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# William Wake's Byzantine Manuscripts: Notes on Provenance

Jesse W Torgerson, *Wesleyan University*



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# CHRIST CHURCH LIBRARY

## NEWSLETTER

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### In Memoriam John Mason

Librarian of Christ Church 1962-1987

John Mason (9 June 1920 – 31 October 2009) won a scholarship to Jesus College in 1937 and, after war service in India, took a first in history in 1948. From 1950 to 1957 he was a research lecturer at Christ Church, being principally concerned with the papers, then on deposit in the college library, of the Victorian Prime Minister Lord Salisbury. In 1957 he was elected official Student of Christ Church, and remained so until his retirement in 1987. In 1962, he became Librarian, a post which he held for the next quarter of a century. He presided over a period of great change in the Library. When he took over in 1962, the scaffolding around the exterior of the building was just being removed, to reveal a newly refaced and gleaming façade. The original Headington stone on the north, west and east sides of the building was replaced with Portland Shelly Whitbed stone, with Clipsham stone used for the capitals of the great columns and the infilling between the columns.

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### Lights, Scaffolding...Action

First Phase in the Restoration of the Library

Since the end of Trinity term, the Library has been the scene of frenetic activity. This may not be apparent now, because those who are familiar with it will be more aware of the *absence* of familiar objects than the presence of unfamiliar ones. Certainly, the new lights in the reading rooms are very conspicuous, but where are the portraits and where are the familiar busts of George II and grumpy Queen Victoria?

The explanation is simply that a great deal of work fundamental to the library's wellbeing has been undertaken during the summer, but that the final tidying and repainting of the interior will not be completed until summer 2010. The vestiges of the scaffolding, still visible at the start of this term, were merely a hint of the scale of the work which has been carried out during the summer months.

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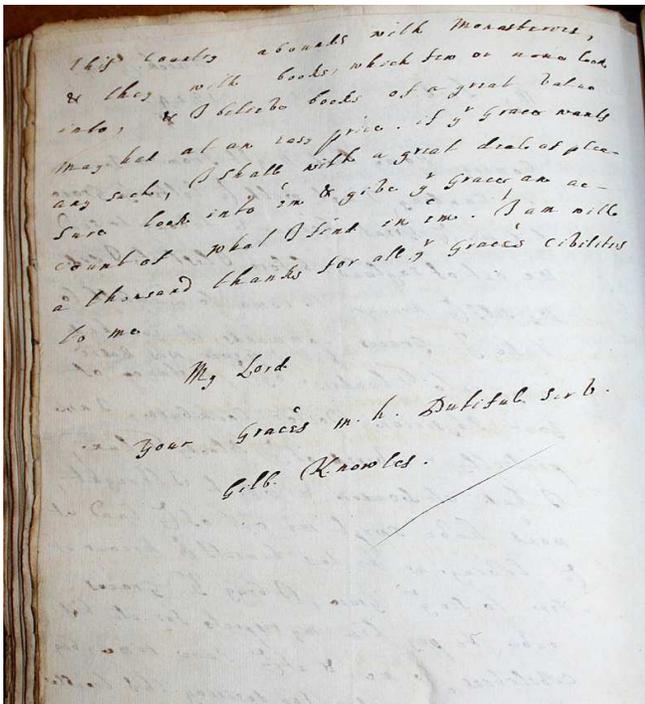


Detail of a French illuminated Book of Hours (use of Rome) dating from the fifteenth century (MS 100, fol. 101v – The angel appears to the shepherds; note one of the earliest representations of a shepherdess). Otto Pächt's addition in the Library's copy of Kitchin's catalogue of Christ Church manuscripts identifies the artist as É. of Bourdichon.

