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Securing and Preserving Written Documents in Byzantium

Abstract: The administrative organisation (civil, military, ecclesiastical) of the Byzantine Empire belonged to the most sophisticated in the medieval world. The power of the written word was omnipresent. However, almost no material evidence concerning archives can be found, but written sources provide some information on storage of data. The reconstruction of libraries is a more promising endeavour, since manuscripts sometimes disclose their original storing place. Lists of books allow the reconstruction of libraries echoing also the importance of their social capital. Collections of manuscripts in monasteries give an idea of their medieval predecessors.

1 Introduction

‘Libraries are the self-conscious accumulation of written texts, both literary and documentary, which preserve information for other readers and other writers’. This quotation can be found in a volume of collected essays published in 2002, explicitly devoted to literacy and manuscript transmission in Byzantium.¹ According to the author of the essay quoted, the safekeeping of information seems to have been more important than the transmission of (mainly ancient) knowledge in Byzantium. This idea forms the main argument here and may differ slightly from the views of classical philologists and ancient historians who tend to emphasise aspects of preservation and survival of classical Greek literature. It also contradicts notions of a static Byzantine culture—a culture said to lack innovation and transformation. The investigation of Byzantine libraries and archives was mostly related to questions concerning the transmission and preservation of ancient texts.² Much of the research conducted in recent decades has focused on detecting traces of lost authors or unearthing unknown ancient texts such as the famous Archimedes palimpsest, a tenth-century manuscript that was written over by monks in the thirteenth century. It was discovered in 1906, but deciphered in the last decade.³

1 Waring 2002, 167.

2 For example, Harlfinger 1980.

3 Netz/Noel/Tchernetska/Wilson 2011.

The reconstruction of libraries and the original storage places of Byzantine manuscripts belongs to the realm of palaeographical and codicological research, but apart from the localisation of a book,⁴ its production and its attachment to a scriptorium, almost nothing else can be said about its storage, presentation and usage; the physical appearance of a library or an archive, how it was organised and what size it was are still practically unknown.

Byzantine libraries have already been discussed from multiple perspectives in other publications.⁵ Carl Wendel devoted a series of articles to the history of book collections.⁶ In his thesis, Otto Volk accumulated information on monastic libraries in the Middle Byzantine period,⁷ while Nigel Wilson focused on ancient authors, their afterlives in Byzantium and the value of books. Wilson understands the term ‘library’ to mean a collection of books gathered by learned men who used them in their classes and valued them as sources of rhetorical refinement; florilegia, i.e. selections of excerpts by different authors, played an important role here—appropriate sections of various kinds of literature were easily at hand. The culture of encyclopaedism and florilegia is a growing field of interest in Byzantine studies.⁸ On the one hand, a florilegium reflects the process of concentration on specific topics, while on the other hand, it stands for a library as well.⁹

Book-hunting and the search for classical Greek texts intensified in the last few centuries of Byzantium. Western scholars became interested in both classical Greek texts and works dealing with Byzantium enemies. The historical works of Laonikos Chalkokondyles (a famous Byzantine Greek historian in the second half of the fifteenth century) described the Ottoman Turks and were held in particularly high regard; these were printed and translated into Latin relatively early. Many Byzantine/Greek books found their way into Western libraries and became precious imperial artefacts.¹⁰

4 A new form of ‘book’ emerged in Late Antiquity and codices became the main information carriers instead of scrolls. However, imperial and patriarchal charters, legal documents and liturgical texts continued to be made in a scroll format (until the end of the Byzantine Empire). This may have caused problems regarding storage, an issue that libraries and archivists still face today; see Hunger 1989, 25–26 (including references to the process of transformation).

5 Wilson 1968 (see also Wilson 2008); Hunger 1989; see also Waring 1998. A good starting point for information on Byzantine libraries is Harlfinger 1980 (which includes a detailed index).

6 Wendel 1954 and 1974.

7 Volk 1955.

8 Van Deun/Macé 2011.

9 See the classic study by Treadgold 1980 on the library of Photius; translation in Wilson 2002.

10 See the study by Wilson 1992.

The function of written documents in Byzantine society¹¹ and the status of book collections and their owners have seldom been the objects of systematic reflection, however, and a cultural history dealing with Byzantine archives and libraries is still lacking. It should definitely include official documents and tax registers—besides their design, layout and contents.

2 Sources

The investigation of libraries and archives in Byzantium is a rather frustrating undertaking compared to studies focused on Antiquity since there are almost no archaeological or physical traces of them from the Greek Middle Ages.¹² The site of the Hellenistic library at Pergamon, for instance, is still visible and the remains of the building allow a reconstruction of its sophisticated design and structure. Libraries also belonged to the urban topography of the Roman world: traces of them have been found in the capital of the Empire and in many provincial towns. In one telling example, a building for books was commissioned by Senator Tiberius Julius Celsus Polemaeanus in Ephesos. The foundations of the library were laid in 117 CE and the building took three years to complete. The library was built to store 12,000 scrolls, but also served as a monumental tomb for Celsus, who was entombed in a sarcophagus beneath the building. Since it was generally unusual to be buried within a library or within city walls, the monument underlines the extent to which the Ephesians appreciated and honoured their benefactor. The library was open to the public and reflects the importance of literacy, literature and books even in the provinces. Nothing remained of the library's interior after it was destroyed by fire in 262 CE. The surviving parts were transformed around 400 CE into a nymphaeum—a monument or fountain dedicated to the nymphs. The façade was destroyed in the Byzantine period, but reconstructed by Austrian archaeologists in the 1970s.¹³

The situation took a turn for the worse in later centuries. Plans for storing the imperial book collections and patriarchal archives have not been found anywhere, even in the capital of the East Roman Empire. Byzantine monastic libraries partly save the day, since they reflect the medieval habit of storing and collecting books (at the monasteries of Mount Athos or St John on the island of Patmos, for example). Hidden manuscripts can also be detected—at the Monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai, for instance.¹⁴

11 Hunger 1984, a study on the regulation of daily life by the Byzantine administration.

12 See the overview on ancient libraries by Hoepfner 2002.

13 Hoepfner 2002, 123–126; Wiplinger/Wlach 1996, 31–36, 124–127.

14 *The New Finds of Sinai* 1999.

