

The Dispersal of Monastic Libraries in the Early Nineteenth Century:

Buxheim and Karakallou

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TO THE TYPESETTER: Please note the presence of Greek and Cyrillic characters in both text and endnotes.

This article discusses the dramatic dispersal of monastic libraries in Europe and the Christian East during the early nineteenth century through two contrasting examples. These are: (1) the 1423 St Christopher woodblock print and other early examples of fifteenth-century printing, formerly the property of the Charterhouse at Buxheim in Swabia but purchased in 1803 by Alexander Horn for George John, 2nd Earl Spencer; and (2) a series of Byzantine manuscripts, formerly the property of the monastery of Karakallou on Mount Athos but purchased in 1837 by Robert Curzon, later 14th Baron Zouche. It identifies changing perceptions surrounding the value and use of books on the parts of both monks and collectors as central to this moment and explores the different – but often surprisingly similar – ways in which books left monastic ownership in western vs. eastern contexts.

Keywords: Monasticism, monastic libraries, secularisation, book collecting, Earl Spencer, Robert Curzon

The property of monastic institutions has suffered from regular, often violent, appropriation by secular powers since the time of the Reformation. Books have been particularly prominent in these appropriations due to their nature as simultaneously valuable but easily transportable

objects and there is a growing literature which documents their movement from religious to secular libraries over the past five hundred years.¹

In this article I argue that the period between approximately 1790 and 1840 represents a particularly intense, complex moment within this longer history: a moment in which there was a massive shift in the ownership of books which had rested on the same shelves for centuries, sometimes for over a millennium, from monastic libraries to English private collectors. This shift brought with it a series of radical changes in these books' environments and uses. They were divorced from their contexts in space and the collections of which they were a part and placed in spaces shaped both by contemporary elite taste and by the interests of individual collectors; they were removed from one set of reading practices (devotional, meditative, scholarly) and placed in another quite different, where they were often not read at all and certainly not for the same reasons; they were removed from a sphere of shared reading and access, becoming private rather than communal property and less accessible to anyone other than the owner; and, most obviously and brutally, they were often physically removed from their bindings and despoiled, via washing, of their annotations and previous marks of ownership.

But there was also a more fundamental shift present in these changes of ownership, one which was intimately connected with the gap between the spiritual world of the monastery and the secular world of nineteenth-century Europe. Books which had previously been either objects of use, valued for their texts and what those texts could do, or objects of veneration, valued for their age and association with a specific community, were transformed into commercial goods. They were wrenched out of the spiritual world into the world of capitalism.

Considering these changes in the context of the other essays within this issue, it becomes clear that what is being described here does not fit easily into Darnton's

communications circuit, which, in any case, privileges ‘new’ rather than ‘old’ books.² We may notice among other points that the state, figured only as an outside presence in the form of ‘Political and Legal Sanctions’ in Darnton's original model, here becomes a part of the circuit, directly affecting the use and movement of books (see below). Likewise, describing collectors as ‘readers’ seems to misunderstand the potentially significant distinction between valuing a book as text and a book as object. While it is not my intention to do so here, such slippages suggest the need to revisit Darnton's model in reference both to book collecting in general and the movement of books from sacred to secular contexts in particular.

While the activities of this half century constitute a distinct epoch, one which saw a dramatic shift in how both books and traditional monastic communities were viewed in the western world, this epoch included two distinct strands of monastic library dispersal which stood in stark contrast to each other. One was the expropriation of books from Roman Catholic monasteries. This, which had its prologue in the suppression of the Jesuits and the dispersal of Jesuit libraries earlier in the eighteenth century, stemmed from the forced secularisation – the suppression of monastic communities and the confiscation of their property, usually by the state – brought about in France, the Holy Roman Empire, and elsewhere in continental Europe either directly or indirectly as a result of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.³ In this case, books were either confiscated directly by the state – sometimes as cultural trophies, sometimes as potential economic resources, and sometimes for symbolic mutilation or destruction – or were transferred by the state to private individuals, often as compensation for other state-sponsored expropriations (e.g., the mediatisation of many of the Imperial nobles and the consequent loss of their estates). Such books generally reached English collectors only at one or two removes. Most of the major collectors of the period relied on agents, often themselves current or former Catholic priests

or monks, who obtained items from monastic collections either just before or in the wake of overt state-sponsored violence and directed the flow of these objects around Europe.⁴

The other strand was the removal of books from Orthodox monasteries, mostly but not exclusively those within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, either in Ottoman Europe (Greece and the Balkans) or in the Levant.⁵ In these cases, English collectors generally engaged directly with the monasteries themselves and acquired the books in question during extended periods of travel, often conceptualised within discourses of the Grand Tour and its post-Enlightenment successors. Direct violence, state-sponsored or private, was less in evidence here, being replaced instead by a sense of cultural superiority and corresponding Orientalisation of the books' monkish owners which, however, often ended in the same results. This strand also had a much longer history entwined with western European book- and manuscript-hunting in the eastern Mediterranean and Islamic world. As scholars such as Simon Mills have documented, English and other western scholars were actively collecting manuscripts, both Christian and Islamic, in the Levant from the seventeenth century, if not earlier, and the removal of books from Orthodox monasteries in the nineteenth century is a practice both dependent on and informed by the work of these earlier traveller-collectors.⁶ What changed, however, was the intensity with which monasteries, in particular, were targeted for their collections and the ways in which this targeting became systematised over the course of the century (as discussed below).

These are large claims, not least insofar as they touch on potential moral and ethical issues surrounding the ownership of the books today. In the remainder of this article I will begin to substantiate them through two examples, one from each of the strands outlined above, before bringing these together to make a larger argument about the importance of this period and the place of monastic libraries within it for our understanding of the transmission and use of medieval manuscripts and early printed books.

