' library. The date of its foundation is not known, but may be not much later than the transference of government to Constantinople in A.D. 330. It so happens that we possess a description of the physical appearance of the library at a very late stage in its history; to the best of my knowledge this is the only such description of a Byzantine library surviving. In the last years of the empire the Spaniard Pero Tafur visited Constantinople, and this is how he began his description of the palace as he saw it in the year 1437:

At the entrance to the palace, beneath certain chambers, is an open loggia of marble with stone benches round it, and stones like tables raised on low pillars in front of them, placed end to end. Here are many books and ancient writings and histories, and on one side are gaming boards, because the emperor's house is always well supplied.¹

The furnishings of the library were simple and durable, plain stone benches and tables. How much if at all its appearance varied at different times during the empire we cannot say; it is likely that the room which Tafur saw was the result of reconstruction after the conquest by the Crusaders in 1204. Unfortunately he does not tell us how the books were kept; were they loose on shelves, or chained, or even locked up in metal chests? In fact they were probably loose on the shelves, since there does not seem to be evidence of chained libraries or the use of metal boxes in Byzantium. But if the books were on shelves they may not have been stacked in the manner normal today, for some extant manuscripts have their titles painted in large letters on the fore-edge, and these suggest that books might be laid

¹ Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures*, tr. Malcolm Letts (New York and London 1926) 145, rendering *Andanças é viajes de Pero Tafur* [= *Colección de libros españoles raros o curiosos VIII*] (Madrid 1874) 180: "á la entrada del palacio debaxo de unas cámaras está una lonja sobre mármoles, abierta, de arcos con poyos en torno bien enlosados é junto con ellos como mesas puestas de cabo á cabo sobre pilares baxos, así mesmo cubiertos de losas, en que están muchos libros é escrituras antiguas é estorias, é á otra parte, tableros de juegos, porque siempre se falla acompañada la casa del Emperador." See also A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzantium* 7 (1932) 75ff. Errors by Letts have been corrected above.

horizontally in a pile on the shelf.² It is a reasonable supposition (one of many that I shall be obliged to make in the course of this essay) that the furnishing of the imperial library was more luxurious than the average. Stone benches and tables may well have been too expensive for the ordinary monastic library, and in any case the mediaeval reader often dispensed with a table, resting the book on his knee, whether for reading or writing.³

There is no means of telling how many books the emperors' library contained. Even if the mediaeval sources gave any figures they would have to be treated with reserve, as numerals are singularly subject to corruption in manuscript tradition, and in addition it is a well known fact that the majority of people find it impossible to give accurate estimates of large numbers. Obviously it was a large library by the standards of the day, since it had to satisfy the demands of the imperial family and probably the civil service officials employed in the palace. It is not known whether members of the public could gain access; in the twelfth century John Tzetzes, writing to the emperor (*Epistula* 58), comments on the rarity of a book that he would like to read, the *Scythica* by Dexippus, now lost; but I do not know whether to treat his remark as a polite hint to the emperor that he would like to be allowed to have a look for it in the imperial collection. It may be worth anticipating a later point by saying here that a thirteenth-century emperor, at the time when the government was exiled to Nicaea, founded more than one library which the public could consult,⁴ and as he is not praised for being the first emperor to do this, one might conjecture that some such facility had already existed in the capital; but this is very uncertain.

To return to the contents of the emperors' library: one may assume, but it is only an assumption, that the staff did their best to fill gaps as occasion offered, so as to maintain an almost complete library of known literature. Yet there were times when the library failed to produce the book that was needed. In the early ninth century the emperor Leo the Armenian, being involved in the Icono-

² Mss with titles on the top or bottom fore-edge are common, e.g. *Coislin* 6, 8, 23. Decoration on all three edges occurs, e.g. *Barocci* 110 of A.D. 1360; this may imply upright stacking with the spine facing the wall. See B. van Regemortel, *Scriptorium* 8 (1954) 9, for further examples.

³ But occasionally a table was used; see B. M. Metzger in *Akten des XI internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongresses München 1958* (München 1960) 355-62.

⁴ Theodorus Scutariota, ed. A. Heisenberg (*BT*, Leipzig 1903) pp. 297-8.

clastic controversy, wanted texts to support his view and evidently did not find enough in the palace, for we are told in two sources that a wide search was made on his behalf.⁵ In the next century the learned emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus found himself in a similar position at least twice.⁶ At the beginning of his *De legationibus* he claims to have collected relevant books from all over the inhabited world. In the *De ceremoniis* he says that he needed works on the duties and activities of the emperor in wartime, but could not find them in the palace; at length, after a great deal of trouble, he found what he wanted in the monastery called Sigriane, to which a former imperial secretary had retired, taking with him, it would appear, confidential documents; it is worth mentioning that this monastery was not in the capital but about two hundred miles away, near Cyzicus.⁷

Though the library sometimes failed to come up to expectation when rare books were required, it was no doubt well equipped with standard authors. There is a report of the twelfth-century emperors Alexios and Manuel Comnenos making presents of books, presumably duplicate copies, to visiting deputations; the former helped St Bartholomew of Simeri to establish good libraries in the monasteries of southern Italy and Sicily, whereas the latter appears to have given the exemplar of Ptolemy's *Almagest* which was translated into Latin in Sicily about 1160, together with some treatises on alchemy. It is not known whether these books were taken by the emperors direct from their library, as opposed to transcripts made from copies retained in their possession; but there is nothing in the sources against the notion that these were direct gifts by the emperors, and in either case they deserve credit for their generosity. Another donation of this kind can be traced in the early fourteenth century. It appears that Andronicus III gave a copy of one of Galen's works to Robert I of Anjou, which was used as a basis for a Latin translation by Niccolò of Reggio (*floruit ca.* 1308–45); the evidence for this is that a manuscript of Niccolò's version (Paris, *Nouv.acq.lat.* 1365) has a colophon dated 1336 which mentions the gift. As certain works ascribed to Galen survive only in the Latin versions by Niccolò, it is tempting to speculate that these too reached the West through a gift of the emperor. Finally we can

⁵ *P(atrologia) G(raeca)* 95.372 and 108.1025.

⁶ *De legat.*, ed. C. de Boor, I (Berlin 1903) 1, 25-7; *De caer.*, ed. Reiske, I (CSHB, Bonn 1829) p.456.

⁷ J. B. Bury, *A History of the Eastern Roman Empire* (London 1912) 74 n.1.

point to a small gift made to a collector of the Renaissance, Giovanni Aurispa, who says that the emperor gave him copies of Xenophon's *De re equestri* and Procopius' *Wars*; this took place about 1420.⁸

It is also a reasonable inference that a few luxuriously produced volumes with portraits of individual emperors were intended for their use and became part of the imperial library. Examples are *Parisinus gr.* 510, a ninth-century copy of Gregory of Nazianzus, and two books prepared for Basil II, the so-called *Menologion* (ms *Vat.gr.* 1613) and the *Psalter* (ms *Ven.gr.* 17). But these are standard texts and tell us nothing significant about the library. It is good that such masterpieces of illumination and calligraphy have survived, but if they had not, it would not have been rash to assume that the emperors had fine copies of these works.

