
Offering a lavish production with excellent images and easy-on-the-eyes typeface, this second instalment in a planned five-volume study of the history of libraries in western civilization provides a sweeping commentary on the development of a Roman book culture. By taking account of the most significant primary sources, the author attempts to place the rise of the collection and storage of books into a broad historical context.

The first chapter focuses on the Greek foundations of Rome’s culture; the author clearly spells out his underlying philhellenic assumptions. While a vivid picture of the means by which Romans became acquainted with Greek traditions is evoked, this approach does not give due heed to the Italic world and its influence on Rome.1 The second chapter continues in a related vein; celebrated names (e.g. Livius Andronicus, Ennius, and Plautus) of early Roman writers are briefly discussed, especially in light of their “Greekness.” It is not until chapter 3 that a closer look at the development of Roman libraries occurs. Here we encounter not only an emergent book culture, together with the trade of books and publishers, but the possibility of a genuine library as revealed by the prolific writings of Cicero, who clearly had a major book habit. In chapter 4, after introducing familiar figures of the early principate (Augustus, Mæceanas, Virgil, Horace, and Ovid), the author unexpectedly reverts to the dying days of the republic and the foundation of a public library sponsored by Julius Caesar and carried out by the wealthy Asinius Pollo. I would note, though, that a discussion of what exactly is meant by a “public” library is sorely lacking: does this suggest a collection funded by the state or perhaps one which is available to anyone?2

1 See for example, T.J. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars* (c. 1000-264 B.C.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).
The remaining four chapters are more satisfactory in their collation of information specifically regarding Roman libraries. The fifth chapter moves the reader further along in the exploration of "bookishness" in the city of Rome; topics such as intellectual property and literary patronage are discussed. The main focus of the chapter, however, is the identification of libraries in large imperial bath complexes; symmetrically placed rooms with rectangular niches (serving as *armaria* or bookcases for the storage of scrolls) are the main marker for such spaces. Somewhat surprisingly, this discussion includes material datable to the fourth century, well beyond the defined period of the volume. Chapter 6, illustrated with multiple detailed floor plans and photographic figures, presents an almost encyclopedic account of the main structures that have been identified as libraries throughout the Roman empire. It is reassuring that the author acknowledges some of the difficulties in such identifications (299), highlighting the varying opinions put forth by excavators and scholars alike. Chapter 7 provides a map and accompanying list of known libraries in the ancient Greek and Roman world from the sixth century BC through the fourth century AD. While potentially informative, a lack of explanation or discussion limits the map's usefulness; it might have been more effectively deployed as an appendix or even an inside-cover map. The final chapter, after a lengthy digression on Roman architects, focuses on how particular architectural features were integral to libraries; thus, attention is given to the ways books were made accessible or preserved through the manipulation of space and building materials. Some of the most intriguing questions about Roman libraries are how and by whom they were operated. Unfortunately, these issues are relegated to the final three pages of the volume, placed as an afterthought to the architectural discussion.

The volume, given the clear mandate inherent in the title, in the end does not deliver what it claims. While there are notable accomplishments, including the author's reasonable command of the literary and archaeological evidence, there are many problems with this work. The foremost concern is that it is not obvious for whom this study was intended: prolific footnotes and primary sources suggest professional classicists; superficial discussions of Roman culture point to a non-specialist reader; substantial untranslated passages seem best suited to the volume's original Greek readership. Rather than sticking to the task at hand, the author uses the topic of the library as a lens to offer comment upon the broader culture of early Imperial Rome. Thus, we are offered extraneous information about an
architect’s duties (328), bathing activities (190), and Pliny’s work ethics (145–47). Moreover, despite the abundance of high-quality images, many of them seem unconnected to the text: the famous inscription preserving Augustus’s posthumous account of his accomplishments (not his will, as the caption reads, 172) is illustrated without further comment (170–71); the map known as the Tabula Peutingeriana is shown as proof for the extent of Rome’s eastern empire (94–95); and a wall painting from the Boscoreale villa is used to illustrate a theatrical set (41). Most surprising of all is the author’s own observation: “If one were to comb through ancient literature to find references to writers’ book collections and libraries and collate them logically, making rational deductions from the information available, one would conclude that nearly all writers and men of letters – and others too – possessed some kind of library, large or small” (200). If this were truly the aim of this study, the results, ironically, fall far short of their mark. In the end, it might be hoped that a reader who encounters this book will become sufficiently interested in the topic to seek out other more successful (and accessible) studies.3

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Syriac is a Semitic language and belongs to a family which includes a number of ancient languages – Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Phoenician are examples – together with Arabic, Hebrew, and ancient and modern Aramaic, which survives today among a few scattered Christian communities in the Near East. Syriac, which remains a liturgical language, is sometimes called Christian Aramaic, and, in terms of grammar and syntax, Aramaic and Syriac are essentially the same, though they are not written in the same script. Syriac itself is written in three different but closely related scripts, the oldest of which is Estrangela (deriving from a Greek work meaning “rounded”), and Estrangela was well established by 411 (7). The two other forms are