3 Archives

Ever since classical Greek historiography began, the term *archeion* (ἀρχεῖον) has designated a wide range of things: (a) a town hall, residence, or office of chief magistrates, (b) public records, archives, (c) a college or board of magistrates, magistracy, and (d) a headquarters in a military camp.¹⁵ However, in many instances, ‘library’ and ‘archive’ cannot be clearly differentiated.

Although the Byzantine administrative system was one of the most elaborate of the Middle Ages, continuing in the same vein as the Roman tradition, tax lists, land registries, military lists or maps are almost non-existent. A unique example of a copied cadastre is preserved in the manuscript Vaticanus graecus 215 (representing eleventh- and twelfth-century tax lists from the Greek town of Thebes).¹⁶ Fragments of account books from the late Byzantine period have been preserved.¹⁷ The situation is all the more tragic, given that Constantine I decided to transform Constantinople into his primary residence within the Empire. It goes without saying that Constantinople became the administrative centre as well. It needed archives that kept track of any information dealing with the emperor’s subjects. But where were they housed? Several years ago, Christopher Kelly discussed a unique example of a possible imperial archive in a study devoted to Late Roman bureaucracy.¹⁸ He focused on structures under the Hippodrome of Constantinople that were attached to the imperial palace: the British expedition of 1927 recorded that five rooms roughly rectangular in shape (approx. 3.5 to 8 m) were found in the substructures of the Hippodrome’s south-eastern side. They opened out onto a corridor lit by high arched windows. A total of 25 to 30 such rooms could have been situated between the imperial box in the hippodrome and the so-called Sling (*sphendone*, σφενδόνη). These rooms offered an impressive amount of storage space and provided a steady temperature and optimum fire protection, since they were embedded into the foundations of the enormous building complex. Kelly’s line of argument seems convincing as the rooms were integrated into the system of the imperial palace. This archaeological record can be combined with a passage from John the Lydian, who lived in the sixth century and wrote an instructive work on the administration of the Empire. John reports:

¹⁵ Liddell/Scott/Jones 1996, s.v. ἀρχεῖον.

¹⁶ Svoronos 1959.

¹⁷ Edited and commented by Schreiner 1991.

¹⁸ Kelly 1994.

Also closely attached to the *scrinium* of the *commenta* was the so-called *instrumentarius*, namely, ‘document-guardian of the archives of the court of justice,’ for signing and filling in the decision-records. And an area has been set aside for him from olden times in the Hippodrome to the South below the Emperor’s balcony down to the so-called ‘Sling’; and all the matters that have been transacted since the reign of Valens in the greatest courts of justice at that time are preserved there and are available to those who ask for them in such a way as if they had been transacted yesterday by chance.¹⁹

Since hardly any physical evidence of archives can be traced, it is necessary to consider other strategies for reconstructing or defining space for storing documents. The office of *chartophylax* (χαρτοφύλαξ) (*chartophylakeion*, χαρτοφυλακείον) was an influential post in the patriarchal administration and illustrates the importance of preserving documents, including books, that had to be available for providing documentary evidence and substantiation.²⁰ The position is first mentioned in the acts of the Synod of Constantinople in 530. The *chartophylax* was responsible for managing the patriarchal archive, but there was no sharp distinction made between storing charters and storing books. According to Anastasius, a learned ecclesiastic of the ninth century, the *chartophylax* was the guardian of records and performed the same duties within the Church of Constantinople as the *bibliothecarius* in Rome. The *chartophylax* rose to become one of the most powerful officials in the patriarchal administration. He was responsible both for correspondence and for introducing clerics to the patriarch. He wrote down the decisions of the patriarch, who then signed and sealed them. The relationship between the *chartophylax* and the patriarch has been compared to that of Aaron and Moses, emphasising the high esteem in which the position was held.²¹ The *chartophylax* took precedence over the bishops in elective assemblies, general meetings outside the patriarchal palace and in public ceremonies. From the twelfth to the fifteenth century, the *chartophylax* continued to be the right hand of the patriarch.

¹⁹ John the Lydian, *De magistratibus populi Romani libri tres* 3, 19 (Wünsch 1903): Καὶ συνήπτο σχεδὸν τῷ σκρινίῳ τῶν κομμένων ὁ καλούμενος ἰστρουμεντάριος, ἀντὶ τοῦ χαρτοφύλαξ τῶν ἀρχείων τοῦ δικαστηρίου, εἰς τὸ ὑπογράφειν καὶ πληροῦν τὰς ψήφους· καὶ χῶρος μὲν αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ ἵπποδρομίῳ ὑπὸ τῷ τῆς βασιλείας βήματι ἐπὶ τὸν νότον ἄχρι τῆς καλουμένης Σφενδόνας ἐξ ἀρχαίων παρακεχώρηται, πάντα δὲ τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας Οὐάλεντος ἐν τοῖς τότε μεγίστοις δικαστηρίοις πεπραγμένα αὐτόθι σῶζεται καὶ τοῖς ἐπιζητοῦσιν οὕτως ἐστὶν ἔτοιμα, ὡς εἰ χθὲς τυχὸν πεπραγμένα. Translation: Bandy 1983, 161–163.