Not much else can be said of the imperial library. There are references to a "royal library" in a letter of Planudes *ca.* 1290–1300,⁹ in which he complains of the losses and neglect that it had suffered. But the editor of the letters argued (p.243) that this may only be the library of a monastery under imperial patronage, in which case it might be possible for Planudes to describe it as royal. Alternatively I would suggest that the books may have been a donation of the emperor. At all events it cannot be the imperial library, for it is stated to be in the monastery where Planudes lived, and we can hardly imagine that the imperial library was still neglected thirty years after the restoration of the government in Constantinople.

The only other book surviving from the library seems to be *Parisinus gr.* 1115, a collection of theology written in 1276, which has the note "deposited in the royal library" (*ἐναπετέθη ἐν τῇ βασιλικῇ βιβλιοθήκῃ*). The collection was probably destroyed in the sack of 1453; it may also have suffered serious losses in 1204 from the Fourth Crusade. Scholars have occasionally supposed that at least part of it survived in the Seraglio. The ultimate source of this idea is the report of Sultan Murad III's doctor, Dominico Yerushalmi, who flourished *ca.* 1574–93. He claims to have seen very fine old manuscripts there; but I am not sure that he is to be trusted. Certainly the collection that

⁸ On St Bartholomew see *Acta Sanctorum September VIII* (Antwerp 1762) 821bc. On the *Almagest* etc., C. H. Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science* 2 (New York 1960) 164-5, 174, 191. On Niccolò, L. Thorndike, *Byzantina Metabyzantina* 1 (1946) 213-35. On Aurispa, Ambrogio Traversari, *Epistulae* ed. P. Canneto (Florence 1759) 24.53 col. 1027.

⁹ *Epist.* 67, ed. M. Treu (Breslau 1890, repr. Amsterdam 1960). See also C. Wendel, *BZ* 40 (1940) 406ff.

now exists in the Seraglio is not of any great moment; nearly all the books date from the fifteenth century or later.¹⁰

At most periods of the empire Constantinople had two institutions that might reasonably be classed as universities, one primarily devoted to secular, the other to theological studies. In the early centuries there existed the High School organised by Theodosius II in A.D. 425 for literary and philosophical studies, while the patriarchate maintained an ecumenical school of chiefly but not exclusively theological nature. The existence of the former seems to have come to an end some time during the Iconoclastic controversy, and the latter may have suffered some disruption at the same time. However that may be, the end of Iconoclasm coincided with a revival of learning. In the theological field the patriarchal academy was re-established. For secular studies there was first the university founded by Leo the Philosopher under the patronage of the Caesar Bardas in A.D. 863; after a time this failed and was replaced in the middle of the eleventh century by the foundation of Constantine IX Monomachus.¹¹

These institutions presuppose the existence of substantial libraries, but information about them is remarkably scanty. One of the tenth-century professors of rhetoric, Alexander of Nicaea, possessed an important Lucian manuscript (*Vat.gr.* 90); but it was presumably his private property, and I know of no book attributable to the secular university, if one may use the phrase; this fact raises the suspicion that perhaps its library was not so large after all. A contrast between Byzantine and Western universities is to be noted here; the university of Constantinople has left no trace of a central library and does not appear to have stimulated book production by the *pecia*-system or any other means. All one can say is that from time to time in copies of the works of Aristotle the commentary depends ultimately on some lectures. The heading "from the lectures of so-and-so" (*ἀπὸ φωνῆς τοῦ δεῖνα*) does not imply, however, that the scribe had himself been at the lectures.

With the library of the patriarchate we are a little better placed. There is a report of a library being established by the patriarch Sergius (A.D. 610–38).¹² We hear of a public disputation in the Icono-

¹⁰ On Yerushalmi, see E. Jacobs, *SB Heidelberg* 1919, Abh. 24, esp. p.134, where he accepts the evidence as reliable; also the same author in *Oriens* 2 (1949) 6ff.

¹¹ See F. Fuchs, *Die höheren Schulen von Konstantinopel im Mittelalter* (Amsterdam 1964) = *ByzArch* 8 (1926) esp. p.47.

¹² George Pisides, *Carmen* 46; see *WS* 14 (1892) 55.

clastic era, at which the text of *Isaiah* was quoted to justify a particular view. This was challenged as incorrect and reference was made to a copy of the text hurriedly fetched from the patriarchal library; the person who required the copy appears even to have known the shelf-mark (τήνδε τήν θέσιν).¹³ But this library was burnt down in 726, and a chronicler records the loss of John Chrysostom's commentaries on the scriptures.¹⁴ As Chrysostom's works were extremely common in all Byzantine libraries, it looks as if the chronicler here means that the books destroyed were the author's autograph copies. But after this disaster the library was reestablished at a date not precisely known,¹⁵ and according to Slavonic tradition Constantine, better known as St Cyril, was at one time in charge of it.¹⁶ One or two books from it survive or can be inferred to have existed there. We hear of a copy of the *New Testament* written in the patriarchate in the time of Sergius.¹⁷ It is rather a surprise to find a fourteenth-century copy of Sophocles and Pindar marked "from the patriarchate" (ἀπό τῶν πατριαρχικῶν).¹⁸ But the most interesting case is ms *Vaticanus gr.* 1. This is an important copy of Plato's *Laws* written about 900. At a number of points in the text a later reader, perhaps of the eleventh century, has noted variant readings and marked them with the words "in the patriarch's copy the reading is . . ." ¹⁹ Here we can see a Byzantine reader of scholarly attitude using library facilities. He has his own copy of the text and compares it with another in order to find the best readings in difficult or corrupt passages. If we make two likely assumptions, first that the patriarch's book had not been abstracted from its proper home and second that we are dealing with the library of an institution rather than the collection of an individual (for the wording of the marginalia is not decisive), this scholar is to be envisaged as doing his work in the patriarchal library itself.

This raises the question of access to libraries that has already been mentioned in connection with the imperial library. Who had the right

¹³ Theophanes Continuatus 3.14= PG 109.120A.

¹⁴ Zonaras 15.12.1.

¹⁵ Theodore Prodromus, in ms *Vat.gr.* 305, fol. 74v.

¹⁶ A logothete, having a high opinion of Constantine, "statuit eum, monachatu et sacerdotio auctum, bibliothecae patriarchicae ad S. Sophiae praepone; quod et fecit." See *Acta Sanctorum October XI*, ed. Martinov (Bruxelles 1864), p.169.

¹⁷ See the description of MS *Coislin 23* in R. Devreesse, *Le Fonds Coislin* (Paris 1945).

¹⁸ *Vat.gr.* 1333, fol. 78v.

¹⁹ L. A. Post, *The Vatican Plato and its Relations* (APA Monograph IV, 1934); the notes are τοῦ πατριάρχου τὸ βιβλίον and ἀλλαχού.

to go and consult the patriarch's books or the collections in the university? Were they available to all *bona fide* students, so that the collection could almost be regarded as a central reference library?²⁰ Or were only students of the school permitted to enter? It is most tantalising that the identity of this eleventh-century reader of the Vatican manuscript cannot be ascertained, as this might throw much light on the situation. Our only definite information on this point concerns the law faculty in the secular university, founded in the eleventh century by the emperor Constantine Monomachus. He laid it down that the head of the faculty should have the right to free use of the library, borrowing books from the library at will, so that he should have all the tools of his trade at home and avoid the need to beg or borrow from others. This implies that junior members of the staff and students had fewer rights; the former could no doubt consult books in the library, but it is possible that the students did not even have that right. Unfortunately it is not clear from the wording of the foundation charter whether the emperor's provisions were more or less liberal than was customary in such institutions. Until further facts are discovered I should hesitate to assume that access to the library was easy for the ordinary student. A modern parallel will serve as a warning; in Oxford there have been long periods when neither the central university library nor the college libraries were open to students.²¹

Mention of the notion of a central reference library leads me to consider briefly the question of public libraries. In the ancient world such libraries were not uncommon, and it is clear that an important one was established in Constantinople in the middle of the fourth century. Our source is a speech by the sophist Themistius (*Or.* 4.59d–61b) in honour of the emperor Constantius in the year 357. Through

²⁰ This is basically the idea expressed by A. Dain, *DOPapers* 8 (1954) 36.

