

Evidence of an Early Modern Scholar's Visit to the Library at New College, Oxford in the Early Seventeenth Century

Robert Ashley (1565–1641) was a lawyer, translator, and the founder of the library at Middle Temple, one of the four Inns of Court. Although no visitor books or library registers for New College exist for the earlier seventeenth century, there is evidence that Ashley visited the library, probably in 1622/23, and made notes about the books he viewed there. In addition to bequeathing a collection of approximately 5,000 books to the Middle Temple, Ashley collected a wide range of information, as evidenced by his habit of excerpting and extracting texts in his book marginalia, and in the only known miscellany in his hand, Newberry MS 5017, the *Book of Magical Charms*.

Ashley was born in 1565 in Damerham (originally Wiltshire, now Hampshire), the second son of Anthony Ashley (d. c. 1580) and Dorothy Lyte (c. 1545–1601).¹ His brothers were Sir Anthony Ashley (1551–1628), Clerk of the Privy Council, and Sir Francis Ashley, MP for Dorchester (1569–1635). Ashley graduated BA from Magdalen Hall in 1583 and obtained his MA degree from Magdalen College, becoming a fellow there, and at which he was assigned to give public lectures in geometry.² Ashley contemplated a civil law career, but Anthony encouraged him to join the Middle Temple in 1588. His common law studies did not last long, and he soon found himself visiting France at the behest of Sir Henry Unton and Sir Francis Walsingham. In 1591/2 he fought with the English army in France against the House of Guise, returning suddenly to England due to ill health.

Upon his return, Anthony recommended Robert as secretary to Sir John Puckering (1544–96), but he did not remain with Puckering for long, citing too much competition in the Lord Keeper's employ. He thus finally resumed his common law studies and was called to the Bar in 1595. In the early seventeenth century he was arrested and imprisoned for debt on at least two occasions. Marginal notes in two of his books, Thomas Brugmann, *Quadratura circuli nova* ([s.l.], 1608), and Justus Lipsius, *Mellificium duplex ex media philosophia petitum* (Leiden, 1591), reveal that Ashley was in the Netherlands in 1617. This information is confirmed in a letter dated 1617 from Sir Dudley Carleton to Sir Ralph Winwood: 'Mr. Ashley can relate unto your honour, as having been an eye-witness, how much here in the Hague the number of those, which make profession of the old religion in the new church, exceeds that likewise of the new religion in the old church'³

Ashley continued his travels in 1618, visiting France and Spain, including El Escorial library, witnessing 'a glorious golden librarie of Arabian bookes' there.⁴ Five years later, and closer to home, he visited the Bodleian Library in December 1622/January 1623.⁵ This information is replicated in the advertisement to the reader of *Almansor*, where he recounts spending 'some hours of some few weeks' at the Bodleian.⁶ He contributed a Latin poem to the memorial volume honoring Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626), *Memoria honoratissimi domini Francisci, Baronis de Verulamio, vice-comitis Sancti Albani sacrum* (London: John Haviland, 1626). In August 1628 he presented Richard Napier with one of his (unspecified) published books, most likely in recognition of Napier's medical-astrological consultation, on his way to Oxford to have another book published;

¹ I have not replicated here the excellent biographical summary that Virgil B. Heltzel provided in his edition of Ashley's *Of Honour* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1947). This shortened version of Ashley's life-story does include additional biographic details that were unknown to Heltzel, however. A full transcription and translation of Sloane MS 2131 is being prepared for publication.

² C. F. Russell, *A History of King Edward VI School, Southampton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), p. 119.

³ *Letters From and to Sir Dudley Carleton, Knt. During His Embassy in Holland*, 2nd edn (London, 1775), pp. 172–4.

⁴ Miguel de Luna, *Almansor the Learned and Victorious King that Conquered Spaine* (London: John Parker, 1627), sig. A1r.

⁵ Bodleian Library, *Liber admissorum* (1602–20), Bodleian Library Records e.532, f. 12v.

⁶ De Luna, *Almansor*. Ashley's translation is a partial one of the Bodleian's copy of *La Verdadera hystoria del rey Don Rodrigo* (Çaragoça, 1603). He presented a copy of this work to John Bainbridge (Bodleian Library, Savile Z9 (2)), Henry Briggs (Magdalen College Oxford, Magd.ASHLEY-R (ALM)), and to the Bodleian Library (Bodleian Library, 4 H 4(10) Art.).

no evidence of this book has been traced.⁷ Further research is required to determine if there is a record of his visit to Oxford at this time, but it is feasible that at this time he revisited the Bodleian.

