

Preface

In the fifth and final volume of the *History of the Library in Western Civilization. From Petrarch to Michelangelo*, we have outlined the evolution and nature of libraries (private and others), as influenced by the pioneers of the humanistic ideal who, initially in Italy and from the mid-14th century, attempted to reconnect their present with Graeco-Roman tradition. This is the era of Petrarch and his quest for inspiration in the works of the great Roman authors, above all Cicero. Discovering lost manuscripts in monastic libraries during ‘forays’ from his base at Avignon, Petrarch succeeded in amassing an important book collection and zealously turned to text emendation, sometimes even compiling dispersed fragments, like in the case of Livy. He moulded the character of humanistic libraries: their aim was to celebrate, as much as possible, Graeco-Roman tradition, as a minimal homage to the words and deeds of Antiquity’s great poets and intellectuals. Between the 14th and the 16th centuries, this idea was embraced by almost all of the Italian humanists, and subsequently by the members of humanist communities in Continental Europe and the British Isles.

Men of letters, poets and prose-writers joined a common effort to revive the ancient world, with the aim of promoting their firm belief in the power of these texts to act as models for fulfilment of human existence’s full potential, revealing the path towards securing the timelessness of their creations. The heroes of the past returned to the fore through the works of Homer, Virgil and others, while the humanists seek to define their own identity by delving into their personal collections, in dispersed ancient manuscripts, kept in monastic libraries, and in the copies they themselves prepared. Thus, their library became a treasure-trove for showcasing the orations of Cicero, the works of Seneca and Horace, but also Lucretius,

Livy and Terence, in the unshakable belief that they are responding to a purely metaphysical calling. Petrarch was not the only one who gradually transformed his circle into a closed, informal school. Around him gathered luminaries of complementary specializations such as Boccaccio, Leonzio Pilato, and Barlaam: Petrarch examined Barlaam's library, Pilato taught Boccaccio Greek.

Petrarch exclaimed "your Homer is mute!" when Nikolaos Sigeros offered him a manuscript of the *Iliad*; he then set out to learn Greek. Perhaps Petrarch's utterance influenced Coluccio Salutati, who in 1397 invited Manuel Chrysoloras from Constantinople to officially become a teacher of Greek in the Florentine Studium. Chrysoloras accepted the invitation, and through his teaching he drastically widened the intellectual horizon of Italy, reviving a language for centuries completely forgotten in Western Europe. Many of the most eminent Italian scholars became his students, such as Guarino Veronese, Leonardo Bruni, Pier Candido Decembrio, Jacopo Angelo da Scarperia, to name but a few. This is the time Chrysoloras produced his *Erotemata*, a tool for learning Greek at the elementary level. For more than two centuries, Western Europeans, Italian and Northern Europe humanists alike, studied Greek with a copy of the *Erotemata* in hand, like Erasmus, for instance.

To support Chrysoloras's work as a teacher, Palla Strozzi dispatched agents in the East to search for and acquire Greek manuscripts, while Chrysoloras himself 'endowed' the West with classical works unknown till then, such as Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, Ptolemy's *Cosmographia* a.o. Chrysoloras thus became an eastern apostle of letters, and the library constructed by Strozzi, which features separate sections for Greek and Latin works, revived the Roman tradition of the 'double library', which had died out after the 4th century AD. Chrysoloras's students espoused his translation philosophy, captured in the emblematic phrase *transfere ad sententiam* (= translate according to meaning); in this spirit, he embarked upon a quest to provide Latin renditions of Greek works departing from the literal, pedantic approach of medieval scholastics. Outstanding among his students were Pier Candido Decembrio, who translated Plato; and da Scarperia, who edited the translation of

Ptolemy's *Cosmography*, an edition that would become the standard for centuries to come.