²¹ For the text of the charter see P. de Lagarde's edition of John Euchaita in *Abh. Göttingen* 28.1881 (published 1882) 196ff, esp. 198. On Oxford libraries see C. E. Mallet, *A History of the University of Oxford* (London 1924–27) I.318, II.221: in the middle ages the central library of the university was open only to graduates and senior students; and when the Bodleian was established, access was normally limited to doctors, masters and bachelors, and this remained the rule for centuries. As to colleges, two examples may be cited. At Corpus Christi the founder's statutes granted free access to all members of the college (J. R. Liddell, *The Library*, SER. IV 18 [1938] 397), but they must have fallen into abeyance, for in the library there hangs to this day a notice saying, "June 26th 1862. At a college meeting holden this day it was agreed to allow the undergraduates access to the library subject to the following conditions . . ." Dr R. Shackleton of Brasenose College kindly informs me that there undergraduates were not allowed access to the old library until 1897, but there was a separate library for their use.

the haze of rhetoric some facts can be dimly discerned. Besides the standard texts of famous authors the library was to contain a good many of less importance, which might otherwise perish owing to the infrequent demand for copies. Themistius expects visitors to come from elsewhere to consult these works. But the worthy object of this collection was not entirely successful. In 475 there was a fire, and even if the books were replaced (*cf. Anth.Pal.* 16.70–1) there was probably another fire in the eighth century. There is no trace of such an institution in the period that I am mainly concerned with, and the lack of it must have had a bad effect on the circulation of the less common texts; even the frequent lending of books among friends will hardly have offset this fully.^{21a}

The only trace I can find of libraries freely open to the public comes from the empire of Nicaea and later. The emperor Theodore Ducas Lascaris, who took a great deal of interest in restoring the educational facilities of the empire in its new home, is said to have collected enough books to make several libraries, which he despatched to various cities of the empire with instructions that they should be made open to the public. Our source, the historian Scutariota, fails to tell us to what extent Theodore was doing something new, and passes at once to praise the fortunate results of the emperor's educational policy.²² At the end of the century the library in Planudes' monastery, already mentioned above, is described by him as being open to students.

To return to the capital: perhaps one may conclude this discussion of the four major libraries of Constantinople by a brief speculation as to their holdings of rare texts, in particular texts which do not survive. There are famous reports, such as that of Constantine Lascaris, that he had seen a complete copy of the history of Diodorus Siculus, of which part only has come down to us.²³ But a general inference about the contents of the libraries is better made from an analysis of the writings of the most learned Byzantines, such as Photius. From his *Muriobiblon* it is clear that he had read about sixty works of secular literature not available to us now in any form other than his summary; they are predominantly historians of the late Roman and early Byzantine period; poetry is not represented, but that may be due to a limitation of Photius' interests as much as any-

^{21a} See C. Wendel, *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen* 59 (1942) 193–209.

²² See n.4 *supra*.

²³ PG 161.918.

thing else. In addition he summarises about a hundred patristic works lost to us, including heretical authors such as Origen (*Cod.* 8) and Agapios the Manichaean (*Cod.* 179).²⁴ In the next century the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus made excerpts of important historians not now surviving in any other form.²⁵ Occasionally other authors allow one to infer the existence of books that have since been lost: in the twelfth century Tzetzes appears to have had access to more of the poetry of Callimachus than we do now, and he knew a good deal of the obscure early satirist Hipponax; also Eustathius could perhaps have read more of Pindar and Michael Choniates possessed Callimachus' *Hecale* and *Aetia*.²⁶ If all these works had survived entire, the volume of Greek literature would be notably increased, but the number of works of high literary merit would probably remain almost unchanged. It was once believed that the plays of Menander survived in Byzantium, but the list of books in which his name appears is now reckoned to be untrustworthy; this attractive title was one of several intended to interest wealthy Western collectors of manuscripts in the sixteenth century by giving a false impression of the riches that remained to be found. Menander probably survived until the sixth or seventh century but hardly later.²⁷

Monastic Libraries

So far I have considered interesting but untypical libraries. Now it is time to turn to the monasteries with their numerous smaller collections. In the Eastern empire monasteries did not belong to orders as in the West; the nearest equivalent to a learned order such as the Benedictines was a loose group of monasteries that adopted the rule of St Theodore of Studium, which contained some provisions about reading and copying books. Theodore was following the tradition already observable in the earliest monasteries of Egypt by providing for a scriptorium and encouraging the monks to read.²⁸ To discuss

²⁴ See K. Ziegler, in *RE* 20.1 (1941) s.v. PHOTIUS 13.

²⁵ K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur*² (München 1897) 252ff.

²⁶ The source of Hipponax fragments is often Tzetzes; as to Callimachus, see J. Irigoin, *REG* 73 (1960) 439-47. On Pindar: *Eustathii prooemium* 34, in *Scholia vetera in Pindarum* ed. Drachmann, III (*BT*, Leipzig 1927) 303. R. Pfeiffer, *Callimachus* II (Oxford 1953) xxxii, discusses Choniates.

²⁷ P. Maas, *BZ* 38 (1938) 409-12. See also Koerte's second Teubner ed. II (Leipzig 1959) 13 and 291. G. Neumann, *Hermes* 81 (1953) 491-6, claims that William of Blois' *Alda* may depend on some knowledge of Menander's *Androgyne*. But the hint of this in the prologue may be due simply to Ter. *Eun.* 19-20 (prologue).

²⁸ See Ducange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae graecitatis* 552-3.

the scriptoria would be irrelevant here, but as to the habit of reading this is what Theodore says:

It should be known that on days when we perform no physical labour the librarian bangs a gong once, the brothers gather at the place where the books are kept, and each takes one, reading it until late. Before the bell is rung for evening service the librarian bangs again, and all come to return their books according to the list. If anyone is late with his book, he is subject to a penalty.²⁹

But the Eastern church has not always concerned itself with learning, and to make it clear that such care for books was not typical one may quote from the twelfth-century archbishop of Salonika Eustathius. In his work on the reform of the monastic life he addresses illiterate monks as follows:

You treat this as a matter of trade, selling off this advantage you possess, indeed listening to the suggestions of the evil spirit who tells you “Sell these books of yours, spend the money as you please and follow me” . . . You illiterate fellow, why ever do you wish to reduce the library to the level of your own character? Just because you have no trace of culture, must you empty the library of the books that transmit it? ³⁰

Shortly afterwards he speaks of a magnificent volume of St Gregory of Nazianzus, often admired by visitors to a certain monastery as a calligraphic masterpiece. When he asked for permission to see it, he was first told that it had been moved. He then inquired from the abbot himself, who initially made no answer but then admitted that it had been sold. “What use was it to us?” he asked.