## William Wake's Byzantine Manuscripts: Notes on Provenance

When surveying the priceless collection of manuscripts bequeathed by Archbishop William Wake to the Christ Church Library, one wonders what was the primary impulse that led to their assemblage. As Irmgard Hutter pointed out, it can hardly be considered a humanistic collection, for “es gibt keinen einzigen klassischen Autor in seiner Kollektion!”<sup>1</sup> But, is it more accurate to consider the collecting activities of William Wake as those of an early eighteenth century “antiquarian” or “scholar”? The volumes of letters addressed to William Wake collected at the Christ Church Library contain correspondence that would seem to indicate both.<sup>2</sup>

The frequent missives from Sir Francis Head back to his patron give the impression of a young man sent on holiday with a blank cheque book. His letters are more travel literature than anything else, with carriage rides through stunning Italian scenery and vague notes on medals and manuscripts that sparked his interest.<sup>3</sup> Thus, regarding the Duke of Parma's palace, from Rome on December 14<sup>th</sup> 1723, he wrote: “... the Library is a large room well-filled with books, and adjoining to it is another Room fill'd with MSS some very curious ones ... .” More to that view, a letter from Gilbert Knowles leaves one with the distasteful sense of scavenging ancient libraries as though antique shops:



The end of Knowles' letter to William Wake (Wake Letters v.30.181)

<sup>1</sup> Irmgard Hutter., *Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturenhandschriften*, v.4.1, (Hirseemann: Stuttgart, 1993), p. xli. (referring specifically to the Greek codices of the collection).

<sup>2</sup> Only the rare draft of a reply letter from the Archbishop is preserved in his own files.

<sup>3</sup> Wake Letters, v.31.10 and following.

“This country abounds with Monasteries, & they with books, which few or none look into, & I believe books of a great value may be had at an easy price. If y'r grace wants any such, I shall with a great deal of pleasure look into 'em and give y'r Grace an account of what I find in 'em.”<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the great weight of evidence supports the idea of William Wake, the scholar. There is, firstly, his own scholarly career: his education at Christ Church, as discussed in Norman Sykes's 1957 biography, and his work, *The state of the Church and clergy of England in their councils, convocations, synods, conventions, and other publick assemblies, historically deduced, from the conversion of the Saxons to the present times*, published in 1703.

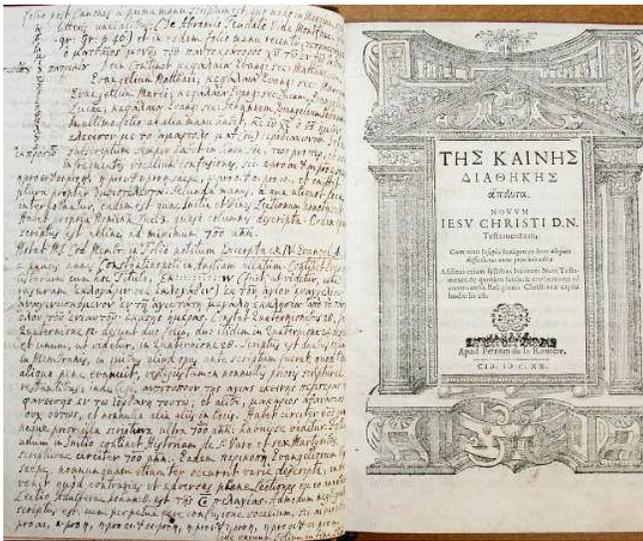
When his ecclesiastical responsibilities kept him from continuing such endeavours directly, Archbishop Wake adapted by sponsoring other scholars. This second category of evidence centres on the lives and work of David Wilkins and John Walker. Wilkins was employed for decades as Wake's librarian at Lambeth Palace, with the task of completing the project envisioned in the book just cited. Under William Wake's support, the librarian completed the 17<sup>th</sup> century scholarship of Henry Spelman by publishing the *Leges Anglo-Saxonicae Ecclesiasticae & Civiles* in 1721. Wilkins then added his own monumental *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae* in 1737, published just after his long-time patron's death. He was himself a scholar at heart, writing to the Archbishop that: “My zeal must be moderated here with prudence, for peace is not to be had but by living so retired as I do amongst the dead in the Bodleian.”<sup>5</sup>

The work of John Walker under William Wake's patronage reflects the expanding scholarly interests of the Archbishop. Walker, trained as a classical scholar, was often employed on tasks of textual criticism. This is nowhere more concisely exemplified than in the 1620 Geneva edition of the New Testament housed in the Christ Church Library as MS Wake Greek 35. In 1732, John Walker utilized eight New Testament manuscripts in the Archbishop's collection at that time to add in-line collation to this 1620 edition.