²⁰ Leontaritou 1996, 628–660.

²¹ The *chartophylax* Nikephoros; see Krausmüller 2014, 120.

There is a document preserved in the collection of Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos (901–907 and 912–925), who started his career in the civil service as a *mystikos* (μυστικός),²² which sheds light on the function of the patriarchal archive and its sophisticated organisation. The heading of the text reads as follows: ‘The patriarch Nicholas the Ancient: that the patriarchal letters should be made available free on request, according to the text preserved in the archives’.²³ After some remarks about the old custom of using archives, the document focuses on the office of *chartophylax*:

Its keeper (of the *chartophylakeion*), who bears the title of *ostiarus*, used to demand fees from those who requested patriarchal letters, in payment for the copy, a thing he should not have done; the practice was utterly outrageous and preposterous, one that besides rousing God’s wrath was also an insult to this venerable place and compromised the very dignity of the priesthood. In order to preclude any pretext on the part of the *ostiarus*, however, we have fixed an annual salary for him and have consigned this evil practice to utter oblivion and everlasting banishment. Decreeing in the name of the Holy Spirit that henceforth it shall in no way be tolerated, we enjoin upon those who shall successively hold the office of *chartophylax* and upon the scribes at their disposal to maintain the present regulation and to see to it at all times that no indifference or negligence (an eventuality which it is sinful even to envisage, let alone to bring about) shall lead to the smallest infringement.²⁴

This passage reflects the need to keep information available and accessible—reading and copying documents seem to have been normal procedures.

There were other forms of documentation besides the patriarchal and imperial archives. It seems that civil servants regularly officiated at their homes in Late Antiquity, coinciding with the decline of public buildings.²⁵ Houses and palaces served as administrative buildings in Byzantine times as well. Michael Hagiotheodorites, who lived in twelfth-century Constantinople and held the office of

²² Magdalino 1984; the *mystikos* is a confidant of the emperor.

²³ Westerink 1981, no. 201: Νικολάου πατριάρχου τοῦ παλαιοῦ, περὶ τοῦ τὰς πατριαρχικὰς ἐπιστολὰς ἀμισθὶ δίδοσθαι τοῖς αἰτοῦσιν, ὡς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ χαρτοφυλακείῳ.

²⁴ Westerink 1981, no. 201, lines 11–24: Καὶ γὰρ ὁ τῶν τῆδε τὴν φυλακὴν ἐμπιστευμένος, ὃν ὀστιάριον ἢ Ῥωμαίων γλῶσσα καλεῖ, τοὺς πατριαρχικὰς αἰτουμένους ἐπιστολὰς μισθόν, ὡς οὐκ ὤφειλεν, ἀπῆρτε τῆς παραλήψεως· καὶ ἦν τὸ πρᾶγμα λίαν ἐφύβριστόν τε καὶ καταγέλαστον, οὐ μόνον θεὸν παροργίζον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν σεμνὸν τόπον ἐξαιτιοῦν καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς ἱερωσύνης ἐκφαυλίζον αἰδέσιμον. Ἄλλ’ ἡμεῖς γε τὴν τοῦ ὀστιαρίου σκῆψιν ἐκφυλλοφοροῦντες, τούτῳ μὲν ῥόγαν ἐτήσιον δίδοσθαι ἐτάξαμεν, τὴν πονηρὰν δὲ συνήθειαν λήθη βαθεῖα καὶ αἰδίῳ ὑπερορίᾳ παρεπεμψάμεθα. Ἦν μηδαμῶς χώραν ἔτι ἔχειν ἐν ἀγίῳ διοριζόμενοι πνεύματι, ἐντελλόμεθα τοῖς τε κατὰ καιροῦς χαρτοφύλαξι καὶ τοῖς ἀμφ’ αὐτοῦς νοταρίοις ἄθραυστον τὸν παρόντα τύπον διατηρεῖν καὶ τούτου ἐπιμελεῖσθαι ἀεὶ, ὡς μὴ ῥαστώνῃ τινὶ καὶ ὀλιγωρίᾳ (ὃ δὲ καὶ ὑπολαμβάνειν, μῆτι γε πράττειν, ἐφάμαρτον) κἂν τὸ βραχύτατον παρατρέπεσθαι.

²⁵ Saradi 1993, 22–23.

logothetes tou dromou (λογοθέτης τοῦ δρόμου, minister of information and internal affairs), owned a palace that was besieged by petitioners. It transpires that the high official also stored at least some of his files at home.²⁶ During the riots prior to the usurpation of Andronikos (I) Komnenos in 1183, many palaces and rich people's homes were attacked and destroyed.²⁷ Even the *oikos* belonging to Theodoros Pantechnes, Eparch of Constantinople (the governor of the city), was plundered by the mob. Theodoros was able to escape, but the contents of his palace were ravaged. As Nicetas Choniates, the principal historian of the last decades of the twelfth century, reports:²⁸

They did not confine these activities only to the vicinity of the Milion but also gathered at the turning post of the magnificent Hippodrome while they faced the palace. When this was repeated over many days, the populace was incited to open rebellion. In a rage, many willfully pulled down the most splendid dwellings and plundered their furnishings while the *protosebastos* (πρωτοσεβαστός) and the empress looked on with remarkable sang-froid. Among these was the beautiful residence of Theodore Pantechnes, the eparch of the City, who presided over the probate court, distinguished himself on the judge's bench, and saved his own life by taking flight. The mob carried off everything within, even the public law codes containing those measures which pertained to the common good of all or to the majority of citizens; these were powerless before the craving for private gain and could not wet the winebibber's pharynx.²⁹