Let us concentrate on monasteries where books were valued: we may presume that in the capital there were many houses which had at least a modest collection. Evidence comes from a library list that has survived together with the possession notes of librarians who took interest in their property.³¹ Books with these notes seem to be almost exclusively of religious character, as would be expected; there is little or no trace of secular learning, apart from the occasional Aristotelian

²⁹ *Epitimia*, PG 99.1713.

³⁰ ed. Tafel, §§ 128, 144.

³¹ See O. Volk, *Die byzantinischen Klosterbibliotheken* (Diss. München 1955).

book, which might be studied by a person of perfect piety and orthodoxy (e.g. ms *Berol.gr.* 409 from SS Cosmas and Damian, of the fourteenth century). The books surviving from any one library are not numerous as a rule; it is exceptional that fifteen have come down to us from the monastery of the Hodegoi or Hodegetria, all of theological nature. One other exception is a special case; the monastery of St John Baptist 'on the Rock' had a school attached to it, and so perhaps it is not surprising that more than twenty books remain from its collection nor that their contents are not exclusively theological. These twenty books may not be more than a small proportion of what the house possessed. It owned the very famous illuminated herbal of Dioscorides now in Vienna (ms *med.gr.* 1). It possessed at one time a copy of the letters of Demetrius Cydones and Libanius, the exemplar from which the fourteenth-century ms *Vaticanus gr.* 678 was copied, and in the fifteenth century copies of Plutarch and Polybius were among its books. Similarly one presumes that a good library existed in the monastery where the scholar and monk Maximus Planudes ran a school *ca.* 1300; this may have been the Chora monastery, where about 1330 the statesman and scholar Theodore Metochites set to work to restore the library.³²

More definite information of an earlier period comes from a late eleventh-century document by which a certain Michael Attaleiates established the monastery of Christ Panoiktirmon and listed as part of his will the books that he intended to donate to it. These were about forty or forty-five volumes, all theological except two. The first is called a *seismobrontologion*, a text on weather signs and the like, no doubt an amalgam of superstition and astrology; it may be thought strange to find this in a monastic library, but perhaps they were common, for another one was in the Patmos library, as we shall see later. The second non-theological book is a chronicle composed by the founder of the house himself. Our source mentions but does not list in detail some donations to the library of slightly later date.³³ Both in size and content I suspect that this was a typical monastic library, in that it has substantially less than a hundred books, of which none are classical texts, one or two may be historical, and all

³² *Scriptorium* 5 (1951) 279-88.

³³ The list is printed by C. N. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη* I (Venice 1872) 49ff. On the *seismobrontologion* see C. Wachsmuth's Teubner ed. of Johannes Lydus, *De ostentis* (Leipzig 1897) pp. xxxix-xl.

the rest are biblical, liturgical and patristic, especially sermons by Chrysostom, Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, lives of saints and catenae on various books of scripture. Such complete information does not exist for other monasteries in the capital; but the conjecture is probably justified by a comparison with the data offered by lists of provincial libraries, several of which survive. To these I will now turn; I shall include in the provinces certain regions where the emperor did not in fact govern after the Arab or Turkish conquests, but where the monasteries seem to have been in communication with Constantinople and acknowledged the jurisdiction of the patriarch.

Provincial Libraries

Byzantine civilisation is often regarded as being centred in the capital to an overwhelming degree, with scarcely a trace of culture to be found in the provinces. That this is a true picture of some provinces at some dates is beyond doubt. Poverty of libraries is easy to glean from our sources. A few examples will make this clear. Antiochus of Saba, writing the preface to his *Pandectes* ca. A.D. 600, offers it to the abbot Eustathius of Attalina near Ankara with the comment that it should be a helpful compendium of knowledge for one who lives in a place where books are hard to find.³⁴ The complaints of Michael Choniates on the ignorance of the inhabitants of Athens, where he became bishop at the end of the twelfth century, are famous;³⁵ they suggest a total absence of literary culture. Revealing also is a less well known remark in the works of the canon lawyer Theodore Balsamon. In 1203 the patriarch of Alexandria sent him some legal problems with a request for an opinion; the third question includes the statement: "The sixty books of the *Basilica* are not in circulation in our district, and so we are in the dark."³⁶ It is rather a surprise that the patriarch could not lay his hands on this work.

Nevertheless it may be a mistake to dismiss all provinces as culturally desolate. Literary and scholarly pursuits were possible in Salonica from time to time. One of the most learned of all Byzantines, Eustathius, was archbishop there at the end of the twelfth century. In

³⁴ PG 89.1421, μήτε δύνασθαι ἐν τόποις ἐν οἷς ἐπιδημεῖτε εὐρίσκειν εὐχερῶς τὰ ἐπιζητούμενα.

³⁵ E.g. βεβαρβάρωμα χρόνιος ὧν ἐν Ἀθήναις, an adaptation of Eur. Or. 485.

³⁶ PG 138.952ff (A.D. 1203), but H. G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (München 1959) 658, gives the date as 1195.

the fourteenth century lesser but still important men, such as Demetrius Triclinius and Thomas Magister, worked there. What inference one may make about their libraries is not clear. Eustathius had held a teaching post in the patriarchal academy in Constantinople at an earlier stage in his career, so that his books and his learning may have been acquired there. Of the other men one can say that they read and studied with pupils the standard range of classical Greek literature; a library of about fifty manuscripts would have been quite adequate for that purpose. One interesting hypothesis recently advanced is that Triclinius discovered a neglected old book in a local library, perhaps originally the property of Eustathius, which contained nine plays of Euripides that were not normally known to the Byzantines, and indeed would not have survived to the present day but for his discovery.³⁷ Though the details of this story cannot be proved beyond a doubt, the idea is most plausible. On the other hand there seems to be no further evidence suggesting an institution with a valuable library in the city, despite its size and importance.³⁸

Nearby on mount Athos there were great treasures. At the present day there are still libraries with a total of some 12,000 books. The individual collections vary from a handful to 1,500 at Vatopedi and 2,000 at the Great Lavra. Some three quarters of the books were written during the period of Turkish occupation, and so are outside the scope of this paper. But if we make allowance for the fact that since the Renaissance quite a number of mediaeval volumes have found their way by sale or theft to other places, and some have been destroyed by fire, as at the monastery of Simopetra, we may reasonably guess that in the Byzantine period there were several thousand books on Athos. The contents of the present-day collections cover the usual range of theology and related subjects; but it is worth noting that even today there are about sixty classical texts written earlier than *ca.* 1600.³⁹ Possession notes tell us of other classical texts that were there once, such as the important *Codex Crippsianus* of the Attic orators (*ms Burney 95*) at Vatopedi and a Xenophon at the Lavra (*ms Escorial 174*): unfortunately we do not know how early such treasures reached these libraries or whether they were appreciated by any of

³⁷ G. Zuntz, *An Inquiry into the Transmission of the Plays of Euripides* (Cambridge 1965) 180-92.

³⁸ O. Tafrahi, *Thessalonique au XIVème siècle* (Paris 1912) 149-69, evidently knows of none, despite his extensive knowledge of primary sources.

³⁹ S. Rudberg, *Eranos* 54 (1956) 174-85.

the monks, and so it is not possible to conclude with any certainty that in the strictly Byzantine age there were monks reading classical texts on Athos. It has to be remembered in connexion with all monastic libraries that in Byzantium it was a common habit to retire to a monastery to spend one's last years; if men of literary tastes did this and took their books with them, these eventually became property of the monastery, but they may not have been of any interest to the majority of the monks.

