

Hoe zit het met de sluiting van niet christelijke filosofisch scholen in 529

Wat informatie n.a.v. vraag in een van de colleges

“Keizer Justinianus verbiedt heidenen om les te geven. De neoplatonische filosofen Damascius, Simplicius en Priscianus verlaten Athene om een toevlucht te zoeken in Perzië. Na het vredesverdrag tussen Chosroës en Justinianus vestigen ze zich in Carrhae, op Byzantijs grondgebied, maar onder Perzische invloed, en ze zetten hun onderricht voort.” (Bron Pierre Hadot *Filosofie als een manier van leven*)

“Joannes Philoponus behoort niet echt tot de bekende filosofen - ik had nog nooit van de goede man gehoord. Toch blijken heel wat geleerden zich te hebben beziggehouden met het werk van deze Alexandrijnse denker uit de zesde eeuw na Christus. Er vindt zelfs al jaren een discussie plaats over de aard van dat werk. Was Philoponus - een geboren christen - nu een christelijk filosoof die vanuit zijn christelijke overtuiging ook commentaren schreef op de 'heidense' Aristoteles? Of was hij zelf, ondanks zijn christelijke afkomst, een heidens filosoof geworden, die zich later met een ommezwaaai tot de christelijke wijsbegeerte wendde? Koenraad Verrycken pleit in zijn studie *Alexandrië 529 voor het laatste.*” (bron **Hans Dijkhuis** 6 maart 1999)

Hieronder twee zeer tegengestelde meningen / benaderingen van de sluiting in relatie tot het opkomende christendom:

Hoe christelijk terrorisme de antieke cultuur om zeep hielp

Bron <https://marcelhulspas.nl/home/hoe-christelijk-terrorisme-de-antieke-cultuur-om>

Ze hadden het er liever helemaal niet over. En als het dat toch moest, spraken ze verhullend over 'de huidige omstandigheden'. En over de dreiging van 'de tiran'. De laatste Atheense filosofen voelden bij het woord 'christendom' alleen maar een diepe weerzin.

Het christendom, de tiran, had eeuwenoude tempels verwoest. De christelijke 'gieren' en 'cyclopen' hadden de beelden van de goden omvergehaald, ze hadden priesters vermoord, bibliotheken op straat gesmeten. En natuurlijk, dat tuig had in 415 de grote filosofe Hypatia vermoord. Na dat gruwelijke voorval waren tientallen Alexandrijnse filosofen hun toevlucht gezocht in het nog

‘heidense’ Athene. Maar ruim een eeuw later deelde de tiran ook dáár de genadeklap uit. Keizer Justinianus besloot dat de Academie, de laatste filosofische school, gesloten moest worden. Korte tijd later vertrokken Damascius, het laatste ‘hoofd’ van die school, samen met zes collega’s, naar het oosten, naar Perzië. Ze hadden gehoord dat de Perzische koning Khosru een tolerant en belezen man was.

De sluiting van de School van Athene, in 529, is ook het slothoofdstuk van ‘Eeuwen van duisternis’ van Catherine Nixey. Met nauwelijks verholen woede beschrijft Nixey (dochter van een uitgetreden monnik en dito non) de ‘triomf’ van het christendom. Een triomf die gepaard ging met een ongekennde vernietiging van cultureel kapitaal. Tempels, badhuizen, scholen, plus alles wat daarin aan ‘afgodsbeelden’ en ‘demonische kennis’ te vinden was, werd grondig vernietigd. De grootste sloop voltrok zich zo rond 400, onder keizer Theodosius. Het was deze keizer (en niet Constantijn) die het traditionele Grieks/romeinse polytheïsme de nek omdraaide. Bisschoppen kregen van hem toestemming om naar hartenlust te stelen en te plunderen – en velen maakten daar enthousiast gebruik van, geholpen door het christelijk gepeupel. Schitterende tempels werden rokende puinhopen. Een enkele dappere heidense filosoof (Libanius) riep de keizer op om de sloop van onvervangbare kunstschaten een halt toe te roepen. Tevergeefs.

