

BIG LITERARY FIND IN CONSTANTINOPLE

Savant Discovers Books by
Archimedes, Copied About
900 A. D.

IT OPENS A BIG FIELD

Whether the Turks Destroyed the Li-
braries When They Took the City
Always a Disputed Question.

COPENHAGEN, July 15.—Y. L. Heiberg, Professor of Philology in the University of Copenhagen, made a most interesting discovery in the Convent of the Holy Grave at Constantinople a few weeks ago.

While studying old manuscripts in the convent he discovered a number of palimpsests which, in addition to prayers and psalms of the twelfth century, included works by Archimedes.

The Archimedes manuscript was a copy made about the year 900 by a monk and later conveyed to Constantinople.

The Turkish authorities did not permit Prof. Heiberg to remove the manuscript. He was permitted, however, to make a copy of it, and this will shortly be published.

The fact that Prof. Heiberg copied the Archimedes manuscript apparently indicates that it consisted, entirely or in part, of works by Archimedes that have hitherto been lost, for he would hardly have taken the trouble to transcribe the books on plane geometry, solid geometry, arithmetic, and mechanics which have come down to us from among the writings by the great Greek. Perhaps, even, the manuscript found at Constantinople may contain the work on notation which Archimedes is supposed to have written and which, when it was lost, meant the loss to the world of the system he invented.

But whether this is so or not, the discovery is of extraordinary interest as showing that ancient manuscripts do exist in Constantinople—that the old legend, "Where the Turk's foot is planted grass never grows again" does not apply to all the libraries that were in the city when Mohammed II. took it in 1453. It may even be that careful search would result in the discovery of the lost books of Livy and Cicero and many other treasures of antiquity that vanished between the close of the classical age and the Renaissance. Perhaps, indeed, the book the loss of which was the greatest literary loss the world ever suffered, the Poems of Sappho, will be at last recovered and one of the chief objects of the proposed excavation of Herculaneum will be attained in another way.

For it has always been a disputed question whether the Turks destroyed or preserved the libraries they found in Constantinople. It is known that the Turk was always reluctant to destroy writing, lest perchance it should contain the name of God, but a good many scholars have been of the opinion that this scruple did not weigh with Mohammed and his followers when they entered the great city and started to make a bonfire of the treasures of antiquity that were contained in it.

Some years ago J. C. Robinson obtained permission to enter the Sultan's library of manuscripts, and saw 3,000 of them ranged in leather cases upon the wall. He came to the conclusion that Western scholars had examined them long before and that there was nothing of value in them. As a matter of fact, there is no record of any such examination.

Meredith Townsend, in "Asia and Europe," made an appeal for the examination of this library. He said: "The Sultan's library should be searched through as the first condition of the next loan made to Turkey—if there ever is another—and permission demanded to hunt for that older and more valuable store of manuscripts believed or known to be stored in the crypt of St. Sophia. * * * That is the last place left where we shall be likely to make a great literary find, and it should be searched before the great day when the destiny of the Ottomans is completed, and Constantinople once more sinks down, a mass of blood-stained ruins, fired by its possessors before they commence their final retreat to the desert from which, in the mysterious providence of God, they were suffered to emerge, in order to destroy the eastern half of the civilized world. The only other chance is in the Shereefal Palace, at Morocco, and it is uncertain if a library exists there."

Mr. Townsend might have referred to the further chance, a slight one, it is true, but still a chance, that the Chinese Empire may contain some of the lost treasures of the past. But the Danish savant's discovery in Constantinople indicates that that city is by far the best hunting ground for the modern Humanists, if any still exist.