The Library of Doctor John Dee as it Relates to Libraries in the English and European Renaissances

by

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Abstract: John Dee, an English scholar in the sixteenth century, was influenced by both the Continental rebirth of scholarship and the need for native repositories of knowledge and centers of scholarship in England when he created his large private library in the 1570s. The history and contents of the library indicate that the Italian Renaissance, as it spread outward from the continent, met England at a time when that country was in need of native repositories of knowledge and centers of scholarly exchange. Scholars such as Dee took the new developments of the continental Renaissance and implemented them in their own country to promote its individual advancement.

Headings:

Dee, John, 1527-1608 - Library

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The Renaissance in the Western World

RENAISSANCE 1. a. The great revival of art and letters, under the influence of classical models, which began in Italy in the 14th century and continued during the 15th and 16th; also, the period during which this movement was in progress (OED, 605).

The period 1400-1600 is generally accepted as being that during which the Western world evolved out of a medieval mindset and into a modern one. The driving force behind this evolution is believed to be the resurgence of interest in the classical Western civilizations of Greece and Rome, whose art, literature, and other surviving products became the focus of wide scholarly and popular interest during that time. This rediscovery of classical civilization is the source of the period's common name, "Renaissance," French for "rebirth."

According to historical convention, the Renaissance as a continent-wide phenomenon began in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. Its roots, in particular the gradual recovery of classical literature from the Islamic world, stretch far back into the early and central middle ages. However, it was not until that time that the classics began to be actively studied by a significant proportion of the population, and classical themes began to be widely incorporated into original art and literature. It was in Italy that this phenomenon first clearly manifested itself. Similarly wide-ranging developments did not appear in other
nations until later; in some cases, such as that of England, several decades passed before those nations experienced their own Renaissances.

The Renaissance in England in the Sixteenth Century

England was one of the countries who recognizably underwent its own Renaissance many years after Italy and other nations on the Continent. The English Renaissance is usually associated with the reign of Queen Elizabeth, which began in 1559. Occasionally, the preceding three or four decades are included as well, and the given starting date is Henry VIII's break with Rome. Printing, scholarship in the classics, and other activities associated with the Renaissance had been going on in England for many years before this. However, they did not acquire the widespread, popular character of similar activities in Italy and other nations until this time.

An interesting question to ask is, why did the Renaissance not develop in England until this time? There can be two general answers, depending on certain fundamental elements of the nature of the Renaissance. If the Renaissance was a single phenomenon, originating in Italy and spreading from there, then the delay can be attributed to a combination of the distance between the two countries, which was fairly significant even in a world whose ability to communicate was evolving rapidly, and social and political events in England that may have inhibited the
development of scholarship through importation. Alternatively, if the Renaissance was not a single phenomenon, but a number of similar individual phenomena whose development was native to each particular nation, then explaining the delay, and thus the development of the Renaissance in England, may be a much more complicated matter, requiring a detailed examination and analysis of the span of English history through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It is this latter interpretation which has been endorsed by the majority of scholars. For example, H. J. de Vleeschauwer, in his *Survey of Library History*, describes the Renaissance as a “national, and not a cultural, phenomenon” (80). However, nations in the early modern period did not develop in a vacuum. Foreign influences must have had some effect on these individual national phenomena.

The examination of particular people, places, or episodes in history may yield insight into the larger developments which surrounded them. In this case, it is John Dee, his private library, and the forty-year history thereof that may help illustrate a hybrid theory of the development of the Renaissance in England. Dee's library and its history show that the English Renaissance may have been inspired by foreign ideas, but that those foreign ideas were imported and accepted in response to native situations and developments.
Libraries in the Renaissance

The history of libraries in the Renaissance is important to understanding the history of the period in general. Many libraries existed in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. However, they were primarily scholarly in nature, associated with major urban universities or monastic schools. During the Renaissance, libraries, while still uncommon compared to today, became more widespread, and more popular in nature, as literacy levels increased and the printing press made the creation of books much easier.