Nixey wijst op de vrome sprookjes die christenen sindsdien hebben verzonnen om hun terroristische gedrag te verhullen. Het sprookje van de wrede vervolging onder de heidense keizers. Het sprookje van de wijze kerkvaders en bisschoppen (haatzaaiers waren het), het sprookje van de vrome monniken (oncontroleerbare roversbenden die het vuile werk opknaptten). En het sprookje van de kloosters waar nijvere monniken de klassieke geschriften kopieerden (veel en veel meer kostbare werken gingen verloren omdat het perkament schoon werd geschrapt om de zoveelste bundel psalmen te schrijven). Nixey zet het fanatisme en de domheid van de eerste christenen midden voor het voetlicht, zoals Edward Gibbon dat trouwens drie eeuwen geleden al deed in zijn *Decline and Fall* (en hij kreeg daarna een vloedgolf van ‘geschokte’ kritiek over zich heen). En ze heeft volkomen gelijk wanneer ze zegt dat deze ramp sindsdien bedolven is geraakt onder vrome praatjes en onder de mythe van de ‘onvermijdelijke’ ondergang van het klassieke polytheïsme, dat ‘vermoeid’ zou zijn terwijl het christendom zo verfrissend was. Dat aspect van de klassieke geschiedenis mag best wel weer eens aandacht krijgen – maar het heeft ook een beter boek verdient.

Nixey wil duidelijk haar ongezouten mening geven over het christendom. Ze laat haar verontwaardiging de vrije loop. Ze schrijft gedreven, geeft vele citaten, vlecht hier en daar een persoonlijke anekdote in haar betoog, maar al met al is ‘Eeuwen’ meer een uitgesponnen essay of pamflet dan een geschiedenis. Ze springt van de hak op de tak, maakt hetzelfde punt nét iets te vaak, terwijl de grote lijnen aan de aandacht van de lezer ontglippen. Ook besteedt ze geen aandacht aan drie toch wel belangrijke parallele processen.

Ten eerste de interne ontwikkeling van het polytheïsme en de relatie met de filosofie. Beide zaken komen te weinig aan de orde. Ten tweede de sloop van synagogen. (De Joden genoten in principe keizerlijke bescherming; het jodendom was een erkende religie, maar daar trokken de christenen zich niets van aan.) Ten derde de strijd tussen verschillende christelijke stromingen. De oorlog tegen het polytheïsme was meedogenloos, maar minstens zo meedogenloos, en veel omvangrijker, was de oorlog tegen allerlei 'ketterse' sekten zoals donatisten, nestorianen, arianen, monofysieten en ga zo maar door. In die laatste oorlog zijn zeker minder boeken en kunstschaten verloren gegaan dan in de strijd tegen de heidenen. En zeker, Nixey wil vooral schrijven over verloren schatten. Ze geeft ook geen schatting van het aantal mensen dat vanwege hun 'heidense' geloof gedood is. Maar het aantal slachtoffers onder 'ketteren' lag zonder twijfel vele malen hoger. Christenen hebben in die eeuwen vooral christenen vermoord.

Damascius keerde overigens na korte tijd weer terug. Hij ontdekte al snel dat de Perzische hoofdstad nog erger was dat Alexandrië, en dat Khosru nauwelijks enige ontwikkeling had. Maar de koning had respect voor de filosofen, en toen Justinianus vrede wilde sluiten, bedong Khosru dat zij terug mochten keren en, eenmaal thuis, niet lastiggevallen zouden worden en mochten denken en schrijven wat ze wilden. Dat was volgens Nixey, 'de enige verklaring van ideologische verdraagzaamheid die Justinianus ooit zou ondertekenen.' Dat is niet waar, maar dat doet er nu niet toe. Het clubje filosofen keerde terug. Heeft Justinianus woord gehouden? We weten het niet. Verdere sporen van deze mannen ontbreken.

