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This paper examines the libraries and book culture of the Byzantine Empire. It finds that the Imperial and Patriarchal Libraries enjoyed royal patronage from the empire's very inception, and benefited from imperial largesse throughout its span. Private libraries and monastic libraries were also important; some private libraries rivaled their monastic and imperial counterparts. Another interesting find was that book ownership was reserved for the few; those in the practice of book production could derive a significant income from selling these items of luxury. Finally, devotion to the book assured that many works from antiquity and from the Byzantine period itself have survived until the present day. This devotion ranged from emperor to scribal monk, from calligrapher to scholar collector.

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LIBRARIES AND BOOK CULTURE OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

by  
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Jerry Saye

for my grandmother, Barbara Lockwood Brewer,  
who taught me to embrace the many faces of life

## Libraries and Book Culture of the Byzantine Empire

Barbara Ilie

The Byzantine Empire preserved many of the books that we have today. This empire took a great interest in literary culture and preserved many of the works of antiquity while at the same time writing a new literature. The Byzantine Empire supported literary life at a time when many other parts of the western world were in a state of literary darkness. In this paper, I endeavor to discuss the libraries and book culture of the Byzantine Empire and their roles in the empire's success at literary conservation and cultivation.

During the second and third centuries the Roman Empire was forced into eastern and western halves with the invasions of the Goths and Vandals. The Western Roman Empire, through traditional interpretation, came to its official end in 476 A.D. However, its power and eminence had been transferred before this date to the Byzantine Empire when Constantine I founded his capital city, Constantinople, in 330 A.D. on the strait connecting the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara. Between the second and fourth centuries, the Roman Empire and its literary life sustained a great blow. In the second century the empire boasted numerous public libraries; by the fourth century its library system was in no way reminiscent of its glorious past. A Latin scholar in 378 A.D. wrote "the libraries, like tombs, were closed forever" (69 Marshall).

Constantine I, who would prove to play an instrumental role in the importance of literary life in the new empire, was the son of Constantius Chlorus. Constantius Chlorus

had ruled as an original tetrarch in the tetrarchy formed at the end of the third century by the Emperor Diocletian. Constantine I, before inaugurating Constantinople as the new capital of the empire, recognized Christianity after hundreds of years of suppression (3 Gonosova and Kondoleon) and envisioned himself as Christ's earthly representative (4 Gonosova and Kondoleon).

Constantine I chose the well placed Bosphorus Strait as the seat of his new empire. He set to work building his capital city by embellishing existing structures such as the hippodrome and constructing new ones such as his church. In many ways, he modeled his new empire after the fallen Roman Empire. Much spolia, or architectural and artistic remnants, were brought from Rome and placed in the Hippodrome as a way of designating the city as inheritor of the old capital's grandeur.

Similarly, Constantine I looked back at the Roman Empire as a model for literary culture and attempted to illustrate Constantinople's ties with it by making Latin the official language of speech and literature. The Greek language, however, would persist in practice and also in book production.

As Constantine I looked back on the decay of the Roman Empire, he must have thought diligently upon the fall of its libraries and literary culture. Its literary culture's demise had caused serious repercussions in the education of its people. Perhaps he considered this a great weakness in the fabric of the Roman Empire. If not for this reason, Constantine I nonetheless placed a high priority on learning and literary culture.

Constantine made this priority known when he made provisions for Imperial and Patriarchal Libraries in 330 A.D. (47 Thompson). The Imperial library would still be in some part extant over 1,000 years later during the 1453 A.D. capture of the city. It would

be created through the aid of Greek scholars a full two centuries before the burning of the library at Alexandria and contain both religious and secular works (38 Dahl). The date of these libraries' provision, indeed at the very inception of the empire, illustrates the significance the founding emperor placed on them as integral pieces of the new empire. The Imperial and Patriarchal Libraries, however, did not remain unaccompanied for long. The Academy Library, also known as the University Library, and the Law Library were established soon thereafter.