Robert Ashley died in 1641, and in addition to his books, he bequeathed his bedding, furniture, and £300 to the Inn to employ a Keeper of the Library; he was buried in Temple Church. Although he left a library collection of approximately 5,000 volumes,⁸ there is no evidence that he left manuscripts, and none of his personal papers survive at the Inn. His library remains relatively intact at Middle Temple, and is typical of an early modern gentleman's library, containing mostly Continental Latin imprints, with strong holdings of French, Italian, and Spanish titles, with fewer in English, and only a minor number in Dutch and German. The subject range is broad, including history, languages, medicine, politics, science, theology, and travel among other subjects.

TRANSLATIONS

Ashley published six translations in his lifetime, all printed in London: *L'Uranie ou muse celeste* (1589);⁹ *A comparison of the English and Spanish nation* (1589);¹⁰ *Of the Interchangeable Course* (1594);¹¹ *Almansor the Learned and Victorious King that Conquered Spaine* (1627); *Cochin-China* (1633);¹² and *David persecuted* (1637).¹³

Although long believed to be an original unpublished work, Ashley's *Of Honour* was also a translation of Sebastián Fox Morcillo's *De Honore* (Basel, 1556).¹⁴ There are three known manuscript copies of his translation: Trinity College, Cambridge, MS R.14.20; Huntington Library, MS Ellesmere 1117; and Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS 1148. Until recently only the Huntington Library had the correct authorship attribution.¹⁵ All three versions are undated and written by different scribes, but based on the dedications, the manuscript can be dated to around 1596/7.

⁷ Ashley's consultation is incomplete. 'CASE66846', *The Casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634: A Digital Edition*, ed. Lauren Kassell, Michael Hawkins, Robert Ralley, John Young, Joanne Edge, Janet Yvonne Martin-Portugues, and Natalie Kaoukji, <<https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/cases/CASE66846>> (Accessed: 25 April 2021).

⁸ A full analysis of his library is ongoing, based on the sixteen manuscript catalogues compiled after his death (Middle Temple, MT.9/LCA/1-16). These are available online at: <<https://www.middletemple.org.uk/archive-history/archive-information-access/sources-resources/digitised-records/library-manuscript>>. The figure of 5,000 is based on preliminary analysis of these catalogues. For current transcription updates see: <<https://hcommons.org/docs/transcription-of-middle-temple-library-ms-catalogues/>>. The modern library catalogue is at: <www.middletemplelibrary.org.uk>.

⁹ Guillaume de Salluste du Bartas, *L'Uranie ou muse celeste de G. de Saluste Seigneur du Bartas*.

¹⁰ Gentil-homme Francois, *Discours politique, tres-excellent pour le temps present*.

¹¹ Louis Leroy, *De la vicissitude, ou, Variété des choses en l'univers* (Paris, 1579). Ashley's source copy has some marginalia and corrections to the text.

¹² He based his translation on the French version of the original Italian: Borri, Cristoforo, *Relatione de la nouvelle mission des Peres de la Compagnie de Jesus, au royaume de la Cochinchine. Tradvite de l'Italien* (Rennes, 1631). The copy in his collection has his marginalia, underlining, and a quote from Seneca on the title page: 'Cum hac persuasione vivendum est: non sum uni angulo natus, patria mea totus hic mundus est'—'One should live by this motto: I was not born to one little corner—this whole world is my country'. This quote was included on the title page to the published translation.

¹³ Malvezzi, Virgilio, *Davide perseguitato*.

¹⁴ Antonio Pinilla Espigares, 'Teoría y práctica de la imitación ciceroniana en el diálogo *De inuentute* de Sebastián Fox Morcillo', in *Pectora mulcet: Estudios de Retórica y Oratoria latinas*, 2 vols, ed. Trinidad Arcos Pereira, Jorge Fernández López and Francisca Moya del Baño (Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos—Ayuntamiento de Calahorra, 2009), II, 799–816.

¹⁵ *The James Catalogue of Western Manuscripts* at Trinity College, Cambridge originally listed the author as 'Robert Asheley', and dated the manuscript to the 17th century, as it had been donated to the library by Sir Henry Puckering (1618–1701). Ashley used variant spellings of his surname. The manuscript is digitised and available online: <<https://mss-cat.trin.cam.ac.uk/Manuscript/R.14.20>>.