Catherine Nixey, *Eeuwen van Duisternis. De christelijke vernietiging van de klassieke cultuur*. Uitgeverij Nieuw Amsterdam, 400 blz., 29,99 euro.

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Emperor Justinian's Closure of the School of Athens

Bron <http://www.bede.org.uk/justinian.htm>

Introduction

From Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* to Anthony Gottlieb's *The Dream of Reason*; and from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* via Andrew Dickson White's *Conflict between Science and Theology* through to Charles Freeman's *Closing of the Western Mind*, all histories of intellectual thought mention with varying degrees of outrage that Emperor Justinian closed down the Athenian Academy in 529AD. This, we are told, was the official end of pagan philosophy and the last light to be put out in Europe as the Dark Ages closed in. The professors who had taught at the Academy left the Byzantine Empire for Persia

where they were welcomed by the Shah. Thus, the enlightenment of the east contrasted with the shadows that Christianity had thrown in the west.

The Neo-Platonic Academy of Athens

Justinian was by no means the first man to close down the schools of his political or religious opponents. The Pharaoh Ptolemy VII Psychon had expelled all the scholars from Alexandria in 170BC prompting many to travel to Greece in search of a living. Around 363AD, the pagan Roman Emperor Julian the Apostate forbade Christians to teach publicly anywhere in the Empire but the edict was repealed after his short reign ended. The Athenian Academy, originally founded by Plato in the early fourth century BC had not enjoyed uninterrupted existence either. The Romans had closed the schools in Athens before, back when they had first invaded the city in the second century BC. By the sixth century AD, the re-founded Academy was a neo-Platonic foundation espousing the mystical doctrines of Plotinus and Proclus (411 – 485). It was also quite anti-Christian, counting the philosopher Porphyry (233 – 309) among its alumnae. He had written a lengthy anti-Christian diatribe which was condemned and now survives only in fragments. On the other hand, Porphyry's commentary on Aristotle's logic was a key part of the course in Christian schools throughout the Middle Ages and featured on the syllabus at the University of Paris. The contrasting fate of Porphyry's works shows that it was possible and permissible for Christians to separate the wheat of useful writing from the chaff of polemic.

For such a famous decree, Justinian's edict that closed the schools in 529AD is surprisingly hard to get hold of. It is in the rarely published *Codex* of his laws. Eventually, I tracked it down to the British Library and also found a translation from the original Greek into Latin. Here's my own rendering into English:

We wish to widen the law once made by us and by our father of blessed memory against all remaining heresies (we call heresies those faiths which hold and believe things otherwise than the catholic and apostolic orthodox church), so that it ought to apply not only to them but also to Samaritans [Jews] and pagans. Thus, since they have had such an ill effect, they should have no influence nor enjoy any dignity, nor acting as teachers of any subjects, should they drag the minds of the simple to their errors and, in this way, turn the more ignorant of them against the pure and true orthodox faith; so we permit only those who are of the orthodox faith to teach and accept a public stipend.

There are two things to note about this. Firstly, it is aimed at Jews and heretics as well as pagans. Secondly, it makes no mention of Athens or any other particular school. The prohibition against teaching is general.

The decree is mentioned by the late sixth century Syrian chronicler [John Malalas](#) as occurring in 529AD (the actual decree is undated, but from the dates of pronouncements around it, it must have been enacted between 527 and 529). Malalas reports "The Emperor issued a decree and sent it to Athens ordering that no one should teach philosophy nor interpret the laws." Malalas is clear that the decree was specifically aimed at attacking the Athenian school. In the same year he also says, "The Emperor decreed that those who held Hellenic (i.e. pagan) beliefs should not hold any state office." It is fairly obvious that this refers to the same decree even though Malalas mentions the prohibitions against teaching and accepting a public stipend separately.