de Vleeschauwer, in the second chapter of his Survey, entitled "The Social Ostentatious Library of the Renaissance and Baroque," describes the partially private, partially public library of the Renaissance. In Italy, during the fifteenth century, the revival of scholarship, in concert with the development of printing in the middle of the century, led to a comparatively unprecedented growth of private book-collecting. A collection of books became an important display of wealth and power, as well as erudition. Noblemen, high-ranking members of the clergy, and other important figures acquired books accordingly. The library of Pico della Mirandola, which will be discussed in detail later, was one of the greatest of these. There were also many others. Federigo, the duke of Urbino, amassed a library comparable to Pico's, as did the dynasties of more or less all of the other Italian city-states (de Vleeschauwer 86-7).
However, many of these libraries did not remain private for long. Often, the death of their owners moved them into the public domain. For example, Petrarch, arguably the original Renaissance man, willed his books upon his death to the city of San Marco (near Venice) on the condition that they be made available to the public, although this plan never came to fruition. The famous poet Boccaccio donated his works to a monastery in similar fashion (de Vleeschauwer 9). One of the finest collections of religious and classical Greek works of the fifteenth century, that of Cardinal Bessarion, was successfully opened to the public in the same way that Petrarch had hoped his would. He donated it to the city of Venice in 1468 with the condition that it be made available to the public, and it is now the foundation of the Library of St. Mark (Johnson and Harris 131-1). The Church, following the example of secular collectors and governments, also acquired many private libraries. This was the fate of Federigo's books, which the Vatican absorbed in the mid-sixteenth century.

Thus, an aspect of the Renaissance important to the history of libraries was the way in which libraries became more widespread, and more public, during that time than they had been in the Middle Ages.

English Libraries Before the Elizabethan Period

In the early sixteenth century, England went through a series of upheavals which severely inhibited the development
of scholarship in general and libraries in particular. During the Middle Ages, England, like the rest of Europe, had developed comparatively substantial collections of religious and scholarly works in its monasteries and universities. The development of printing allowed these collections to grow considerably in the fifteenth century. However, these were to be severely depleted by the events of decades subsequent. Henry VIII's secession from the Catholic church in 1527 was accompanied by the annexation of all church properties. This included the manuscripts, manuscript books, and early printed books in the libraries of churches and monasteries. These were seized by the agents of the crown or opportunistic private citizens. Some found their way into private collections and were thus preserved. However, most books and manuscripts held by the Church at this time were lost or destroyed. Many of the royal commissioners tasked with the disposition of church property were zealous Puritans, who advocated the destruction of anything related to Catholicism. Furthermore, books and manuscripts that were not actively destroyed often were lost regardless, as a result of exposure to the elements and lack of continuous care.

Anti-Catholic reforms continued under the next monarch, Edward VI. He continued the despoiling of the church and monastic libraries, and also turned his attentions to the university libraries. In 1550, the king's commissioners visited the libraries at Oxford and destroyed whatever they
considered "Popish, or diabolical, or both" (French, 27). Among the works lost were books on religion, all branches of the old Scholastic philosophical and scientific tradition, and mathematics. Other university libraries were similarly visited. The destruction of the English academic libraries continued with the ascension of Queen Mary to the throne. Unlike her immediate predecessors, Mary was a Catholic. She accordingly attempted to reverse Henry and Edward's anti-Catholic reforms. This effort did not eventually succeed, but it had the immediate effect of further weakening England's repositories of knowledge. As part of this program, she sent more royal commissioners to the English universities, this time to remove all books injurious to Catholic sentiments. The result was more confusion and damage, as well as a certain amount of private outcry on the part of scholars.

One of the scholars who politely protested against Mary's efforts was John Dee. Dee, a young man living in London at the time, in 1557 authored a letter entitled "A Supplication to Queen Mary, by John Dee, for the Recovery and Preservation of Ancient Writers and Monuments" (Dee, Tracts, 44-7). In this document, he advocated both the restoration of previously existing religious and scholarly libraries, and the development of a national public library, for the preservation of both old and new manuscripts and printed books.
John Dee's Life and Works

John Dee, born in 1527, was a prominent scholar and minor political figure. He was a significant person in his time for a number of reasons. He was famous for the people he knew. He was an associate of many notable personalities of the Elizabethan era, Queen Elizabeth being foremost among them. He was a noted astrologer, and was consulted to cast the horoscopes that chose the date for her coronation. It has also been argued by some in Dee’s time and the modern day that he was both an overt and covert diplomatic agent for the Queen.

Regardless of whether or not he did so with political ends in mind, Dee was famous for the places he traveled to throughout his life, which included almost all of western Europe and a number of points east of the Rhine, including Poland and the capital of the Holy Roman Empire at Prague.

