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*Rica to ****

The other day I went to see a great library in a convent of dervishes who are in effect its depositories, but who are obliged to let everyone enter at certain hours. [1]

As I entered I saw a grave man who was walking about among innumerable volumes that surrounded him. I went up to him and bade him tell me what some of the books were that I could see were better bound than the others. Monsieur, he said, I live here in a foreign world ; I know no one here. Many people ask me such questions, but you can realize I am not about to read all these books to satisfy them. But I have my librarian who will give you satisfaction ; for he is busy day and night deciphering everything you see here. [2] He is a man who is useless, and a great burden to us, because he does not work for the convent. But I hear the refectory bell ringing ; those who like me are in charge of a community must be the first at all exercises. With these words, the monk pushed me out, closed the door, and as if he had flown disappeared from my sight.

Paris this 21st day of the moon of Rhamazan 1719

[1] These details seem to point to the library of the abbey of Saint Victor : though the Bibliothèque Mazarine was the first library open to the public, in 1643, these were the express conditions of the legacy of Henri Du Bouchet in 1652, obliging Saint-Victor to open its library doors to the public at least three days a week.

[2] Presumably in the sense that he is cataloguing them.