ASHLEY'S ANNOTATIONS AND THOMAS JAMES'S *ECLOGA*

As to be expected of a humanist translator and lawyer, Ashley annotated many of his books, and these annotations often consist of cross-references to other pages/folios in the work, or references to other works. A typical example is found in his copy of Lancelot-Voisin La Popeliniere's *Les trois mondes* (Paris, 1582), a work about discoveries in geography: at sig. 24v, at the entry for the 'Chiorne' of Ulysses, he wrote: 'v. l'epistre ded. De Jean Carl. Saracen sur l'architect de Serlio', which is a reference to Sebastiano Serlio's, *De architectura libri quinque* (Venice, 1568–9), translated by Giovanni Saraceno. The dedicatory epistle of Ashley's copy of Serlio's work is heavily underlined throughout. In addition to making notes about books in his printed books, in the seventeenth century he compiled a miscellany which included references to books, and excerpts from books and manuscripts which were not in his collection.¹⁶ This miscellany's excerpts focus on the themes of charms, magic, medical recipes, and other miscellaneous topics, including a reference to Conrad Gessner's *Bibliotheca*. The latest dateable text is from 1612, Angelo Rocca, *De Campanis Commentarius*, 1612.

Another book that Ashley annotated heavily is his copy of *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis* (London, 1600), Thomas James's catalogue of the manuscripts in the colleges in Oxford and Cambridge. The annotations that Ashley made at the New College entries demonstrate that he must have consulted the manuscripts in person, since the annotations have been written directly beside the relevant entry. The transcriptions are as follow:

