

LEARNING AS A SOCIAL GRACE

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Abstract. *In this paper I shall discuss, against the background of the basic education Romans received, a number of elements that contributed to their further intellectual development and eventually led to their becoming truly learned. Roman booksellers, copiers and bookshops made a huge contribution towards Roman education and further learning; private and public libraries had a large influence on the literary culture of the Empire; public baths with libraries and lecture halls also contributed towards the enlightenment of the Romans; scholarship and continuing studies encouraged intellectual discussion among learned people; and both travelling and relaxation added to and enriched their knowledge and insight. In this discussion it will become apparent that educated Romans had a strong desire to further their education and gain more knowledge and that they made use of their many opportunities to do so.*

Key words: *Education; learning; social graces; booksellers, copiers and bookshops; private and public libraries; recitations; public thermae; scholarship; relaxation; travelling.*

Cuvinte cheie: *educație; învățare; distribuitori de cărți, copiatori și librării; biblioteci publice și private; recitări; băi publice; bursă; relaxare; călătorii.*

1 Introduction

When one is asked to talk about “Roman education”, the first thing that comes to mind is the formal education Roman children and more advanced students received. There were, however, many other ways, that will also be discussed in this paper, of furthering mental growth. Aulus Gellius, for example, states that the main purpose of his *Noctes Atticae* was to encourage people to dedicate all their free time to the pursuit of learning.¹ His own life serves as a model: he devoted every spare hour he could steal from his daily business to study,² and undertook to do so for the rest of his life.³ He depicts the activities of an *otium litteratum*, such as private reading or educated conversation, not only as dignified and worthwhile, but also as an enjoyable means of occupying leisure time. One of the stated objects of his book is to suggest to his readers appropriate spare-time pursuits for gentlemen.

In this paper, I shall discuss a number of topics associated with lifelong learning. I shall refer to the following: Roman booksellers, copiers and bookshops, in whose absence there would have been very little learning. In addition, I shall focus on the places that promoted and disseminated learning, namely private and public libraries and the Roman baths. In addition, I shall discuss scholarship, travelling and relaxation.

2 Roman scribes, books, booksellers and bookshops

The earliest booksellers in Rome were scribes who copied books at the request of purchasers. The same people were simultaneously booksellers and copyists, who could use one skill to supplement another. Soon, however, booksellers⁴ employed professional copyists.⁵ As time went by and requests for books from private libraries increased, more copiers were needed and it soon became apparent that some were much better than others. Books in private libraries were also of a markedly better quality than those in public bookstores.

The dissemination of works of Latin prose was still in its infancy during Cicero's time. Most prose works were composed by senatorial writers, who were wealthy and important enough to circulate their work to a select group.⁶ However, commercial copying and bookselling were necessary so that manuals such as that by Columella on agriculture, Vegetius on military tactics or Celsus on medicine, were available to members of the public.⁷ There were also pirated copies: Quintilian, for example, entrusted his *Institutio Oratoria* to Trypho for publication since, he says, two pirated copies were already being circulated in his name.⁸ The existence of pirated copies suggests that there was profit to be made from such copying, and people who wished to read certain books apparently had no scruples about buying or commissioning pirated copies. In addition, in Tacitus' *Dialogus* and Gellius' accounts of the book trade we learn that there may have been an antiquarian market from which affluent collectors could obtain the books of famous Roman authors.⁹ If someone wanted a copy of a literary text, he had two choices: he could search for it in a private or public library, or he could instruct an educated slave to copy it from the original manuscript, since no copyright existed at that time and books could be reproduced without the authors' permission.¹⁰ This obviously added to the corruption of manuscripts that already existed. In addition, authors probably received no payment for their books, although it seems that they did sometimes sell books personally.¹¹ A buyer could also commission a bookseller to search for a book and have it copied.¹²

Atticus, Cicero's friend, had Cicero's works copied and distributed. He owned Athenian slaves, who were specially trained to copy manuscripts, which ensured that their copies of the Greek classics were accurate. Atticus had books copied and offered to his Roman friends merely as a pastime and for the love of books; but this was undoubtedly much appreciated by his friends, since in those times authors often complained that their books had been inaccurately copied and were full of errors.¹³