Walker then wrote out brief catalogue entries for each of these manuscripts on the fly leaves before and after the New Testament text, primarily noting when and whence they came *in angliam*. These are categorized today as the manuscripts Wake Greek 12, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 26, and 38. Incidentally, these notes by John Walker also serve as the earliest (though perhaps only partial) catalogue of William Wake's Greek manuscripts.

<sup>4</sup> Wake Letters, v.30.181. March 14, 1725

<sup>5</sup> Wake Letters, v.38.9



Manuscript Wake Greek 35, with Walker's autograph annotations.

This interest in the textual history of the New Testament was not a whim, but represents more than a decade of Walker's international research while patronized by William Wake. In Wake Letters v.30, no. 25, John Walker wrote to the Archbishop from Lille on July 22, 1722 that:

"I have met with an old Greek MS of the whole New Testament except the apocalypse. It has been made use of formerly by Erasmus, who has wrote his name, and some Remarks in it in several places. I have collated it, and find it a very (p. 2) good One, and shall be very glad if my stay in Flanders may contribute anything to make the Edition of the New Testament, which I hope is by this time ready for the Press, more exact and compleat".

This New Testament project was certainly driven to a large degree by William Wake's own desires.

But, while engaged on his patron's project, John Walker did not hesitate to attempt to expand the Archbishop's interests, and thus the breadth of the collection. On November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1721, he wrote rather excitedly from Brussels:

"I have bought lately 15 or 16 MS, most of them old ones ... the greatest curiosity that I have met with in this was a very old MS of Arnobius and Minucius Felix;<sup>6</sup> of which Authors, especially of the latter, learned men have always thought that there was only one MS in the world, which is lodg'd in the Library of the King of France ... .<sup>7</sup>

From this evidence it could be postulated that by the 1720s, the Archbishop's role as a patron of scholars and scholarly projects may have begun to leave a stamp upon the contents of his library, independent of the mark made by his own not insignificant intellectual gifts.

Is it more accurate to view the collection that bears William Wake's name today as the sum of these parts, orchestrated and endorsed by William Wake, rather than exclusively the product of his single mind, however endowed with material resources and inspired by a diversity of interests? For instance, the Archbishop's relationship with the Swiss émigré John Henry Ott led to his pursuit of medal and coin collecting—the results of which are now housed at the Fitzwilliam Museum—and which presumably motivated the above-cited journey of Sir Francis Head.<sup>8</sup> Which of the three men was most responsible for the character of the extant collection?

William Wake's sponsorship of independent scholars, his own scholarly interests, public position, and accessibility each played a role in the collection that we have today. An example of these last two can be found in a series of letters from August of 1723 to March of 1724 from one Robert D'Oyly who wished the Archbishop to review his work *On the Origins of Evil*, eventually published in 1728.<sup>9</sup> In the midst of this correspondence D'Oyly stated his wish to bequeath to the Archbishop's care a manuscript on New Testament errors. He believed it had been composed by the well-known seventeenth century rabbi Manesseh Ben Israel, and wanted to hand it over simply because he did not think anyone else could be trusted with such a volatile text.

It thus seems plausible to suggest that the collection of William Wake might be studied as a result of the scholarly projects of his circle of correspondents. The scholars whom the Archbishop engaged were themselves involved in academic networks with their own dynamics and interests, which would in turn exert influence back upon William Wake, affecting the antiquities he collected and how he acquired them. It is accepted that during William Wake's chaplaincy to the Ambassador Lord Richard Graham Preston he made friendships on the continent—such as with Charles Delarüe, the Parisian Benedictine scholar—which facilitated his collecting activities. If these contacts influenced Wake, would not the interests of Walker, Wilkins, and their associates do the same?

Due to the very short duration of my own time in the Christ Church Library, I have been unable to trace down the majority of names mentioned in the circles of David Wilkins and John Walker. I offer my scant findings here in hopes that they may be a useful starting point for understanding the concentric rings of intellectual activity around the Archbishop. At Cambridge, a Dr. Davies, and a Dr. Needham are vaguely mentioned by John Walker. He more

<sup>6</sup> Fourth-century Latin Christian apologists.

<sup>7</sup> Wake Letters, v.22.81.