Alan Cameron, in his analysis of the decree back in 1969, suggested that the last line of the decree should not be read as a blanket ban on teaching, but rather a ban on non-Christians being paid to teach from the public purse. He notes, for instance, that there is no evidence that there was ever a formal decision to suppress the Alexandrian schools. One of the last pagans to teach there was a man called Olympiodorus who was active in the late sixth century, well after Justinian's decree. So, according to Cameron, Justinian did not close the Academy in Athens, he just cut off any public funding. I think Malalas makes clear this is wrong and that the decree was intended to close the Athenian schools only. Nowhere, in fact, are we told that the Academy actually did close or whether, as Cameron believes, it might have limped on under its own resources. My own feeling is that the Academy did shut its doors at this point although the significance of this event has been massively overstated. The great schools of Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople remained open, active and well patronised. Only it fell to the Arabs in the seventh century did the Alexandrian school lose its influence.

One thing we can be absolutely sure of is that Justinian did not stop pagan philosophers from writing and publishing. We know this because several works by Damascius, the last head of the Athenian academy, and a large corpus by Simplicius, its leading light, survive to this day. Their contributions to neo-Platonic philosophy were valued enough by Christians to copy them out and later translate much of the material into Latin. The story of the Athenian philosophers tramping off to Persia in disgust at Justinian's policies is found in only one source, the *Histories* of Agathias (c. 532 – c. 580). He was a lawyer working in Constantinople, well connected but not very influential. As a writer he seems to have suffered much frustration at his lack of success and started on his historical work late in life after failing to make it as a poet. His book is a continuation of the account of Justinian's reign started by Procopius and takes events up to the mid 550s. Agathias died before he could finish the job so we can use internal references to date the work's composition to the 580s. The story of the philosophers' exile in Persia is actually a flashback intended to illuminate the character of the Persian king Chosroes I. Agathias thinks that Chosroes is a bit of a poseur with delusions of intellectual grandeur. He illustrates this point by telling us how the Athenian philosophers were bitterly disappointed when they visited him. Although the

Academy was closed in 529AD, Chosroes did not ascend the throne until September, 531.

Attracted by his reputation as a patron of thinkers, Agathias tells how seven pagan philosophers set out to try their luck at the Persian court. He names them as Damascius of Syria, Simplicius of Cyrene, Eulamius of Phrigia, Priscian of Lydia, Hermias and Diogenes of Phoenicia and finally Isidore of Gaza. The philosophers were unhappy in the Byzantine Empire because they were being victimised on account of their religion. According to Agathias, the seven philosophers made their way to the Persian capital of Persepolis and were doted on by the king. He was desperate that they stay on as an adornment to his court. Sadly, the Persians disgusted the Greeks, especially their promiscuity, so they vowed to return home. The king begged them to remain but when they refused, he had a clause added to his treaty with Justinian to guarantee them safe passage and freedom of thought back in the Roman Empire. The treaty in question was signed in September, 532AD although the text is not extant.

As it stands, this story is wildly implausible. Not only is it only mentioned by one author fifty years after the event, but we must suppose that the philosophers decided to leave Athens, travelled to Persepolis, got homesick and managed to persuade Chosroes to let them return in the space of a year. It is hard to know whether it is less likely that the Persian king would allow the philosophers to leave if he wanted them to stay or that Justinian would accept the exiles back. After the alleged events of 531/2, Damascius lived on until at least 538AD and Simplicius enjoyed a lively career as a philosophical writer. Agathias also tells a bizarre story about the journey home. On the way back, the philosophers came across a corpse lying on a hillside. They did the right thing and buried it. That night, however, one of them had a dream where he was told that burying the corpse was a mistake and that the ground itself would reject it. Next day, the philosophers managed to get lost and doubled back on themselves until they reached the same hillside upon which they had found the body. During the night it had been unearthed and now once again lay on the grass. Warned by the dream, the philosophers left it well alone and made their way back home. There may be some moral to this tale but Agathias does not tell us what it is and I am not going to speculate. All I can say is that it casts further serious doubt of the whole story of the exiled philosophers. Despite this, it is faithfully repeated in almost all the standard reference books. Recently, one scholar went so far as to claim that Agathias's account is probably derived from a written record from one of the philosophers themselves.