He was famous in a less romantic, but in a more significant fashion, for the books he wrote. A bibliography of his personal works would include texts on philosophy, mathematics, optics, astronomy, astrology, navigation, architecture, geography, alchemy, mysticism, and the reformation of the calendar. Politics was also a theme of some of his work, although a subtly-expressed one. His treatises on navigation were created for the express purpose of training mariners for the expansion of the British trading empire.

He was famous, and indeed perhaps unfortunately for him
notorious, for his experiments in alchemy and what might be called magic. Additionally, during the 1580s, he purported to have had extensive mediated conversations with the higher powers, i.e. angelic beings. As a result of those conversations, as well as certain astrological portents, he took an extended holiday to Prague and attempted to enlist the aid of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II in an effort that lay between between world conquest and a total transformation of human society and behavior.

Leaving aside the confusing business in Prague, whose character does not resemble that of the other periods of his life, John Dee was most famous in his own time and most noted by students of history for his library. It was his most prized possession and representation of his multifaceted interests. In his estate on the Thames at Mortlake, a short distance outside London, Dee eventually amassed the largest collection of loose and bound manuscripts and printed books in private hands in England. The precise size of the library is a topic of some debate. According to Julian Roberts of the Bodleian Library, his library contained at its height 2,337 printed books and 378 manuscripts. This is based on Dee's 1583 inventory and cataloging of the collection and books which are known to have been held but not included in that catalog (Renaissance Man 36). Sears Jayne estimates its size at about 2,500 printed books and 170 manuscripts (125). Dee himself estimated that "the divers books of my late library, printed
and anciently written, bound and unbound, were in all near 4000, the fourth part of which were the written books" (Dee, Autobiographical Tracts 27). Regardless of the precise numbers, however, the library was undoubtedly of great size and significance. It dwarfed institutional collections in England, and was comparable to some private and institutional libraries on the continent.

**Literature on Dee and His Library**

While during the prime of his life he attracted both fame and notoriety, Dee died in relative obscurity. It bears mentioning, however, that many people of note paid attention to the disposition of his library after his death. From his death in 1608 until the middle of the nineteenth century, the only major written work on him was Meric Causabon's *True and Faithful Relation of What Passed for Many Years Between Dr. John Dee and Some Spirits*, an account of Dee's journey in the 1580s to eastern Europe and accompanying experiments in the conjuration of angels. This work was published with somewhat questionable motivations in mind on the part of Causabon. Its effect on Dee's reputation for some time thereafter was severely deleterious. Frances Yates states:

> It shows Dee in an extremely superstitious light and as the deluded victim of [medium Edward] Kelly's deceptions. It stamped Dee with the reputation which lasted all through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the reputation of a deluded fanatic, an
object of scorn and derision (Yates 5-6).

In the nineteenth century, two volumes of Dee’s personal papers were published separately by historical societies, in 1842 and 1851, respectively. The first of these was *The Private Diary of Dr. John Dee*, published by the Camden Society in London. It contains a collection of excerpts from Dee's private diary and a partial catalog of his manuscript collection, extracted from manuscripts in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford and Trinity College Library at Cambridge. The editor, James Orchard Halliwell, appears to have had little interest in, or understanding of, Dee in a historical sense. He appears to have regarded Dee mainly as a curiosity, and was presumably influenced by the erroneous interpretation forwarded by Causabon (*Dee, Private Diary* viii). However, the work is undeniably important, as it represents an early effort to illustrate the significance of Dee's library.

The second of these works is the *Autobiographical Tracts of Dr. John Dee*, published by the Chetham Society of Manchester, which seems to have been interested in Dee due to his occupancy of the office of Warden at the college of Manchester. The *Tracts* include a number of pieces written by Dee at various points in his life, and hence present him in a generally favorable light. Central to the collection is a document usually referred to as the "Compendious Rehearsall," a lengthy autobiography in the form of a letter
to Queen Elizabeth I. Most important with regard to the
history of the library, however, and indeed to libraries in
England in general, is the previously-discussed
"Supplication to Queen Mary".

Despite the early publication of these notable primary
sources, serious study of Dee and his place in history is fairly new. Charlotte Fell-Smith's biography John Dee was published in 1909, but it is heavily influenced by Causabon's interpretation of Dee, and authorities regard it as useful only as a source of factual data. A variety of short works from later in the first half of the century, such as E. G. R. Taylor's examination of navigational and geographical scholarship in the English Renaissance, and F. R. Johnson’s study of astronomers in the same period, made some attempt to rehabilitate Dee's image, which at that point remained colored by the interpretation presented in Causabon's work. However, all the currently-existing major secondary works on Dee have been published in the last thirty years. Furthermore, actual scholarly debate on Dee did not begin until approximately ten years ago. As a result, an agreed-upon picture of the precise nature of Dee and his library has yet to emerge.