A picture of the Imperial Library can be obtained through a comparison of it with Emperor Diocletian's Imperial Library at Nicomedia. Emperor Diocletian's Imperial Library at Nicomedia of the late third century served as a prototype for Constantine's library in Constantinople. One learns about Diocletian's library in a letter sent from Theonas, Bishop of Alexandria, to Diocletian's chamberlain, Lucianus. This letter contains instructions on how to care for the library and how to serve as literary steward to the emperor. The letter states that the chamberlain should be familiar with all of the books in the library and instructs him to catalogue them in proper order (44 Thompson). It offers further advice on the copying of books. It advises that the chamberlain obtain the most accurate copyists for old books in need of repair and new ones needing to be copied. It also instructs the chamberlain to avoid the use of purple skins and gold lettering unless specifically requested by the emperor. This is followed with the seemingly sound advice to do whatever is requested of him by the emperor. The last duty the letter outlines is to choose books for the emperor to read. These recommendations are to be made not only on the chamberlain's own knowledge but also on the advice of other trustworthy and learned persons (45 Thompson).

Like Diocletian's library, one can suppose that Constantine I's Imperial Library had a chamberlain to oversee its operation. This chamberlain, like Diocletian's chamberlain Lucianus, would have known the books it contained and kept them accounted for and in order. Certainly Constantine's library would also have had one or more copyists. Did the chamberlain in Constantine's library abstain from using illustrative material unless instructed to do so? One cannot know, although it is easy to imagine that some of the books were very ornate. One can also wonder if the chamberlain of Constantine I's Imperial Library suggested books for the emperor to read, as Lucianus was instructed to do for the Emperor Diocletian.

Whether or not Constantine I himself enjoyed reading prodigiously, it is known that he was a generous benefactor of his newly established Imperial Library. He sent agents across the empire in search of books at its foundation (88 Marshall). The historian Euripus relates that he took more interest in stocking it than he did in stocking the Patriarchal Library. It is probable that the Imperial Library's contents consisted of more Latin than Greek works. A twelfth century source from Monte Cassino relates that the Imperial Library was the depository of a bejeweled book which had at one time been presented to Nero. He states that Constantine I had it translated from Greek to Latin. It is also a probability that a predominant number of works were of a historical or legal nature. By the time of Constantine I's death in 337 A.D., the Imperial Library numbered 6,900 volumes (47 Thompson). Constantine I also took a personal interest in the quality of the volumes. It is known that he ordered the scriptures for his new churches to be inscribed on vellum (139 Smith). This preference for vellum (and in the form of the codex) over

the papyrus scroll was a reflection of the early Christian communities preference for the former (4 Brown).

The codex appears in the first and second centuries, and is first mentioned by the Roman poet Martial around 85 A.D. when he describes it as a format amenable to travel. The early codex was made of both vellum and papyrus. Despite this revolution in format, the book roll continued to enjoy favor for centuries to come and was only replaced by the codex in great number by the fourth century (22-23 Brown).

For the most part, the Imperial Library fared well under ensuing emperors. Constantius, Constantine I's son, apparently did not share his father's enthusiasm in supporting it, but it experienced steady growth nonetheless. The next emperor to serve as a major benefactor of the library was Julian the Apostate, so named because of his anti-Christian politics. The emperor Julian built a portico to create more space for the library and added substantially to its collection. The zealotry in which he nurtured the library can be illustrated by the following account.

The Emperor Constantius demanded of Bishop George's prefect in a series of two letters that the bishop's library be relinquished under threat of torture. His methods of book acquisition are by today's standards impolitic. He also ordered "that the works of the impious Galileans be destroyed," referring to works of Christian authors (47 Irwin). From this order, one can infer that the Imperial Library did not acquire Christian books under Julian's reign, and that Christian books in the empire were possibly confiscated and destroyed.

The last emperor to offer substantial patronage to the Imperial Library in its first hundred years of existence was Emperor Theodosius II. He and his wife were illustrious



benefactors. His wife was the daughter of the Athenian philosopher Leo, and thus, was probably a learned person herself. The Imperial Library numbered 120,000 volumes by 477 A.D. This number reflects the patronage of this couple whose reign was from 408-450 A.D. Unfortunately, the library burned the same year that this count was taken (49 Thompson, 38 Dahl). Like so many other Byzantine buildings, it was rebuilt and it survived in one form or another until the city was captured by the Turks in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (87 Johnson).