Reichskartause Buxheim

The early nineteenth century has been often described as the golden age of bibliophilia, an epithet which owes something to the endless enthusiasm and self-promotion of its chronicler, the English clergyman and bibliophile Thomas Frognall Dibdin, but also in a very real measure to the sudden flood of early printed books onto the European market as a result of the Napoleonic Wars.⁷ The English private libraries formed in this febrile period – those of Richard Heber, Thomas Grenville, Mark Masterman Sykes, and the Duke of Devonshire to name only a few – have not only been unsurpassed, but are unsurpassable, dependent as their assemblage was on a unique moment in the history of the international book trade.⁸

Chief amongst this generation, standing head and shoulders above the rest in the scope and intensity of his collecting, was George John Spencer, 2nd Earl Spencer (1758-1834).⁹ Born into wealth and inheriting a fine, if not exceptional, library Spencer came to collecting in his thirties, balancing it with a series of public roles as Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, British minister to Vienna, First Lord of the Admiralty, and ultimately, though briefly, Home Secretary.¹⁰ In 1789 he bought the outstanding classical library of Count Karl Emerich Reviczky de Revisnye (1737-1793), the Imperial ambassador to London, paying in return a yearly annuity to its former owner.¹¹ Reviczky, in turn, took the younger man under his wing, introducing him to continental dealers and agents like Eusebio Maria Della Lena and Angelo Maria Pannocchieschi, Marchese d'Elci. By the middle of the 1790s, Spencer could already boast of an impressive network of contacts who were supplying him with volumes either directly bought from or otherwise obtained from monasteries under threat of secularisation.¹²

Foremost amongst these agents was the ever-resourceful librarian, bookseller, and British diplomatic informant Father Alexander (in religion Maurus) Horn, OSB (1762-1820), a Scottish-born Benedictine monk in Regensburg.¹³ Horn's remarkable political career has been

dealt with elsewhere; his role as agent and finder-out of Europe's rarest books is still being explored.¹⁴ Somewhat surprisingly for a monk, he showed little concern for the oncoming tidal wave of expropriation which faced the monasteries of the German lands at the end of the eighteenth century, happily writing to his employer Spencer on 22 March 1798 that, 'the Secularization of Suabia will make an excellent harvest for Collectors of old books which I shall not fail to turn out to your Lordship's greatest advantage', and again on 5 March 1802 that 'in the present uncertain state of the Bavarian Monasteries I have renewed the Attack', i.e., his attempts to convince one librarian to part with a particularly desired item.¹⁵ When widespread secularisation came in 1803 and monastic books began to be confiscated on a vast scale, partly to furnish the newly-enlarged Electoral Library in Munich, he boasted to Spencer that the commissary in charge of looting was 'a particular acquaintance of mine', able to gently derail the right books from their journey to Munich into Horn's hands.¹⁶ Later that summer he 'came into concurrence with one of the under Librarians' of the Electoral Library, i.e., he bribed the recently-minted bureaucrat to sell him still more books destined for the collection.¹⁷ For Horn, books were commercial commodities which could and should be obtained by whatever means required; his letters display a brazen – or simply unselfconscious – openness as to his methods, though he was quick to assure Spencer that 'I should be sorry if the slightest suspicion should fall on me of being capable of the common tricks of Booksellers'.¹⁸

One of Horn's most bibliographically significant transactions was his acquisition of a group of books which had belonged to the Charterhouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Buxheim, near Memmingen in Swabia. Founded in 1402, it rapidly became one of the largest and wealthiest Carthusian houses in the Holy Roman Empire, containing a library singularly rich in incunables and other early printing.¹⁹ This was in substantial part due to the donations of Hilprand Brandenburg (1442-1514), sometime rector of the University of Basel and

patrician of the small town of Biberach.²⁰ His gifts, according to the *liber benefactorum* of Buxheim, amounted to ‘450 books large and small’.²¹ This collection, almost all incunabula, remained at Buxheim, largely in their original fifteenth-century bindings, for the remainder of the monastery's existence and their importance was well-known by the end of the eighteenth century. Martin Gerbert, Abbot of St Blasien, could, for example, write in 1765 that the monastery library ‘abounds in books from the first epoch of the art of printing’ and could spend several pages of his bibliographical travelogue, the *Iter Alemannicum*, describing at length the 1462 Bible and other treasures of the house.²²

But Brandenburg was not alone in his rich donations and incunables were not the sole extent of Buxheim's treasures. Another, seemingly much more modest, gift was made in the first half of the fifteenth century by Anna von Gundelfingen (c.1400-1442), a canoness in the nunnery of Buchau.²³ It was a single manuscript, written in Bohemia in 1417, of the Matins of the Virgin.²⁴ This manuscript was remarkable, however, not for itself, but for a woodcut pasted inside its cover: a large, hand-coloured woodblock print of St Christopher dated 1423. It is (probably) the earliest known dated example of a woodblock print in Europe.²⁵ Prints like these were mass-produced for purposes of private devotion, nurturing, as Parshall and Schoch have argued, ‘a sense of closeness . . . privacy . . . and personal interpretation’ and functioning in the same way as vernacular devotional literature.²⁶ Anna von Gundelfingen would have likely used the St Christopher for this purpose, just as she would have used the manuscript in which it was placed for day-to-day worship.