The first published, fully-researched, conclusive statement about Dee's role in history was made by Frances Yates of London's Warburg Institute in the late 1960s. Yates studied Dee as part of a larger program of research into the culture of the Renaissance, which focused on the
Hermetic, Neoplatonic ideas and ideals that were embraced by many of the notable scholars of the time on all parts of the continent. In her book *Theatre of the World*, as well as other works, Yates describes Dee as a "magus and mathematician," (the two terms being nearly synonymous in the Renaissance) and one of the primary "representatives of Renaissance philosophy in England" (Yates xi). Yates' position is perhaps best summed up by one of the more recent opponents of her interpretation, William Sherman, who describes her picture of Dee "as England's great magus, the philosopher-magician who embodied the Hermetic, Neoplatonic Renaissance..." (Sherman, *Place of Reading* 62).

Her examination of Dee's library and interpretation of its significance is central to this theory. The key comment regarding the library in Yates' work is to be found in *Theatre of the World*, where she states:

> The whole of the Renaissance is in this library...the Renaissance as interpreted by Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, with its slant towards philosophy, science, and magic, rather than towards purely grammarian humanist studies. (Yates 12)

The idea of Dee as the Renaissance magus of England is built primarily on that foundation.

Yates' interpretation of Dee remained the prevailing one for several years, heavily influencing Peter French's 1972 biography *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus*. However, as said above, new interpretations have arisen in the last two decades. The first author to present a theory
at significant odds with Yates' was Nicholas Clulee, who did so in his 1988 study *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion*. Clulee did not entirely abandon the old portrait of Dee as the "Hermetic magus," but expanded it to conceive a picture of Dee as a person of broader interests than just Hermetic philosophy and other fields as they related to it. In his conclusion, Clulee states,

...there is a thread that ties the various manifestations of his natural philosophy together, a thread not of philosophical principles but of intellectual intent. This common intent was the desire to know nature, not superficially but through the "preeminent virtues," the hidden springs and ultimate reasons behind the processes and very existence of the cosmos. In addition, he had a firm conviction that mathematical principles and procedures offered important aid in understanding nature (31).

This results in a picture of Dee that more closely resembles such figures as Kepler and Galileo, involved in part with Hermetic ideas, but also moving towards the modern conception of mechanistic science. At the same time, though, the continuing interest in magic that manifested itself subtly throughout his career and highly unsubtly in the Bohemia period kept him tied to an older, explicitly religious view of the world. Julian Roberts and Andrew G. Watson, in their catalog of Dee's library, state "Dee has been seen, notably by Professor Clulee, as a man standing at a watershed between magic and science, looking back at one and forward to the other" (Roberts and Watson 69).
Drawing a clear distinction between Clulee and Yates' interpretations of Dee as a whole necessitates examining closely the different ways in which they interpret Dee's library. The key difference in Clulee's approach is the way he examines the library's development and progression, as well as its final contents. Yates examines the library as a static entity at its height in the 1570s, and she examines Dee as a static entity at the time of the "Compendious Rehearsall". This results in her relatively unambiguous interpretation: "Dee comes straight out of a main renaissance Hermetic stream..." (Yates 17). Clulee, on the other hand, with the aid of the bibliographic research which had been done in the intervening twenty years, examines the gradual development of both the library and Dee over the forty years of his active career. This results in his less sharply-defined portrait of Dee, as a man with a single large goal in mind, "an insatiable zeale, & desire to knowe his truth," but with difficulty in finding the means to achieve that goal (Dee, Tracts 72). At some points in his life, he found a modernistic system of rational inquiry to be most effective. In others, he despaired of the effectiveness of such methods and resorted to explorations into the supernatural. Clulee's work, like Dee's life, ends on a disappointing note, because the conclusion of this interpretation is that Dee never found the method of discovery he sought, and as a result never acquired the aforementioned knowledge.
The most recent study of Dee, William Sherman's *John Dee and the Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*, builds on Clulee's conception of Dee's career and interests, but comes to different conclusions. Sherman argues that Dee's apparently haphazard program of study, moving from discipline to discipline over the course of his life, was in fact not accidental, but the result of a desire on Dee's part to acquire as much and as many varying types of knowledge as possible. Furthermore, he argues that Dee was not interested in the pure synthesis of knowledge that Clulee refers to as his "natural philosophy," but was instead in the pursuit of knowledge for many practical, and particularly political, purposes. He builds this argument on both an analysis of the development of the library (having as he did access to even more bibliographical studies thereof than Clulee, in particular Roberts and Watson's) and more explicitly biographical study of Dee's life and associations with the famous figures of his time. The traditional view of Dee, stemming somewhat from Yates but also from Causabon and Fell-Smith, is that he was not a major social figure. This may may result from reflexive stereotyping of the occult scholar, but there is also evidence to support such a picture. He lived on his rural estate at almost all times when not traveling, despite encouragement from Queen Elizabeth and others to live at court, and conventional wisdom has long stated that he was on less than cordial terms with his neighbors. However,
Sherman's examination of Dee's writings and correspondence, among other resources, reveals that despite its out-of-the-way location, the estate at Mortlake was in fact a center of scholarship in England. Some reviewers of Sherman have described it as the first modern "think tank." According to Sherman, this came about as the result of the destruction of public academic resources in England that was discussed earlier; Dee attempted to fill that gap by amassing his own collection of resources and making them available to other scholars.