By the beginning of the Empire, the publication and sale of books were well established. Highly esteemed booksellers (such as the Sosii) were located close to the Forum, and had shops in or near the Argiletum.¹⁴ The names and prices of available books were inscribed on pillars beside the doors at the shop entrances.¹⁵ By the second century, however, the *vicus Sandalarius* and the *Sigillaria* had become renowned for its booksellers.¹⁶ It was situated close to the *Horrea Chartaria*, paper suppliers, which was convenient for copyists and booksellers. Books came to be regarded as luxury items when the upper classes started collecting them for their private libraries, thus demonstrating that they were educated people

with status and money. In Rome, luxury trade was conducted around the centre of the city, and the *vicus* Tuscus became famous for selling luxury goods, *inter alia* books.¹⁷ Since booksellers catered to the tastes of a select and specialised group of people, books were initially not readily available to the public.

Some book dealers became specialists in their field and travelled widely, visiting famous bookstores in search of scarce manuscripts for serious collectors and scholars. In this way they, too, contributed to the dissemination of learning. Their business expanded as Roman citizens became more interested in literature. Successful and resourceful publishers had a high standing in society and are mentioned by important authors such as Cicero and Horace,¹⁸ who also refer to the copying of manuscripts by their cultured slaves.¹⁹ Booksellers had to produce each copy of a text individually, and much work was probably done to order. There were, however, often complaints (for example by Cicero) about careless copying and translating and about mistakes.²⁰ In addition, booksellers also sold books, and by the late first century, they probably concentrated more on selling books than on copying them. Books were often copied and distributed for profit,²¹ so that literature spread to every city of the Empire. However, since some of the available books were of poor quality, many people had their own copies made. If they were fortunate enough to have a master copy, they could employ their own scribes to copy new texts.

Interestingly, second-hand books were also traded in Rome. High value seems to have attached to original copies of famous books. For example, Aulus Gellius, who may be described as a bibliophile, relates that Fidus Optatus, a famous grammarian in Rome, showed him an exceptionally old version of the second book of the *Aeneid* (which may once have belonged to Virgil himself) that he had bought in a bookshop in the *Sigillaria*.²² Such books were valued highly, not only because they were old, but also for their literary merit.

As stated earlier, when toward the end of the Republic it became fashionable to have one's own private library, the book trade flourished. Many Romans, whether scholars, students or others, browsed in bookshops, saw which books were available and bought those they wanted for their private libraries. They also spent much time in bookstores studying and discussing literary matters with friends and other interested parties. These shops gradually became popular meeting places, especially for the cultured elite during the late Republic. We read that Catullus would go *ad librarium* at dawn,²³ and, searching for Camerius, he would look in all the bookshops (*in omnibus libellis*).²⁴

Not all books were obtained from bookshops: many were circulated privately among a small and interconnected library elite.²⁵ People who were known to be avid readers received books as gifts, and sometimes friends would lend them books they wished to read so that they might make their own copies. The private availability of books obviously affected the bookselling trade adversely, but modest and highly specialised shops continued to sell expensive items.²⁶

Wishing to add to his knowledge, Gellius visited the bookshops of the *vicus* Sandalarius where he found many books for sale.²⁷ The number of Greek and Latin books had increased to such an extent that it was no longer possible to read everything,²⁸ even if copies were available.²⁹ Because educated Romans were expected to have some literary knowledge,

however superficial, summaries and selections from books were welcomed. To them, someone like Aulus Gellius was an invaluable source of knowledge. Although Gellius refers to detailed encyclopaedic compilations such as that of Pliny, his *Noctes Atticae* does not claim to be exhaustive although it contains selective and concise information and discussions on a wide variety of topics. This type of literature was popular during his time.