We may presume that these original uses were carried with the manuscript into its new Carthusian home, though we cannot be sure how long this would have continued. Certainly, by the latter part of the eighteenth century the original devotional purpose of the St Christopher woodcut had receded into the background and its place in the history of art and technology had become central to contemporary understandings. In this context, its

importance for the history of printing was first noted by Buxheim's librarian, Franz Krismer, 'a polymath and great lover of the arts and belles lettres', who showed it to the art historian Carl Heinrich von Heineken on his visit to Buxheim.²⁷ Krismer subsequently published a study of early woodcuts in 1776, including the St Christopher (the earliest detailed study on the subject).²⁸

It was probably from the works of either von Heineken or Krismer himself that Spencer came to learn of the St Christopher and its significance.²⁹ In a draft reply to his then regular agent and correspondent, Jean-Baptiste Maugérard, later to become a commissaire looting monasteries across Europe for the French, Spencer had scribbled imperatively, 'get me the Print of St Christopher at Buxheim'.³⁰ Maugérard, if he attempted, did not succeed. Nor, at first, did Horn himself. He later wrote of his first attempts that,

I recollect that being in 1802 at Buxheim where I intended to buy some old Editions and procured [*sic*] your St Christopher those rich Carthusians were convinced that they alone would escape the general Fate of the Monasteries because they having nothing to do with the World, the World had nothing to do with them.³¹

Unfortunately for the Carthusians, what Horn later described as their indifference to 'all worldly Concerns' did not stem the onrushing tide and Buxheim was secularised with other Bavarian monasteries in 1803.³² Its property, including the library, was given as compensation to Count Johann Friedrich Carl Maximilian von Ostein (1736-1809), an otherwise undistinguished nobleman who had lost estates in the redrawing of the European map during the course of the French invasions.³³

For what happened next, we are indebted to Horn's correspondence with Spencer. The vast majority of the Buxheim library passed to Graf von Ostein, was then inherited by the

Grafen Waldbott von Bassenheim and was sold by that family in a high-profile auction in München in 1883.³⁴ But not, it would seem, all. Writing to Spencer on 4 July 1803, Horn gleefully noted that,

The Monks of Buxheim who before in hopes of not being suppressed refused all the offers I made them secreted their principal Articles and now I am invited to meet their collection at Ulm.³⁵

Which monks and how these items were kept back is unclear, but Horn spent at the better part of the summer at Ulm triumphantly reporting his acquisition of the St Christopher as well as the monastery's Gutenberg Bible, 1462 Bible, 1459 Durandus, Fust and Schöffer Cicero, and Mentelin Virgil, amongst others, many of them part of the bequest of Hilprand Brandenburg: a feast for any bibliophile. Overconfidently, Horn wrote that 'I expect Your Lordship's orders'.³⁶ He repeated this list, now swollen to fifteen items, apparently all from Buxheim, in a letter of 12 January 1804, proposing £700 for the lot.³⁷

Unfortunately for Horn, Spencer, who already had copies of many of the rarities his agent had obtained, demurred, taking only the St Christopher and leaving Horn out of pocket and unexpectedly at loose ends. The immediate consequence of this was that Horn found he could not pay the exiled Carthusians who, accordingly, kept back the St Christopher as security until their account was finally settled.³⁸ When Horn did arrive with the money in hand, in the early autumn of 1804, he reported that 'the Proprietors of the St Christopher . . . showed a Determination to get rid of that part of the Bargain which concerned him and even offered to restore the Money' but '[a]fter a great Deal of wrangling' Horn prevailed and triumphantly brought away the woodcut and its enclosing volume.³⁹

In the following years, Horn advertised several of the unsold volumes from Buxheim for sale, including the Gutenberg Bible, in literary journals both German and French. As Eric White has shown, some of these were ultimately purchased by the Bibliothèque Nationale while others, again including the Gutenberg Bible, were purchased in 1808 by Comte Léon d'Ourches, a French collector.⁴⁰ These scattered volumes had various trajectories. Comte d'Ourches's collection was sold in 1811.⁴¹ Amongst his Buxheim volumes, the Mentelin Virgil, one of Brandenburg's books, was sold to the Manchester slave trader and bibliophile George Hibbert and, from him, passed into the hands of Thomas Grenville; it now rests, with Grenville's other books, in the British Library.⁴² Another Brandenburg volume, the beautiful 1462 Bible, illuminated with its donor's arms, was purchased at the d'Ourches sale for Anne-Thérèse-Philippine, Comtesse d'Yve (1738-1814), a Belgian revolutionary, pamphleteer, bluestocking, and bibliophile, who had also bought the Buxheim Gutenberg Bible.⁴³ When her collection was sold in 1820, the 1462 Bible found its way to England where it passed into the Huth collection; it is now in the Huntington Library.⁴⁴ The Gutenberg was acquired by the London booksellers Payne and Foss, who appear to have sold it to 'Mad Jack' Fuller (1757-1834), the philanthropist and defender of slavery, who subsequently gave it to Eton College Library, where it now resides.⁴⁵ Other Buxheim books which do not appear on Horn's lists from 1803-4 were probably also acquired, by him or other book agents, around this time, one example being the 1475 *editio princeps* of Horace which also found its way into Spencer's collection.⁴⁶

Returning to the St Christopher, we can observe the ways in which its use, value, and meaning shifted dramatically after its removal from a monastic context to that of an aristocratic collector's library. What had begun its life as an object of personal devotion for Anna von Gundelfingen and had subsequently found its way into a book with practical, communal liturgical value for the Carthusians at Buxheim was transmuted into a commodity,

an object valued for its rarity, cultural importance, and economic value rather than for any religious, or even aesthetic, quality; 'there are', Dibdin wrote in his catalogue of Spencer's library, 'perhaps few more precious relics in existence, connected with the early history of the ART OF ENGRAVING, than the present'.⁴⁷ Likewise, its place within the manuscript *Matins of the Virgin* was elided over such that most modern discussions of the *St Christopher* completely neglect its larger manuscript context (Anna von Gundelfingen is never mentioned and Buxheim only rarely).