This habit did not change until the end of the Byzantine Empire, as is echoed in the satire of Mazaris. It was written in the fifteenth century, but reflects practices

²⁶ See the oration of Constantine Manasses addressed to Hagiotheodorites, Horna 1906, 182, 313–315: ἔγωγέ τοι πολλάκις ἐν δόμοις παρατυχῶν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς καὶ τὴν τοῦ πλήθους θεασάμενος σύρροισιν, ἰλιγγίασα καὶ ἐκινδύνευον καταβροντηθῆναι τὰς ἀκοάς. ἄρτι μὲν γὰρ ἀκτίνες ἡλίου προσεγέλων τῇ γῆ καὶ πύλαι ἀνεπετάννυντο, καὶ σμήνος δυσάριθμον ἐπεβόμβει τοῖς δόμοις, ἡύτ' ἔθνεα εἴσι μελισσῶν ἀδινῶν.

²⁷ *Nicetae Choniatae historia* 235, 12–14 (van Dieten 1975).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14–17 (van Dieten 1975).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 17–20 (van Dieten 1975): οὐκ ἐς αὐτὸ δὲ μόνον ἔδρων ταῦτα τὸ Μίλιον, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατ' αὐτὴν τὴν τῆς λαμπρᾶς ἵπποδρομίας σφενδόνην παραγενόμενοι καὶ ἀφορώντες εἰς τὰ ἀνάκτορα. καὶ τοῦτο ἐφ' ἡμέρας συχνὰς γινόμενον ἐξεκύμαινε τὸν δῆμον καὶ εἰς στάσιν ἀνέφλεγε. καὶ εἰς αὐθάδειαν οἱ πολλοὶ τραχυνόμενοι οἴκους λαμπροτάτους κατέσπασαν καὶ τὰ ἐντὸς τούτων διήρπασαν οἷς διαφερόντως ἔβλεπον ἡμέρον ὃ τε πρωτοσεβαστός καὶ ἡ δέσποινα· σὺν οἷς καὶ τὸ τοῦ Παντεχνῆ Θεοδώρου περικαλλὲς οἶκημα, ἐπάρχου ὄντος τῆς πόλεως καὶ τὸ τῶν οἰκειακῶν διέποντος σέκρετον τῷ δικαιοδοτικῷ τε θρόνῳ ἐμπρέποντος. καὶ αὐτὸς μὲν ἐξήλυξε δρασμῶ τὸ πεσεῖν· τὰ δ' ἐνόητα διαρπασάμενοι οὐδ' αὐτῶν τῶν δημοσίων τόμων ἀπέσχοντο, οἷα τὸ μὲν χρήσιμον ἐχόντων κοινῇ διαβαῖνον πρὸς ἅπαντας ἢ τοὺς πλείονας, ἀφαιρὸν δὲ τὸ ἐκ τοῦ ιδιώσασθαι κέρδος καὶ μηδ' ὅσον τὸν ἐκείνων ἐδίανεν ἂν οἰνοποτάζοντα φάρυγγα. Translation by Magoulias 1984, 132–133; see Grünbart 2015, 128.

common in the middle Byzantine period. Officials still kept their archives and files at home (including charters and golden bullae). When the health of the protagonist Mazaris began to deteriorate rapidly, the emperor ordered all documents to be stolen from his household and brought to safety; if the emperor had not acted in this fashion, Mazaris would have burnt all of the documents. The passage in the satire reads as follows:

Fourth and last: when the invincible Emperor heard from vampires in the medical profession that there was no hope for me, he began to worry that my nephew Alexios the Varmint might also steal the Golden Bulls and Divine Decrees I had in my possession, some already signed in red ink, some still without [a] signature, as well as the box in which I kept written records of everything, just as he had stolen my personal effects the way I told you.³⁰

There are a few cases where archives can be reconstructed from collections of documents or bundles of papers: the compilations of two high officials are preserved from thirteenth-century Byzantium, namely Demetrios Chomatenos and John Apokaukos. Both were leading figures within the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the regions of Epirus and central Greece. The miscellaneous manuscripts include both letters and juridical documents which reflect and preserve the character of private archives in the provinces.³¹

4 Libraries

In Byzantine sources, the terms *bibliotheke* and more commonly *chartophylakeion* were used to describe collections of documents. No clear distinction can generally be made between the terms, although *chartophylakeion* refers more to charters and documents that were not necessarily books.

The emperor Constantine also founded a library that became the central repository for storing knowledge, since municipal libraries increasingly disappeared in the last few centuries of the Roman Empire (especially in the West).³² The imperial library left only a few traces in written sources, however; it was damaged by fire

³⁰ Mazaris' *Journey to Hades*, 22, 13–19: [...] ὁ ἀήττητος αὐτοκράτωρ [...] δειλιάσας, ἵνα μὴ καὶ ἄπερ εἶχον χρυσόβουλλά τε καὶ προστάγματα θεῖα, τὰ μὲν δι' ἐρυθρῶν ὑπογεγραμμένα γραμμάτων, τὰ δ' ἄνευ, ἀλλὰ δὴ καὶ τὴν θέσιν ἐν ἧ τὰς ἀπάντων εἰδήσεις εἶχον ἐντὸς γεγραμμένας, συλήση, καθάπερ, ὡς ἔφθην εἰπὼν, σεσύληκε καὶ τὰμὰ, [...].