Sherman is not the first author to describe Dee's library as a semi-public institution. F. R. Johnson first commented on this issue in 1937, when he described the library as the scientific academy of England (138-9). However, Sherman considers the library's public nature to be of much greater significance than any previous author. He proposes that the library was not only a center of scholarship and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, but also of applied research for a number of different purposes, some with significant political motivations.

Sherman's interpretation of the library's purpose and significance is of great importance to this paper's thesis. Yates viewed Dee as the English manifestation of a purely continental phenomenon. Sherman, in contrast, interprets Dee as a user of continental knowledge, but a manifestation of a native phenomenon, the desire of Elizabethan England to develop and expand as a world power. Thus he would see the
English Renaissance as a national phenomenon that happened to make use of certain resources acquired on the continent.

The History of Dee's Library

The preceding discussions of Clulee and Sherman's interpretations make considerable reference to the history of Dee's library without describing the details of that history. Those details, however, are central to both their arguments and that of this paper, so it is necessary to present a detailed history of the development of Dee's library as the foundation of a conclusive statement about the larger historical significance thereof.

Dee founded the Mortlake library in 1564, after a long period of travel in the Low Countries and other parts of the European mainland. However, he had been collecting books and manuscripts for some time previous, beginning in the 1540s when he was an undergraduate at Cambridge. Most of his early acquisitions can be linked to his studies. They were, for the most part, Greek and Latin classics, such as Cicero, Tacitus, a Greek Bible, and some grammar texts, among others (Roberts and Watson 3). His collection did not broaden significantly until he began to travel abroad in 1547. At that point he began to acquire works of Renaissance-tinged philosophy and natural science, as well as more classical works, at a significant rate. His travels in France and Belgium, to such cities as Louvain, Antwerp, and Paris, which were funded in part by the patronage of
Edward VI, resulted in his early development into a scholar recognizable as a representative of the larger Renaissance (Clulee 27). The influence of foreign scholarship on his development in this period is worthy of note. During the three years he spent at Louvain in Belgium, from 1548 to 1551, he studied mathematics and science with scholars from France, Spain, and the Low Countries, including the Fleming Gerard Mercator, who invented the Mercator-projection world map (French 4-5).

The scope of this first stage of collecting and study is summed up partially by Dee's first attempt at a catalog of his printed and manuscript collection, commonly referred to as the "1557 list." That may be something of a misnomer, as detailed comparison of the catalogs indicates that the list may have been compiled as late as 1559, but it is the most commonly-used designation (Clulee 35). It is not nearly as complete or well-written as the catalogs Dee created later in his life, but it is enough to create a picture of Dee early in his career that can be compared to that evoked by the later catalogs. The 1557 list shows an intense interest in both contemporary natural science and its classical underpinnings. It makes no mention of the literary texts of his formative years of scholarship; the printed Greek and Latin books are by authors such as Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Euclid (Roberts and Watson 133-149).

The contemporary works are in large part by Continental authors who he had met during his travels in France. There
are too many to make a list of specific examples, but one acquisition worthy of note is a copy of the 1543 edition of *De Revolutionibus*, the famous work by Nicholas Copernicus in which a heliocentric (i.e. sun-centered) universe was first proposed. According to Johnson, Dee had by 1556 become familiar with the new heliocentric theory of the universe, and considered it superior to the Ptolemaic system for the purpose of mathematically predicting celestial movements, although he never made any recorded statements expressing a belief in its physical reality (Johnson 134-5).