Whether this shift came about solely due to Horn's purchase, however, is less clear. As indicated above, the *St Christopher* was already being understood as an object of historical and cultural significance, rather than simply of practical devotional use, by Buxheim's own librarian in the eighteenth century. While we cannot recover the stages by which this shift took place - and, indeed, it is perhaps unlikely that even the actors involved would have been aware of them - we may surmise a similar trajectory to that of another monastic acquisition of Spencer's, the 1457 Mainz Psalter formerly in the library of the Premonstratensian Abbey at Rot an der Rot in Swabia. For that volume we have the testimony of Sigismund Hogl, the abbey's librarian, that it was still in use as a liturgical text until the middle of the eighteenth century, but had subsequently come to be valued for its status as an important milestone in the development of printing.⁴⁸ In other words, a radical transformation of the meaning and value perceived to inhere in the *St Christopher* certainly took place, but we should be wary of assigning responsibility solely to Horn and Spencer. Rather, they took action in a field which had already, to some extent, been prepared for them by the recategorisation of the *St Christopher* as a valuable and desirable art object.

The fate of the *St Christopher* and the other Buxheim books obtained by Horn is characteristic of that which befell the contents of many monastic libraries during the Napoleonic wars. What is unusual in this case, however, is that these choice items were only

commodified and brought into the book market *after* secularisation, whereas individuals like Horn, Maugérard, Della Lena, and their confreres more often coaxed, bullied, and cajoled monks to part with their most valuable books and manuscripts before secularisation, when the threat of expropriation and pillage was imminent but had not yet occurred and religious communities were seeking to prepare themselves as best they could for the coming storm. I have chosen it as an example here, however, for the richness of documentation surrounding the transaction, which allows a better understanding of the motives of the actors involved than would be the case in many other examples.

Karakallou, Mount Athos

By contrast with Spencer, Robert Curzon (1810-1873), who later in life succeeded to the title of 14th Baron Zouche, was a very different kind of collector.⁴⁹ A private gentleman in comparison to Spencer's prominent position in Britain's political life, and the heir of an encumbered and dilapidated estate, he lacked the older man's financial and political resources, a difference which directed the course of his collecting into sharply divergent avenues. Loving manuscripts, early manuscripts in particular, but lacking the wealth to compete in the London market, Curzon went on two manuscript-hunting tours, the first to Jerusalem, elsewhere in the Levant, and Meteora in 1833-34 and the second to Mount Athos and elsewhere in Greece in 1837-38. It was almost entirely during these two journeys that he collected an exceptional library of early manuscripts, beginning with Egyptian mummy wrappings and extending to 228 items when he had a catalogue privately printed in 1849.⁵⁰

Curzon in his own time was famous for that minor classic, *Visits to Monasteries in the Levant* (1849), a work now better-known amongst other travel writers than the general public,

and is at present perhaps most immediately recognisable for the darkly comic episode in which he plied the abbot of the monastery of El-Sourian in Egypt with strong drink until he succeeded in obtaining Syriac manuscripts in the monastery's possession.⁵¹ Here, however, I wish to focus on one of his more spectacularly successful negotiations during his second tour, one in which he acquired fifteen medieval and early modern manuscripts from the monastery of Karakallou on Mount Athos.

Curzon was called by John Julius Norwich 'the Elgin of the Athonite libraries', but was his role quite so straightforward?⁵² More recent writers have been divided, some, such as Robin Cormack seeing him as, essentially, a duplicitous looter, others, like Terence Bowers, as a thoughtful critic of the industrial west whose journeys were genuine pilgrimages into an understanding of eastern Christianity.⁵³ As with Spencer, we must consider the larger context in which his collecting was situated as well as the variation within the modes and methods of his individual acquisitions.

The systematic acquisition of manuscripts from Orthodox monasteries by Englishmen had begun in the generation before Curzon with Joseph Dacre Carlyle, Cambridge professor of Arabic, and Philip Hunt, both members of Lord Elgin's embassy to Constantinople, traveling to Athos and elsewhere in search of lost classical texts.⁵⁴ The overbearing practices of Carlyle and Hunt, who took 'borrowing' in its most elastic sense, set a standard which was well-established by the time of the Bodleian sub-librarian Henry Octavius Coxe's 1858 government-sponsored report on Greek manuscripts in the Levant, a check-list of items for future acquisition.⁵⁵

Curzon, though in a private capacity, was very much a part of this larger trend in British attitudes towards the Christians of the Levant. He was, he wrote,

a sort of biblical knight errant, as I then considered myself, who had entered on the perilous adventure of Mount Athos to rescue from the thralldom of ignorant monks those fair vellum volumes, with their bright illuminations and velvet dresses and jewelled clasps, which for so many centuries had lain imprisoned in their dark monastic dungeons.⁵⁶

His chance came when he reached Karakallou, one of the twenty monasteries situated on Mount Athos, the centre of Orthodox Christianity.

Karakallou is first mentioned in 1018-19 and still possesses archives dating back to 1294. Although sacked by the Ottomans in the first half of the fifteenth century, it survived the fall of the eastern empire and had become cenobitic, rather than iodiorrhythmic, in 1813, a generation before Curzon's arrival.⁵⁷ The only knowledge Curzon is likely to have had of the monastery and its library beforehand is the brief account given by Hunt after his 1801 journey (eventually published in 1817):

Amongst the manuscripts, we found a treatise in small characters, accented and contracted; the commentary surrounding the text is in beautiful uncial letters . . . [a] miscellaneous compilation containing part of Demosthenes, of Justin translated into Greek, of the Hecuba of Euripides, and the first book of Euclid, and some verses are the only classical fragments. The verses are from Hesiod and from the *Batrachomyomachia* of Homer.⁵⁸

We know that Curzon was aware of Hunt's published account. His oft-cited 'notes of libraries in the Levant', contained in a letter sent to Sir Thomas Phillipps on 6 January 1837, contains a lengthy description of Athonite libraries which is a manuscript-by-manuscript paraphrase of

Hunt's survey with no new information, unsurprisingly given that Curzon would not visit the Holy Mountain himself until later that year.⁵⁹

Curzon reached Athos in the late summer of 1837. Most of his attempts to obtain manuscripts there were unsuccessful, the major exception being his negotiations with the abbot of Karakallou. Finding a manuscript leaf written in uncial characters, he ‘made bold to ask for this single leaf as a thing of small value’. His account of the subsequent transaction is worth quoting in full:

“Certainly!” said the agoumenos [abbot], “what do you want it for?”