By the 1530s, new libraries of a purely humanistic and public orientation were being formed in monastic complexes, like San Giorgio Maggiore at Venice and St Mark's at Florence. The landscape of Italian humanist bibliophiles is populated by enlightened rulers and abbots, as well as private patrons and collectors, all keen to celebrate the cultural heritage of Antiquity. These libraries were designed to serve purposes quite diverse from those of medieval times: these libraries were not cloistered, but spaces open to the public; some in fact were adorned by renowned Renaissance artists, such as Brunelleschi and mainly Michelozzo, who established a new typology for designing libraries. Novello Malatesta's decision to commission Mateo Nuti in 1447 to design a library for his collection at Cesena left a definitive mark on Renaissance library architecture: not only was it masterly in conception, both in terms of its shell and its furnishings, but it still survives intact. The sense of a space impervious to the passing of time is consummated by the sight of manuscripts still chained to the reading desks, like a 12th century codex containing Demosthenes's orations, acquired from Constantinople.

The rapprochement between the Byzantine East and Western Europe, both on the level of letters and studies, and in the context of efforts to reconcile the two churches, allowed many of the most eminent Byzantine scholars to seek refuge in Italy shortly before the fall of Constantinople. With them they brought a significant number of codices. In their new environment, these men entered and formed academic circles, teaching Greek and interpreting ancient texts; others became members of royal and princely courts – overall, they were quickly incorporated into the intellectual milieu of the era. They started producing Latin translations of classical Greek and Byzantine authors, thus helping bridge the chasm between Greek and Latin literature. Georgios Trapezountios translated Plato's *Laws* as a member of Pope Nicholas V's Curia; Theodoros Gazis composed a grammar that would become a key textbook for teaching Greek, gave lectures at Ferrara and participated in Panormita's circle at Naples. Ioannes Argyropoulos lectured on Aristotle at Flo-

rence, inaugurating a new chapter in Aristotelian studies in the West. Members of his circle of enthusiastic students, like Donato Acciaiuoli, will transform this closed school into an Academy, the *Chorus Academiae Fiorentinae*. By the mid-15th century, Florence had become the cradle of humanist philosophy, and the city of Arno had evolved into a place of pilgrimage for all those working under the humanist ideal, while soon after its establishment by Marsilio Ficino the Platonic Academy functioned as a beacon of Platonic philosophy. All of Plato's works were translated, members of this Neoplatonist school formed important private libraries; in this context, Pico della Mirandola composed his humanist manifesto, the *Oratio*, where he argued that the meanings and principles immanent in classical works can contribute to the formulation of a personal 'existential' philosophy.

One Byzantine scholar realized Petrarch's vision, i.e. to have his library 'adopted' after death by an entity that will ensure its future survival and allow it to become *res communis*. This was Cardinal Bessarion. Bessarion was an upholder of Plato, and in his villa at Rome he formed an Academy which was frequented by some of the most prominent Italian and north European scholars, like Regiomontanus. His agents bought manuscripts from Western and Eastern Europe, while Bessarion assiduously sought out all texts that formed links in the chain of Graeco-Roman cultural continuity. Copyists and calligraphers worked under him, such as Ioannes Rossos, enriching his library with contemporary copies that laid side-by-side of historical manuscripts, like the Venetus A, the oldest surviving copy of Homer's epics. Like another Plethon, he promoted Platonic studies in Italy; his works elicited the enthusiasm of the then Rector of Sorbonne, Guillaume Fichet, who embraced Platonism and became the first scholar to spread this philosophy in Northern Europe, as early as 1470. Bessarion's wish that his book collection should become a guiding light of Hellenism in the West led him to donate it to the Republic of Venice, thereby giving birth to the *Biblioteca Marciana*.

By the mid-15th century, the library of the Holy See had become the single most important book collection in Europe. Pope Nicholas V

was the first to impart a more humanistic orientation to it, by searching manuscripts containing works of ancient literature and patronizing a new approach to translation, exemplified by figures such as Manetti, Decembrio, Valla, Tortelli, as well as Trapezountios, Gazis, Kallistos a.o. For the first time Herodotus, Thucydides, Diodorus Siculus, Xenophon and the Fathers of the Eastern Church became accessible to those not versed in Greek or unable to procure texts in the original. During the papacy of Sixtus IV (1471-1484) the library was revitalized when Platina was put in charge; he reaffirmed its role as a valuable repository of Graeco-Roman and Christian tradition. It is telling that its original 770 Greek and 1,575 Latin manuscripts were soon multiplied. Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590) drastically altered the site of the library, entrusting the architect Fontana with an ambitious renovation project; the result is a veritable jewel of Renaissance art with murals alluding to the unity of classical and Christian literature.

