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The Greek Manuscripts
in the Old Seraglio at
Constantinople

by

STEPHEN GASELEE, M.A.,

Fellow and Librarian of Magdalene College, Cambridge.

Cambridge

at the University Press

1916

Price One Shilling net

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THE GREEK MANUSCRIPTS IN THE OLD
SERAGLIO AT CONSTANTINOPLE

It was announced that one result of the Young Turk régime would be the publication of a careful and complete catalogue of the small collection of Greek MSS. which was known to exist in the Old Seraglio. Exaggerated stories of them had long been current in the West: indeed they were believed by some to be the remains of the Palace Library of the Byzantine Emperors.

In the present state of the world's history it seems as though the appearance of this catalogue might be long delayed, and I have therefore thought it worth while to give the results of a personal inspection of them seven years ago. The following journal of my visit to Constantinople was written on the spot and at once, and I have given it without modification: the interest at present taken in all the political moves of Turkey for the last decade will excuse the presence of a certain amount of descriptive matter somewhat remotely connected with the Classics. I happened to stumble upon the last effort of Abdul Hamid to recover the power which he had lost at the time of the Young Turk revolution, and though almost ideally unfitted to describe any historical event, I accidentally found myself in the middle of rather exciting circumstances and wrote down just what I had myself seen, as soon as I could put pen to paper, with the idea of keeping my own observations clear in my own mind before I had had time to talk to anybody else about them. The greater part of all that follows was written on board the steamer on the

way back through the Black Sea, and finished within the week in the train across Europe.

In the Easter Vacation of 1909 I went to pay a visit to some friends then living at Bucharest. I arrived there at the beginning of Holy Week, and found that week sufficient to see most of the sights of the city: I spent much time over the wonderful gold hoard of Petrossa, the *exuviae* of some Gothic king, with runic inscriptions. I attended the midnight service on Easter Eve at the Metropolitan Church, where I stood for more hours than I now like to count in evening-dress and white kid gloves, holding in my hand a yellowish candle: but I shall not soon forget the constant refrain of the splendid choir, "Christos a inuiat," in which Latin and Slavonic elements meet—as they do in all that is best in Roumania—with such wonderful and novel effect.

Leaving my big luggage behind, I packed a bag on the Sunday afternoon and took the train for Constanza. It was pitch dark when I arrived, and though I had taken with me and read on the journey the *Epistolae ex Ponto* and the *Tristia* of my favourite poet, I could not make out any of the features of the place. I can only say, however, that, unless the world's climate has notably changed since the beginning of the Christian era, some of Ovid's descriptions of the place must be received with caution. It is inconceivable that it was ever cold enough for wine to be sold by the pound (though it is true that in Cambridge we buy butter by the yard), and his stories of its perpetual and extreme cold must be strangely exaggerated: after all, Constanza is on the same latitude as Bordeaux. After a calm and comfortable night down the Black Sea, I arrived in Constantinople about mid-day on Monday, April 13th. I did not want to go to the largest hotel, the Pera Palace, chiefly because I wished to take my meals out, and I put up at a comfortable little place, kept by Greeks, called the Continental, and began to think about my manuscripts. Before leaving England I had obtained an official letter by means of which I was able to get an *Irada* from the

Sultan to allow me to enter the Old Seraglio and to examine the thirty or so Greek manuscripts there.

I went to bed that night little dreaming of what was to take place before I awoke: on going down the next morning the proprietor of my hotel asked me what I was proposing to do; and when I replied that I was going across to Stamboul to begin seeing the sights of the town, he told me that there had been a mutiny and that it would be impossible to pass the Galata Bridge. Wishing, however, to see for myself, I walked down from Pera, but was unable to get a dragoman to accompany me on any terms whatever: the inhabitants of Constantinople appeared to have a wholesome terror of any movement connected with the army. I passed on to the Bridge without difficulty, though the traders of the lower quarters of Galata were shutting up their shops as rapidly as possible, and I there fell in with a British officer on leave, who, like myself, wished to see what was going on. On arriving at Stamboul we turned to the left and went up towards St Sophia: the streets were full of the lowest class of the people, porters and hangers-on, with a liberal sprinkling of Softas or theological students: and then we began to see the mutineers. Bands of them were converging from all parts of the town to the broad place in front of St Sophia and the House of Deputies; they were led, if led at all, by non-commissioned officers: and as they ran they loaded their rifles, each holding his own firmly into the small of the back of the man next in front of him. We heard that their officers, meanwhile, were lying securely tied up in their barracks—a few had been killed (only those who made some show of resisting the mutineers) and some of the more discreet had managed to slip into civilian clothes and leave their quarters. We were admitted into St Sophia without difficulty, although some kind of service was going on, and were able to look well at the wonderful building: when we came out again on to the place, shortly after mid-day, it was thick with troops, and we could see perhaps a hundred Ulemas or priests going to and