My servant suggested that, perhaps, it might be useful to cover some jam pots or vases of preserves which I had at home.

“Oh!” said the agoumenos, “take some more;” and, without more ado, he seized upon an unfortunate thick quarto manuscript of the Acts and Epistles, and drawing out a knife cut out an inch thickness of leaves at the end before I could stop him . . . I ought, perhaps, to have slain the *tomecide* for his dreadful act of profanation, but his generosity reconciled me to his guilt, so I pocketed the [fragment], and asked him if he would sell me any of the other books, as he did not appear to set any particular value upon them.

“Malista, certainly,” he replied; “how many will you have? They are of no use to me, and as I am in want of money to complete my buildings I shall be very glad to turn them to some account.”⁶⁰

Curzon's account of this interchange is a complex text to parse. On the surface, it was undoubtedly written to amuse – Curzon was a great raconteur – and draws on the deeply-entrenched stereotype of the ignorant monk, already seen elsewhere in his work, to weave a

narrative which simultaneously makes us cringe and smile. Looking deeper, however, while its breeziness and its stereotypes are very much of the age, we have no reason to doubt the essential veracity of Curzon's account. Most tellingly, we have the physical remains of the abbot's actions: British Library Add MS 39599 is the main (eleventh-century) manuscript, damaged and incomplete at the end, while Add MS 39601 is the section removed, containing the Book of Revelation with a commentary by Andreas of Caesarea. If the abbot *did* vandalise his manuscript in front of an outraged Curzon, happily unaware that something which he perceived as simply rubbish waiting to be repurposed might have a different set of values for his visitor, it certainly puts the transaction in a different light than, for example, Curzon's lubrication of the abbot of El-Sourian with rosoglio.⁶¹

The next question, to be asked is: what precisely did Curzon acquire at Karakallou? In his *Visits* he wrote that,

I looked over the library, where I found an uncial Evangelistarium; a manuscript of Demosthenes on paper, but of some antiquity; a manuscript of Justin (Ιουστινου) in Greek; and several other manuscripts, - all of which the agoumenos agreed to let me have.⁶²

His *Catalogue* reports a total of eight manuscripts specifically identified as being from Karakallou, including the Demosthenes, there stated to be fifteenth century in date, but not the Justin (which is entirely absent) or the Evangelistarium, which must be the manuscript described, without provenance, as item 18 at pp. 23-24 (now BL Add MS 39602).⁶³ In 1917 Curzon's daughter, Darea, bequeathed his collection to the British Museum. The modern British Library catalogue reports a total of fifteen manuscripts in all with Karakallou provenance amongst Curzon's collection (the Justin, again, is absent).⁶⁴

This was by no means an insignificant portion of the monastery's manuscript collection. When Spyridon Lambros was preparing his great – and still standard – catalogue

of Athonite manuscripts and visited Karakallou in 1880, he recorded 277 manuscripts still to be found there, almost all inferior in age or importance to those which Curzon had obtained.⁶⁵ One could fairly say that Curzon took the opportunity which was presented him to gut the library of Karakallou of its most important items. Equally, one could also see this – as Curzon himself seems to have done – as the heroic salvation of priceless manuscripts otherwise destined to neglect or wanton destruction, a view which would have been reasonable enough given the abbot's actions. While most of the manuscripts acquired by Curzon would have begun life having practical liturgical, devotional, and scholarly value for the community at Karakallou, there is no clear evidence that they were still valued as such when Curzon arrived on the scene. Indeed, the library had, he tells us 'been locked up for many years'.⁶⁶

* * *

Initially, these two episodes may seem to have little in common, but I would like to make the argument that not only do they share a number of key features, but that in these features lies a larger roadmap to understanding the transfer of books out of monastic and into private ownership at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In both cases, the items under discussion had begun their lives as objects intended for devotional and/or liturgical use in their respective monastic homes. Likewise, in both cases there is at least some evidence that their original purposes were no longer seen as relevant by their monastic owners in the period discussed. In the case of the St Christopher at Buxheim, it had shifted from being an object of private devotion to one of artistic and historic value, whereas in that of the manuscripts at Karakallou they had, seemingly, been either superseded or ignored and left to a more or less benign neglect in the locked library.

In neither case, however, did the shift in value alone cause the items to leave monastic ownership. What was required, I propose, was not merely a change in use but that change in use combined with changing western European perceptions of monastic communities and their ownership of antiquities. Anti-monasticism, whether sweeping, overtly violent, and state-sponsored or localised, verbal, and personal, combined with the growing passion for collecting manuscripts and early printed books provided the impetus necessary for English collectors to capitalise on monks' changing understandings of the value and use of their collections and so to obtain items from those collections for themselves.