Gutenberg's efforts, from the 1450s on, to establish the art of printing with metal movable types were crowned with success, and with the 42-line Bible as an emblem German printers soon flooded the cities around Mainz and travelled to Italy and elsewhere, initiating craftsmen and men of letters into the art of typography. The availability of books in multiple copies drastically altered the purchasability of works, and allowed previously inaccessible and unique titles, kept by 'book-graves', to rise to prominence. Furthermore, university book collections were immensely enriched, thus forming a common educational library. By the 1470s, Latin grammars were being printed at Rome by Sweynheim and Pannartz in hundreds of copies; Academies and literary circles spring up around printing houses. The art of printing is compatible with miniature art, and famous miniaturists, like Attavante degli Attavanti, in their school at Florence will continue to embellish pages of incunabula for the Medici, Corvinus, the Vatican Library and many more.

The first humanist library outside Italy, a collection rich enough to allow its owner to boast that it is the richest in the West, after the Vaticana of course, was amassed in the court of King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary. With the aid of Vitéz and Pannonius, rare codices were collected from the Italian market and purchased from cele-

brated calligraphy and micrography workshops, in translations by eminent Renaissance scholars. The content of Corvinus's library was purely encyclopaedic and, apart from philosophy, literature and almost the entire Graeco-Roman canon, it contained various other texts, like scientific treatises in the exact sciences, as well as astrology and astronomy. Plato was not absent from the Budapest court, and Corvinus went as far as to invite Ficino to establish a new Platonic Academy in Buda.

Since Cosimo's time, the Medici were seeking to put together a family library, mainly by incorporating Niccoli's remarkable collection of codices, which contained old and largely obscure manuscripts, like Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis*. Following Cosimo's initiative, the public library at St Mark's abbey at Florence was established, containing a wealth of books; yet it was Lorenzo the Magnificent who imparted to it splendour worthy of the Medici name, whose members were prominent patrons of letters and the arts. Lorenzo commissioned Ianos Laskaris and Angelo Poliziano, his advisors, to search in Italy and the East for works unknown in the West, and compile lists of books his library should contain. Returning after a long tour, Laskaris enriched the library with over 200 Greek codices he collected from places such as Crete, Mt Athos and Constantinople. The Medici library was open to scholars, and members of the humanist community often 'sojourned' there. Politian, for instance, borrowed rare codices from it and dedicated himself to emendating passages relying on his philological instinct.

A decisive step towards the publication of Graeco-Roman literature in its entirety was started by Aldus in 1495, and his project was continued by his successors and associates. The practice of printing in small format and in many copies, starting in 1502 with a book of Sophocles's tragedies that was printed in 2,000 copies, reveals the great interest of the literati and students for Greek works. These books also contributed to the formation of private and other libraries, influencing the character of the humanistic library, where works of ancient literature were treated as an indispensable learning tool and repositories of knowledge for practitioners of the arts and scholars alike. Aldus's printing presses produced hundreds of thou-

sands of copies, paving the way for other Italian and northern European publishing houses that followed, like the Judas, the Estiennes a.o. His printing press had become nothing short of an Academy and famous scholars ‘studied’ at Aldus’s printing house, among them Grocyn, Linacre, Erasmus, Reuchlin, while many more perfected their knowledge of Greek language and literature under Mousouros, Laskaris and Doukas.

Gifted individuals, such as Cato, Mancini, Emili, Andrelini, travelled from Italy northwards, heading for Paris, intent on spreading the message of humanism in the Parisian world of letters. Paris soon became a centre of humanism in Northern Europe, and new books containing French translations of classical works, like Thucydides and Xenophon, were gradually published by Claude de Seyssel. Fichet introduced Platonic studies and Lefèvre d’Étaples evolved into an apostle of Neoplatonism and an advocate of Ficino’s philosophy. The teaching of Greek had begun in 1458, yet it was only in the era of Ianos Laskaris and Aleandro that the level of instruction could be considered on a par with that offered in the illustrious Italian centres. This intellectual climate nurtured and motivated people like Budé, who published the *Commentarii Linguae Graecae*; the great printer Bade, who took his lead from Aldus in the world of publishing, and of the prodigious Robert Estienne, who as *Typographus regius* imparted unique prestige to his first editions. These books, and the output of the numerous printing press that gradually sprang up in France, invigorated and deeply influenced French literature, which was soon enriched by the poetic compositions of Ronsard and Du Bellay, as well as by French translations of works of classical literature by de Macault, like Cicero’s *Philippics*.