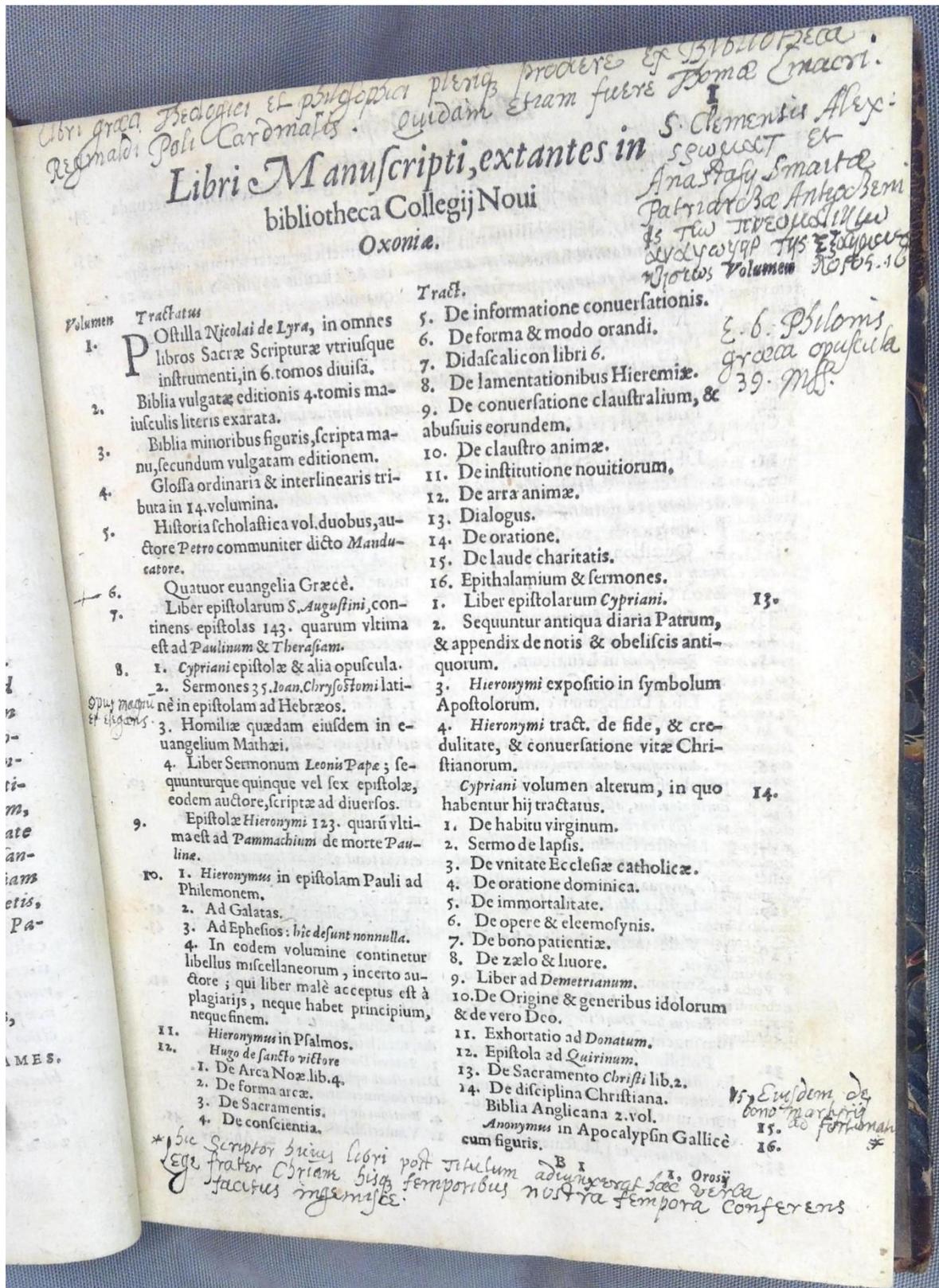
- 1: Top of the first page of the catalogue entries for New College Library, Oxford: 'Libri graeci theologici et philosophici plerique prodere ex Bibliotheca Reginaldi Poli Cardinalis. Quidam etiam fuere Thomae Linacri.'¹⁷
2. Below previous: 'S. Clementis Alex- στρωματ et Anastasii Sinaitae Patriarchae Antiocheni. εις την πνευματικην αναγωγην της εξαμηριου κτισως λογοι ιβ'.¹⁸ This is today New College Library, Oxford, MS 139.
- 3: In right-hand margin to same page: 'E. 6. Philonis graeca opuscula 39 MSS.' This is today New College Library, Oxford, MS 143, a Pole manuscript of Philo of Alexandria.
- 4: Bottom of the same page, presumably linking Ashley's use of an asterisk to no. 6, the Gospels in Greek, which is marked with a cross: 'Hic scriptor huius libri post titulum adiunxerat haec verba Lege frater Christiane hisque temporibus nostra tempora conferens tacitus ingemisce.' Probably today New College Library, Oxford, MS 68.
- 5: Against no. 8: 'Opus magnum et elegans', a collection of Cyprian, Chrysostom, and others, today New College Library, Oxford, MS 130.
- 6: Against no. 15: 'Eiusdem de bono martyrii ad fortunatum.' Today New College Library, Oxford, MS 132, a further collection of Cyprian, this indeed being the last item.
- 7: Against no. 63: 'M. Moschpalam [?]'—Photius cod. 150.¹⁹ Today New College Library, Oxford, MS 260, Manuel Moschopoulos's collection of Greek words.
- 8: Against no. 116: 'NB transcriptus Romae 1523.' Today New College Library, Oxford, MS 270, in the hand of the famous Cretan scribe Zacharias Calliergi, at the expense of the English humanist Richard Pate.