At this point it is possible to reflect on what it meant to be a library patron. What purpose did the Imperial Library serve? It would appear that it served at least the emperor and his family, his statesmen, and possibly the statesmen's wives who shared the posts and privileges of their husband's offices. As discussed earlier, it served as a means for diversion for the emperor and it seems probable that it served the same purpose for his statesmen. Princess Anna Komnene, renowned female historian of the early middle ages and daughter of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos, doubtless had access to an extensive selection of both secular and non-secular materials. She belonged to a literary circle that discussed and wrote about Aristotle (5, Gouma-Peterson) and cites Aristotle and Plato in the preface of her *Alexiad* (88, Gouma-Peterson). Yes, as a member of the imperial family, she was able to access knowledge and become the famed female scholar of her time.

The Patriarchal Library, also founded by Constantine I, was founded at the same time as the Imperial Library. It, like the Imperial Library, would continue to exist until the fall of the empire. In contrast to the Imperial Library's core substance of secular works, the Patriarchal Library consisted mainly of Greek works of theological content

(47 Irwin). This core seems understandable when one considers the Greek Byzantine population. The Patriarch would have had to have known Latin as a learned man, but he would have also had to have known Greek in order to communicate with his Greek-speaking congregation (48 Thompson). During at least one period of mid to late Byzantine history, only the clergy were allowed to teach publicly (134 Gouma-Peterson). It is easy to imagine, then, that access to certain collections was limited. Knowledge and learning seen in this way can be viewed as a controlled commodity reserved for the few and privileged.

Among the Patriarchal Library's earliest acquisitions was a gift from Constantine I. Gift giving was an elaborate social phenomena left over from Roman times. It consisted of two important elements: when to give a gift and what that gift should be. Imperial largesse, as illustrated by Constantine I's gift to the Patriarchal Library, also included such luxury items as rings stamped with the emperor's image, gold and silver plate and ivory diptychs among other items (21 Gonosova and Kondoleon). Constantine I commissioned a set of 50 scriptures to be transcribed from a library at Caesarea, destined for the Patriarchal Library. The quality of these volumes was of the utmost importance to the emperor as evidenced by the fact that some of the copies were rejected as inferior. These rejections may be the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanist (47 Irwin). The Patriarchal Library probably also contained secular works. Civil servants of high degree were educated at the Patriarchal Palace and it follows that their education would have required access to a comprehensive library containing secular works. Also, bishops assumed civic roles within the empire (6 Gonosova and Kondoleon). They would have required similar such works.

The Patriarchal Library had a head keeper, comparable to the Imperial Library's chamberlain. The Patriarchal Library's location was at least sometimes located in the church of St. Sophia (316 Thompson).

Other libraries founded early in Constantinople's history are the Academy and Law Libraries. The Academy was founded during the reign of Emperor Thodosius II (70 Marshall). It oversaw the education of statesmen which was regarded as a solemn task. In this function, the Academy Library most likely had works related to the professions of state.

The Law Library in Constantinople contained both Greek and Latin works (49 Irwin). The Law Library would later play an important role in Justinian I's codification of Roman law. In this endeavor, Justinian I's scholars poured over 1,000 years of Roman law and condensed it into a more cohesive and understandable body. These men must have had access to a large and comprehensive library.

The end result of their labors is the Corpus Juris of the sixth century, which still serves as a model of law throughout the western world. Further insight into the Law Library's contents can be obtained from an order attributed to Constantine Porphyrogenitus in the eleventh century. In this order, Constantine VII declares that the Law Library must contain "all the books useful and necessary for the teaching of law."

Other important libraries of the empire were located at Berytus and Rome (89 Johnson). The Eastern Byzantine Empire reached a zenith of artistic endeavor, among other areas, during Justinian I's reign from 527-565 (4 Gonosova and Kondoleon).

Monastic libraries, or libraries located within monasteries, comprised another important group of libraries. This group played an important role in the preservation of

literary culture. Monasteries scattered themselves across the Christian world, taking Christianity as well as teaching with them to their new settlements. Bolstering the role of the monastery as a place of teaching and learning were laws giving the clergy the sole authority to teach publicly, as aforementioned (134 Gouma-Peterson).

58Although there were many rural monasteries, a still significant number were to be found in urban settings. Urban monasteries often existed with distinction (129 Nees). Monastic libraries were generally more extensive than private libraries yet smaller in size than state supported libraries. Their presence, however, was very significant. Monasteries in the Byzantine period exhibited a high amount of devotion to the library and to the book.

In discussing monastic libraries of the period, it is important to acknowledge the possibility that one person could have played several roles simultaneously in the book arts. Therefore, a scribe could be a book owner, a book owner could be a librarian, a commissioner could be a scribe, and so on (91 Lowden).