fro amongst them. Some of the soldiers fired at the windows of the House of Deputies, more, I think, to attract attention than to do damage to life or limb, just as they fired in the air: but their aim was not always of the best, and some of the bullets whistled so close that we thought it prudent to retire across the water to our hotel. It must be made clear, however, that the mutineers' attitude toward foreigners was what a local paper called "d'une correctitude parfaite": they smiled on us, as they did upon the *Times* correspondent, the American Ambassador, and the first Dragoman of the Italian Embassy, who were all on the scene at different moments.

Returning in the afternoon, the situation had become more critical. Romolo Spathari, a brilliant young Greek officer, had been sent with 300 men against 20,000, and had met his certain death like a hero; as I reached the middle of the square Nazim Pasha, the Minister of Justice, was killed on the steps of the House of Deputies for refusing to give up his revolver and Riza Pasha, the Minister of Marine, who was with him, was wounded at the same time.

The actual murder was less unpleasant than might have been expected; the two ministers were driving away from the House of Deputies when their carriage was stopped by the mutineers, and they were forced to return: on the steps they were a little jostled, and Nazim was foolish enough to draw his pistol and to cover with it some of those who were pushing him. Then it was all over in a minute: one man fired his rifle into him at close quarters—two more shots (I think) followed, and the work was finished with bayonets, to make all certain. Yet there seemed little brutality about it, and the body, when I went up to look, was not mangled or disfigured.

I also heard that Yahya Sadik Pasha and Mehmet Arslan Bey, the deputy for Latakia, had both been killed in mistake for Hussain Djahid Bey, the hated editor of the *Tanin*, the organ of the Committee of Union and Progress. That at least was the account given: but if the theory of inspiration from the highest quarters has any grounds, it must

be remembered that both of these were members of the Committee, and this alone may have been the explanation of their murder. The soldiers, primed by the Ulemas, had formulated their demands to the Deputies—an amnesty, changes in their officers and in the officials of the Chamber, the banishment of certain publicists on the side of the Committee, the resignation of the Grand Vizier and the Ministers of War and Marine, and above all the application of the Shariat, or religious law. As everyone knows, they were completely successful in their demands, and the new cabinet was formed from the Liberal party, which is far more conservative than the Committee, and might perhaps be said to represent an enlightened Tory government in this country.

The Shariat, if I understood its nature aright, is naturally founded on the Koran, but has other contributory sources, some depending upon tradition and some comparable to the *responsa prudentum* of Roman Law—the decisions of sages on such debateable points as have appeared in the past. It is far from being a bad code, though in one or two cases it might appear vindictive to Western eyes: I was told for instance that a thief caught *flagrante delicto* is to have his hand slashed open and bound up with salt-petre: the result being that the muscles stiffen and the hand cannot again be used. As it affects non-mussulmans, the law is unexceptionable: it only exacts that in mussulman countries none shall speak slightly of Mahomet or the faith which he founded—a course of conduct which is after all indicated by the merest rules of courtesy as well as of good citizenship. In the opinion of those best qualified to speak there appeared to be nothing mutually exclusive in the Shariat and the Constitution as drawn up, and the Committee of Union and Progress deserved severe censure for having neglected the Law, or at any rate the easy task of making the Constitution harmonize with it. The immediate cause of the cry as to the neglect of the Shariat was the murder of Hassan Fehmi, editor of the *Serbesti*: the soldiers and Softas insisted that the government

knew perfectly well who the assassin was, and were neglecting the Shariat by refusing to bring him to justice and execution.