Mediaeval inventories of the Athos libraries do not exist or at least have not yet come to light. We know a little about the arrangements in the Lavra, as there are possession notes on a number of its books which indicate shelf-marks. The system may go well back into the middle ages, for ms *Coislin* 8, which is marked as book 14 on shelf 9, also has a note saying that it was deposited in the Lavra in 1218. This volume has incidentally a title painted on the bottom fore-edge, which may mean that the books were simply piled up on the shelf horizontally. There was also a book cupboard (*ἀρμάριον*) at the Lavra, and three manuscripts still there are marked as having belonged to it (mss 2, 221, 1476). But the fact that the last of these books is as late as the seventeenth century makes me suspect that the cupboard was not part of the mediaeval furniture.

Enough of the shelf-marks survive to allow a little more analysis. Some of the books are still on Athos, many have found their way into the Coislin collection in Paris, and a few are scattered elsewhere. The Lavra seems to have had two libraries, one of which is designated as that of the catechumens. Of sixty-three books with shelf-marks, thirty-nine come from the library of the catechumens and only twenty-four from the main library. It is something of a surprise to find that the catechumens' library does not consist entirely of theology. Of the present Coislin manuscripts they had nos. 136, Cedrenus and Michael Attaleiates; 161 and 170, Aristotle and commentators; 323, Aristotle, Themistius, Demosthenes and Aristides; 337, Ptolemy's *Geography*. They also had a Xenophon (ms *Escorial* 174) and the church historians Eusebius and Socrates (ms *Ven.gr.* 339). At what dates these books became part of the library of the catechumens is not known; but one may reasonably suspect that such a range of reading would not have been considered appropriate for them at all stages of Byzantine history; the liberal view of St Basil in his *De legendis libris gentilium* was outweighed by the majority opinion that pagan books

should not be read.⁴⁰ How many books the catechumens had is also unknown; the shelf numbers ran up to twelve, but within each shelf the books are not numbered, indeed often the shelf number itself is not given. But in the main library the shelf numbers run up to sixteen, and at least some shelves were very big, for we have the thirty-fourth and forty-first book of the first shelf (mss *Coislin* 57 and *Lavra* 447), and from the third we have nos. 50 and 60 (mss *Coislin* 242, 241). These two volumes are of average format, and so the high numbers cannot be explained by supposing that all the smallest volumes were put on the third shelf; nor are all the books on shelf three of the same content, for though the two just mentioned are copies of St Basil, the eighteenth and thirty-sixth books were respectively a *geronticon* and a set of excerpts of various theological works (mss *Coislin* 127 and 120). No principle of order can be observed; mss *Coislin* 27 and 28 are of the same content (the Pauline epistles with catena), date and format, but they were on different shelves. They also serve to remind us that common works were frequently duplicated in such collections. Other items from the main library deserving a mention are ms *Coislin* 387, philosophical and rhetorical treatises; ms *Coislin* 152, Books 11–14 of the *Basilica*; *Paris.supp.gr.* 1155 fol. 58, Galen. As to the total number of books, if every shelf had sixty books, the main library alone possessed about nine hundred and sixty; that seems to me a very high figure, but I have no means of telling whether it is too high and if so by approximately what percentage. The only other figure available for purposes of comparison is that the Patmos library had three hundred and thirty books at the beginning of the thirteenth century. If my estimate is approximately correct, the library of the Lavra was over three times as large.

In discussing Athos I am obliged to take the Lavra as my only example, thereby neglecting some twenty other institutions. There is no good evidence about them, for it is not safe to infer much about the mediaeval holdings of a library from its present contents, in view of the undeniable fact that the movement of books was considerable in Byzantium. The same difficulty prevents me from dealing as I should wish with the collections at Meteora in Thessaly and others in the eastern centres of monasticism, especially mount Sinai and Jerusalem. It may be worth saying that whereas at Athos there may have been

⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. Gregory of Nazianzus, PG 36.508B.

some classical texts in the libraries during the middle ages, there is little trace of these in the eastern libraries, since they contain at present a smaller proportion of classical manuscripts and they have not left any marks of possession on classical manuscripts now elsewhere. The famous palimpsest of Euripides (Patriarchal Library, *Τάφου* 36) was an asset of which the monks were not conscious. There is one hint that the library of St Saba near Jerusalem had some interesting texts; the *Pandectes* of Antiochus already referred to is a compendium of a number of early patristic writings, and it contains fragments of early Christian writers whose works do not survive complete; so perhaps the author had copies of these at his disposal in St Saba.⁴¹ This is likely, but one cannot exclude the possibility that he got his knowledge second hand.

Fortunately the picture can be supplemented from another famous centre of monasticism, the monastery of St John on Patmos.⁴² Of this library there are three inventories, dating from 1201, 1382 and *ca.* 1580. The house was founded in 1088 by one Christodoulos. Before going any further I should narrate an episode from his earlier career which shows his spirit and character to advantage. He had been a monk on the Turkish mainland at mount Latros, and in 1079 the advance of the Turks made it necessary to evacuate the monastery. Christodoulos took the trouble to ensure that its library was transported to the island of Cos, from which it was later sent on to Constantinople; the story is told appropriately enough in a note on a spare page of one of the books which survives (*ms Paris.gr.* 598).⁴³

The new foundation on Patmos did not have a smooth history in its early years; at one point the Turks forced Christodoulos to leave and take refuge in Euboea for a time. But he returned and his persistence was rewarded; by 1157 the community had grown to seventy-five monks, and *ca.* 1200 there were nearly one hundred and fifty. Christodoulos took pains over the library. He recovered from Constantinople, by the good will of the patriarch, a quarter of the books that he had brought from mount Latros, and his interest in the library comes out in a long document addressed to his monks, which

⁴¹ O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Litteratur* V (Freiburg Br. 1932) 77-9.

⁴² For Patmos I depend chiefly on C. Diehl, *BZ* 1 (1892) 488ff, with the corrections made by G. Mercati, *Per la storia dei manoscritti greci di Genova, di varie badie basiliane d'Italia e di Patmo* (Rome 1935) = *Studi e Testi* 68, pp.119ff.

⁴³ F. von Miklosich / J. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana* VI (Vienna 1890) 16ff. The sources for the next paragraph are *ibid.* pp.81, 131, 87, 74.

includes the instruction that “the abbot is to keep the books and in addition the papers and documents and other property of the church; he is to make a list of them and keep them with the utmost care.” How often this order was carried out we do not know, but a list was made in 1201. After dealing with the contents of the treasury it comes to the books. The total number is 330, and the list is subdivided into the parchment volumes, which number 267, and the paper ones, of which there were 63. There does not seem to be any other principle of arrangement, and there are no shelf-marks. Apart from this division into categories it looks as if the books were not kept in any fixed positions, and when the monks made the inventory they probably went through the books as they happened to be on the shelves at the time. The proportion of paper books, nearly one fifth, is to be noted; considering the date it is higher than might have been inferred from the total number of Greek manuscripts now extant, among which paper books are quite exceptionally rare before the thirteenth century. The contents of the books leave no doubt as to the interests of the monks. Of the parchment books 109 are biblical and liturgical, 23 hagiographical, and almost all the others theological. Only eleven fall outside these classes; one classical text (Aristotle’s *Categories*), a lexicon, two volumes of grammar, two of medicine, a Josephus and a commentary thereon, two chronicles and finally a *brontoseismologion*, a type of work already mentioned in connection with the monastery of Christ Panoiktirmon in the capital. Among the paper books the story is the same. Only five are not theological, an Aristotle, a lexicon and three chronicles.