³¹ Prinzing 2002; Magdalino 1987.

³² Wendel 1942.

several times, and information on its dimensions remains rather vague. It was frequently used nonetheless: books were borrowed to be consulted during court meetings. The newly founded library, which was possibly open to the public and attached to a scriptorium, was recorded under Emperor Constantius II and Julian (who possibly expanded it); Valens and Theodosius II supported the library, but it was burnt down in 475 (when 120,000 volumes were reportedly destroyed). An ‘imperial library’ (βασιλική βιβλιοθήκη, *basilike bibliotheke*) reappears in the historiographical writings from the court of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw the emergence of an increasingly learned stratum in society centred in the capital that went hand in hand with an accumulation of manuscripts and documents.³³ Book collections were also attached to ‘schools’ and monasteries.³⁴

The so-called Fourth Crusade marked the end of a prospering period: the city of Constantinople suffered three fires before the crusaders captured the city in 1204. It is possible that some losses were incurred, but there is no indication of the existence of a formal imperial library at the time and no source that mentions lost manuscripts kept in the palace.³⁵ If there was a library in the palace, it most certainly ceased to exist in 1204 at the latest. In the remaining parts of the Empire, attempts were undertaken to build up collections of books. John III Doukas Vatatzes (r. 1222–1254), ruler of the ‘exiled’ Empire of Nicaea, is the only Byzantine emperor on record to have founded several collections of books which were open to the public. After the re-installation of the Empire in 1261, the administrative centre returned to Constantinople and intellectual life resumed.³⁶ Books from a reinstated ‘imperial library’ were housed in the Chora monastery in the late thirteenth century; in 1437, the traveller Pero Tafur described a small library in the Blachernai Palace.

It goes without saying that the emperor and the patriarch possessed the richest collections of books. A patriarchal library is first attested under Patriarch Sergios I in the seventh century. George of Pisidia wrote a poem celebrating the patriarch’s collection:

You gaze upon a collection of God-written books,
the Patriarch Sergios’s property;
through these the spiritual meadow grows
and fills the earth with incense for the soul

³³ For general information on the learned circles in the capital, see the volume by Steckel/Gaul/Grünbart 2014; on the so-called university at Constantinople see Speck 1974.

³⁴ Fuchs 1926.

³⁵ Madden 1992.

³⁶ See Constantinides 1982.

and grafts new shoots of fruitless hearts.
 You who behold the grace of paradise
 And who see here the harvests of the teachers,
 Be not troubled lest you observe, among the roses,
 Thorns; for no bramble can grow up beside them
 In a garden mystically worked by hoes.³⁷

Libraries were an important resource for synods and theological discussions, as various examples will show. The patriarchal library is mentioned a couple of times in the context of the Ecumenical Council at Nicaea supporting the iconophile movement in 787. The majority of books displayed and used during the ecclesiastical meeting came from the patriarchal library; seventy books are recorded, fifty of which were stored there. It is possible to imagine the process of retrieving and re-shelving books from various passages in the records:

We have come bearing the holy books which we have brought from those deposited in the library of the Holy Patriarch of Constantinople, namely the canons of the Holy Apostles and of the holy Synods, and the books of our holy Father Basil and of the other holy Fathers.³⁸

Further detailed information is provided:

Patriarch Tarasios (in office from 784–806) said: Yesterday the abbot of Maximinus gave us the *leimonarion* (Λειμωνάριον, i.e. a collection of sayings of the Church Fathers) and it was read; and we, too, have found in the library a copy of the same *leimonarion*, which had the folia dealing with icons cut out.³⁹

37 Sternbach 1892, 55: Εἰς τὴν κατασκευασθεῖσαν βιβλιοθήκην ὑπὸ Σεργίου πατριάρχου τοῦ πατριάρχου Σεργίου τὴν οὐσίαν, ἄθροισμα βιβλίων εἰσοράξ θεογράφων, δι' ὧν ὁ λειμών βλαστάνει τοῦ πνεύματος πληροὶ τε τὴν γῆν ψυχικῶν ἀρωμάτων καὶ τὰς ἀκάρπους ἐμφυλλίζει καρδίας· σὺ δὲ σκοπήσας τοῦ παραδείσου τὴν χάριν καὶ τὰς ὁπώρας τῶν διδασκάλων βλέπων, μηδὲν παραχθῆς, εἰ θεωρεῖς ἐν ῥόδοις καὶ τὰς ἀκάνθας· οὐ παρανθεῖ γὰρ βάτος κήπη δικέλλαις μυστικῶς εἰργασμένῳ. Translation by Waring 2004.

38 *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, XII 1019D (Mansi 1960): Κατὰ τὴν κέλευσιν τῆς ὑμετέρας ἀγιότητος πάρεσμεν ἐπιφερόμενοι τὰς ἱερὰς βίβλους, ἄσπερ ἡγάγομεν ἐκ τῶν ἀποκειμένων ἐν τῇ βιβλιοθήκῃ τοῦ εὐαγοῦς πατριαρχείου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, τῶν τε κανόνων τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων, καὶ τῶν ἁγίων συνόδων, καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Βασιλείου, καὶ ἐτέρων ἁγίων πατέρων. Mango 1975, 31.

39 *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, XIII 192D (Mansi 1960): Ταράσιος ὁ ἁγιάτατος πατριάρχης εἶπε· κατὰ τὴν χθὲς ἡμέραν εὐλαβέστατος ἡγούμενος τῶν Μαξιμίνου τὸ Λειμωνάριον ἐξήνεγκε, καὶ ἀνεγνώσθη· καὶ ἠῦρομεν καὶ νόμους ἐν τῇ βιβλιοθήκῃ τὸ ἴσον τῷ αὐτῷ Λειμωνάριον, τετμημένα ἔχον τὰ φύλλα ἐν οἷς τὰ περὶ εἰκόνων ἔκειντο. Mango 1975, 32–33.