Most of the next morning—the Wednesday—I spent inside the Seraglio grounds: but before going in, I passed an hour or so driving round Stamboul. No officers had appeared, and the soldiers were still quite wild: they were mostly walking through the streets in groups of three or four—some, I regret to say, partly intoxicated (where was the Shariat now?)—firing off their rifles into the air, and it was by this promiscuous firing that most of the damage was done. Late the night before, it is true, a short engagement had taken place between the mutineers and three regiments who had been kept true to the Committee by Mahmoud Mukhtar Pasha, the son of the old representative of Turkey in Egypt: he had returned from the Asiatic side and held the War Office against the mutineering troops: in the interchange of shots seven soldiers were killed and three wounded, while there were more than sixty casualties among civilians in the surrounding streets. So small a body could of course do nothing against 20,000, and the three regiments soon yielded. Mahmoud had a very narrow escape and his life was in danger for the next twenty-four hours: on the Wednesday evening his house was surrounded by 200 soldiers, with orders to shoot him at sight. Hearing of this, the British and German Embassies did their best: the first Dragoman of the British Embassy went first to the new minister of War, who said that he was not yet in the saddle, and was powerless, and then direct to the Sultan, who sent him up to the beleaguered house with an order to the effect that the soldiers were to disperse. They did not seem anxious to obey, and meanwhile Mahmoud's English neighbours smuggled him through their houses on to a yacht, whence he was transferred first to a pinnace and then to the German man-of-war lying in the Bosphorus, which took him on board.

There was a short list of some kind which was of assistance to me in going through the collection: and the

following is the result of my rather hurried inspection. The Roman figures give the (estimated) century in which each MS was written unless actually dated.

1. Vellum. XII. Euclid. Heron of Alexandria on measures.
2. Paper. XIII. Iliad, with scholia.
3. Paper. XV. Critobulus. History of the first seventeen years of Mahomet II.¹
4. Paper. 1465. Συναγωγή λέξεων Ἀντωνίου μονάχου.
5. Paper. XIV. Eight astronomical treatises: by Maximus, Nicomachus Gerasenus, John Philoponus, Isaac Monachus, etc.
6. Paper. 1474. Michael *αἰχμαλωτός* on the antiquities of Constantinople.
7. Paper. XIV. Lexicon of Eudemus: Joh. Patricius on verbs: an anonymous lexicon and grammar.
8. Vellum. XIII. Catena patrum de veteri testamento, with rather fine Byzantine miniatures, the warriors in conventional Roman armour. The illuminations do not run all through the volume, but in the latter part of the book there are blanks left for the miniatures.
9. Paper. XV. Fourteen *γεωργικαὶ ἐκλογαί* by different authors.
10. Paper. XVI. Aesop's fables, with the life of him by Planudes.
11. Paper. XV. Medical works: Galen, Hippocrates, Michael Psellus.
12. Paper. XV. *περὶ λίθων ἰδιωμάτων*, and another treatise of the same kind about plants.
13. Vellum. XIV. *ἐξήγησις τοῦ βιβλίου τῶν ψαλμῶν τοῦ Δαυίδ*. A Byzantine miniature at the beginning, and a few more.
14. Paper. XV. Lexicon of St Cyril.
15. Paper. 1463. Michael Moschopoulos, Grammar.
16. Paper. XVI. Arrian, de ascensu Alexandri, and description of India.
17. Paper. XV. A miscellaneous collection, *περὶ μαγίας*.
18. Paper. XV. Anonymous, *περὶ γραμματικῆς*.
19. Paper. XIV. (a) Aristotle, *περὶ γενέσεως*.
 (b) Proclus, *φυσική*.
 (c) Heron, *γεωμετρία*.
 (d, e) Prognostics of weather.
 (f) Palmistry.
 (g) (Arrian?) *τακτικὸν πρὸς Τραϊανόν*.
 (h) Leon, *τακτικά*.

¹ Much the best-known of the collection: it is the only MS of the Greek authority for the fall of Constantinople.