The growth of the library in little more than a century is remarkable. The initial donation by Christodoulos cannot have been very large, even with the books recovered from his former monastery. But gifts and legacies can be traced. Some books carry notes to this effect. In one, a liturgical book dating from 1174 (ms *Patmos* 175) the scribe wrote inside the front cover:

I am donating this book, not because the monastery does not have a copy—far from it, for what other holy monastery has more teachers of grammar and calligraphers than this divine house dedicated to St John?—but so that I, a sinner, and the humble and ill-governed monastery of Artamyntine that is under my unworthy care may be thought of and remembered briefly by you.

Acquisitions by legacy may be exemplified from the following century, when the abbot Sabas gave some thirty books, all theological except for one legal and one medical work.⁴⁴

To return to the books of 1201: out of 330 only 108 on parchment and three on paper can be identified in the present-day library, which has some 800 books. In other words, two-thirds of the books in the list have been lost. Part of this loss will have occurred through sales by mercenary abbots, part through loans; at the end of the list about 45 volumes are recorded as lent to various places in the islands and on the mainland, even as far away as Crete. By 1382 the total contents had declined slightly to 300 volumes; the details have never been published. But the processes of loss and acquisition went hand in hand, as we can see from a partial list made very much later in *ca.* 1580; this has 58 items only, of which 22 do not appear in the early list, and it is noteworthy that among these acquisitions as many as seven are of secular content. There is a Plato, beyond reasonable doubt the famous *Clarkianus* now in the Bodleian, together with Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, Diodorus Siculus, the *Basilica*, two Byzantine historians and Nicephorus Choumnos. If we could be sure that these books were deliberately added to the library instead of being acquired as unsolicited gifts or legacies, it would be possible to infer a change of outlook, a broadening of interests in the later period of the empire.

Patmos and Athos were far from typical. The ordinary monastery, to judge from a few inventories, had a small and entirely theological collection. These inventories are not numerous, but as they come from various regions and dates it is not rash to hope that they are representative. One or two examples will suffice. In 1083 one Gregory Pacourianos founded a monastery at Petritsos near Philippopolis, now Plovdiv in Bulgaria. He gave it thirty books, six biblical, twelve liturgical and twelve patristic. At Paphos in Cyprus the monastery of Neophytos had sixteen volumes of exclusively theological content in the year 1209.⁴⁵

Another provincial library which may have been important was at Caesarea in Cappadocia. The historian George Syncellus, writing about A.D. 800, says that he found something in a very accurately

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.241.

⁴⁵ Lists are enumerated in *RevOchr* 17 (1912) 269-79. For the two mentioned here see L. Petit, *Vizantiskij Vremennik* 11 (1904) app. p.53, and F. E. Warren, *Archaeologia* 47 (1882) 1-40.

written volume that had come to him from the library at Caesarea. And he remarks on a note in the volume stating that the exemplar from which it had been copied had been corrected by St Basil himself. This means that books dating back to the fourth century could still be brought to light in the early ninth. In view of the damage done by fire to collections in the capital, the keen scholar might reasonably feel it worthwhile to look for texts in the provinces. Caesarea may be important in another respect: it was the see to which Arethas was appointed. His private library was one of the best in the whole of the middle ages, and it is tempting to suppose that some of his later acquisitions were the result of a find of good books in the local episcopal library.⁴⁶

Libraries in South Italy

The only other region of the empire that I should like to consider in any detail is southern Italy. Even after the collapse of Byzantine power there were numerous Greek monasteries flourishing both in Italy and Sicily. The strength of the Greek influence is shown by the continuing use of the language in Calabria and Apulia throughout the middle ages, and it is well known that today there are still tiny communities speaking a kind of Greek. Most of the monasteries could be presumed to have resembled their counterparts in the empire proper. A few brief inventories give the usual impression.⁴⁷ The famous Patirion monastery at Rossano founded *ca.* 1103 had a collection above the average size, though typical in content; about 1500 it still had some 160 manuscripts, and analysis of about fifty books attributable to it in the middle ages shows that only two were not theological, one being a lexicon, the other a grammar.⁴⁸ An important book that seems to have passed through this monastery without being appreciated by the monks is the Vatican palimpsest of Strabo, dating back perhaps to the fifth century (MS *Vat.gr.* 2061A).

Another famous monastery was that of the Saviour at Messina, which even in its foundation charter had a reference to the excellence of its library in all branches of literature.^{48a}

⁴⁶ Georgius Syncellus, *Chronographia* ed. Dindorf, I (Bonn 1829) p.382,7.

⁴⁷ S. Borsari, *Archivio storico per la Calabria e la Lucania* 18 (1949) 139-46.

⁴⁸ P. Batiffol, *L'Abbaye de Rossano* (Paris 1891) 48-68, with corrections by R. Devreesse, *Les manuscrits grecs de l'Italie méridionale (Studi e Testi 183, Rome 1955)* 20ff.

^{48a} *Analecta Bollandiana* 23 (1904) 19. The surviving inventory is of 1563 and too late to be useful; see Mercati, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.42) 232; also *infra* n.54.

One monastery that deserves a closer look is St Nicolas of Casole, a mile outside the town of Otranto, an important place until its destruction by Turkish invaders in 1480. The library was large, and some scholars have thought that the monks had unusually wide interests, including the study of classical Greek literature.⁴⁹ We are fortunate in possessing an account of the place in the works of Antonio Galateo of Lecce, a doctor and scholar born and bred in the district, who flourished *ca.* 1500 and visited the library before its destruction. The account is in his geographical survey of the region, *De situ Iapygiae*, and is worth quoting in full:⁵⁰

Coenobium est Divo Nicolao dicatum mille et quingentis passibus ab Hydrunto distans. Hic monachorum Basilii Magni turba convivebat; hi omnes veneratione digni, omnes litteris Graecis et plerique Latinis instructi, optimum sui praebebant spectaculum. Quicumque Graecis litteris operam dare cupiebat, iis maxima parte victus praeceptor domicilium sine aliqua mercede donabatur. Sic res Graeca, quae cotidie retrolabatur, sustentabatur. Fuit temporibus proavorum nostrorum stante aula Constantinopolitana vir philosophus Nicolaus Hydruntinus, cuius ante Turcarum transitum plures libri de logica et philosophia in hoc monasterio habebantur. Hic abbas huius monasterii factus et Nicetas nominatus saepe a summo pontifice ad imperatorem et ab illo ad summum pontificem permeabat ad componendas res, quando inter pontificem et imperatorem aliqua contentio aut de orthodoxa fide aut de alia re oriebatur. Erat enim hic vir gravissimae auctoritatis et sanctissimorum morum, ut qui de philosophia ad religionem commigraverat. Hic sumptui minime parcens quos per universam Graeciam invenire potuit librorum omnis generis bibliothecam in hoc coenobio congregavit, quorum magna pars negligentia Latinorum et contemptu litterarum Graecarum periit. Non parva pars Romam ad Bessariionem cardinalem deportata est et inde Venetias; partem quae superfuerat Turcarum qui monasterium populati sunt bella absumpserunt.