Works on alchemy, cabala, and similar pursuits are conspicuously absent from the 1557 list. It is evident that Dee did not develop a significant interest in such matters until the 1560s. This is supported by evidence from Dee's correspondence and publication during the 1550s, which were focused on astronomy and navigation, two subjects that he became a leading authority on in England at that time.

In his capacity as a known expert on navigation, he was a frequently-consulted advisor to many exploratory voyages. Richard Chancellor, the leader of the Muscovy Company, a project backed by the Duke of Northumberland and London wool merchants to find a northeastern passage to east Asia, was initially educated in navigation by Dee in the mid-1550s (French 83). Also, E. G. R. Taylor, in her history of geography and navigation in the Tudor period, puts forth a strong argument to suggest that Dee was one of the guiding forces behind Sir Francis Drake's historic attempt to
circumnavigate the globe in 1577 (115-119).

Dee's knowledge of astronomy was similarly solicited in matters of significant import. The most famous example of this is the horoscope he cast to choose an auspicious date for the coronation of Elizabeth I in 1588. However, his expertise ranged far beyond astrology. He was involved to some degree in the popularization of the Copernican theory among scholars in England. John Feild's 1556 publication of a set of tables of astronomical data, entitled *Ephemeris Anni*, contained a preface written in Latin by Dee. In it, he speaks of the "Herculean labors" of Copernicus and his successor advocates of heliocentricity. While he does not go into detail about the theory, its origins, or his belief in it, he does clearly state that the mathematical results it produces are more accurate than pre-existing ones (Dee, *Astronomy* 57). Also, in July 1558, around the same time as the composition of the 1557 list, he finished and published an original work on astronomy, *Propaedeumata Aphoristica*, which presents a view of astronomy centered around the classical Ptolemaic/Aristotelian/Scholastic view of the universe (with attendant religious influences), but which is surprisingly free of Hermetic and Platonic influence. It heavily stresses the use of precise mathematical methods to explain the workings of the cosmos, recalling Pythagoras to some extent, but related to that emphasis is a mechanistic view of the universe, without the guiding celestial intelligences proposed by the Neoplatonists (Dee, *Astronomy*
It was in the 1560s that Dee began to develop the interest in occult philosophy which became the source of the balance of his reputation in the future. It is evident from his acquisitions in 1561 and 1562, as well as evidence pertaining to certain unpublished and subsequently lost manuscripts, that he was learning to read Hebrew and directing that knowledge towards study of cabala (Roberts and Watson 9). Shortly afterward, he began another major period of travel on the continent and corresponding acquisition of books and knowledge mainly related to the Hebrew language, cabala, alchemy, and Paracelsian medicine. The latter is a method of medicinal chemistry heavily influenced by alchemy and Hermeticism. This series of journeys was much more varied than his more northerly-confined trip in the early 1550s. He returned to the Low Countries, in particular Belgium, but continued from there to Switzerland, several cities in Italy, and also Hungary, where Maximilian II was being crowned king. The visit to Italy is particularly significant, as it was the beginning and center of the Renaissance, and the library eventually contained an exceptionally strong representation of the country's major philosophers (French 37 and 50).

In subsequent years he published works which, from a modern perspective, differ to a significant degree from those of a highly rational character that he produced in the 1550s. Chief among these is the *Monas Hieroglyphica*, the
most "occult and...irrational" of Dee's works, which would make its influence known some years later during the Bohemia period (French 9). The *Monas* is an exceptionally difficult work to understand. Most modern writers despair of fully explaining what Dee meant by it and instead take the simpler route of guessing at its meaning through examination of Dee's secondary writings about it and behavior on his part which seems to have been guided by it. In very vague, broad terms, the *Monas* is an attempt at a symbolic representation of all human endeavor, and a corresponding blueprint for a magical/alchemical transformation of society and thought.

The library reached its highest points between when Dee settled at Mortlake in 1566 and when he left for Poland in 1583. This was when Mortlake became the "think tank" that Sherman describes, the chief source of knowledge and meeting-place of scholars in England. The library reached the high point enumerated earlier, and was significant enough to merit visits from Queen Elizabeth on two occasions (Yates, *Theatre* 4; Dee, *Diary* 8-9). During this period his personal studies moved in more and more dubious (from a modern perspective) directions, involving intensive experimentation in alchemy his purported consultations with angels through the aid of various mediums and scryers.