Of Simplicius and Damascius we know a fair bit from their surviving works. The Persian story is not mentioned in the works of Simplicius but, given they are dense books of philosophy, this need hardly surprise us. He includes very few autobiographical details beyond the names of his teachers. However, there is one hint that does point to a sojourn in Persia. He states that he has seen the River Aboras, a tributary of the Euphrates, with his own eyes. This is not in Persia, but it

a long way from Athens or Alexandria. Two books attributed to Priscian of Lydia, who is mentioned by John Philoponus as well as Agathias, survive. One is a paraphrase of Theophrastus. The other, extant only in Latin translation, purports to be an account of the queries addressed to the philosophers by the Persian King. Whether or not it is genuine, I have no idea. Of the other five philosophers, we know nothing at all. Indeed, none of them are attested anywhere else apart from in Agathias. The combination of Simplicius having seen the River Aboras and Priscian's book lead me to accept the basic fact of a journey to Persia, if not the details of the story in Agathias. However, if further research shows Priscian's book to be spurious I would withdraw even that limited assent.

The Significance of Justinian's Action

The claim that the closure of the Athenian Academy, a hotbed of neo-Platonism rather than mathematics or science, marked the end of ancient learning rests of the assumption that pagans were somehow better at philosophy than Christians. It is indeed easy to quote the early Christian Fathers out of context to make them seem opposed to any kind of secular learning. Tertullian (160 - 225), a lawyer and Christian convert from North Africa is one of the Fathers most commonly cited in this way. He was a highly trained rhetorician schooled in the ancient art of making his point in a striking and entertaining way. His writing is full of figures of speech, hyperbole and exaggeration of the kind familiar to anyone who has studied the oratory of Cicero. Unfortunately, people today often have a tendency to read him completely literally and so utterly misconstrue what he is talking about. Tertullian himself was quite an ascetic and ended up lapsing into heresy in reaction against the less rigid doctrines of the Orthodox Church.

There are two sound bites from his work that sceptics commonly trot out to demonstrate that early Christians were irrational and closed-minded. "What," Tertullian once asked, "has Athens (pagan philosophy) got to do with Jerusalem (Christian theology)?" In these two short phrases, he seems to have rejected all the fruits of pagan learning and even thrown out reason. In context, however, it is clear that this is not what he is doing at all. When contrasting Athens to Jerusalem, Tertullian is talking specifically about how the teaching of Jesus differs from the Greek ethical thought expounded by pagan philosophers. These philosophical schools, such as the Stoics and Epicureans were socially acceptable to the Romans in a way that Jesus' more radical teaching was not. So inevitably, there seem to have been efforts to make Jesus more acceptable to Roman society by combining his thinking with pagan ideas. As far as Tertullian was concerned, the Bible's revelation from God was complete and would not be enhanced by adding a bit of pagan philosophy to the mix. When you look at the schools of thought current at the time, it is hard to escape the conclusion that he had a point. Epicureanism was a strictly atheistic philosophy that said that the point of life was pleasure. It is almost completely incompatible with Christianity even if its defenders have insisted that by 'pleasure' the Epicureans really mean philosophical contemplation. Stoicism

preaches the maintenance of high moral standards whatever the world throws at you. Thus, it does appear to have some affinity with the ethical teaching of Jesus. But by making “fate” the final arbiter of man’s destiny, it completely subverts God’s sovereignty. Tertullian may also have been suspicious of Stoicism because it was popular with the Roman ruling elite who had declared Christianity to be an illegal cult.