It is interesting that the library, evidently a fairly large one, was in a monastery that ran a school; a similar combination of institutions

⁴⁹ Devreesse, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.48) 44, 48; but he does not employ all the evidence and his argumentation is weak (see esp. p.51 n.8).

⁵⁰ p.45 in the Basle edition of 1558. (Nicetas is Galateo's error for Nectarius; see J. M. Hoeck / R. J. Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios Abt von Casole* [Ettal 1965] 1-2.)

came to our notice in connexion with Constantinople, at the monastery of St. John the Baptist 'on the Rock'. If one assumes that one of the main functions of the library was to serve the school, the contents could be deduced to a large extent from a knowledge of the curriculum; but Galateo expresses himself in general terms on this point, just where precise information is most needed. He says that in its more flourishing days the monastery had offered free board and lodging to anyone wishing to study Greek. Taken literally his words mean that literary studies were encouraged, and in this context literary studies probably include classical Greek literature. But this is very unusual in a Greek monastery, and one is tempted to make the more cautious interpretation that the teaching of the monks concentrated round theology and philosophy; that would imply in turn that in addition to the usual range of liturgical and patristic works the library had some volumes of Aristotle, especially the *Organon*. That is an inference which happens to be confirmed by other evidence, the list of books lent from the library, of which more later. We come next to Galateo's reference to the abbot Nicolas, who held his position 1219-35. He spent large sums on books while travelling on diplomatic missions, but only one purchase can be identified with certainty, a copy of the *Donation of Constantine*. This we know because Galateo made a transcript of it before it was destroyed by the Turks, and presented it to Pope Julius II, with an accompanying letter designed to show that the work was no forgery;⁵¹ his letter amusingly ends with some remarks about the arrogance of Valla, who had declared the *Donation* to be a fake ("*miror audaciam Vallae*").

The next fact in Galateo is that a substantial portion of the library became the property of Cardinal Bessarion in Rome and was later moved to Venice. It is therefore to be hoped that examination of the Marciana Library will lead to identification of these books. But hopes have so far been deceived. Zanetti's catalogue of the library does not mention any notes of possession or other evidence that might be helpful. I have personally examined a number of the manuscripts but have never found any evidence pointing to the library at Otranto as the previous possessor of a book, nor to the best of my knowledge is there any in modern publications about the collection.⁵² Perhaps the

⁵¹ *Della donazione di Constantino*, in *Collana di opere di scrittori di Terra d'Otranto*, ed. S. Grande, IV (Lecce 1867-69) 93-9.

⁵² E.g. E. Mioni, *Codices Aristotelei qui in Venetis adservantur bibliothecis* (Venice 1959).

librarians at Otranto were not in the habit of marking their property. The fact remains that we have to look elsewhere, particularly to the list of books on loan from the monastery, some of them in Brindisi. In this there are 66 items. Some of these are not theological: a grammar book, a lapidary, a lexicon, a book of canon law, a work on the interpretation of dreams, and finally two classical texts, Aristotle's *Sophistici Elenchi* and Aristophanes. It has been suggested that the latter is the famous *Codex Venetus*, and if this is right it means that the reader had before him seven of the eleven preserved comedies, not merely the selection of three that was normally read in Byzantine schools.⁵³ And there were other classical texts in the library. Constantine Lascaris tells us that Bessarion found the *Posthomericæ* of Quintus of Smyrna in Otranto.⁵⁴ It is recorded that he also recovered from this source Colluthus' *Raptus Helenæ*, which is said to have been well known in Apulia.⁵⁵ Just how much else he found at the same time it is impossible to say; but the natural inference is that if Bessarion discovered there other and more important classical texts not known to the learned world at the time, Lascaris would have told us in detail.

From trying to reconstruct the composition of the Otranto library we have seen that some classical authors were certainly to be found in it. Galateo's remark about the encouragement to literary studies given there is thus made a little more plausible than it might otherwise have seemed. But it is tantalising that we cannot know what proportion of the books were classical texts nor the date and the means by which they were acquired, for these are the facts really required for any reliable judgement on the library. One or two other classical manuscripts may deserve a passing mention here, not because there is any certainty that they ever belonged to this library, but because they were either certainly or probably written in the district and may conceivably have belonged to the library or been transcribed from an exemplar in it. The most important of them are: Homer, written in Otranto in 1201 (ms *Pal.gr.* 45); Lycophron's *Alexandra*, probably written in the nearby town of Nardò, dated

Miss L. Labowsky kindly tells me that she has not come across any evidence during her study of Bessarion's library.

⁵³ H. Omont, *REG* 3 (1890) 389-90; T. W. Allen in his preface to the fascimile of the *Marcianus* of Aristophanes, p.20.

⁵⁴ PG 161.940-6, ultimately from ms *Madrid* N.57 of A.D. 1496. (He himself found Theodosius' *Περὶ τόνων* in the monastery of the Saviour at Messina, *ibid.* 941).

⁵⁵ See Weinberg in the Teubner ed., quoting the preface from ms *Ambrosianus* Q.5 *sup.*

1255 (MS *Escorial* 18); Porphyry's *Isagoge* with Nicetas David's commentary, dating from 1223 and 1296–7 (MS *Paris.gr.* 2089); another copy of the same work but with Ammonius' commentary from Gallipoli, dated 1290–1 (MS *Laur.Plut.* 71.35); a thirteenth-century copy of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* also from Gallipoli (MS *Barb.gr.* 75). Of less certain provenance but possibly from this district are four other classical texts: a book with four of the plays of Sophocles, dating from 1282 (MS *Laur.Conv.Sopp.* 152); another with three plays of Euripides, a palimpsest of ca. 1300 (MS *Vat.gr.* 1135); the lexicon known as the *Etymologicum Gudianum*, written in 1293 (MS *Gud.gr.* 29–30), which has lines ruled in lead pencil to guide the script, a practice unheard of in ordinary Greek books of the middle ages; the *codex unicus* of the obscure epistolographer Aristaenetus (MS *Vindob.phil.gr.* 310), which contains also a work by the local author Nicolas of Otranto and is written in a script that may just possibly be characteristic of the area. The notion that the library at Otranto had copies of all these texts is not entirely beyond the bounds of possibility; if by any chance it did, one would not hesitate to designate it as by far the most interesting of the provincial libraries.⁵⁶

One more clue has to be followed. The local inhabitants of Otranto wrote several works, mainly of the thirteenth century, that have come down to us. It might be hoped that in these writings quotations or allusions to literary sources would allow us to guess the extent of the author's reading, especially in view of the imitative character of most Byzantine writing. The abbot Nicolas, mentioned above as a book-collector, was the author of a number of theological tracts, but unfortunately those that have been published are in an edition that seems not to be accessible in this country, so that they cannot be used for the present purpose.⁵⁷ Other writings by local worthies have been made available lately.⁵⁸ There is nothing very remarkable in them except that one of them, John Grassus, is clearly dependent in his verses on classical models. He echoes Aristophanes, Euripides, Lycophron and Musaeus; these are all authors who would have been known to some extent to any Byzantine who had received secondary education, probably a rather small proportion of the population.

⁵⁶ The evidence on which Devreesse, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.48) assigns other classical books to the library or the district seems to me somewhat open to question.