Note that not all books were copied: when Varro's library was plundered during the proscriptions, quite a number (*aliquam multos*) of the 490 "books" that he had written, disappeared.³⁰ This suggests that not all authors took the trouble to distribute copies of their books. The most important method of distributing books was not by trade, but through gifts and loans among friends.³¹ If, therefore, an author wished to give copies of a book to friends, he had to have them copied in advance, since in Rome an author was expected to give his own work to chosen recipients. Cicero, for example, was very privileged: he could simply commission his friend Atticus to supply copies of his new works, since he was one of the few people in Rome who employed professional scribes and could produce multiple copies of a text for himself or his friends.³² Crassus, too, had well-trained copyists, mainly for business purposes, but they could also copy Latin manuscripts. Cicero could gain access to Greek and Latin books in various ways: he made use of his friends' private libraries and his own growing library. He also borrowed and copied texts owned by friends or arranged to have texts copied.³³

It was common practice for Roman authors seeking to draw attention to their works to arrange a public reading or *recitatio*. During the imperial age, learned people familiarised themselves with recent literature not only by reading, but also by attending public recitations which became quite fashionable. These were well attended and were popular as a means of publicising literature during the reigns of the Flavian emperors.³⁴ The recitations could take place either in public, in the great baths or forums, which were open to all, or in private houses to invited audiences.³⁵

Asinius Pollio, who built Rome's first public library, was also, according to the elder Seneca, the first person in Rome to invite the public to recitations of his own work. Since he had funded the library in the Hall of Liberty, he probably held his readings there.

Libraries played an important role in the literary education of both readers and writers, and constituted important venues for both private and public recitations and literary discussions.³⁶ With the development of formal education and the increase in private libraries, we may assume that there was a reading public drawn from the upper classes during Cicero's time. Most works dating from this period would therefore have had an instant audience and only afterwards have become available for reading.³⁷ These recitations therefore constituted a large part of the education of younger Romans as well as the cultural formation of their seniors. Poetry, for example, most likely had three phases, of which the first was recitation, the second the distribution of private copies of the printed work to privileged people, and the third the ensuing publication of the work for a wider reading public.³⁸ A number of important writers of the second century gave extensive accounts of the cultural milieu of their time, from which it appears that performance continued to be as important a means of disseminating books as reading.

3 Private and public libraries

Rome's conquests in the East had an enormous influence on its culture,³⁹ since victorious Roman generals seized libraries in Greece and Asia Minor and took the books home when they returned.⁴⁰ These books constituted the first private libraries. A few examples will suffice: Lucius Aemilius Paullus, victor at the Battle of Pydna in 168 BC, took the books of the Macedonian king Perseus as spoils of war, and Lucius Licinius Lucullus collected many books while conquering Asia Minor. The owners then opened these private libraries to everyone who wanted to consult the books which dealt with various topics, mainly relating to philosophy, history and literature, but also to agriculture, the art of war, medicine and engineering.

Since education was highly esteemed in early Rome, books were considered to be of great value, not only for the scientific knowledge they imparted, but also from a cultural point of view. Reading gave much pleasure, and the private libraries of many affluent Romans enhanced their status. These private libraries were usually housed in the owners' country villas. Although some owners of private libraries merely wished to display their books, not really to read them, a private library was nevertheless a necessity for any educated person who wished to continue his studies during the first century AD.⁴¹

Although the first private libraries were not designed and built specifically for books, provision was made for their storage and for seating. However, since they saw books as a source of ongoing education and knowledge, their owners started to build special rooms in their houses to serve as libraries. These libraries were also embellished so that the owners and their friends who visited and used the libraries would be edified by their surroundings. By the middle of the first century, private libraries had become so common that Seneca declared a library to be a necessity in a home. This induced Vitruvius to start designing libraries for private homes.

Lucius Lucullus, a learned man who contributed large sums of money to the arts and sciences, conquered Armenia and over time built up an impressive collection of books that were famous for the quality of their texts. He returned from the wars in the east with a vast treasure: booty he had captured during his wars in the East. He then built libraries, cloisters and study-rooms on his estate in Tusculum. It was probably the most important and best private Roman libraries, highly rated for the number of its books and their quality.⁴² He opened his library to all interested scholars and philosophers.⁴³ This evoked praise from Plutarch,⁴⁴ who said that Lucullus had collected many well-written books, which were being put to good use by Lucullus himself, who spent much time in the library, and by many others. Cicero, for example, made use of this collection. Once when he went to Lucullus' library in search of some *Notebooks* of Aristotle to read during his holiday, he met Cato who enquired why Cicero had come to Lucullus' library when he himself had such a good private library.⁴⁵