In preparation for the synod of 815, books were collected from churches and monasteries all over Constantinople, however, as the holdings of both the patriarchal and imperial libraries proved insufficient.⁴⁰

As mentioned previously, the reconstruction of libraries relies heavily on written sources. In addition to protocols of theological debates and historiographical texts, information on the organisation of libraries is also provided by the works of scholars who had access to books or were able to find manuscripts within their learned networks. Inventories of property (βρέβια, *brevia*), booklists and wills (διαθήκαι, *diathekai*) reflect the private use of manuscripts; monastic foundation charters (τυπικά, *typika*) contribute further material that helps us understand the economic and social capital generated by books.⁴¹ Library lending lists represent promising sources that shed further light on the contents of monastic book collections.⁴²

The private collections of learned men such as Photios, Arethas, Michael Psellos, John Tzetzes and Michael Choniates allow us to reconstruct which books they possessed and what reading habits they had. An example which is often quoted is the so-called *Myriobiblon* ('Thousand Books') or *Bibliotheke* ('Library'). It was written by Photios, patriarch of Constantinople, in the middle of the ninth century and is a central document for tracking down texts in Byzantine book collections of that period.⁴³ It comprises around 280 texts or codices in the form of notes, commentaries and excerpts from classical authors. Photios preserves unique passages written by classical writers such as Ktesias, Memnon of Heraclea, Konon, Diodoros Sikulos or Arrian. The florilegium does not contain any ancient poetry or philosophical texts, however. Photios provides commentaries on the authors excerpted in his work. His notes vary in length, but they nevertheless provide insights into both the appreciation and interpretation of classical authors in Byzantium and the availability of texts in the capital (there was a great deal of discussion about Photios' access to the texts he analysed).

40 Mango 1975.

41 The publication of *Typika* includes a useful index containing many references to books, inventories and libraries; see Thomas et al. 2000.

42 Waring 2002 (focusing on the monastery of St John at Patmos); Oikonomides 1988 investigated documents from the Athonite libraries concerning levels of literacy.

43 Treadgold 1980, the text of Photios partly translated by Wilson 1992.

Scholars sometimes left traces of their thinking in manuscripts in the form of annotations or short commentaries; John Tzetzes, for example, wrote in the margins of the codex now known as Heidelbergensis 252.⁴⁴ Eustathios of Thessaloniki bequeathed autograph manuscripts reflecting his work on the epics of Homer.⁴⁵

However, writing notes in books or adding passages to documents could cause serious problems. John Tzetzes tells a story to this effect in one of his letters. Byzantine letter collections intrinsically reflect the idea of storing archival material or arranging a copybook. Many of them were copied and survived because they provided templates for people to write their own compositions. They also preserved an image of the personality of the writer.⁴⁶ Information on normal daily procedures can sometimes be detected, such as Tzetzes writing to the official John Smeniotes, who went to Greece in order to collect taxes.⁴⁷ The passage in question reads as follows:

I beg you, writing this letter, if you meet the governor of the *thema* (θέμα, province), please try to persuade him not to punish the boy who wrote verses at the bottom of a legal document. The boy did the same thing in a document of yours some time ago, writing his iambs at the end of the document.⁴⁸

While unauthorised additions to a document—or ‘paratexts’ according to the definition by Jean Genette—could compromise the validity of the document; however, such short texts enrich the reconstruction of contemporary literary taste and the Byzantine poetry tradition.⁴⁹

Wills offer detailed insights into private book collections and libraries. Several documents are preserved and many of them have already been translated. Collections belonging to high officials such as Eustathios Boilas or Michael Ataleiates have been studied (both eleventh century). These libraries were often

⁴⁴ Luzzatto 1999.

⁴⁵ See Cullhed 2012, who recently dealt with manuscripts written by Eustathios.

⁴⁶ Grünbart 2015b.

⁴⁷ Grünbart 1996, 120.

⁴⁸ *Ioannis Tzetzae epistulae* ep. 47, 4–10 (Leone 1972): *ικέτης οὖν γίνομαι διὰ τῆς παρούσης γραφῆς, ὡς εἶπερ ἡ σὴ αὐθεντία τῷ προρρηθέντι σεβαστῷ συναντήσῃ, τὸ τοῦ Πατρῶν ἰατροῦ μὴ ἐπιπρεασθῆναι παιδάριον ἡμέτερον ὄν συγγενές, τῷ ῥηθέντι δὲ συνεξεληθὸν σεβαστῷ. οἶδε δὲ ἡ σὴ αὐθεντία καὶ τὸ παιδάριον ἀκριβῶς τὸ μωρόσοφον ἐκεῖνο καὶ δοκησίσοφον, ὃ τοὺς ἰάμβους ποτὲ τῷ τέλει τῶν πρακτικῶν ἐνεχάραξε, καὶ τούτου ἔνεκεν ἡ σὴ αὐθεντία οὐκ ἐπέγραφε ταῦτα, ἀλλ’ ἐκινδύνευον ἀπρακτῆσαι τὰ πρακτικά, εἰ μὴ καὶ τότε σου ἐδεήθημεν περὶ τούτου· καὶ πάλιν ἡ γραφή ποιεῖται τὴν δέησιν.*