10 THE GREEK MANUSCRIPTS IN THE

- (*z*) Heron, *πνευματικά*.
 (*j, k, l, m*) Anonymous, arithmetical and medical.
 (*n*) Adamantion, *φυσιογνωμονικά*.
 (*o*) Anonymous, *φυσιογνωμονικά*.
 (*p*) Prognostics of weather.
 (*q*) Ammonius on the Astrolabe.
 (*r*) John Philoponus on the Astrolabe.
 (*s, t*) Anonymous, dogmatics.
 (*u*) Anonymous, *τακτικά*.
20. Paper. XVI. Philoxenus Syrianus on Aristotle's Politics and Metaphysics.
 21. Vellum. XII. Gospels (a lectionary) in a very fine Byzantine hand. Headings in gold.
 22. Paper. Late xv. Pythagoras, *ἔπη χρυσᾶ* with *ἐξήγησις*: Phocylides: Cato's Sentences translated by Maximus Planudes.
 23. Paper. xv. Lexicon Graeco-Latinum.
 24. Paper. XVI. *Λατίνου τινὸς Χριστοφύρου Ἀνσερίνου περὶ τῶν νήσων πρὸς Ἰορδάνην τὸν Καρθηνάλιον τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς Ἐκκλησίας*.
 25. Paper. xv. Polybius 1-5.
 26. Paper. xv. Eudemus, Lexicon.
 27. Paper. xv. Ptolemy, Geography: Dionysius, Periegesis.
 28. Paper. xiv. John Cantacuzene, History.
 29. Paper. xv. Xenophon, Cyropaedia.
 30. Paper. xv. Lexicon Latino-Graecum et Graeco-Latinum.
 31. Paper. xv. Hesiod, Theogony with commentary.
 32. Paper. xv. Pindar, Olympians.
 33. Paper. xv. Oppian, Halieutica.

Even these few rough notes are enough to show that we have here no remnants of the Imperial Library, but some more humble collection. It is made up of the kind of books that might have belonged to some doctor or other professional man in Constantinople in the 16th or 17th century, and displays a taste reasonably wide but not very deep. We must hope for a real catalogue some time in the future when the world is quieter.

When I came out of the museums at about two o'clock, the firing was still proceeding merrily—in fact, it was increasing, for small parties of soldiers were now passing through the streets even of Pera, firing as they went, to the great alarm of

many of the visitors. The mob meanwhile, headed by Ulemas and Softas, rushed to the offices of the *Shourai Ummet* and the *Tanin*, the two organs of the Committee, and threw all, papers, furniture, presses, and type, out of the windows: it then behaved in the same fashion at the office of the Committee of Union and Progress. Among the papers they found it is said that there were many of an extremely compromising nature, dealing, for instance, with the removal of Hassan Fehmi and other opponents of the Committee. By this time accidents from the falling bullets were becoming frequent: on the bridge as I returned a man within two feet of me fell like a log: a bullet had come down just behind his right ear and out again by the lower jaw. He was taken in a cab to the hospital, and I know not whether he recovered or no. It was estimated that in the course of the three days more than two million rounds were fired; perhaps fifteen people were purposely murdered; and about thirty were accidentally killed and over five hundred wounded.

After the Wednesday, the exciting events were merely sporadic. The whole of the Thursday morning I was examining my Manuscripts in the Library of the Seraglio, and all seemed to be quiet: on my return to Pera that afternoon I was the witness of an exciting and tragic adventure that took place in front of Tokatlian's restaurant.

Two soldiers began to quarrel—I could not see why—and one of them attempted to wrest the other's revolver from him: the second attempted to level his rifle at his opponent and fired. The ball missed its aim, and struck in the head a young Greek who was passing, killing him instantly: the aggressor then ran for his life, while the first soldier prudently retired down a side ally. At that moment a patrol, also soldiers, came round the corner of the street and pursued the fleeing man at full gallop; I could not see the end, but they caught him at the next corner, and put an end to him at once with bayonets and revolvers. The body lay in the gutter for two or three hours: it was finally removed to the courtyard of a neighbouring

mosque, while the unfortunate Greek was taken to an Orthodox Church, the Hagia Trias, at the end of the Rue de Péra.