In other words, the collecting – or expropriation – which occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century was made possible by a unique and multifaceted set of cultural, political, and religious variables which aligned in such a way as to result in the widespread and wholesale transfer of manuscripts and early printed books out of monastic collections and into private hands. While it is a modern truism that any library is ‘fragile’ and that books are far more likely to be dispersed than to be kept together, it is also true that the majority of the monastic libraries dispersed in the Napoleonic secularisations or picked over in the Ottoman Empire by nineteenth-century collector-travellers had survived relatively intact for many hundreds of years.⁶⁷ This was a specific - indeed, a crucial - moment in which items from the common cultural heritage of the European world came loose from their historic moorings, changed hands, were bought and sold, and had their cultural meanings transformed accordingly.

While this is not the place to fully address the moral and ethical implications of these transactions, it would also be disingenuous to ignore the fact that what I have described here is inevitably fraught with ethical challenges for the modern scholar or librarian. The books and manuscripts described here were not stolen. In the case of the Buxheim collection they were sold by their rightful owners, the Carthusian community, albeit in extremity and under

considerable duress, to Horn, and sold by Horn to Spencer. In the case of Karakallou, they were sold by the abbot directly to Curzon. Of course, the Elgin Marbles were also (probably) not stolen, but as the disputes of the past two decades have shown, the fact of a legitimate commercial transaction underlying the expropriation of cultural heritage from one country and context to another does little to resolve the underlying debate over that expropriation's morality.⁶⁸ As we come to better understand the tectonic shifts in book ownership which occurred during the early nineteenth century, we ought also to reflect on the complicated place these objects now occupy in public collections, in the cases under discussion the John Rylands Library and the British Library. Any moral right to the Buxheim volumes is undoubtedly complicated by the dissolution of the monastery itself. Should they be treated as, on some level, pertaining to the surviving Carthusian order as a whole? The case of Karakallou is more straightforward; the monastery survives, as it did in Curzon's day, with the remnant of its library still intact. What relationship should or might the twenty-first-century monks of Karakallou have to their forebearers' books in London?

To conclude, I would like to offer a provocation to other scholars. I have made the case here for the critical importance of the period under discussion for understanding the *longue durée* circulation of medieval manuscripts and early printed books, a claim which has also been made by Kristen Jensen, Eric White, Cristina Dondi, David McKitterick, and others; I have also specifically pointed to how changing understandings of the use and value of books, both within and outwith monasteries, led to a sudden, at times catastrophic, dispersal of monastic libraries in the course of a comparatively few decades at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Finally, I have gestured briefly towards questions of morality, especially where books were forcibly expropriated or obtained under false pretences. What has largely yet to be done, however, is to map these processes in detail, for specific institutions, collections, and regions, recovering, insofar as we can, how books left monastic

ownership, why they did so, and how we might understand that within modern conceptualisations of cultural heritage. To quote Uwe Hartmann, head of the Provenance Research Department of the German Lost Art Foundation, who was himself speaking of books looted and confiscated in the twentieth century, ‘these objects bear a history that we can't ignore’.⁶⁹ As provenance history and the life cycle of the book become increasingly central parts of our discipline, it is imperative that we recover those histories and restore them to the books, once monastic, which now sit anonymously in private collections or on modern institutional shelves.

I am grateful to the editors and to the two anonymous readers for their kind and incisive comments on an earlier version of this article.

¹ See especially Cristina Dondi, Dorit Raines, and Richard Sharpe, *How the Secularization of Religious Houses Transformed the Libraries of Europe, 16th-19th Centuries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022).

² Robert Darnton, ‘What is the History of Books?’, *Daedalus* 111 (1982), 65-83.

³ See Dondi, et al., *Secularization, passim*.

⁴ Kristian Jensen, *Revolution and the Antiquarian Book: Reshaping the Past, 1780-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁵ This strand has attracted comparatively much less attention. Aside from the specialist studies cited below, Robin Cormack and Elizabeth Jeffreys, eds., *Through the Looking Glass: Byzantium through British Eyes* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), offers a useful starting point.

⁶ Simon Mills, *A Commerce of Knowledge: Trade, Religion, and Scholarship between England and the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). For the wider context, extending into the twentieth century, see also Tijmen C. Baarda, ‘Firmly Established in Early 20th-Century Orientalism: Alphonse Mingana Among His Fellow Scholars’, *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 19 (2016), 3-34, and Celeste Gianni, ‘Paul Sbath's Manuscript Library: Conceptualizing the Library of a Syrian Catholic Priest between Europe and the Middle East in the Early-20th Century’, *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 13 (2022), 381-420.

⁷ On Dibdin, bibliophilia, and bibliomania in this period, see Jensen, *Revolution, passim*, Dibdin's own work, especially his *Bibliomania; or Book Madness* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1809, and subsequent editions) and *The Bibliographical Decameron, or, Ten Days Pleasant Discourse . . .*, 3 vols. (London: Printed for the Author, 1817), and John A. Sibbald, ‘Book Bitch to the Rich – The Strife and Times of the Revd. Thomas Frognall Dibdin (1776-1847)’, in *Buying and Selling: The Business of Books in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Shanti Graheli (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 489-521.

⁸ See Jensen, *Revolution*, David McKitterick, *The Invention of Rare Books: Private Interest and Public Memory, 1600-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), ch. 17, and Seymour de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts (1530-1930) and Their Marks of Ownership* (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1930), chs 7-9.

⁹ Jensen, *Revolution*, discusses Spencer's collecting extensively but *passim*. The present writer is preparing a book-length study of Spencer's collecting practices.

¹⁰ *ODNB, s.n.*

¹¹ John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, 17 vols (London: Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1812-1858), ix. 723-4, corrected by Reviczky and Spencer's correspondence in British Library Add MS 76016, particularly the letters between June and August 1789.

¹² Jensen, *Revolution, passim*.

