



FROM MY DIARY

There is a certain very large text from late antiquity to which I have always wished to have access. I don't need to use it often, but when you do, you do. There is indeed an English translation, itself a massive volume 18" tall and 2 inches thick, some 650 pages. But what I really wanted was a PDF.

A couple of months ago I decided to see if I could get an inter-library loan of the volume, with the idea of scanning it. Such massive items tend to be treated as reference works, and hard to borrow.

But last week I got an email from my library that it was available. I walked up to the library in the lunch hour, paid the \$8 fee, and I lugged it back to the office, not without some effort. After work I took it home.

I got my book scanner out, and began to scan it, page by page. The page area just about fitted on the scanner. Scanning is painful, because it is so heavy and so bulky. Lift, turn, lower, hold... lift, turn it the other way, lower, support it while it scans.... This is hard physical work, believe me.

The effort was worse because the volume itself is cracking at the binding. It has, quite clearly, been photocopied to death. It was on loan from a university, and doubtless generations of students did what they had to do. So the binding kept threatening to break, and the cover come off, with every turn of the page. But I persisted. Over the last three days I made progress. This evening I completed 231 pages.

But then something made me check a certain pirate book site. And there.... I found it. Not once, but twice! The first was a monochrome scan, much like my own. This has been nicely OCR'd, bookmarked, and is simply perfect for my purposes. The other consists of colour photographs of each opening, collected into two PDFs, clearly from some Turkish library. Neither was there when I placed that book order. I ought to have checked last week, before I started to scan.

My labour has been futile, it seems. Oh well. I have mixed feelings about this. On the one hand it seems a shame to stop. But on the other hand I will get back a week or so of evenings of my life.

I have found that there was also a price to pay for such activity, at the end of a working day when you need to rest but must instead drive yourself on. The first evening, when I scanned a long chunk, I went to bed afterwards only to experience anxiety dreams. I dreamed that I was back at university, and that it was the first day. But I had nothing to write on, no day book. We were being told all sorts of things - important, vital things - and everyone else was writing notes, but I could not. I knew that their notes would omit stuff that I needed to remember. I woke with some relief. It was not like this when I was scanning books for the web a decade ago. Now I do not need to have more stressful nights.

Another thought strikes me. It is now Saturday evening. It is very humid and sticky, and an inconsiderate neighbour has made it impossible to open the windows by lighting a fire just upwind of me. Now I always dismantle my laptop and external monitor, keyboard and

mouse, and put them in the cupboard, so that I will not see them on Sunday. IT is a demanding profession, and downtime is essential. Locking away my computer is an important piece of self-care. But Finereader 14, the scanner package, tends to go a bit funny with my Opticbook 3600 scanner. It took a number of restarts before it all worked. So I had intended to leave it all set up, and working. I no longer need to do this.

It also means that I can return to blogging!

I think that I ought to give thanks, that the Lord has lifted this burden from me. I really felt that I needed access to a copy. Now I have it; and others also. Good news.