The Hellenistic kings set a laudable example when they founded the illustrious public libraries of Alexandria and Pergamon, an example the Romans followed only much later. Julius Caesar first conceived of the idea of building public libraries in Rome.⁴⁶ Having seen such libraries in important literary centres in Asia Minor, Egypt and Greece, he envisaged the

benefits they could bring to his own people and planned two libraries – one Greek and one Latin – and asked M. Terentius Varro to build them. However, nothing came of this,⁴⁷ and Caesar's dream was eventually only realised by Augustus.⁴⁸

Augustus valued literature and culture highly and soon started fulfilling Caesar's dreams of building public libraries.⁴⁹ This became quite a common imperial habit. Augustus supported and inspired C. Asinius Pollio who, at some time after 39 B.C., had inaugurated the first library in Rome to be dedicated to the interests of the public.⁵⁰ Booty obtained during the Parthian War was used and then, for the first time, scholarly writings became public property.⁵¹ Greek and Latin libraries were created in the magnificent atrium that was constructed from the spoils of war. Busts of various writers, including Varro, were also placed in the atrium. Thus Asinius Pollio became the first Roman to decorate a library, which started a new fashion of using various types of art, such as statues, busts and inscriptions, for decoration.⁵² The Romans approved this fashion and so, together with the books, these items became standard in public libraries.⁵³

In 28 B.C., Augustus founded his famous Palatine library that housed Greek and Latin books separately.⁵⁴ The library consisted of two buildings attached to the Temple of Apollo. Many of the books came from the East, constituting part of the booty taken in the wars. C. Julius Hyginus, a freedman of Augustus and a learned scholar, was appointed librarian of the Palatine library (*praepositus bibliothecae*).⁵⁵

After Augustus' death Livia, Tiberius and Caligula erected a temple in honour of Augustus, which also contained a public library. More public libraries were later founded by other emperors. By the middle of the first century both private and public libraries had become so numerous that Seneca sharply criticised the pretentious hoarding of books which, he said, were collected not for learning but for display.⁵⁶

In A.D. 75, Vespasian built the Bibliotheca Pacis, and later the Bibliotheca Ulpia, adjoining the Forum of Trajan, was opened. This library was famous for its collection of historical archives.⁵⁷ Another library was that of Trajan on the Forum Trajanus.⁵⁸ The library was apparently housed in an impressive building, and Ammianus Marcellinus describes emperor Constantius' admiration for it when he first entered it.⁵⁹ It was in this very same library that the edict of the ancient praetors one day "just happened to fall" into the hands of Aulus Gellius.⁶⁰ From Gellius we obtain a picture of a "library lifestyle" that made legal books available to interested readers, and which set learned and curious people apart from the rest.

Very little survived of all these libraries, but note that all imperial public libraries were built not only to impress visitors, but also to afford them an attractive and comfortable place in which to study and work.

In many towns in Italy and the provinces wealthy citizens followed the admirable example set by the emperors and started building public libraries.⁶¹ Pliny the Younger built a library at a cost of 1,000,000 sesterces for his native town of Comum and bequeathed 400,000 for its maintenance. Another example is that of Ti. Julius Aquila Polemaeanus who, after having built a library, left an amount of 25,000 *dinarii* to the city to provide for the library's maintenance and for the addition of books to the collection.⁶²

There is evidence of seven public libraries in Italy, six in Greece, and five in Asia Minor. These libraries were given to the cities by wealthy inhabitants, or were built by the municipalities. Large amounts of money were required for their construction, and a trust fund or other financial support needed for their subsequent upkeep, for the purchase of new books, and for salaries and repairs.⁶³

That Roman citizens raised public buildings and especially libraries, partly or entirely at their own expense, demonstrates their generosity.⁶⁴ Inscriptions on these memorials indicate various reasons for all this giving. The benefactors were motivated not so much by philanthropy, a desire to benefit their fellow citizens, as by a wish to preserve their names for posterity in the form of some conspicuous and imperishable monument.