¹⁶ Newberry Library, MS 5017. Renae Satterley, 'Robert Ashley and the Authorship of Newberry MS 5017 The Book of Magical Charms', *Manuscript Studies* 6 (2) (Fall 2021).

¹⁷ I.e. 'Many Greek theological and philosophical texts came from the library of Cardinal Reginald Pole, and some were also Thomas Linacre's'.

¹⁸ 'St Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* [Miscellanies], and Anastasius of Sinai, Patriarch of Antioch's *Twelve Books on the Spiritual Allegory of the Six Days' Creation*'.

¹⁹ James conjectured that this work is by Philostratus. Cap. 150 of Photius's *Bibliotheca* indeed lists some (now lost) Greek lexicons of Julian, Philostratus, and Diodorus, but the alternative name Ashley writes here is his garbled attempt at Moschopoulos.



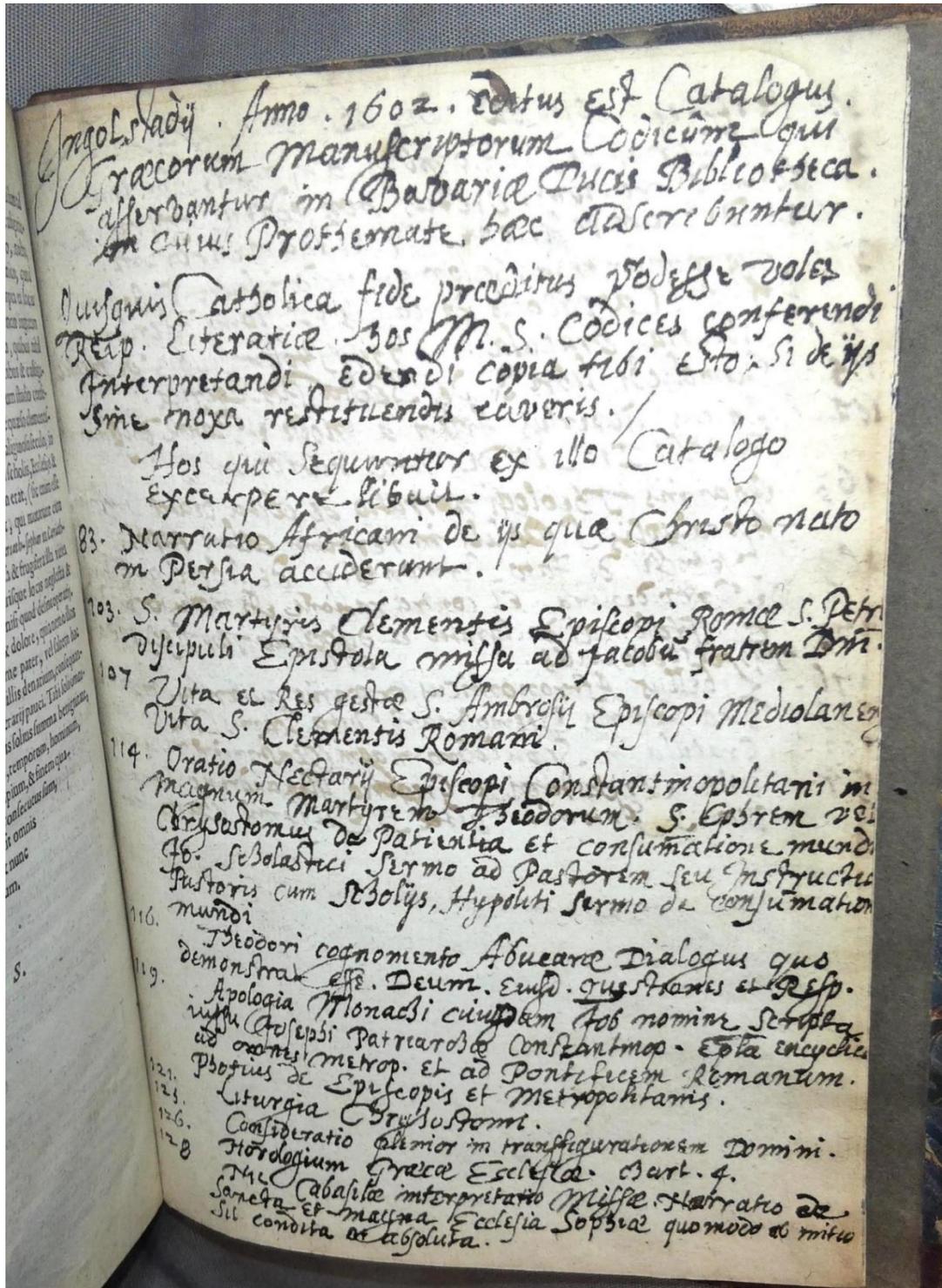
Thomas James, *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis* (London: Geor. Bishop, & Io. Norton, 1600), p. 1

The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple Library, BAY L530

Courtesy of the Librarian of The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple, London

Further entries are underlined or marked with a dash or cross in the margin, indicating his interest in them, or that he viewed them while at the library. Similar marginalia are found at the entries for

Corpus Christi, Lincoln, and Merton colleges. There is a two-page transcript on the end leaves, from *Catalogus Graecorum manuscriptorum codicum qui asservantur in inchoyta serenissimi vtriusque Bauariae Ducis* which, as Ashley himself notes, was published in Ingolstadt in 1602. He partially transcribed specific catalogue entries, with their number, such as: '83. Narratio Africani de ijs qua Christo nato in Persia acciderant.' It is possible that he consulted this catalogue while in Oxford, as he did not have a copy in his collection.