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- ¹³ For Horn's Scottish and Benedictine contexts see Mark Dilworth, *The Scots in Franconia: A Century of Monastic Life* (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1974) and Thomas McNally, *A Saltire in the German Lands: Scottish Benedictine Monasteries in Germany, 1575-1862* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 2016).
- ¹⁴ Claus Oberhauser, ed., *Diplomatie aus dem Untergrund: Die merkwürdige Karriere des Alexander (Maurus) Horn(e) (1762-1820)* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2022).
- ¹⁵ British Library Add MS 75965, Horn-Spencer, 22 March 1798 and 5 March 1802.
- ¹⁶ British Library Add MS 75965, Horn-Spencer, 18 April 1803.
- ¹⁷ British Library Add MS 75965, Horn-Spencer, 10 June 1803.
- ¹⁸ British Library Add MS 75965, Horn-Spencer, 9 July 1798.
- ¹⁹ See Friedrich Stöhlker, *Die Kartause Buxheim*, 4 vols. (Buxheim: Heimatdienst Buxheim e.V., 1974-78), and Volker Honemann, 'The Buxheim Collection and its Dispersal', *Renaissance Studies* 9 (1995), 166-88.
- ²⁰ Paul Needham, 'The Library of Hilprand Brandenburg', *Bibliothek und Wissenschaft* 29 (1996), 95-125, and 'Thirteen More Books from the Library of Hilprand Brandenburg', *Einband Forschung* 4 (1999), 23-5.
- ²¹ Honemann, 168. William Whobrey, in his extensive study of the Buxheim collections, has identified 155 of these scattered across the world at <https://buxheimlibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Hilprand-all-books-final-1.pdf>.
- ²² Martin Gerbert, *Iter Alemannicum, accedit Italicum et Gallicum. Sequuntur glossaria theotisca ex codicibus manuscriptis a saeculo IX. usque XIII.* (St. Blasien, 1765), 164-70.
- ²³ *Germania Sacra, NF 32: Die Bistümer der Kirchenprovinz Mainz: Das Bistum Konstanz 4. Das (Freiweltliche) Damenstift Buchau am Federsee* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), 250.
- ²⁴ John Rylands Latin MS 366. See Moses Tyson, 'Hand-List of Additions to the Collection of Latin Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library, 1908-1928', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 12 (1928), 581-609 at 600 and the more detailed description, with a transcription of Anna's donative inscription, in [Franz Krismer], 'Formschneiderkunst', in Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, *Journal zur Kunstgeschichte und zur allgemeinen Litteratur*, 2 (1776), 104-5.
- ²⁵ This claim is dependent both on the falsity of the 1418 date on a woodblock print of the Madonna and Child now in the Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels and the accuracy of the 1423 date on the St Christopher itself, neither being beyond suspicion. See Peter Parshall and Rainer Schoch, *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-century Woodcuts and Their Public* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2005), 26.
- ²⁶ Parshall and Schoch, *Origins of European Printmaking*, 31.
- ²⁷ Karl-Heinrich von Heineken, *Idée générale d'une collection complete d'estampes* (Leipzig and Vienna: chez Jean Paul Kraus, 1771), 250-251. Discussed in Eric Marshall White, 'Gutenberg for Sale: Alexander Horn as an Agent of the International Antiquarian Book Trade', in *Diplomatie*, ed. Oberhauser, 226.
- ²⁸ See Krismer, 'Formschneiderkunst', 75-179; Parshall and Schoch, *Origins of European Printmaking*, 5.
- ²⁹ Horn assumed that Spencer was unaware of von Heineken's account when he referenced it in a letter of 17 November 1804, but Horn often assumed a superiority of bibliographical knowledge which was not always justified (see British Library Add MS 75965, Horn-Spencer, 17 November 1804).
- ³⁰ Annotation to British Library Add MS 76014, Maugérard-Spencer, 16 October 1797. For Maugérard see Bénédicte Savoy, 'Codicologue, incunabuliste et rabatteur. La mission de Jean-Baptiste Maugérard dans les quatre départements du Rhin (1802-1805)', *Bulletin du Bibliophile* (1999), 313-44.
- ³¹ British Library Add MS 75965, Horn-Spencer, 14 March 1806.
- ³² *Ibid.*; Honemann, 173.
- ³³ Honemann, 173.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 173-4.
- ³⁵ British Library Add MS 75965, Horn-Spencer, 4 July 1803.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 September 1803.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12 January 1804.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4 September 1804.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 17 November 1804.
- ⁴⁰ White, 'Gutenberg for Sale', 229-30.