Books could be taken out of these libraries and people visited them to look at these books at their leisure, or because they were seeking a particular book.⁶⁵ The librarian would occasionally take new books to a well-known reader, such as Aulus Gellius; and sometimes regular visitors would find a valuable and unexpected book in a library: as we have seen, Aulus Gellius, for example, found a book containing the praetors' edicts in Trajan's library.⁶⁶

Ancient libraries were not silent: the visitors read aloud to themselves, and besides, nobody really expected them to be quiet. Thus Gellius reports that when he and a friend went to a library, they had an animated conversation about certain books they had read.⁶⁷

There was a close relationship between books and art: "everywhere many books, many statues, many portraits, which he not only possessed, but even hallowed – Virgil's, in preference to all others".⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that private libraries followed this trend and in large measure duplicated the features of the public library.⁶⁹

The content of libraries is concerned was determined by the needs of the public. For example, a great variety of books was to be found in the library of the Atrium Libertatis, as well as huge collections of documents and poetry.⁷⁰ In addition, both old and newly published works by many authors were continually added to the existing books. According to Juvenal, works on civil law as well as on general culture were available in the Palatine library.⁷¹ In this library, the Sibylline Books, deposited for safekeeping, were stored under the pedestal of the statue of Apollo.⁷² The fact that they were consulted at appropriate intervals only by the Committee of Quindecimviri⁷³ is indeed evidence of their value and of their importance to the library.

On the subject of the management of libraries, we are indebted to many inscriptions, both Greek and Latin, for information on what seems to have been a well-organised system of administration of public libraries: the officials employed, the rank accorded them, the duties performed and other details.⁷⁴

One may well ask what motivated the emperors and citizens of Rome to expand their knowledge and literary culture during the Principate. Why did they build and maintain public libraries? At the end of the Republic there was a noticeable intellectual revival in Rome.⁷⁵ The Romans seem to have been inspired by the amazing libraries in Alexandria and Pergamum, which gave eminent scholars the opportunity to further their erudition and scholarship.⁷⁶ After all the wars, the Romans could now devote themselves to intellectual affairs.

Why was it necessary to have libraries in Rome? Various reasons were cited, such as (1) the preservation of books and records; (2) public education; and (3) the exercise of cultural influences.⁷⁷ Caesar planned his libraries very enthusiastically, stating that he wanted people (1) to use libraries as reading rooms;⁷⁸ (2) to do research in them and use them as places of reference; and (3) to take out books to read at home.⁷⁹ Students interested in various subjects, such as literature, grammar and history benefited from working in these libraries.⁸⁰ In addition, libraries had a beneficial cultural influence on people reading the books and other documents, since the beautiful and calming surroundings had a civilising influence on them.

It was common practice for Roman authors seeking to publicise their books to arrange a public reading or *recitatio*. During the imperial age, learned people familiarised themselves with recent literature not only by reading but also by attending public recitations that consequently became quite fashionable. During the reign of the Flavian emperors these well-attended events were a popular means of obtaining publicity.⁸¹

Asinius Pollio who built Rome's first public library was also, according to the elder Seneca, the first man in Rome to invite the public to recitations of his own work. Since he had funded the library in the Hall of Liberty, and since literary gatherings were held in libraries, one may assume that he gave his readings in that library.

Thus libraries were an important element in the literary education of readers and writers, and accommodated both public and private recitations and literary discussions. The development of formal education and the increasing number of private libraries ensured that a reading public had emerged in the upper classes during Cicero's time. Most works dating from this period would therefore have had an immediate audience, so that it was only at a later stage that they were available to the public. These recitations formed an important part of the education of young Romans and of the culture of older people. Poetry, for example, probably experienced three phases. Firstly, it was recited, then private copies of the printed work were distributed to privileged people, and finally the books were published for a wider reading public.⁸² A number of important writers of the second century gave extensive accounts of the cultural milieu of their time, showing that performance remained as important as reading in the promotion of books.