⁴⁹ Genette 2001. There is a project at Ghent University devoted to this kind of text; see ‘Book Epigrams from Medieval Greek Manuscripts. Compilation of an Unexplored Corpus and Creation of a Searchable Database’; <http://www.dbbe.ugent.be/about>.

donated to monasteries which were founded or supported financially by local benefactors. Books and other precious objects are mentioned in the monastic foundation charters, such as a famous and much-discussed will written by Eustathios Boilas, an eminent provincial magnate in the first half of the eleventh century. In 1059, he wrote his will somewhere at the eastern frontier of the Empire and it was copied into a manuscript. Eustathios possibly lived in Edessa in Syria after fleeing eastwards from Cappadocia. He accumulated a large fortune and owned an estate which included a chapel dedicated to the Mother of God; this was where he wanted to be buried.⁵⁰ He listed around 90 books starting with a precious gospel (written in gold letters and featuring images of the evangelists).⁵¹ His collection included theological works, but also the Alexander romance *Leucippe*, a dream book, and collected letters of Isidore of Pelusium. There is a similar example of a private library belonging to Michael Attaleiates, who studied law and worked in the judicial system. He composed a work known as the *Diataxis* (διάταξις), an *Ordinance for the Poor House and Monastery*, which he founded in Constantinople in the mid-1070s. It provides invaluable information regarding Attaleiates' microcosm and includes a catalogue of around fifty books, plus an additional thirty from other sources available in the monastery's library.⁵² Although theological and liturgical books again predominate, a book on earthquakes and thunder also found its way into the collection. Comparing these two documents, the description of items focuses on their appearance and script—the most precious pieces are bibles, possibly for home use. It is important to list all books, and Attaleiates mentions a 'catalogue' in his *Diataxis*. Counting the books in documents of this kind, the number of items does not normally exceed 100. While charters and archival material are not usually mentioned in listings such as these, it may be taken for granted that they contained other items of information as well concerning the donor person. Monasteries were a safe harbour for books and manuscripts, since they were constructed for eternity and relatively safe from imperial and fiscal afflictions.

Why were documents stored? Byzantines were aware of the importance of the written word, as the poet Theodore Prodromos remarks in a speech addressed to John Agapetos, Patriarch of Constantinople from 1111 to 1134:

⁵⁰ Vryonis 1957; Lemerle 1977, 15–63 (*Le testament d'Eustathius Boilas*).

⁵¹ The design and materiality of the books in Eustathios' collection is discussed by Parani/Pitarakis/Spieser 2003.

⁵² Edition Lemerle 1977, 67–112 (*La diataxis de Michel Attaliate (mars 1077)*) and Gautier 1981, English translation Talbot 2000, 358–359, 367–369.

Books are among life's major necessities, because they have the function of memory and they are most effective against time But while the things themselves have grown old with time, their memory flourishes in books.⁵³

It has become apparent that archives and libraries housed information and stored records such as registers of land, lending contracts and property-possession certificates.⁵⁴ Information on ethnography, explanations of natural phenomena and handbooks were also kept. Archives and libraries turned into resources for decision-making as they housed documents that served as guides for composing charters or writing letters, for example.

Another aspect is the notion of social capital—or prestige—and self-image. Education was a social marker in Byzantium, just as it was in many other societies. But sponsoring poets and displaying knowledge became a sign of distinction and exclusivity,⁵⁵ as can be demonstrated conclusively by means of an example. Foundation documents composed by an important figure in twelfth-century Byzantium have been preserved. Isaac Komnenos (who held the title of *sebastokrator*) donated his fortune to the monastery of Kosmosoteira at Pherrai in Thrace, which he chose as his burial place. Besides organising the processes in the monastery, he furnished it with a library and an archive. The *typikon* (τυπικόν), which can be dated to 1152, offers some detailed insights. Firstly, the patron wanted to be sure that all documents were kept in a safe place:

Since the original documents for the immovable [properties] assigned to the monastery and to the old-age infirmary have been given to the superior, and copies of the originals have been authorized with an indication from the bishop, the superior must not exhibit the originals when they are requested, but their copies. For the originals must be stored in a secure storehouse for all time, along with the original inventory and this *typikon*. Copies of these should always pass through the hands of the superior and the rest of the monks, for reference. For these are my commands, this is the way I want what must be done to be done. All the things proposed with the idea of bringing to completion the construction work going on at the monastery, if they are not made ready during my sorely troubled life, if something

53 Manaphes 1974, lines 266–269: τούτων οὕτω προϋποτεθέντων ἡμῖν, οὐδ' ἐκεῖνο παρετόν ἂν εἶη, ὡς τῶν τῷ βίῳ χρεωδεστάτων ὅτι μάλιστα τὰ βιβλία εἰς τε τὴν πρώτην μάθησιν μέγα μέρος ἦ καὶ τὸ ὅλον λυσιτελοῦντα καὶ εἰς τὴν δευτέραν ἀνάμνησιν καὶ τῷ τὰ φανένθ' ἀλίσκοντι χρόνῳ παντάσῃν ἀντιστράτηγα; see Grünbart 2004, 115.

