

SUMMARY

The Library of the Platytera Monastery in Corfu Manuscripts-Printed Books-Archives

The history of the Platytera Monastery begins in the 18th century. Its foundation is linked to the hard work and the piety of the hieromonk Chrysanthos Syropoulos, from Leukas. The church of Our Lady Platytera was inaugurated in November 1743 and around it there was soon organized the first monastic fraternity having as Abbot the hieromonk Chrysanthos.

In the year 1746, Chrysanthos erected a second monastery in the area of the village Europouloi in honour of Our Lady Evangelistria and of the Saints Chrysanthos and Dareia. The monastery was completed in 1747 and became a dependency of Platytera.

The monastery met with a great destruction during 1798, but was restored in the following years. During the summer of 1801 there was a new inauguration by Archbishop Ierotheos Cigalas. The monastery had a special relationship with the Corfiot family of the Capodistrias, whose rural residence was situated in the area called «Koukouritsa», next to the land of the Evangelistria monastery. Antonios Maria Capodistrias, father of the Governor of Greece, had a particular connection to the monastery as well as Ioannis Capodistrias himself and his brothers Viaros and Augustinos. The graves of the above can be found today in the monastery.

The monks and the abbots of the monastery took care of its embellishment, as well as of increasing its lands and creating an important Library. It is probable that the personal library of its founder who was also the first Abbot, along with those books that were essential to the good operation of the monastery, created a first nucleus for the Library. This first book collection was probably destroyed along with the monastery in 1798. The Library that exists today is a result of the efforts and the interest shown by the abbots, the monks and the friends of the mo-

nastery in the beginning of the 19th century and up till today. All of them brought together a very interesting (both volume and content-wise) collection of printed books and manuscripts which extends from the 15th to the 20th century.

The present work includes the content of the Library that was saved from the destruction of time and is accessible to us today. The work is included in a wider project of recording and description of the ecclesiastical libraries in Corfu, that the writers have undertaken during the last years and it is being added to the already published catalogues of libraries in other monasteries and convents (Palaiokastritsa, Myrtiliotissa and Saints Theodori of Corfu).

The Library of the Platytera Monastery is the largest known monastic Library in Corfu. In it there has been found and described a total of 91 manuscripts. This number includes also the collection of liturgical notebooks and fragments that were found in the monastery. The Library has also an important collection of printed books and the present catalogue includes all of them which were printed between the 15th and the 19th century; 919 titles or 1100 copies have been registered.

All of the manuscripts are post-byzantine and in paper. Only one parchment folio was found in the Library containing a chrysostomic text of the 11th century.

Most of the manuscripts contain Saints' Masses and hymn texts, whereas second in line are the so called mathemataria and third are the musical manuscripts and those containing ecclesiastic literary texts.

It is worth mentioning the most important among the manuscripts, either according to their content or to their origin.

Manuscript no. 1 is of the 16th century and comes from the Holy Mountain of Athos (Meghisti Lavra Monastery). This manuscript contains various hymn texts, including certain canons to Blessed Athanasios of Athos.

Manuscript no. 2, also of the 16th century, and probably coming from Epirus, includes polemical works against the Latins by various writers as well as unpublished texts by Andronikos Doukas Sgouros, a writer of the 15th century.

Manuscript no. 3 contains works by the Corinthian writer Constantine Ressinos, a known theologian of the 16th century who was also a copist of manuscripts and a translator. It is originally from the monastery of Ardenitsa in Epirus and belonged to the Abbot Nectarios Terpos.

Manuscript no. 15 has saved a translation (that wasn't known to this day) in the common greek language of the third book in the work of a professor of Theology at the University of Padua, Antonino Valsecchi, "Dei fondamenti della religione e dei fonti dell'empietà". The translation was done by Makarios, the Archbishop of Roges, and later Metropolitan Bishop of Corfu (1818-1827).

A small daybook (catastico) is of great interest. It is originally from Kephallonia, and in it there have been written down revenues from a money collection that took place during the 18th century in villages of Ilia and Roumeli as well as in villages of Kephallonia and Corfu.

Inside the collection of musical manuscripts, one that presents a particular interest is no. 31 under the title "tenore of psilimoudia" (psalmody in tenor voice). It contains hymns and texts of the Passion in greek and in latin, along with guidelines for their execution in tetraphony. It is one of the few samples of polyphonic music in the Orthodox church and the only one including latin hymns in byzantine semeiography.

Inside the collection of Nomokanones we'd like to note the oldest manuscript (no. 6) which dates back to the year 1589/1590.

Finally it is worth mentioning a collection of school notebooks, called mathemataria which document the method and the teaching material in elementary and middle school classes during the 18th century in the Ionian islands.

Most of the printed books hosted in the monastery date back to the 18th and 19th centuries, but there is a large number of older publications which adorn the Library. There is a 15th century copy, 18 copies from the 16th century and 67 copies from the 17th century. A particular mention should be made to a copy containing Hartmann Schedel's work "Registrum ... cronicorum" of the year 1493 as well as to the works of Gregory the Theologian, printed by Aldus (1504), to a two-volume book of Commentaries on Homer's Iliad by Eustathios of Thessaloniki (1542), to the multi-volume publications with the works of Chrysostomos (Eton 1612-1613, Venice 1734-1741), and finally to the work "Bibliotheca Veterum Patrum" (Venice 1765-1781, 14 volumes).

As it happens with most monastery libraries, most of the books are theological ones, regarding, that is, Mass matters as well as works of the patristic and the ecclesiastical literature. The subjects of the rest of the books belong to philology, philosophy, history, legal sciences, grammar and lexicography. The Platytera Library conserves also some works that

are unknown to greek bibliography along with a large number of books in other languages, mostly in english.

The biggest part of liturgical books was bought for the needs of the monastery. A large part of the rest of the books seems to have come through donations by persons not belonging to the clergy, as well as by orthodox and catholic priests and through the integration of the monks' personal libraries after their death. Consequently, in the Library of the monastery there is preserved today an important part of the books that used to form the core of private libraries mainly in the urban area of Corfu. One can vaguely discern the destiny of those libraries in notes that former proprietors left among the pages of the books.

Finally, an important position in the Library of the monastery is occupied by the archival documents, as administrative documents, case files regarding the property of the monastery as well as daybooks of financial management. The archival collection includes also the personal correspondence of the founder of the monastery, Chrysanthos Syropoulos, as well as the correspondence of other abbots and monks who succeeded him.