However oddly focused Dee's personal output may have been, though, the library grew in all directions. At this point, it is best to outline the full extent of the library at its peak, to illustrate the breadth and depth of Dee's
collection of both his personal interests and those of the other users of his library.

This information derives primarily from the catalog which Dee composed in 1583 before leaving for Bohemia, as well as the additions and modifications made to it by Roberts and Watson. The section of his library whose authors are best-known would be that devoted to classical mathematics, science and philosophy; Euclid, Ptolemy, and Aristotle, respectively. Corresponding to these was a deep collection of contemporary works in the same subjects. He owned extensive medieval and Renaissance commentaries on Aristotle, as well as a smaller but still significant collection of Plato and his descendants, nearly every contemporary scholarly work available on astronomy when he was studying it in the 1550s as well as large quantities of popular writing on astronomy and astrology (pamphlets and similar works), and an equally deep, although not necessarily equal in size, collection of contemporary mathematics in both scholarly and vernacular languages. The practical applications of mathematics were also represented, especially architecture and navigation, and also dramatic engineering (the construction of mechanisms for special effects on stage) and military strategy.

Although little has evidently survived from his alchemical collection, it is evident from the catalogs that he owned a deep collection of alchemical texts and books on related disciplines, such as mining, metallurgy, botany, and
Paracelsian medicine. The vast Paracelsian collection, which dates mainly from the 1560s onward, was accompanied by a related collection of the antecedents of modern medicine, both classical, such as Galen, Hippocrates, and Aristotle's medical works, and contemporary, although he had few medical works written or published in the Middle Ages.

Last, while Dee is not generally well-known for an interest in the humanities, and he did not publish to any notable degree in that area, his collection of history, grammar, literature, and poetry in both classical and modern languages (including Spanish, French, Italian, and Flemish) was quite deep and varied. The 1583 catalog, when compared to the 1557 list, suggests that he may have lost or done away with some of his classical Greek works, and indeed is oddly deficient in the area of classical Greek literature (ironic, considering that for some time in the 1550s Dee was Under-Reader in Greek at Trinity College). However, this is offset by a surprisingly deep collection of other foreign-language materials, even taking into account Dee's frequent foreign travels. He may be presumed to have been fluent in at least six languages.

The group of people known to have patronized the library, both regular and infrequent visitors, has a breadth and depth similar to the physical collection. It would require too much background information for a detailed list to be meaningful, but a general description will be of help to later arguments. As suggested above, a great many
students of navigation passed through the library, both to use its resources on their own and to be tutored by Dee directly. Taylor's list of names in this area is lengthy and impressive, as is his account of the many students of geography who also used the library (Taylor 76). As befit Dee's support for the teaching of mathematics outside the university, a number of later notable mathematicians were trained in part by Dee and his library, the most famous of whom would probably be Thomas Digges (Roberts and Watson 43). Aside from these two major groupings, there were numerous others; alchemical students who assisted Dee's experiments in the 1570s and 1580s, medical doctors, at least one famous theatrical architect, astronomers, politicians and diplomats (particularly men with interest in his navigational and geographical studies), et cetera. Dee was also familiar with scholars and famous names outside the library; Elizabeth has already been mentioned, but he was also acquainted to varying degrees with two Holy Roman Emperors (Maximilian II and Rudolf II; he was on better terms with Maximilian), other noblemen in Italy and most of the countries of northwestern Europe, and scholars in the same places to an even greater degree.

The Library of Pico della Mirandola

The private libraries of the Italian Renaissance, built throughout the fifteenth century, bear considerable structural resemblance to Dee's library. An example of an
Italian private library analogous to Dee's would be that of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) perhaps the most famous "Renaissance man" of the fifteenth century. Mirandola, like Dee, was an author, philosopher, and political figure, and he developed an equally impressive library for his time, which numbered approximately 1,190 volumes (Kibre 21). The core of his collection was built around Greek and Latin classics, most of which were works in philosophy and the natural sciences. His contemporary works, in both classical and vernacular languages, reflected the expansion of study occurring in the Renaissance. Some of these were direct descendents of the classics, but others contained comparatively new ideas. Most of the latter related to the occult philosophy, but others were on theology from both his period and the preceding centuries of the Middle Ages, and on new developments in natural science that were beginning to develop in his time and would eventually form the foundation of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. Overall the character of Pico's library, and to some extent the continental Renaissance library in general, is a mixture of the classical and the modern, with a link between the two in the form of an overarching interest in the natural and occult sciences, which in an age so heavily influenced by such figures as Paracelsus and the Neoplatonists were closely linked to a degree alien to the modern viewer.
The Historical Significance of Dee's Library