Of primary importance is the Studios Monastery in the city of Constantinople. The Studios Monastery was founded by the Senator Studioun although its uniqueness and fame came from the Abbot John of Studioun. This abbot was a devout scholar and developed a new set of intellectual standards for monastic life.

The Abbot Studioun placed an importance on scholastics, which had not previously existed. In Studioun's new orders of 825 A.D., an emphasis was placed on the scriptorium, library and duties of the librarian (90 Marshall). He offered strict punishment to those monks who did not adhere to the new standards. Another example of the new importance placed on scholarship was the creation of reading days. On these days, a

monk would choose a book at sunrise from the monastic library and read it the entire day until sunset. At that time, he would return it to the shelf.

Abbot John Studioum's new orders for monastic life influenced monasteries throughout the empire (89 Johnson). His school of thought replaced the school of thought espoused by St. Pachomius of Egypt, who had less stringent ideas about monastic scholarship (87-89 Johnson).

Incidentally, the Studios Monastery would find itself at the center of the iconoclastic conflict (31 Walther). The iconoclastic conflict was a "full-fledged civil war" in which Emperor Leo III destroyed religious icons and also much religious art (5, Gonosova). Is it possible then that manuscripts at Studios Monastery featuring images met the same fate? An extant example of work from this monastery is the famous Theodore Psalter of 1066 A.D. (14 Mokretsova).

Another prominent monastic library was that of the monastery of St. John the Evangelist on Patmos Island. The library of this monastery was founded with a generous gift from Alexis Comenius (323 Thompson). A medieval inventory in the year 1201 A.D. credits the library with 330 manuscripts. Of this count, seventeen works were secular. These secular works included a work of Josephus and an unidentified work of Aristotle. The majority of the works were on parchment paper, while the remaining 63 were on bombyce, a paper made from silk or cotton (46 Irwin).

St. Christodulus, the founder of the Patmos Library, also served the convent of St. Paul of Latros as proctor where he was a great collector of books. Invasions forced him to flee his home many times, but with each move he took his beloved collection with him. He donated his collection to the library at Patmos at his death with the severe

instructions, “And if ever anyone should try, in the name of the monastery of Stylos or the abbey of Latros, to claim any of the books which have been given me by the very holy patriarch, his claim should be rejected and he should draw upon himself the curse of the three hundred and eighteen fathers as well as my own” (324 Thompson). This admonition illustrates the value both St. Christodulus and the monks at Patmos placed on preserving their literary treasures.

Yet another monastery meriting mention is the Monastery of Christ the All-Merciful. It offers a special glimpse into the work life of a monastery and the ways in which one person could assume many roles. It also offers an indication of the communication of workmen that took place between monasteries in the empire.

The Monastery of Christ the All-Merciful was founded before 1074 A.D. by Michael Attaleiates, a jurist and historian. A certain other Michael was appointed *economos* then abbot. He was evidently also a scribe. Two of his works are extant. The first is a manuscript dated 1081 A.D. now found at Oxford, Christchurch. The second, a manuscript dated 1088 A.D., is at the Vatican. A work from this monastery names the Studios Monastery in Constantinople as a resource for guidance and information. This raises the possibility that Abbott Michael came from this institution (92 Lowden).

Aristotle and other secular works would have been present in monastic libraries because they would have been considered necessary tools in the refutation of secular ideas and movements. Anti-Christian books such as these were kept as a way to teach Christians to be better prepared in their defense of the Christian faith. In knowing the arguments of secular writers, Christian scholars were better able to defend Christianity.

This consideration leads one to education in the monasteries, which also dictated the presence of non-religious works in monastic libraries. Monks would sometimes oversee elementary schools. For this reason, their libraries would reflect the works necessary for the teaching of the quadrivium. Because books at this time were expensive, educational texts were not great in number. A typical school boy would have done most of his work in authors like Homer, Euripides, Maeander and Demosthenes. Thus it follows that a teaching monastery's library would have possessed these works and others like them (21 Wilson). Schoolchildren would practice a common custom today, the passing down of books, if they were lucky enough to have one or more in their own possession (8 Wilson).

Monasteries also trained physicians and entertained fallen court officials (90 Johnson). Physicians would have needed medical texts for their studies. For this reason one can easily imagine a medical text in a monastic library. Secular and entertaining works would have been provided for the entertainment of fallen court officials.

