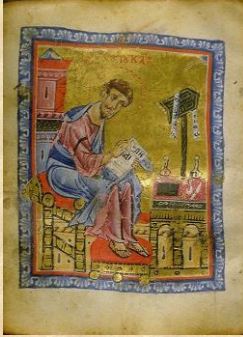


13. Intellectualism from Photios to Michael Psellos



HIST 302

Spring 2012

What do we mean by "Byzantine" literature?

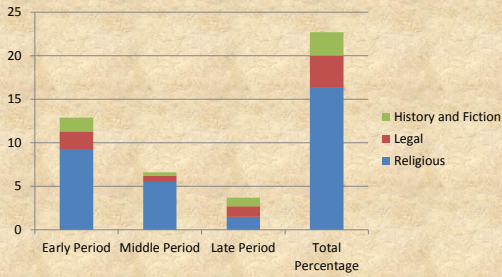
- If defined as that of an Empire or Civilization:
 - **Greek**
 - Latin
 - Syriac (Coele Syria)
 - Coptic (Egyptian)
 - Church Slavonic (Balkans and E. Europe)
 - Armenian
 - Georgian

Survival rates in Byzantine literature

- 50,000 Total number of manuscripts
 - 25,000 Medieval
 - 80% Religious
 - 60% Hagiographies



Manuscript Survival Ratios



How literate were the *hoi polloi*

- Early period (*higher*)
 - Procopius could brag that he was read “throughout the empire.”
- With the plagues of the 6-8th centuries and the demise of urban society, schools and libraries dwindled
- Not until the revival of urban life in the 11th century (Komnenian Period) did literacy level rise again

Where does paper come from ?

parchment



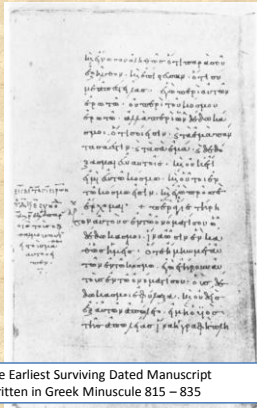
papyrus



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2Bwc1N9Cqo&feature=related>

**Educational consequences
in Egypt's capture by
Muslims**

- lack of papyrus precipitated a new, smaller form of writing
- Byzantine miniscule
 - first example: Uspensky Gospel
 - note a generation after Carolingian miniscule
- sufficient demand for books did not increase until end of 8th C.



The Earliest Surviving Dated Manuscript
Written in Greek Minuscule 815 – 835

The desire for books

- Books and papyrus even expensive after loss of Egypt
- An anecdote by John Moschus about a poor monk
- (6th C. aesthetic writer)
- Very poor monk in Palestine wanted to buy a New Testament
 - worked as a laborer in Jerusalem for 9 *folles*/day
 - spent nothing on food; saved 3 *soldi*
 - 1 *solidus* = 180 *folles* = 60 days labor
 - price = donkey, a poor man's major investment

**Expense of a long
parchment manuscript**

- Codex Clarkianus* of Plato (895 CE)
- commissioned by Arethas of Caesarea
 - 424 folios
 - 13 *solidi* for transcription; 8 for parchment
 - 2 years wages for a manual laborer
 - A gentleman of means might have a family library (multiple generations) of 20 volumes
 - indicates the relationship between parchment and meat consumption

The private church of Eustathius Bolis

Type of Literature	subgroup	# of volumes
Biblical		10
Liturgical		33
Patristic		12
Desert Fathers		3
Apocrypha		1
Hagiography		4
Other Christian		2
Canon Law		3
Secular	1 law; 1 dreambook, 1 Aesop, 1 Georgius Pisides, 2 Chronicles, 1 Alexander romance; 1 Achilles Tatius, 1 grammar; 1 Persica	10
Indeterminate		2
TOTAL		80

Manuscripts in Monasteries

11th C. monastery founded by Michael Attaleiates started with his family 40

- 79 books at his death

Monastery of St. John on Patos had (1201)

- 330 volumes
 - result of over a century of book collecting
 - 150 monks copying
 - imperial benefactions

Devolution into Ελληνιστική Κοινή

- Trend in Christian literature to eschew the highly complex oratory towards mundane, everyday speech
 - “Joe the Plumber” language
- resulted in the neglect (destruction) of numerous Ancient Greek texts

Reliance on the pronoun

- *Life of Saint Pacomius* (4th century)

“When taking the bread from him, the janitor gave it to him so as to restore him according to his injunction that he might be healed.”

Reliance on the pronoun

- Theophanes’ *Chronicle* (~ 810)
 - When talking of the Emperor Nikephoros:

“...having mounted a most gentle and tame horse, by God’s providence he threw him and broke his right foot.”