The other famous bon mote of Tertullian is worth quoting with some context:

The Son of God was crucified: I am not ashamed--because it is shameful.

The Son of God died: it is credible - because it is silly.

He was buried, and rose again: it is certain - because it is impossible.

It is the second half of the last line that sceptics often quote, or usually misquote, to try to demonstrate that Tertullian has rejected the use of logic and reason. But what he is actually doing here, like the trained orator that he was, is exaggerating to make his point. Furthermore, his point is not that we should reject reason but that the death and resurrection of Jesus is so absurd that no one could have made it up. That means that it must be true. Whether or not this is a good argument is open to debate but it is certainly a rational one, as we would expect from such a skilled an advocate as Tertullian.

The attitudes of other Church Fathers to pagan literature varied from enthusiastic support for what it could do for Christianity to deep suspicion that it might subvert the Christian message. Origen of Alexandria (185 – 253) was a prolific and influential author who many theologians later regarded as a heretic for saying that everybody, including the devil, would be saved. He made the suggestion, in a letter to his disciple Gregory, that Christians should make use of pagan learning because it was like the gold of Egypt taken by the Israelites in the Book of Exodus.

I wish to ask you to extract from the philosophy of the Greeks what may serve as a course of study or a preparation for Christianity, and from geometry and astronomy what will serve to explain the sacred Scriptures, in order that all that the sons of the philosophers are wont to say about geometry and music, grammar, rhetoric, and astronomy, as fellow-helpers to philosophy, we may say about philosophy itself, in relation to Christianity. Perhaps something of this kind is shadowed forth in what is written in Exodus from the mouth of God, that the children of Israel were commanded to ask from their neighbours, and those who dwelt with them, vessels of silver and gold, and raiment, in order that, by spoiling the Egyptians, they might have material for the preparation of the things which pertained to the service of God.

The idea that turning it to the service of true religion purifies pagan philosophy occurs many times in Christian thought. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430), the most

influential theologian in the Latin West, agreed about the importance of pagan writers. In *On Christian Teaching* he writes:

If those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, have said things which are indeed true and are well accommodated to our faith, they should not be feared; rather, what they have said should be taken from them as from unjust possessors and converted to our use. Just as the Egyptians had not only idols and grave burdens which the people of Israel detested and avoided, so also they had vases and ornaments of gold and silver and clothing which the Israelites took with them secretly when they fled, as if to put them to a better use.

Other Schools and Academies

Subsequent history has shown that Byzantine Christians remained loyal to their pagan literary and philosophical heritage. As I mentioned above, besides the Academy of Athens, there were several other important centres of learning in the Roman Empire. Foremost among these was Alexandria which remained pre-eminent in medicine and philosophy until Arab forces invaded Egypt in the seventh century. After that, the newly founded capital of Cairo, as well as other Islamic cities like Damascus and Baghdad, eclipsed Alexandria. There is no evidence that there was ever a formal decision to suppress the Alexandrian schools although they gradually Christianised together with the rest of the Empire. One of the last pagans to teach there was Olympiodorus who was active in the late sixth century. However, by far the greatest thinker of this time was the Christian John Philoponus whose commentaries on Aristotle contained trenchant criticisms of his thought, many of which scholars have subsequently vindicated.

Another school of considerable importance was founded at Nisibis in Syria 325AD. Unfortunately, the Romans ceded the city to the Persian Empire in the aftermath of their defeat of Julian the Apostate in 363AD, so the school had to move westwards to Edessa. Here it thrived for over a century and became the seedbed of classical Syriac literature. Syriac was the common language of the people of the Middle East and was the direct descendent of the Aramaic that Jesus spoke. However, politics eventually intervened in Edessa too because the followers of Nestorius, a deposed Patriarch of Constantinople, had congregated there. The Emperor Zeno shut the school in 489AD and the Nestorians simply moved back to Nisibis which was still under the control of Persia. They took with them the works of Aristotle which they had begun to translate into Syriac. Then, the entire Persian Empire fell to the Arab Moslem invasion of 643AD – 650AD and the Nestorians came under Islamic rule. Their knowledge of Greek philosophy meant that they were highly valued as advisors by their new masters who used the Nestorians to give them access to the Greek science and medicine that was so important to the flowering of Moslem culture.