Yates described the library as the whole of the Renaissance. Johnson described it as the scientific academy of England. However, according to Sherman's more recent interpretation, though, Dee's library was all these and more. After Dee's failure to induce Queen Mary and others to create a national library in England, he instead attempted to privately construct an approximation of the modern public library, containing as much useful and available knowledge that could be acquired and open to the use of all who required it. What is even more surprising than this aim is the fact that in large part Dee achieved it, in comparison to the university libraries in England at the time (the closest other analogs of the modern library). What can be made of this library as far as the context of library history in Renaissance England and library history in general? What influences, internal and external, led Dee to compile it and the scholars and political figures of the continent to patronize it?

First among the foreign influences which may have motivated Dee is the general trend towards publicly-displayed private libraries which began in Italy and presumably spread from there. Although there is only a circumstantial connection between the two, Dee's library bears substantial resemblance to Pico's. The resemblance extends to both its content and its organization, as was pointed out by Yates and French. Dee's library has
differences which mark it as a clearly English creation, particularly in the geographical and navigational collections, with their heavy imperial political overtones. Also, Dee and Pico do have one significant philosophical break over the issue of the validity of astrology. Dee was a dedicated practitioner of the art, whereas Pico was a staunch opponent of its practice. However, the core of Renaissance philosophy is very similar, and Dee's deep collection of Pico and his contemporaries and descendants indicates a significant influence. This probably stemmed to a significant degree from Dee's travels on the continent. His interest in the occult philosophy picked up sharply after his travels in Europe in the early 1560s, before which time he evidently collected little on the subject.

Much other indirect evidence points to foreign influences on Dee's development of the library. Chief among this is the highly international character of the library's holdings. As said before, Dee's collection contained large amounts of work from continental authors and in continental languages. Furthermore, they were acquired in large part directly from their continental sources; while Dee patronized many booksellers and bookbinders in England during his lengthy stay in England during the later 1560s and 1570s, before that one of the primary purposes of his travels about Europe was to acquire books.

The direct evidence from Dee's own writings, however, when viewed in concert with those specifically English
elements of the collection, points to a more national, and perhaps even nationalistic, motivation for the development of his library. The "Supplication to Queen Mary" was one of the earliest manifestations of a movement to create a national library in England, spurred in part by the despoiling of the university libraries during the first half of the sixteenth century. It was written in 1556, and shows that Dee had an interest in the development of at least some sort of public library in England some time before he actually built the physical structure that was his library, although not before his travels on the continent. Some pertinent passages are as follows:

Therefore your said suppliant maketh most humble petition unto your Majestie, that it might stand with your good will and pleasure, such order and meanes to take place, as your said suppliant hath devised for the recovery and continuall preservation of all such worthy monuments, as are yet extant...

Whereby your Highness shall have a most notable library, learning wonderfully be advanced, the passing excellent works of our forefathers from rot and worms preserved, and also hereafter continually the whole realm may...use and enjoy the whole incomparable treasure so preserved...

Finally, in the erecting of this your Library Royall, your grace shall follow the footsteps of all the famous and godly princes of old time, and also do like the worthy Governors of Christendome at these dayes. (46-7)

Dee's library was the manifestation of an international idea or movement adapted to serve a national purpose. Libraries in the Italian Renaissance were partly the result of a nationalistic revival of culture, for the benefit of
the general public and the national reputation which represented them, but the quest among the noted men of the time and place for personal glory was at least as significant a factor, if not more significant, in their development. Dee's library, on the other hand, had a much more explicitly public purpose. His writings suggest this directly, and his management of the library and his general conduct of life strengthen that suggestion. His library was open to all, and while he certainly gained prestige from it, its use was much more practical than the ostentatious, show-piece libraries of the Italian princes. It was used, or planned to be used, for the purpose of both the general education of England's national body of scholarship and the specific advancement of England's political fortunes. Thus Dee not only adapted the body of continental scholarship to suit his own personal scholastic interests, but adapted the continental model of the library to suit his own personal political ends, and those of his nation.
Works Cited


Other Works Consulted