Friday, my last whole day, was perfectly quiet: I went to the Selamlik and spent the greater part of the day in visiting various Mosques on the Stamboul side, as well as the Metropolitan Church of the Phanar, where I was fortunate enough to see the Patriarch Joachim. The only incidents were the disarming by the soldiers of one or two officers who appeared in the streets with revolvers, and the murder of the captain of one of the ships of the Turkish navy. This man had foolishly ordered the guns of his vessel to be trained on Yildiz Kiosk, and commanded the marines to be ready to fire if he gave the word. When the mutiny was at its height, he left his boat: when they found him on Friday they took him up to Yildiz, where the Sultan shewed himself at a window: he sent an aide-de-camp, ordering the troops to hand him over to the proper ministers of justice: but before this order could arrive the soldiers and sailors had killed and decapitated him. That afternoon we began to learn of the movement of troops favourable to the Committee from Salonica towards Constantinople: and when I left the next morning at 10 o'clock by boat for Constanza, it was said that the advance guards had arrived at Chertaldja, but of all that has occurred since that date I know no more than anybody else who followed the daily papers.

As to the causes and inner history of the revolt, I had many opportunities of consulting those who were on the spot and had the best qualifications to speak on the subject—not only Englishmen living at Constantinople, but Greeks and Armenians with an intimate knowledge of Turkish, who had passed freely among the mutineers and consulted with them as to their grievances and demands. It was their opinion that in the first place it was a most significant fact that the soldiers had plenty of money. Probably no troops in the world are so badly paid as the Turkish privates—they do not even often get the miserable pittance which is their due. Yet in their first manifesto they said they were willing to wait

indefinitely until their demands were conceded, having plenty of food and sustenance. I saw them buying bread and cigarettes: many, as I have said, were able to get drunk: some were buying revolvers and small pistols for hand-to-hand conflicts. The money appears to have come from the Softas, themselves a miserably poor class; but whence did the Softas get it? There seems to be little doubt that the high ecclesiastical authorities were not the source: the Sheikh-ul-Islam was not even particularly pleased at the turn events took, and was not a rich man. I do not think there can be much doubt that the money came by underground channels from Yildiz itself, and if this is the case much is explicable that would otherwise be dark. The day before the mutiny broke out the Sultan sent openly £10,000 to troops which were being disbanded in Asia Minor: and, it is nearly certain, I think, that he devoted a greater sum to the soldiers in Constantinople itself. It is true that his civil list had been immensely cut down since the days of the Constitution; but he must have had immense reserves from the time when the public treasury and his private list were one and the same, and I imagine that he took his share of every Turkish loan before the money reached its destination. He certainly had investments of great size in most countries of the world: it would be by no means disproportionate to his resources that every private soldier should have fifteen shillings or so each—riches to them—and the non-commissioned officers more *pro rata*. His position was temporarily very greatly improved by the mutiny; and without any abrogation of the liberties of his subjects—at least such liberties as they deserve—he regained a considerable amount of power. He had the skill to see the right moment arrive—the moment when the clergy were becoming exasperated at the neglect of the sacred law, and the people of the city furious at an editor's murder rightly or wrongly attributed to the Committee because he attacked them in the Press and criticised their undoubtedly high-handed and unskilful proceedings. The unanimity of the outbreak must

clearly have been the result of organisation—soldiers do not otherwise come together at three o'clock at night from all parts of the town to air their grievances: and the whole seems to have been a *coup*, successful, at least as far as the capital itself was concerned, beyond the wildest hope of its organizer.

At the Selamlık, or public prayers, on the Friday of that eventful week the monarch was in better spirits and more cheerful and alert than ever before. He appeared particularly delighted to see Europeans present, and ordered coffee and cigarettes to be sent us. He had gained his end for the moment.

When I come to speak of my own opinion of the whole movement, I shall perhaps be on more debateable ground. I was never able to have much sympathy for the Committee and the effects they produced: the best results of the previous revolution might have been brought about by other methods. The constitution of the Chamber of Deputies was sadly jerrymandered: the Turkish Empire consists of three times as many Arabs as Turks, whereas in the Chamber the proportion was just reversed: the Christians—especially the exceedingly numerous Greeks—had hardly any representation at all. The abolition of espionage and certain forms of extortion was all to the good: but on the other side must be placed the fact that life and property in Constantinople were less secure after the revolution than before: and political murder by an oligarchy, however high-sounding their title, is not much superior to banishment by a tyrant.





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