Early Christian emperors recognised the need to preserve the heritage of pagan writing. Constantius II (317 – 361) founded a new scriptorium in Constantinople and created salaried positions for both Greek and Latin copyists. There is evidence that a slump in literary culture had already started before Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. Constantius reversed this decline by ensuring that many decaying papyrus scrolls were copied into new codices. We also know that the texts used for teaching were all works of pagan literature and that the Christian equivalents never superseded them. Far from banning pagan works, Christian scholars kept them at the heart of the educational syllabus. Building on the start made by Constantius, later Christian Emperors founded a new school in Constantinople. It was this institution, with state support and plenty of funds, that probably did more than anything else to bleed Athens of its scholars. In 425AD, the state provided for no less than 28 professors in Constantinople and raised six of them to the peerage.

Most western writers tend to ignore the Byzantine Empire when they are talking about philosophy and science. This gives the mistaken impression that there were no important Christian thinkers during the early Middle Ages and reinforces our prejudice that Christianity meant the end of Greek thought. In fact, Justinian's closure of the Academy of Athens was not the end of Byzantine scholarship by any stretch of the imagination. The school founded in Constantinople in the fifth century was an imperial foundation. Thus, its fortunes did depend on the propensities of the Emperor at any given time and Justinian was less sympathetic than his predecessors were. Worse was to follow as the Byzantine Empire reeled under the hammer blows of the Arab and Bulgarian invasions that deprived it of more than half its territory.

By the ninth century, the situation had stabilised enough to Byzantium to enter what is usually considered the apogee of its cultural achievement. The schools were re-founded by the Emperor Theophilus in 840AD who appointed professors in geometry, astronomy and the humanities. Important scholars like the Patriarch Photius and Leo the Mathematician came to work in Constantinople. So great was Leo's reputation that we are told that the Caliph of the Moslems in Baghdad begged the Emperor to be allowed to borrow him. This was, remember, also the period during which Arabic scholarship was reaching its peak as well so Leo must have been quite something. Photius had a controversial career as an ecclesiastic but produced one of the most valuable pieces of scholarship to come out of the ninth century. A man with a vast appetite for reading, he wrote down summary reviews of 280 books including many historians that have since been lost. Of his own time, Photius commented, "today many of our acquaintances have an exact knowledge of geometry, mathematics and the other sciences." Leo the Mathematician also had a considerable library on the subjects that interested him. For completeness, mention should be made of the story that the Byzantine Emperor Leo III (680 – 741) shut down the university and library of Constantinople founded by his Christian predecessors. The tale is part of a campaign of vilification against Leo as one of the

iconoclastic emperors who banned religious images. Scholars note that the story is political propaganda and that Leo certainly did not close any libraries that we know of.

Conclusion

Other libraries have been lost when armies have taken cities by storm. During the re-conquest of Spain, Ferdinand III took Cordoba in 1236 and his troops caused much damage to the city's enormous literary heritage in the process. It is difficult, however, to claim that this sort of thing is anything other than par for the course in human history and certainly not specifically a Christian trait. As for Justinian's closure of the Academy in Athens, it was far from the end of ancient philosophy. Instead, it was the isolated action of a tyrannical monarch. It was a significant event only for those directly affected. We must also doubt the veracity of what Agathias tells us about the famous sequel in Persia. Learning continued in the Byzantine Empire, buffeted by the prevailing winds of politics, and eventually handed its legacy to the Medieval West.