

Read? Briscoe appears to suggest that librarians need to read voraciously and constantly in their fields in order to maintain and expand their knowledge in the service of their patrons, and then he posits the question of how an employed librarian can find time to read and continue learning without guilt (if one buys into such a concept; I don't) and without feeling like a thief of time. He does not really answer his question, nor does he clarify why it is that he believes that librarians do not read. I suspect that many library administrators expect the same of their staff that Briscoe expects of librarians—that they will read onsite and off, doggedly pursue, even as “homework [Briscoe's word],” the definitive answers to reference questions that they encounter daily, and maintain physical and intellectual contact with books. Yet, increasingly, bibliographers and reference librarians are expected to continue in their primary duties while teaching; taking on bibliographic instruction; writing grant proposals; managing projects; soliciting gifts; sitting on committees; participating in (and organizing and chairing) local, national, and international workshops and conferences; spending countless hours in HR training as new administrators attempt to put their own stamps on the libraries; doing outreach; responding to new programs and initiatives that they were not informed were coming down the pike; continuing their education; and writing and publishing.

Read? Yeah, we also read. But I find that the best librarians, the most well rounded and the most interesting, are those who read outside their fields so that they can function as informed and intelligent, not to say interesting, human beings. No doubt most of them—most of us—do read, but we do it on our own time, not on the library's time, and not necessarily when the administrators are watching us to see if we do, indeed, read.

Briscoe correctly states that, like faculty, the most important thing librarians bring to their jobs, their careers, is their personal knowledge. But unlike faculty,

who generally teach a few hours a week and take sabbaticals, spring break, semester break, Christmas break, and summers off, librarians have to acquire and expand their knowledge while working thirty-five to forty hours a week and trying to have a life. And we do it.

But I wonder why Briscoe thinks librarians don't read. Does he question them? Does he watch them? He states that when he sizes up another librarian (and why does he do that?), one of the things he wants to know is whether that librarian depends on the library for knowledge. When that librarian leaves the library, “is there a book under his arm? It's the bookish habit that matters.” If my supervisors asked me, outside a social situation, if I read or what I'm reading or whether my books come from the library, they might be surprised at my vehemence in refusing to let them in on my private, off-duty, unpaid social and intellectual life. But they would not ask me.

Briscoe is right, of course, that librarians need to read to keep up with their professions and to carry out their duties. Most professionals need to, and it can be assumed that they do. But none needs to be known to read in order to be “worthy of the name.”

This is a thought-provoking pamphlet that many librarians might find a jumping-off point for thinking about what they understand their place to be in the library profession. For the nonlibrarian, it is important that this pamphlet be understood to be just one librarian's view.—*Raymond Lum, Harvard University.*

Casson, Lionel. *Libraries in the Ancient World.* New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Pr., 2001. 177p. \$22.95, alk. paper (ISBN 0300088094). LC 00-11668.

I recommend this delightful history to any reader with an interest in the classical world. Perhaps only a veteran such as Lionel Casson, Professor Emeritus of Classics at New York University, could produce a book that wears its learning so lightly. In this age of the 500-page behemoth, what a pleasure to read a book that

weighs in at a mere 177 pages, including illustrations, scholarly notes, and index! Casson discusses not only physical libraries and their collections, but also methods of acquisition (mostly copying, donation, and looting), funding, staff, readership, and services.

In eight chronological chapters, Casson surveys the history of libraries—as well as literacy, books, and reading—from about 3000 B.C. to the early Middle Ages. The first chapter describes the clay tablet collections of the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians. Three chapters are devoted to classical and Hellenistic Greece, and three to republican and imperial Rome. There is a chapter on the change from the papyrus roll to the codex and a brief concluding discussion of the early Christian era. Although books and reading had flourished in ancient Egypt, too, little is known about them. Casson does not deal with the ancient civilizations of India or China. He is masterful within his chosen field of Greece and Rome, with an obvious affection for the Greeks, whom he describes as “endowed with a high level of literacy and an abiding interest in intellectual endeavor.”

Ancient historians draw on many types of evidence to piece together a story: literary works, inscriptions, graffiti, papyri, visual arts, and archaeological excavations. Because of the durability of clay tablets, we can reconstruct the contents and organization of libraries in the ancient Near East, where basic classification and cataloging began. The first systematically collected library was that of the Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, around 650 B.C. The invention of alphabetic writing by the Phoenicians (c. 1000 B.C.) paved the way for broader literacy and the development of libraries as collections for research, enlightenment, and recreation. Increased schooling produced an audience in Athens for books of poetry, drama, philosophy, history, science, and even cookery.