Thomas James, *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis* (London: Geor. Bishop, & Io. Norton, 1600), end leaf
The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple Library, BAY L530
Courtesy of the Librarian of The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple, London

It is interesting that Ashley noted that New College held books from Reginald Pole's (1500–1558) library, and that two of these originally belonged to Thomas Linacre, one of Pole's tutors at Magdalen College.²⁰ Ashley also noted that this collection contained thirty-nine Greek works by Philo of Alexandria. It is possible that this refers to entry 143 in the Coxe catalogue (although Coxe listed only thirty-seven works).²¹ One wonders if part of Ashley's interest stemmed from the fact that Pole, like Ashley, was an alumnus of Magdalen College. Ashley must have learned about these books through visiting the library because, although there was an inventory drawn up in London in 1555 by George Lily, there is no evidence that Ashley had access to it.²² Even if he had consulted it, the inventory is not a complete list of Pole's books and does not clearly delineate which items are manuscripts. As William Poole has explained, there is a complicated history to the books at New College which once belonged to Reginald Pole, but most of the volumes from Pole's library were manuscripts.²³ Alessandro Pastore transcribed the 1555 inventory and provided publication details for identifiable items. At least ten were unidentified, and five are described in the inventory as a manuscript.²⁴ For example, the first item listed is: 'Operu[m] D. Cristostomi et alio[rum] graece manuscript[orum] volumina no. XVJ'.

Ashley owned at least three works by Reginald Pole: *Pro ecclesiastica unitatis defensione* (Strasbourg, 1555); *Discorso di pace* (Rome, 1555); and *De summo pontifice Christi in terris vicario* (Louvain, 1569). None are annotated, unfortunately, and my research has not yet shown on which side of the Catholic fence, so-to-speak, Ashley sat. Without any personal papers, letters or diaries, my research into his reading and writing habits is based almost exclusively on his library, the marginalia within his books, his miscellany, and his translations. While this can provide a unique insight into his thought processes, it leaves any definitive answers regarding his religious beliefs tantalisingly out of reach.

There is further evidence with Ashley's marginalia in *Ecloga* that demonstrate he consulted books at New College, in particular his notation that the college's copy of John Chrysostom's *Sermones* was large and elegant ('opus magnu[s] et elegans'). He owned six books by Chrysostom, ranging in publication date from 1523 to 1593. He also noted that Stobaeus's *Eclogae* was translated in Rome in 1523. As the 1575 publication is the earliest printed version of this work, it is possible that he is referring to a manuscript translation. The current version of Ashley's collection at Middle Temple does not contain many manuscripts, but he did own the Latin version of Stobaeus's work, published in Antwerp in 1575 and it contains his marginalia. The extracts in his miscellany show that he consulted manuscripts in other (unidentified) locations, as they have not been traced to printed sources.²⁵

Close analysis of Ashley's marginalia, the prefatory material to his translation *Almanson*, and his miscellany has revealed details regarding his knowledge acquisition and access to collections outside of London. The marginalia in his copy of James's *Ecloga* provide a unique insight into how early modern scholars such as Ashley had access to a range of books and manuscripts. His marginalia demonstrate these scholars' ability to consult, and note, materials from a variety of libraries. Pole's manuscripts at New College have been a source of fascination for readers from the

²⁰ Edgar Lobel, *Cardinal Pole's Manuscripts* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1931), p. 1 reiterates Linacre's ownership, pointing to entries 240 and 241 of Coxe's catalogue, Henry Octavius Coxe, 'Catalogus codicum MSS Collegii Novi', in *Catalogus codicum mss. qui in collegiis aulisque oxoniensibus hodie adservantur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1852), vol. 1, p. 87.

²¹ Coxe, *Catalogus*, vol. 1, p. 52.

²² The inventory is now Bodleian Library, MS Broxbourne R.309; this collection was acquired by the Bodleian in 1978.

²³ William Poole, 'A New Acquisition: Christophorus Longolius's Copy of the 1511 Parisian Edition of the *Corpus Juris Civilis*', *New College Notes* 4 (2013), no. 9. Pole's manuscripts of his own writings were dispersed, see Thomas F. Mayer, 'A Reluctant Author: Cardinal Pole and his Manuscripts', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 89 (4) (1999), i–115, at p. 14.

²⁴ Alessandro Pastore, 'Due biblioteche umanistiche del Cinquecento (i libri del cardinal Pole e di Marcantonio Flaminio)', *Rinascimento* 19 (1979), 269–90 at pp. 278–87.

²⁵ Satterley, 'Robert Ashley'.

sixteenth to twenty-first centuries. Ashley's is an example of this interest, albeit 'hidden' away in his book marginalia. As no library register exists for the time that Ashley visited New College, we rely on ephemeral sources such as marginalia, and more permanent sources, such as published prefatory material, to reveal how early modern scholars reacted to the collections of the Oxford libraries, and colleges.

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