54 Oikonomides 1997.

55 See Grünbart 2015, 171–188.

is still left incomplete for the repose of the monks and of their servants, let it too be completed without hesitation and without fail by the superior, lest the entire project be unfinished.⁵⁶

Secondly, John Komnenos wished to create a place where the monks should commemorate their benefactor:

I have bequeathed some books to the monastery (how many there are is indicated by [the list of] their titles in the inventory of the monastery). I bequeathed another book in addition to these, one that I composed with great effort. It [contains] heroic, iambic and political verse, as well as various letters and *ekphraseis*. I do not want this [book] to lie in an obscure place, but to be displayed often as [something to] read (and in memory of me) to those especially industrious men (and they [are the ones who] want to come upon books and pictures). I do not wish these books to be alienated by the monastery, but to survive here forever.⁵⁷

This passage clearly demonstrates the wish of an eminent person to stay alive in the memory of later generations. Besides keeping his portrait, a copy of which was also stored in the monastery, literary works and letters were thought to be the best way to remember and honour a donor. Again, the notion of securing information and authoritative self-representation is shimmering through these lines.

56 Petit 1908, § 99: Δοθέντων δὲ τῷ προεστῶτι τῶν κυρίων τε καὶ δικαιωμάτων τῶν προσκυρωθέντων ἀκινήτων τῇ τε μονῇ καὶ τῷ γηροκομείῳ καὶ τῶν ἴσων τῶν κυρίων πεπιστωμένων αὐτῶν δι' ἀρχιερατικῆς ἐπισημειώσεως, οὐκ ὀφείλει ὁ προεστῶς ἐμφανίζειν τὰ κύρια ἐν οἷς χρεῖα, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἴσα τούτων· ἐν ἀσφαλεῖ γὰρ ταμείῳ χρεῶν ἔσαι τὰ κύρια ταμειεύσθαι σὺν τῷ κυρίῳ βρεβίῳ καὶ τῷ παρόντι τυπικῷ, τὰ δὲ ἰσότυπα τούτων χερσὶ τοῦ προεστῶτος καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν μοναχῶν αἰεὶ διασύρεσθαι πρὸς ἀνάμνησιν· τοῦτο γὰρ διατάττομαι, οὕτω τὰπραχθησόμενα πράττεσθαι θέλομεν· πάντα δὲ τὰ κατὰ σκοπὸν προτεθέντα εἰς ἀναπλήρωσιν τῶν γινομένων ἔργων τε καὶ κτισμάτων τῆς μονῆς, εἰ οὐ φθάσουσιν ἐπαρτισθῆναι ἐν τῇ ἐμῇ πολυπύκνῳ ζωῇ, ἀλλὰ τι καταλειφθεῖ ἀναπαρτιστὸν ἔτι πρὸς ἀνάπαυσιν τῶν μοναχῶν καὶ τῶν ὑπουργῶν τούτων, ἀπαρτισθῆτω καὶ τοῦτο ἀναμφιβόλως παρὰ τοῦ προεστῶτος καὶ ἀράβατα, ἵνα μὴ τὸ ἔργον ὄλον ἐστὶν ἀσυμπέραντον.

57 Petit 1908, § 106 (69, 5–12): ἐπεὶ δὲ βιβλους τινὰς τῇ μονῇ καταλέλοιπα, ὧν δῆπερ ὁ ἀριθμὸς τοῖς ὀνόμασι τούτων ἐν τῷ τῆς μονῆς βρεβίῳ ἐπισημαίνεται, πρὸς ταύταις δὲ καὶ ἕτεραν βιβλον κατέλιπον, ἦν πόνῳ μακρῷ στιχιδίοις ἡρωικοῖς τε καὶ ἰαμβικοῖς καὶ πολιτικοῖς καὶ ἐπιστολαῖς διαφοροῖς τε καὶ ἐκφράσεσι συντέταχα, οὐκ ἐν ἀφανεί τὸπω κείσθαι βούλομαι ταύτην, ἀλλὰ πολλάκις ὑπενδείκνυσθαι πρὸς ἀνάγνωσιν καὶ ἡμετέραν ἀνάμνησιν τοῖς φιλοπονωτέροις τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ προστυγχάνειν βιβλοῖς καὶ ἱστορίαις ἐθέλουσιν, ἀνεκποιήτους δὲ καὶ ταύτας τῇ μονῇ εἶναι βουλόμεθα καὶ ἔσαι αὐτῇ περισώζεσθαι.

5 Concluding remarks

Byzantium was a society based on written communication and administration. It goes without saying that literacy and written documents played an important role at all levels of society in Byzantium. Even on the market-place a basic knowledge of letters (on weights, sun-dials, coins etc.) can be assumed.⁵⁸ However, traces of the administrative aspects of daily life and information concerning the storage of documents are sparse. Our current reconstruction of the structure of archives and libraries is primarily based on written sources since archaeological research has not unearthed many remains of these containers of knowledge and memory so far. The administration was centred in the capital, Constantinople, but it was rather loosely organised as some high officials had their offices and archives in their own palaces. 'Semi-private' archives like these were vulnerable and provided easy targets during times of turmoil.

'Central' libraries existed in the capital of the Byzantine Empire. The function of the imperial and patriarchal libraries is clear: to keep records and collect knowledge. 'Back-up copies' are even mentioned in Byzantine sources, since duplicating documents supported their durability. Availability of information was essential for the imperial government in terms of controlling the distribution of goods, making decisions and preparing for diplomatic action. In the event of ecclesiastical controversies, the archives became important resources for reference and verification. They were containers of knowledge which supported the authority of both the secular and the ecclesiastical ruler. Collections of documents were also a strong weapon against oblivion. Byzantine donors and patrons were aware of the function that could be assumed by a manuscript, a collection of books or even a library. The best way to be remembered in future was to donate a collection to monasteries as they were built to last eternally. Preserving the name of a donor or patron fits perfectly with the competitive habits of aristocratic families in Constantinople: sponsoring literature and accumulating manuscripts became a social marker and a sign of distinction.

⁵⁸ Hunger 1984; see Grünbart forthcoming.

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