Aristotle's large, well-organized private collection is said to have influenced the Library of Alexandria (founded c. 300

B.C.), which attempted to acquire all known works in the Greek language, some 500,000 papyrus rolls. Casson describes with relish the cultural ambitions of the Ptolemies, who lured the intellectual stars of the ancient world to the raw new city of Alexandria to form an ancient think tank, the Museum. Zenodotus (“pioneer of library science”) was the first to arrange a collection by subject and then alphabetically by author. Callimachus of Cyrene was a great bibliographer who invented the shelf list.

Smaller public libraries also arose in the Hellenistic world (the Greek-speaking world created by the conquests of Alexander the Great). They served average readers, including women. Such libraries were located in gymnasia (ancient community centers). In Roman times, small libraries could be found in the public baths (something akin to the early Carnegie libraries with swimming pools). Casson provides fascinating details and anecdotes about popular books and reading in Rome, where educated people were bilingual and libraries had separate Greek and Latin sections. Classics such as Homer and Euripides were the most popular authors, but libraries also had holdings of contemporary writers. Casson speculates that theater managers owned large collections of Greek New Comedy, from which they supplied playwrights such as Plautus with texts for adaptation into Latin.

Later, Roman emperors vied with each other to build more and more sumptuous libraries, and they created a bureaucracy to manage and staff them. Greek-style libraries had consisted of small storage rooms with adjoining colonnades for reading. Roman-style libraries had niches containing wooden bookshelves around the walls of their reading rooms, with tables and chairs in the center. These sumptuous libraries were as much for show as they were for reading. But smaller libraries did exist throughout the empire, usually gifts of wealthy patrons. All this was destroyed as the western empire was “ravished and impoverished,” and although some pagan

texts were preserved in the palaces and university libraries of the eastern empire, it was in monasteries that a dedication to reading and libraries was reborn.

The big technological breakthrough in ancient books was the adoption of the codex, which developed from wooden writing tablets bound together to form a notebook. Parchment soon replaced wood, although papyrus codexes also existed for a time. The Roman satirist Martial (first century A.D.) refers to the new format in the lines:

*This bulky mass of multiple folds
all fifteen poems of Ovid holds.*

The codex was more compact, durable, and convenient to use but did not completely replace the traditional roll for several centuries. The fact that Christians used the codex exclusively probably expedited its victory.

Casson's is not the first history of ancient libraries. James Westfall Thompson's *Ancient Libraries* (1940) is a standard, and H. L. Pinner's *The World of Books in Classical Antiquity* (1958) is a charming little work for the general reader. But *Libraries in the Ancient World* is surely the best current work on the subject. Several studies of the Library at Alexandria have appeared lately, and the British Library recently published a gigantic illustrated work, *The Great Libraries: From Antiquity to the Renaissance*, by Konstantinos Sp. Staikos. But Casson's book would be the choice for the reader who wants not only to learn about ancient libraries, but also to experience the humanity of the people who lived in societies so different, and yet so close, to our own.—*Jean Alexander, Carnegie-Mellon University.*

Day, Ronald E. *The Modern Invention of Information: Discourse, History, and Power.* Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Univ. Pr., 2001. 139p. \$35 alk. paper (ISBN 0809323907). LC 00-047033. Although "information" receives widespread usage among librarians, the word itself has received modest attention in the historical and cultural contexts of library

and information science. Ronald E. Day, a professor in the Library and Information Science Program at Wayne State University, has written in *The Modern Invention of Information*, a cogent analysis of information in a society that takes the very word itself for granted.

Day begins this important new book by writing, "No historical account of information in the twentieth century can turn away from the problem of how a rhetoric, an aesthetic, and consequently, an ideology of information has come to shape late modern history and historiography." He argues "not only that the history of information has been forgotten but also that it must be forgotten within any 'metaphysics' or ideology of information, because information in modernity connotes a factuality and pragmatic presence ... that erases or radically reduces ambiguity and the problems of reading, interpreting, and constructing history." Day leads the reader through a careful and close reading of the texts of eminent theorists and philosophers, from Paul Otlet and Suzanne Briet to Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin, to reveal the rhetorical and historical devices that link science to information in theory and practice.

Although sensitive, at times, to historicism, Day's approach to the topic of information is not one of narrative history. A substantial portion of the book is devoted to an inquiry into the rhetorical strategies utilized by the European Documentalists Otlet and Briet, Warren Weaver, Norbert Wiener, and, more recently, Pierre Levy in his theories of cyberspace and "the virtual." Through examination of key texts by Otlet and Briet, including work by Briet yet to be translated into English, Day presents a framework for reading information as a "trope" for science. Accordingly, information becomes a rhetorical strategy for defining the role and locating the work of librarians and documentalists in scientific discourse and culture. In Weaver and Wiener, one finds a link between communication and scientific information in their articulation of a scientific theory of com-