4 Roman baths

During the first two centuries A.D., the emperors did all they could to make life convenient and agreeable for the inhabitants of the city.⁸³ Augustus established a reputation for munificence on an imperial scale, not only in Rome but also in Italy and the provinces. He was among the emperors and magistrates who erected public buildings including large public *thermae* or baths in Roman cities and towns, a favorite gift to the people⁸⁴ that provided citizens with "recreation in the full and best sense of the word".⁸⁵

Roman baths were a very characteristic and widely distributed type of building in the Roman world. By the first century A.D., public baths were a normal feature of Roman cities. The *thermae* of ancient Rome thus fostered both intellectual life and recreation. As we have

seen, libraries were sometimes on the same premises as public baths.⁸⁶ Vopiscus, for example, speaks of consulting books in the Ulpian library, which in his time had been removed to the *thermae* Diocletianae.⁸⁷ In addition, recent discoveries in Rome revealed, among the excavated ruins of the *thermae* of Caracalla, an apartment clearly used as a library. Niches in the walls gave clear evidence of the use of shelves and reading desks.

Trajan's baths in Rome were magnificent complexes, comprising gardens, lecture halls, libraries and other cultural facilities.⁸⁸ "Bathing" consequently formed an important part of everyday social life. Friends would meet at the baths, where they could talk, attend lectures and read. The facilities provided were sufficiently impressive to attract educated and learned people, but also provided cultural opportunities to the lower classes. The baths included art galleries and various assembly rooms in which people could, for example, attend recitals.⁸⁹

5 Scholarship⁹⁰

Various people helped to place literary scholarship on a firm footing. According to Suetonius, the first Romans to become renowned scholars were Lucius Aelius and Servius Clodius (Roman knights and wealthy men of leisure). Fields of scholarship included antiquarian research and linguistic enquiries.⁹¹ Julius Caesar wrote about grammatical analogy and the morphological regularity of language while campaigning in Gaul. Senator Nigidius Figulus wrote on grammar, science and technology and Atticus composed a chronological summary of the history of Rome and the "world" in general. Varro wrote widely on almost everything, such as the liberal arts, divine and human antiquities, and the Latin language; Verrius Flaccus compiled a voluminous dictionary, and Messala Corvinus, a prominent military man, public figure and literary patron, wrote a monograph on the letter "s". The emperor Tiberius, of a later generation, enjoyed the company of scholars and liked to test them by asking them particularly challenging questions.⁹² Claudius took matters further: besides writing a monograph on the need for additional letters in the alphabet, he used his influence to see that the letters were actually used in imperial documents and inscriptions.⁹³

This kind of scholarship was highly esteemed and made a large contribution to Roman civilisation and erudition.⁹⁴ Although many of these works are lost to us, extracts from them have fortunately been included in the works of authors writing at a later time. Aulus Gellius usually stresses the edifying function of these writings. Earlier works of scholarship, consulted by Gellius and his contemporaries, probably also expressed similar ideas.⁹⁵ Works of Roman scholarship generally seem to reflect the belief that readers would benefit from them, which confidence seems to have been appropriate.⁹⁶

Interestingly we learn from Suetonius' *Lives* that many teachers and scholars were slaves who had originally come from the eastern Mediterranean, Gaul, Spain, Illyria and even parts of Italy. Although some had been educated before being enslaved and others after enslavement, their learning always benefited their masters. During the first century B.C., scholarship and devotion to learning promoted social exchanges among the upper classes, with the ready availability of books playing an important role here.⁹⁷ An excellent example was

Lucius Lucullus who opened his impressive library to his friends and anyone else who wished to make use of it.⁹⁸ This library attracted intellectuals and continued to do so even after Lucullus' death. Cicero's active acquisition and construction of libraries⁹⁹ demonstrates the same connection between scholarly and social relationships.¹⁰⁰

Scholarship and learning also came to feature in everyday discussions and letters. For example, the Emperor Tiberius' dinnertime conversation, which attested to his erudition, forced some of his dinner companions to try to find out what he had read recently so as to prepare for intellectual discussions with him.¹⁰¹ Later on, in the time of Aulus Gellius, such learned conversations had become commonplace not only at dinner,¹⁰² but also while people were out walking across the Field of Agrippa near the Campus Martius,¹⁰³ or when they happened to meet people on the way to the palace.¹⁰⁴ Such encounters, and many others, often led to highly intellectual discussions.