Trends towards Atticizing by the 10th century

in 9th C. most copyists relegated to prose

- poetry might be considered crypto-pagan

By 10th C., poetry acceptable again

- Homer, Pindar, Attic dramatists
- teachers began to write anthologies of poetry from ancient times to present day
 - new creations
- trend towards overt sophistication

Striving for Simplicity

- *De administando imperio*
– Constantine Porphyrogenitos

“I have not been studious to make a display of fine writing in the Atticizing style, swollen with the sublime and lofty, but rather have been eager with the means of everyday and conversational narrative to teach you those things of which I think you should not be ignorant.”

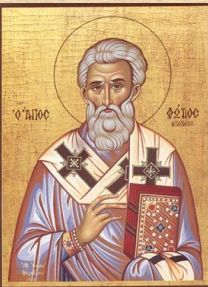
Striving for Simplicity

- *De cerimoniis*
– Constantine Porphyrogenitos

“With a view towards making out text clear and intelligible, we have used a popular and simple style and those very words and names which in current speech have long been attached to a thing. “

Patriarch Photios (ca. 810 – ca. 895)

- most powerful Patriarch in a century
- from a well-educated family
 - uncle had been Patriarch
- “most learned man of his age”
- helped bring about “Triumph of Orthodoxy”
- sent out Constantine and Methodios
- staunchly opposed to Pope
 - was deposed by Basil I (Mac. Dynasty)
 - became tutor of Basil I's kids
 - was brought back
- stopped Basil from blinding his son
“greatest men in Byzantine History”



Greek Icon : St. Photios

PHOTIUS, *BIBLIOTHECA* (*MYRIOBIBLON*)

"Register and enumeration of the books read by us, 279 in number"

- 1st Byzantine Encyclopedia
 - shows a desire to catalog and codify
 - **what is the ideological impetus for Encyclopedias?**
- mentions works not usually available to Byzantine Greeks in Constantinople
- may have heard of them during his exile in Baghdad



Canon of Byzantine Literature

- Patriarch Photius, *Bibliotheca* [*Myriobiblon*] (c. 850)
 - collection of book titles and synopses
- Constantine VII, *De ceremoniis* (c. 950)
 - -----, *Constantinian Excerpts*
 - of 58 sections, 3 ½ survive
- Symeon the Logothete, *Menalogion* (<950)
 - collection of hagiographies—altered form
- *Suda* (10th C.)
 - dictionary of literature
- John Skylitzes, *Chronicle* (late 11th C.)
 - historical narrative from 811-1057
 - great resource for images
- Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* (c. 1040-1078)

The historian Michael Psellos (1018-96)

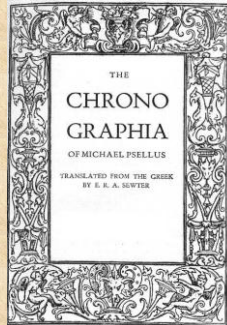
- trained as a Neo-Platonist at philosophical school
- was a rhetorician, philosopher and historian
- *Chronographia* (c. 1040-1078)
 - usual in that he does not submerge himself from the narrative
 - prattles on about himself
 - not interested in wars
 - mentions Basil II without ever discussing Bulgaria
 - is interested in court gossip
 - human motives and innate character



Michael Psellos and student, Byzantine Emperor Michael VII

Curiosities of the *Chronographia*

- comes down to us in a single manuscript
- had Classical models
 - Demosthenes
 - Isocrates
 - Aristides
 - Plutarch
- Psellos displays keenness of observation
 - rise of the urban bourgeoisie
 - similarities to the *Alexiad*



Portrait Gallery of Imperial Rulers

explicit moral, physical & psychological description:

- Constantine VIII a good cook
- Ruddy complexion of Constantine IX
- Oedipal complex of Michael IV

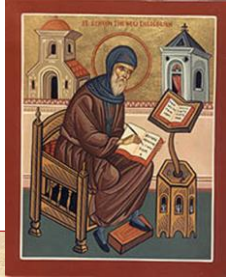
Dynamism of characters

- Basil II changes from lazy to stern and irascible
- Romanus III changes because of illness
- Michael IV becomes a serious ruler once he mounts the throne

Symeon the Theologian (949-1022)

Monk and abbot of St. Mamas in Constantinople

- 58 hymns
- passion, theological insight
- vivid direct style
- political verse
- ideas came to dominate Byzantine lit. and spirituality



11th C Renaissance in literature and art

Wide spectrum of the population patronizing art

- book illustration often used Classical models
- painters, sculptors, mosaics
- art with fresh eyes
- innovative, not looking back to Late Antique models