<sup>8</sup> There is also a fascinating series of letters from J. H. Ott to William Wake from late spring to early summer of 1726 which mention his repeatedly frustrated attempts to get an edition of John Chrysostom across the channel to the Archbishop. See Wake Letters, v.30.259, v.31.208-209 and 211.  
<sup>9</sup> Wake Letters, v.22.

specifically mentions Dr. Richard Bentley, sometime Master of Trinity College, whom Walker cites as being willing to help with the New Testament project as soon as his own work on Terence is completed.<sup>10</sup> The scholar and antiquarian Thomas Baker of St. John's College, Cambridge is also cited as a possible aid in the procurement of rare books, and Samuel Drake is mentioned for his association with the Matthew Parker and Robert Cotton collections. Finally, there is brief mention of a Mr. Tanner, a Mr. Gibson, and a Mr. Nicolson whose associations and accomplishments I have as yet been unable to trace.

Finally, William Wake's long occupation of the Archbishopric put him in position to receive diplomatic gifts which would lend their own unique flavour to the collection. It is my hope that this final point will also provoke some discussion of the related puzzle that is the provenance of William Wake's Greek manuscripts. To this end, I wish to draw attention to a letter cited in Irmgard Hutter's catalogue of the illustrated Greek manuscripts at Christ Church Library in the *Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturenhandschriften*.

This letter, from Marco Nomico, dated to July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1725 provides the earliest concrete evidence for books travelling internationally as diplomatic gifts into the hands of William Wake.<sup>11</sup> The letter reads as follows:

"May it Please y'r Grace: I had the hon'r of bringing to y'r Grace at two different times three books; an humbly present from the holy Patriarch of Jerusalem this next week I am to return to my own Country and think it my duty to Attend y'r Grace, wch. I now do, in all humility in order to know what Commands y'r Grace may have for the Pious Patriarch. I live in hopes, at my returne to bring y'r Grace some Manuscripts of moment. I am with infinite duty, and the most profound submission. May it Please y'r Grace, Y'r Grace's Most Obedient, Humble Servant, Marco Nomico, Servt. To the Patriarch".

The Patriarch of Jerusalem in question here is Chrysanthos Notoras (1707-1731), who held his see *in absentia* from Constantinople. The two ecclesiarchs were engaged in ecclesiastical diplomacy that was also the occasion for another manuscript to be sent to England from Nicholas Maurochordatus, prince of Wallachia, in 1724.

The codex from Maurochordatus was the first of the Greek manuscripts in John Walker's 1732 catalogue of New Testament codices in England, cited above.<sup>12</sup>



Manuscript Wake Greek 26, a New Testament received as a gift from Nicolaus Maurocordatus, Prince of Wallachia.

The phrase in Nomico's 1725 letter: "bringing ... at two different times three books", is somewhat roundabout but certainly means a total of six books; one's hope is that they might be matched with medieval Greek manuscripts in the Wake collection, but that is not necessarily the case.<sup>13</sup> Ancient and medieval manuscripts or not, Walker's catalogue entry and Nomico's letter denote up to fourteen texts which exert a distinctive influence on the diversity of William Wake's collection, but which all arrived unsolicited and were selected by others.

Perhaps our understanding of the history of the Wake collection, and the provenance of its manuscripts, may be advanced by taking several steps to either side, rather than by attempting a step straight forward. That is to say: rather than pursuing Wake himself, perhaps studying the Archbishop's wider circle of scholarly acquaintances for evidence of when and whence may make it possible to piece together how certain outstanding items – such as manuscript Wake Greek 5 containing Theophanes the Confessor's *Chronicle* – found their way into the collection of a figure whose scholarly interests were dominated by the history of the Church of England.

Jesse W. Torgerson  
University of California, Berkeley

<sup>10</sup> This edition was indeed published in 1726. For more on Bentley's influence on Wake, see I. Hutter, *Corpus*. p. xxxii.

<sup>11</sup> Wake Letters, v.26.297.

<sup>12</sup> For further details see I. Hutter, *Corpus*. p. xxix and following, citing especially George Williams. *The Orthodox Church of the East in the Eighteenth Century*. (1868).

<sup>13</sup> See I. Hutter, *Corpus*. pp. xxxix-xli. Dr. Hutter here follows G. Williams. *Orthodox Church*. p. lv, fnt. 1 in identifying two of these books, neither of which are manuscripts of antiquity.