Other examples of monastic leaders who emphasized the importance of intellectual pursuits can be found in Cassiodorus and St. Benedict. Cassiodorus translated Greek works to Latin, thus making them accessible to western readers. St. Benedict at Mount Cassino wrote the *Rules of St. Benedict*, a work which dictated the importance of copying and reading books (112-13 Johnson). The care and production of books became an integral part of monastic life and was viewed as a beneficial way to occupy the monks' time.

The scriptorium was the location of this productive activity. The first mention one gets of a scriptorium is from Themestius. In an address to emperor Constantius in 357

A.D., Themestius asserts the necessity of book preservation and cultivation. In this address, he focuses on books which he believes will be lost if there is not an effort to preserve them (50 Wilson). Books by the authors Plato, Aristotle and Demosthenes he does not deem in danger because of their importance in the school curriculum and subsequent number of copies. Themestius' recommendation was important; the establishment of scriptoria at such an early time in the history of the empire helped to preserve much of the body of ancient literature we have available today. At the time of Themestius' oration, the library at Alexandria had not yet burned, and it quite assuredly possessed a fine collection and contained even the most obscure authors (50 Wilson).

Another mention of a scriptorium closely resembles that of Themestius. In this mention, Emperor Valens hires 7 *antiquarii*, four Greeks and three Latinists, whose job it is to restore manuscripts and make copies of existing ones (19 Irigoien). From these examples, one can see the importance of the relationship between the scriptoria and library.

One gets insight into the characteristics of a monastic scriptorium from the guidelines of John of Studios. As mentioned before, the Abbot Studium introduced a new set of academic standards to the medieval monastery. His punishments for shoddy workmanship allow a glimpse into the scriptoria in general, and the monastic scriptoria in particular.

Theodore of Studium offers the following punishments for shoddy workmanship in his guidelines. A monk who fails to keep the original and copy clean is forced to offer 130 prostrations. From this punishment one can imagine that copying could be a messy job. This is understandable considering that writing involved the use of ink wells.



Another punishment is offered to the monk who wanders from the content of the original text. For this offense, he is excluded for three days from the community. Interpreting this punishment, one understands that strict transcription was a necessity. Reading a text carelessly brings a monk three days of only bread and water. A monk who breaks his pen in a fit of anger is forced to offer thirty prostrations. From this punishment one can infer that the work was at times stressful.

The monastic scriptorium was also a place of business. In addition to stocking their own library shelves, monasteries supplied books to private, public and other monastic libraries. The Studios Monastery excelled in this practice. It, along with other monasteries, took commissions from the public (9 Wilson).

Books were a rare commodity and the business of book production proved to be lucrative. One example of book as gift follows. The town of Honorati gave a book to Aniciana Juliana in thanks for her hand in building a church there in 512 A.D. It is supposed that Aniciana Juliana herself paid for the gift (41 Cormack). A few things can be noted about this sixth century book gift. One is that it was undoubtedly expensive, as Aniciana Juliana purchased it herself even though it was supposed to be a gift for her. Second, the book was an exalted item, as illustrated by its status as a gift fit for the royal. Third, the culture of gift giving intrinsic to the empire in at least its early years and the exaltation of book as status symbol served to keep scriptoria in business and in prosperity.

An example of work done in a monastery for another location is of Ephraem's transcription of Polybius and Aristotle's *Organon*. This scribe's monastery did not have a

school, so one knows that these school books were copied and destined for another library (9 Wilson).

Monks often left a subscription, or list of works, in their books. According to John Sphodroe's list in the fourteenth century, he transcribed around twenty volumes. One also learns about the occupation of Symeon the monk when he records the completion of and payment for a manuscript he has transcribed. Another inscription sheds light on the Patmos monastery's scriptorium. A volume was presented as a gift to the Patmos monastery with this accolade and dedication, reading "not that [the Patmos Monastery] lacks its own calligrapher and grammarians; far from it, for which other monastery can claim to have more?" (10 Wilson). From this dedication one assumes that the Patmos monastery had a large and distinguished scriptorium.

Colophons are worth mentioning as sources of information about bookmaking in the empire. They often date production, using two systems of dating simultaneously. In the first, the calendar begins on the 25 March, 5,508 years before the creation of the world. In the second, the tax year begins in 312 A.D. and repeats in 15 year cycles. Books are dated under both systems, as it took some time for the competing modes to normalize. Thus, to understand the date in a Byzantine colophon, it is necessary to be aware of and use conversions based on both systems (47 Cormack).