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- ⁴¹ *Catalogue des livres rares, précieux et bien conditionnés du cabinet de m. **** [i.e., Comte Léon d'Ourches] (Paris: Chez Brunet, 1811). The copy at Bodleian Library 25899 e.116 contains prices realised in manuscript.
- ⁴² British Library G.9759. See John Thomas Payne and Henry Foss, *Bibliotheca Grenvilliana*, 2 vols. (London: Printed by William Nicol, 1842), ii. 772; White, 'Gutenberg for Sale', 230.
- ⁴³ White, 'Gutenberg for Sale', 230.
- ⁴⁴ Huntington Library 92587; Herman Ralph Mead, *Incunabula in the Huntington Library* (San Marino, Cal.: Huntington Library, 1937), 4. For d'Yve's sale see *Description bibliographique d'une très-belle collection de livres rares et curieux, provenant de la bibliothèque de Melle la Comtesse d'Yve*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Aug. Wahlen & Compe., 1819-20).
- ⁴⁵ Eton College Library Sd1.2.01-02.
- ⁴⁶ John Rylands Library 3302.
- ⁴⁷ Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Bibliotheca Spenceriana or A Descriptive Catalogue of the Books Printed in the Fifteenth Century . . . in the Library of George John Earl Spencer*, 4 vols (London: Printed for the Author, 1814-1815), i. i-iv.
- ⁴⁸ British Library Add MS 75964, Sigismund Høgl - Horn, 23 February [1798], and see White, 'Gutenberg for Sale', 215-19.
- ⁴⁹ For Curzon see Ian Fraser, *The Heir of Parham: Robert Curzon, 14th Baron Zouche* (Alburgh: The Paradigm Press, 1986), and Meridel Holland, 'Robert Curzon, Traveller and Book Collector', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 65 (1983), 123-57.
- ⁵⁰ Robert Curzon, *Catalogue of Materials for Writing, Early Writings on Tablets and Stones, Rolled and Other Manuscripts and Oriental Manuscript Books* (London: Printed by William Nicol, 1849).
- ⁵¹ Robert Curzon, *Visits to Monasteries in the Levant* (London: John Murray, 1849), 86-89. See the modern artistic responses to the 'Persuasive Powers of Rosoglio' at <https://www.manuscripthunters.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/index.php/curzon/>.
- ⁵² John Julius Norwich and Resesby Sitwell, *Mount Athos* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), 95.
- ⁵³ Robin Cormack, "'A Gentleman's Book": Attitudes of Robert Curzon"', in *Through the Looking Glass*, 147-62; Terence Bowers, 'Robert Curzon, Orientalism, and the *Ars Peregrinationis*', *Victorians Institute Journal* 33 (2005), 117-48.
- ⁵⁴ See Fraser, *Heir of Parham*, 94-95, and Hunt's 'Mount Athos: An Account of the Monastic Institutions and the Libraries on the Holy Mountain' in *Memoirs Relating to European and Asiatic Turkey; Edited from Manuscript Journals*, ed. Robert Walpole (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1817), 198-230, as well as Michael E. Martin, 'Two Cambridge Orientalists on Athos', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 26 (2002), 149-77.
- ⁵⁵ Henry Octavius Coxe, *Report to Her Majesty's Government, on the Greek Manuscripts Yet Remaining in Libraries of the Levant* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1858), 1.
- ⁵⁶ Curzon, *Monasteries*, 394.
- ⁵⁷ Cyril Pavlikianov, *The Byzantine Documents of the Athonite Monastery of Karakallou and Selected Acts from the Ottoman Period (1294-1835): Critical Edition and Commentary of the Texts* (Sofia: 'St. Kliment Ohridski' University Press, 2015), 23-49.
- ⁵⁸ Walpole, *Memoirs*, 210.
- ⁵⁹ Published as 'Robert Curzon's Notes of Libraries in the Levant' in A. N. L. Munby, *Phillipps Studies No. 3: The Formation of the Phillipps Library up to the Year 1840* (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1954), 170-77. Curzon's indebtedness to Hunt does not seem to have been noticed before.
- ⁶⁰ Curzon, *Monasteries*, 381-82.
- ⁶¹ When the philologist Viktor Ivanovich Grigorovich attempted to see the library a few years later, in 1844, he was told that he could not as 'there is no abbot [and] he did not leave the keys with the governor' ('Игумена нет, наместнику он не оставил ключей'). Grigorovich's telegraphic style makes this passage obscure and it is unclear if the abbot whom Curzon had met was no longer performing his office or was simply absent on a journey (see Виктор Иванович Григорович, *Очерк путешествия по Европейской Турции, Виктора Григоровича* [Казань: в типографии Императорскаго Казанскаго Университета, 1848], 15).
- ⁶² Curzon, *Monasteries*, 436-37.

⁶³ Curzon, *Catalogue, passim*. For confirmation of this identification see the description of the same manuscript in Frederick Henry Scrivener, *An Exact Transcript of the Codex Augiensis* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1859), 1-li.

⁶⁴ British Library Add MSS 39586 (Psalter and Canticles, 11th c., though Curzon was uncertain whether he had obtained this at Karakallou or from the Monastery of St. Sabba, near Jerusalem, see fol. ivr), 39590 (New Testament, 11th c.), 39593 (Gospels, 12th c.), 39594 (Gospels, 12th c.), 39599 (Acts and Epistles, 11th c.), 39601 (Revelation, 11th c.?), 39602 (Evangelistarium, 10th c.), 39605 (ps.-Gregory of Nyssa, sermons on John and Matthew, 10th c.), 39606 (Gregory Nazianzene, *Orationes*, 11th c.), 39607 (John Chrysostom, homily on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, 12th c.), 39608 (John Chrysostom, homily on Genesis, 13th c.), 39609 (Isaiah of Scetis, *Asceticon*, 11th c.), 39612 (Revelation, 14th c.), 39617 (Demosthenes, *Orationes*, 15th c.), and 39623 (fragments of an Evangelistarium, 14th c.).

⁶⁵ Σπυρίδων Π. Λάμπρος, *Κατάλογος των εν ταις βιβλιοθήκαις του Αγίου Όρους Ελληνικών κωδικών*, 2 τομ. (Κανταβρίγια: Της Αγγδιάς, 1895-1900), i. 130-50, ii. 472-75.

⁶⁶ Curzon, *Monasteries*, 381.

⁶⁷ For recent reflections on the fragility of books and libraries see Brian Cummings, *Bibliophobia: The End & the Beginning of the Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) and Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The Library: A Fragile History* (London: Profile Books, 2021).

⁶⁸ The legality of the removal of the Elgin Marbles, let alone its morality, is a hotly contested question. See the contrasting views in William St. Clair, *Lord Elgin and the Marbles: The Controversial History of the Parthenon Sculptures*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Catharine Titi, *The Parthenon Marbles and International Law* (Cham: Springer, 2023).

⁶⁹ Quoted in Anders Rydell, *The Book Thieves: The Nazi Looting of Europe's Libraries and the Race to Return a Literary Inheritance*, tr. Henning Koch (London: Penguin, 2017), 34.