In the meantime, not only the upper classes but also freedmen added to their general knowledge through education. A fairly high level of literary education thus became the norm, and throughout the Empire the Roman elite came to be known for their literary learning.¹⁰⁵ Although the Roman Empire encompassed a large part of the known world, a fairly homogenous culture had arisen, since the same texts were usually read in all parts of the Roman Empire to which Latin scholarship extended.¹⁰⁶ This was probably thanks to the classical education that Roman children received in schools.¹⁰⁷

By now, the upper classes were learned, and the nouveau riche generally well educated. During this period, attention was focussed on collect existing texts rather than acquiring new knowledge. Original research gave way to the writing of textbooks that would help members of the upper classes impress their friends on social occasions. The *Noctes Atticae* by Aulus Gellius is an excellent example: it did not claim to be complete or original, but contained many interesting facts and also discussions of a number of topics that would appeal to readers.¹⁰⁸ Gellius had read widely, and carefully chose those topics that would enable his readers to acquire some honourable erudition (*honestae eruditionis*) and not appear ignorant.¹⁰⁹ Gellius believed that it was important for men of good social standing to know something about the law,¹¹⁰ anatomy,¹¹¹ and chronology. In the *Noctes Atticae* Gellius discusses a variety of topics (grammar, mathematics, rhetoric, philosophy and law) with the apparent aim of showing his readers why education is worth having, namely that it is enjoyable, social, useful and moral.¹¹²

Early in the Principate there was such intense pressure on people to demonstrate familiarity with literature that even poorly educated men attempted to conform to the trend.¹¹³ It was expected of an educated adult to continue to read and to attend recitals by important Greek and Roman poets, so that he could acquire the social grace of quoting literary texts, which would add to his status. Seneca recounts the story of Calvisius Sabinus who longed to be educated, but unfortunately had a poor memory. He tried to solve the problem by buying learned slaves who could recite Greek poetry by heart. When he attended dinner parties, they had to assist him, prodding him when he wanted to quote Homer or Hesiod, for example. Another well-known story about ignorance was the one about Trimalchius who bought libraries in bulk.¹¹⁴

Pliny was a famous Roman scholar, who was intensely interested in scholarship: not necessarily original information, since he preferred leaving a huge legacy of invaluable work rather than merely providing enjoyment to his readers.¹¹⁵ During his lifetime he collected basic information and details on “Hellenistic and Roman knowledge of cosmology, astronomy, anthropology, zoology, botany, medicine, and metallurgy, not to mention a history of human culture and inventions ... and the fullest surviving account of Greek and Roman art and artists known or represented at Rome in the first century”.¹¹⁶ He was an unassuming man, and spent much time at home in his Laurentine villa studying, reading, writing, consulting his books and cultivating his mind.¹¹⁷

Suetonius, too, was a learned man. Early in his life, he dedicated himself to scholarship, as is evidenced by his many literary works. Later, however, he gave up his private studies to become an imperial official.¹¹⁸ This post claimed much of his time.¹¹⁹ He was probably appointed in recognition of his scholarly work and as an encouragement to continue it.

6 Relaxation

Educated men everywhere generally found reading to be pleasurable and relaxing. A desire always to know or learn more, characteristic of an educated mind,¹²⁰ was evident in the scholarly society of the late Republic and the educated world of the Empire. Learned conversations, according to Gellius, could take place almost everywhere: at dinners, in public libraries and bookshops, at the bedside of an ill friend, on board ship, in classrooms and theatres or simply on leisurely walks.¹²¹ Busy people had many opportunities to engage in intellectual discussions. In their free time they could enjoy the pleasure of short, learned conversations and at the same time fulfil their social duties. This recalls Gellius’ description of his acquiring knowledge *per omnia semper negotiorum intervalla, in quibus furari otium potui*.¹²² He believed that intellectual pursuits were the only admissible ones for a learned man’s free time.¹²³ Gellius was often to be found at work in a library or browsing through libraries, or in a bookshop.¹²⁴ Grammar and geometry, he stated, were the basics of an education, while philosophy and law constituted the higher classical education of wealthy Romans.¹²⁵

Cicero, however, held his dialogues during times of *otium*, for example on public holidays, whilst the younger Pliny and Fronto dedicated much of their free time to reading, writing and learned conversation.