Private calligraphers also practiced the trade of book copying, but they were much fewer in number than their religious counterparts. Theodore of John-and-Phocus is the first known calligrapher. He was a professional, singular in his operation (9 Wilson). Like monks in monasteries, he would have taken commissions from the public.

Before moving on to the subjects of private ownership and personal libraries, it is useful to make a cursory investigation into the materials and workmanship necessary to manuscript production. This gives an idea as to why, as outlined further in this paper, book ownership was a privilege reserved for the few.

Up until the current era of technological innovation, much of what is known about the materials and techniques of manuscript production was surmised from an examination of images depicting the evangelists writing (210 Mokretsova). These images show the prophets with writing utensils, reading tables and volumes. One example is Garrett Manuscript 2 at the Princeton University Library. This manuscript dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was produced in Constantinople. Saint Matthew is depicted within reach of reed pens, a knife to sharpen his pens and two ink wells (4 Neuenschwander).

Contemporary documentation of the process is scarce. The closest thing to a documentation of the process and materials comes from the eighth century *Compositiones ad tingenda*. Translated from Greek to Latin, it includes instructions on how to make parchment and recipes for pigments (202 Mokretsova).

Modern scientific knowledge and techniques have added substantially to our knowledge of the materials and techniques employed by Byzantine artists. The State Research Institute for Restoration in Moscow, for example, has for over the past thirty years conducted research on Byzantine manuscript production and recorded their findings. Advanced micro-chemical, histochemical analysis and electron scanning microscopy have ascertained a certain albumen coating characteristic of Byzantine workmanship (206 Mokretsova). Other research indicates that parchment in the empire was chiefly made of goat and was produced in varying degrees of quality (208

Mokretsova). Their examination of manuscripts in their collection and of those loaned to them for care reveal the use of ruler and compass, fastenings to prevent the turning in of edges and forceps to do the same (205-210 Mokretsova). Clearly manuscript production was a complex endeavor. Manuscript value can thus be easily understood. The skills collectively which were used to produce manuscripts were no doubt livelihoods, or a contribution thereof, to those who practiced production.

Books in the Byzantine Empire, from beginning to end, were rare and expensive. One reason for their expense was the difficulty with which one obtained materials for them. Parchment, the prepared skin of animals, was not readily available. Constantine VII relates that there were parchment preparation facilities in the city of Corinth. The Studious Monastery also produced parchment (1 Wilson). In Constantinople, a 12<sup>th</sup> century schoolmaster complains about the shortage of writing material in the capital city. A century later Maximos Planudes, also living in Constantinople, asks a friend to send him writing materials (2 Wilson). One can infer that parchment shortage was a problem not limited to the poorer provinces.

While not always the preferred medium of bookmaking in Christianity, papyrus use was persistent in the empire. Interestingly, papyrus became the center of a political fight between Justinian II and an Egyptian caliph. In retaliation of a political move, the caliph began marking exported papyrus with Moslem religious inscriptions. The Byzantine market was heavily dependent on Egyptian imports of papyrus (49 Head). Clearly, the caliph viewed this marking as an effective tactic in his struggle with the Byzantine emperor.

As illustrated above, even those with an expendable income had difficulty in obtaining writing materials. The schoolteacher's complaint is not that he cannot afford writing materials, but that he cannot locate them. Likewise, Maximus Planudes emphasizes the shortage and indicates that he has money for parchment purchase when he requests that his friend send him some. Thus, two factors contributed to the expense of books. The first, as outlined above, was the scarcity of writing materials. The second was the expense of book transcription and the expertise held by those practicing it.

The average citizen's salary came nowhere near the range required for book ownership. Civil servants had somewhat of a chance, but only the highest paid ones could possibly afford this luxury reserved for citizens of wealth. The one exception to this rule was in the case of clergymen who could perform the task of transcription for themselves. One way of further illustrating the high cost of book ownership is a comparison between the price of an average book and the average salary of a civil servant.