⁵⁷ ed. J. M. Hoeck (Diss. München 1943). But see now the work cited in n.50.

⁵⁸ M. Gigante, *Poeti italobizantini del secolo XIII* (Naples 1953); M. Gigante and S. Borsari, *La Parola del Passato* 6 (1951) 287ff.

Lycophron and Musaeus, though seeming recondite and obscure to us, were in fact almost as much read in Byzantium as the more famous classical authors, if the number of manuscripts of each surviving is any guide to popularity. The only noteworthy feature in Grassus' reading rather surprisingly turns out to be the possibility that he knew Euripides' *Troades*, a play surviving in so few manuscripts that in the middle ages it must have been a very rare text indeed. But closer examination of Grassus' words shows that all the verbal similarities between his work and Euripides can be explained on the assumption that he knew only the *Hecuba*, which was the most commonly read of all the plays. And so with regret I conclude that the writings of the inhabitants of Otranto do not bring us any nearer to deciding how far above the average the local monastic library may have been.

The Survival of Classical Texts

Among the provincial libraries I have given special attention to those of the Lavra at Athos, of St John at Patmos and of St Nicolas at Otranto, because they were clearly outstanding and their contents are to some extent capable of reconstruction. Others of great importance at Meteora, Sinai and Jerusalem have had to be neglected for lack of suitable evidence on which to build a picture. But the general conclusion to be drawn is, I think, reasonably clear, namely that in the provinces many monasteries may have had small collections, but the number of institutions with any substantial quantity of books, say over a hundred volumes, was tiny. A matter which deserves a little further discussion is the survival of classical texts. Outside the capital they evidently enjoyed only a small circulation, except in Salonica in the fourteenth century and perhaps also in Patmos and Otranto. But was their circulation really as limited as this? The Athos libraries at the present time own about sixty classical texts, some five per cent of their total holdings; most of these, however, are very recent, belonging to the fifteenth century at the earliest. There is just a handful of earlier books (mss *Vatopedi* 36, a twelfth-century gnomology; 655, thirteenth century, Ptolemy and Strabo; 671, thirteenth century, classical poets; *Lavra* 1885, a tenth-century Dioscorides). As has been said above one does not know whether these came to the libraries through any deliberate choice of the monks. Equally difficult to evaluate is the frequent possession by a monastery

of a famous manuscript of a classical author, for example the *Clarkianus* of Plato came from Patmos, the Vienna Dioscorides belonged to the Prodromus monastery in the capital, the *Parisinus* of Demosthenes to the library of Sosandra, established during the empire of Nicaea, the *Crippsianus* of the Attic orators to Vatopedi on Athos, the Escorial copy of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* to the Lavra, and recently the only complete copy of the *Lexicon* of Photius was found in a monastery at Zavorda in Macedonia. These facts may imply a slightly wider diffusion of classical texts than has been hitherto suggested in this paper.

Three other arguments point in the same direction. In the middle of the thirteenth century the scholar Nicephorus Blemmydes, living in the kingdom of Nicaea, went hunting for books in mainland Greece. He visited Salonica, Athos and Larissa, probably at some risk to himself in view of the political uncertainties of the time, though in the event he was not molested by the officials of the Latin kingdom.⁵⁹ The interesting fact here is his inclusion of Larissa, a small provincial town; one would hardly expect any library there, and indeed perhaps his main success in his journey was at the other places. All he tells us is that many of the books were extremely hard to find, but they included some titles not known even to every educated person. There is nothing to indicate in more detail what he was looking for, but some classical texts, especially the philosophers and the commentaries on them, are likely to have been among his finds, as he himself wrote on logic and physics; but his range of interests was wide, and his other works include two short pieces on geography.⁶⁰

Another trace of the existence of books in unexpected places may be given by the early translator William of Moerbeke. He tells us in the subscriptions to his translations where he was working at the time. Two days before Christmas in 1259 he completed Aristotle's *Historia animalium* in Thebes. In April of the following year he was in Nicaea, finishing the *Meteorologica*. He is also found working at Viterbo and in 1277 became bishop of Corinth. Nicaea under the Lascarids was a seat of learning, but one does not think of Thebes or Corinth in the same way; and though in theory his work did not require many books, in practice it is difficult to believe that

⁵⁹ Nicephorus Blemmydes, *Curriculum vitae et carmina* ed. Heisenberg (BT, Leipzig 1896) p.36 lines 3ff.

⁶⁰ PG 142; see Heisenberg's preface, esp. pp. lix ff.

he would be satisfied without access to a library with some classical texts.⁶¹ Finally one should mention that Janus Lascaris, travelling in search of books in Greece *ca.* 1491–2 and visiting both private and monastic libraries, found a wide selection of texts, some classical ones among them, in Corfu and Pherae, as well as in centres where they would be more expected. At Pherae he found the novel of Heliodorus and some medical books; in various libraries in Corfu he found Anna Comnena's *Alexiad*, a Procopius, Cornutus' summary of Greek mythology, Proclus on Plato and many medical books.⁶² But in view of the late date of his travels I should not like to lay too much emphasis on this last argument, as the books might all have reached these provincial libraries as a result of the dispersal of books that took place on the capture of the capital by the Turks. Taken together, however, I feel that these three arguments have some weight, and that consequently one should not press too strongly the view that classical texts were scarcely ever to be found in the provinces.

In conclusion let us consider how well the libraries performed their function. One may lament the loss of texts, both classical and theological, that took place in the Byzantine age. But in fairness to the librarians it has to be allowed that circumstances were much against them. Destruction by fire and foreign invasion was frequent. Writing material was relatively scarce and expensive, so that additional copies could not always be prepared without delay. To meet the shortage of texts the librarians were, as we have seen, ready to make loans, even to places quite far distant; but lending resulted in loss, as Planudes complained,⁶³ despite the fact that many books were marked with the owner's name together with the curse of the three hundred and eighteen fathers of the Council of Nicaea on anyone who should steal or sell the books to others (*e.g.* Patmos MSS 175 and 218, the MSS of the Roe collection in the Bodleian).

In these circumstances perhaps one should rather be surprised that so much survived. Among patristic authors some were so popular that their survival was guaranteed against all but the most complete disaster; so many copies of the leading fathers exist that their number is more an embarrassment than a source of pleasure to the modern

⁶¹ On William of Moerbeke's subscriptions see Grabmann in *SB München* 1928, Abh. 5, pp.16-7.

⁶² K. K. Müller, *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen* 1 (1884) 333ff.

⁶³ *Epist.* 67.73ff.

scholar who has to edit the text. Even the texts of heretical writings did not perish immediately after their condemnation; and we still have the works of the apostate Julian. This is surprising in view of the religious fervour and intolerance of the Byzantines. But Photius' knowledge of such books in the middle of the ninth century shows that intolerance and the destruction caused by the unrest of the iconoclast epoch had not yet caused the loss of all the books. As to classical literature, the losses were more serious. That many of these occurred in the Byzantine period is clear from traces of their survival in Photius and elsewhere. But before assigning all the losses to Byzantine times one should consider whether the complete range of classical literature ever existed in libraries at the beginning of the empire. There is evidence to suggest that some Greek texts were already lost in the late ancient world, for example the epic cycle and the writings of the early sophists. If that is so, it follows that Byzantine neglect and religious prejudice, though powerful, were not responsible for all the losses.

LINCOLN COLLEGE, OXFORD

October, 1966