

# **COLLECTION OVERVIEW**

## **CLASSICS, BYZANTINE, AND MEDIEVAL STUDIES**

### **I. SCOPE**

This overview describes research collections in classics (in its broadest definition), Byzantine studies, and mediaevalia. These areas of study can be thought of as those dealing with the peoples and cultures influenced by two groups of Indo-European speakers, namely, the Greeks and the Romans. In addition, this overview also extends to all relevant portions of the ancillary disciplines needed for research in these areas. These disciplines include archaeology, art, literature, philosophy, numismatics, history, anthropology, and linguistics as well as the earliest textual documentation in the Western world of almost any subject (e.g. Archimedes, physics, mathematics).

### **II. SIZE**

From almost 6,000 incunabula and over 1,500 early manuscripts to electronic texts, the field of classics includes not only the range of the PA 1-8595 classification of classical literature and the D 1-1075 ranges of ancient and medieval history but also the full range of the Library of Congress classification schedules A-Z as applied to the earliest Western literature of any subject area. Hence, it would be difficult to isolate and provide a quantification of the hundreds of thousands of classics volumes that fall within the A through Z classification scheme.

### **III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS**

The Library of Congress is a major center for this scope of study. Classics have been with this institution since its inception. Thomas Jefferson's library was heavy with classical works, in the original languages and in English and French translations. One can see Jefferson's handwritten notations in the margins of his Greek and Latin works. The Library continued to develop these collections throughout the nineteenth century, which also witnessed growth in the discipline and in its scientific development—from textual criticism to archaeological methodology.

The classics collection at the Library of Congress, in quantity as well as quality, must be viewed as one of largest for these studies in the United States. Classics, both early printed works in the custody of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division and works in the general collections, are among the richest on this side of the Atlantic. Texts

of core authors, translations, commentaries, historical discussions, excavation reports, reference works, and dissertations as well collections of inscriptions and illustrations of works of classical art are included and continually developed in the general and special classics collections as well as in microform and electronic formats.

#### **IV. AREAS OF DISTINCTION**

Secondary material from the nineteenth century including long runs of nineteenth century serials from the major European classics departments is quite probably the richest collection of this era's supporting material in the United States.

The Microform Reading Room is the repository of microfilmed collections of Latin, Greek, and other ancient language texts. Included in these collections are manuscripts from the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, various monasteries of Mount Athos, and the Monastery of St. Catherine's on Mt. Sinai. This project was done for the Library of Congress in the 1950s and the collections remain a major resource for scholars here and abroad. Acquired in 2005 was a set of over eight thousand microfiche based on the Incunabula Short Title Catalog (ISTC) at the British Library. This collection reproduces full-text editions of incunabula (i.e. fifteenth century printed works, chiefly Latin) from libraries around the world including the earliest printed textual documentation in a wide range of subjects such as mathematics, medicine, philosophy, law, geography, cosmography and travel literature as well as early translations of core classical authors.

The Library's collection of dissertations, available in microform and/or included in a subscription data base includes over 6000 titles relevant to core classical studies and many thousands more which relate to the early textual history of other subject fields.

Acquired in 2001 and available to the public in the Computer Catalog Center of the Humanities and Social Sciences Division is a valuable set of five discs of machine readable texts of the 221 printed volumes of the first edition of Jacques-Paul Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, a Latin language nineteenth century multi-fascicle work which is extremely difficult to serve in the printed format. In many cases the *Patrologia* provides the only transcribed version of a given text. The electronic edition is far easier to maintain, to serve, and to search than the printed fascicles and is sought out by scholars including those with access to the printed edition.

Possibly the most comprehensive collection of fifteenth century core classical texts in the United States is in the custody of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division. The Library of Congress collections also include thousands of sixteenth-century and other early imprints in Latin and Greek, along with early translations and historical discussions and an exemplary collection of early travel literature including the earliest illustrations and printed maps. Also included in the pre-nineteenth-century classics collections are early American imprints including classical texts printed by Benjamin Franklin. In addition to the editions of core classics texts printed by early American printers, the

Library of Congress collections include early American works in a range of subjects, texts which include copious classical references (e.g. Metcalf Bowler's 1786 Treatise on agriculture and practical husbandry with copious references to classical literature). Microform editions of these texts as well as microform editions of early American imprints in the custody of other institutions are available in the Microfilm Reading Room of the Humanities and Social Sciences Division. Dating from the eleventh century, Latin and Greek manuscripts owned by the Library are in the custody of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division.

The Manuscript Reading Room houses the diaries and letters of many of the founding fathers of the Republic. These are peppered with classical references as well as references which although not directly related to the study of classics are infused with the classical knowledge typical of the era. Of special note are the words Thomas Jefferson wrote to Joseph Priestley on January 27, 1800:

“to read the Latin & Greek authors in their original is a sublime luxury ... I thank on my knees him who directed my early education for having put into my possession this rich source of delight; and I would not exchange it for any thing which I could then have acquired & have since acquired”

The Geography and Map Division is famous for its manuscript and early printed antique map collection. Many maps are directly applicable to the study of these regions and the areas they influenced. These collections are also important for tracing knowledge of the world at a given point, through classical atlases and study of toponyms.

The Law Library has major collections of Roman law and canonical law including early printed texts; its works on the legal structure of corresponding cultures and nations are also highly useful.

## **V. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES**

Available on all public work stations at the Library of Congress is an ever growing collection of subscription data bases relevant to classical studies. Titles include the premiere index to periodical literature in classics, *L'Annee Philologique*, numerous full text journals, as well as sources such as the collection of bibliographic resources provided by Iter Gateway to the Renaissance and Middle Ages. An electronic subscription to the *English Short Title Catalogue* provides bibliographic records and institutional holdings information for works printed in any language within Great Britain and its colonies from 1473-1800. Many of these works are Latin and Greek classical texts, early translations and commentaries. Holdings information includes references to all surviving printed copies as well as microform, digital, and facsimile texts.

## **VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS**

Unfortunately much 19th century material, though still valuable, was published in the era of acidic paper. Serials and European multi-volume monographic works are problematic. The Library has many serials from around the world, but the collection could be improved not only by adding titles (printed or electronic) but also by filling gaps in the holdings.

Classics, and especially editions of the classical, Byzantine and mediaeval authors, do not enter easily the mechanisms for acquisitions in the Library of Congress. A new edition may consist of the addition of the variants based on one or two manuscripts. This additional record of scholarly research makes the new edition absolutely indispensable, yet it may not have been ordered because of the existence of older editions or because it includes a translation in a language other than English. Works on the disciplines included in classical studies are published in every major language and yet important new foreign works may not have been recommended or acquired systematically. Although the Library of Congress does not collect translations in languages other than English, it can be worthwhile to make exceptions when the translation and commentary are by an internationally recognized foreign classicist.