Civil servants earned from 72 to 3,500 nomismata per year, with the average salary consisting of a few hundred nomismata. In comparison, books cost anywhere in a range from 3 to 30 nomismata. Most were priced in the upper range. Some examples of book cost can be taken from an account of the collection belonging to a scholar named Aretha. His volume of Aristotle is recorded as costing 6 nomismata, and it is unclear whether this cost included both the price for materials and the fee for transcription. His volume of Clement is more clearly marked, indicating that he paid 20 nomismata for the transcription and 6 nomismata for the parchment (3 Wilson). From this account one learns that books were out of the reach of the average worker and that monasteries were able to derive substantial income from their work in manuscript transcription and

production. The combined factors of cost and material availability made private library ownership rare but not non-existent. The Byzantine Empire was nonetheless home to a number of private libraries.

An early account of a private Byzantine library comes from Ananius of Shirik. In 620 A.D., Shirik came to the Constantinople to study under the teacher Tychius. He offers the following account of his impressions; recording “And I lived with him for eight years and read and learned many writings.....for he had an enormous library, secret books and open, ecclesiastical and profane, scientific and historical, medical and chronological” (314 Thompson). From this account one sees that Tychius’ library held diverse works and one can imagine that other private libraries did as well. One can also infer from his account that similar works were also available in state supported libraries. A brief mention of Cosmas the student illuminates the contents of his private library at Alexandria. John Moschus’ *Pratum Spirituale* outlines that this student “possessed the finest private library in Alexandria and freely lent his books to all readers” (315 Thompson). From these references, one learns that despite the cost and rarity of books, substantial private libraries existed within the empire.

Other scholars such as Photius and Arethas were also important library owners. Photius, a ninth century scholar and important figure in the court, had a salon and reading room in his home which attracted scholars from all over the empire. Photius’ student, Arethas, is said to have possessed the next largest library to that of Photius. Parts of his library exist today. Arethas’ copy of Euclid is now located in the Bodlean (319 Thompson).

Private libraries experienced growth along with the empire. The dark ages of Byzantine history were probably not helpful to their growth, while the reigns of illustrious emperors likely were. The reign of Justinian I appears to have been a fruitful time for private library emergence and growth. A sixth century mosaic of Justinian I in Ravenna, Italy features the emperor in courtly costume and with imperial accoutrements, including a bejeweled book carried by an attendant (19 Gonosova and Kondoleon). Does this depiction reflect the emperor's taste for literary life? It is not hard to imagine, or that others in the empire would choose to emulate such taste in the pursuit of a higher social status. One private library during Justinian I's reign numbered 120,000 volumes (47 Irwin). This library was enormous; its size can be compared to the Imperial Library's collection at the death of Constantine I much earlier in the empire. It must be noted that this library's size is exceptional. Most private libraries were small. A collection of twenty volumes would have been considered a library. Another mentionable private library is that of Constantine VII in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

The literary life that the Byzantine Empire fostered was variously less or more geographically far reaching. For example, provincial Byzantine monasteries of the period between 550-800 reached over most of western Europe (131 Nees), while the twelfth century found manuscript production centers at Paphos, Palestine, Rhodes, Cyprus, Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Patmos (45-46 Carr). The filtration of books to the west did occur on occasion before the fall of the empire. During this period as the empire lost progressively more western ground, books traveled as far north from Constantinople as France, whose King Charlemagne requested works for his palace at Aachen. This request gives an indication of the empire's illustrious reputation in the areas of bookmaking. And a

complete library was transferred to Armenia at the request of a princess there (92 Johnson). These occurrences were not the norm, however, and for the most part, books remained in the empire until invasions took the collections by force.

The first blow to Constantinople was administered by the Fourth Crusade in 1204. This invasion served in damaging the city and despoiling it of much of its treasure. Later, when the Turks arrived in 1453, the city surrendered completely. It is interesting to note that the Christian invasion proved to be the more destructive one to the city's books and libraries. The Turk's subsequent attack was less destructive of them because by that time the books were deemed valuable and sold to the Italians. The Italians then began the book market which filtered the empire's works to the western world (60 Marshall). Byzantine monasteries, "strongholds of Greek learning throughout the Middle Ages," later became mines for book collectors of the Renaissance (38-39, Dahl).

In conclusion, the Byzantine Empire served as a literary and cultural bridge from the classical times until the present day. From its inception, it placed a high value on books and learning. Its libraries provided its people with a means of education, livelihood, and artistic inspiration. Its efforts to preserve and cultivate literary culture have distinguished it as a great empire and made the works of antiquity available today. Its libraries, both public and private, made this invaluable feat possible.



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