The tone of the humanist renaissance in France was also set by certain members of the royal family: Charles VIII, returning from his victorious campaigns in Italy, brought with him as spoils invaluable books from the libraries of the Medici, the kings of Aragon a.e. Francis I was not content with the manuscripts he inherited from Luis XII, and dispatched learned agents to acquire more manuscripts, mainly Greek, for the royal library. The library was relocated from Blois to Fontainebleau; a small universe of people of the

book trade, calligraphers, miniaturists, book-binders, philologists authors and other prototypographers, will enrich his collection.

An unwritten law applies between the members of the humanist community: their collections form a *common library*. Erasmus, that apostle of Christian humanism, through his incessant travels to southern and northern Europe established personal rapports that lead to the first notion of this common library: books were exchanged, purchased and borrowed or lent, and copies of recently published works travelled to and fro, in an effort to arrive at editions containing dependable texts. Once more, it was Erasmus that paved the way for a new chapter in Christian literature, through the publication of his Greek New Testament. Supporters of the Greek text's authenticity, detractors of the Vulgate, as well as upholders of Jerome's translation produced a rich, imposing and independently significant body of works. This the context of the emergence of the Reformation; the publication of Luther's Bible was welcomed by many clergymen and inspired bishops: these persons believed that congregations everywhere should have access to and study the Scriptures through texts available in the national languages, and therefore intelligible by all. Thus we have the birth of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible, the Bibles of Coverdale and Matthew and many more, leading to an exponential multiplication of interpretive Bible translations, all of them printed and circulated in tens of thousands of copies.

Described as another Athens of the Classical era by Henry Estienne, the Frankfurt Book Fair attracted new publications, printers, calligraphers and font designers, collectors, and representatives of universities, who promoted their products. Bulky bibliographical lists from the fair, together with catalogues of well-known printing houses revealed the orientation of European book production on a yearly basis, and served as encyclopaedic and philological tools. Library owners proliferated, for no self-respecting scholar, be it a historian, philosopher, poet, jurist, mathematician, geographer, physician, professor or humble teacher, and in general no cultured person, and certainly no cleric or church official could operate outside this 'common circle' of bibliophiles. Characteristic cases, among many,

were those of Pontano and Orsini in Italy, Reuchlin in Germany, Chamelet in France, Ponce in Italy, Dee and Perne in England.

By the early 16th century, traditional libraries in virtually every European country were supplemented with new sections dedicated to various fields of knowledge, like poetry, theatre, as well as to sciences such as jurisprudence, geography, mathematics, geometry, medicine. By now classical literature, both Greek and Latin, had become available in printed form its entirety, and many of these works had been translated in national languages, and this made them available to an immensely larger readership. On these literary foundations a new literature was built; sometimes by paraphrasing treatises and medieval epics, other times drawing models from the works and days of Graeco-Roman heroes. New books and frequent reprints helped form a new setting in the production and marketing of books, with important consequences for local societies and Europe as a whole. Tasso, Ariosto; the members of the *Pléiade* in France, like Ronsard and Dolet, the anonymous author of *Faust*; Camões; Cervantes; Montaigne and Shakespeare; all these were protagonists and contributed to the creation of a new literary identity without borders; their works are still being translated and commented on today.

In terms of their architecture, libraries were designed and adorned by eminent Renaissance architects and sculptors, like Brunelleschi and Michelozzo, who restored libraries to their Graeco-Roman splendour. These libraries, public in their majority, attached to monastic complexes in big cities, like Venice, Rome and Florence, were modelled after important churches, like St Lawrence's at Florence. Colonnades, arches and groined vaults feature prominently in the typology of the three-aisle library, which is largely the norm for Italian libraries during the 15th and 16th centuries. We should also note the masterly designs of Michelangelo that were used to erect Medici library; and those of Sansovino for the library of the Holy See in Vatican.

Konstantinos Sp. Staikos