7 Travelling

Travelling, one of the ways in which a learned man could add to his knowledge, will now be discussed briefly.

Amongst the upper social classes, travel was considered part of a young man’s education.¹²⁶ A Roman youth seeking to pursue his studies or complete them would attend highly respected universities in other parts of the Empire. This was costly, but considered worthwhile since in this way students learned much.¹²⁷ We read that Aulus Gellius and a

few other Roman students in Athens had dinner together on the Saturnalia, and one may assume that studying in Athens would also have provided many opportunities of visiting other Greek lands.¹²⁸

Upper-class young Romans could also extend their education by either accompanying their fathers as they travelled through the Roman Empire, or by holding administrative posts as *comites* in the provinces.¹²⁹ Learned and civilised Romans were fond of travelling, since they were familiar with Roman history and wished to extend their knowledge. An excellent example of a “famous” traveller was Germanicus, who was sent to the East at the end of AD 17. His journey may have been regarded partly as a pleasure tour, but he undoubtedly also learned much from it: on his way to Syria he visited Nicopolis, the site of the battle of Actium; Athens; a number of Greek islands; the Bosphorus; the site of Troy; and Colophonon. During the next winter he went to Egypt from Syria to see its famous monuments (“*cognoscendae antiquitatis*”). There he visited Alexandria; sailed up the Nile; and saw Memphis and the pyramids.

8 Conclusion

From the above discussion a number of conclusions may be drawn. The first is that, as from the time of the late Republic, educated Romans very much wished to further their education and gain more knowledge. They could do so in various ways and at various places that constituted influential elements in the intellectual life of Rome. In this paper, the following elements were discussed: books, booksellers and book copiers; private and public libraries as well as literary recitals; Roman baths; scholarship; relaxation; and travelling.

Books, scribes and booksellers made a huge contribution to Roman education and continued learning. Roman authors, for example historians and poets, wrote in Latin, while learned Greek slaves copied Greek books. Booksellers gradually gained in importance, having their own scribes. They eventually had bookshops in the centre of Rome, books by then being regarded as luxury items. Clearly, since every book had to be copied by hand, books would have been costly. As scholarship developed and private libraries increased in number, the demand for books grew. In time, some booksellers started specialising in specific fields, travelling widely in search of rare manuscripts, and thus added to the spread of learning. By the end of the Republic, bookshops were flourishing; some had their own professional copiers and often made books to order. These shops became popular meeting places where bibliophiles spent much time, studying and discussing literary matters with other interested parties.

Their education gave the Romans a lifelong interest in literature. As keen students, they retained their literary and scholarly interests long after they had left school.

Did the rise of private and public libraries throughout the Roman Empire have any effect on the education and culture of Roman citizens? Yes, they undoubtedly had a huge influence on the literary culture of the Empire. Public libraries, in particular, made an enormous

contribution by promoting literature in the Empire and providing material for cultural upliftment and research.¹³⁰

What inspired emperors and magistrates to undertake such large building projects as public baths? Vitruvius, addressing Augustus, may give us some guidance in this regard: "Furthermore, with respect to the future, you have such regard to public and private buildings, that *they will correspond to the grandeur of our history, and will be a memorial to future ages.*"¹³¹ From Vitruvius' remarks one may deduce that emperors built grandiose buildings not only to fulfil existing public needs, but also to enhance the glory of the Empire and their own status, and because they wished to be remembered by future generations. It should be added that in building public baths containing libraries and lecture halls, emperors, magistrates and private individuals made a large contribution to the growth of literary culture and to intellectual development in the Roman Empire.¹³²

From fairly early on, Roman literary scholarship was placed on a firm footing by people from different classes and backgrounds: emperors, upper classes, slaves and freed slaves. The fact that slaves and freedmen were also educated, contributed to a rather high general level of literary learning.¹³³ Although much was written on a large variety of difficult subjects, thus furthering Roman civilization and erudition, very little of this writing has survived. Fortunately, extracts do appear in the works of later authors. During the first century, intellectual conversations formed part of social life among learned people, and the availability of books played a large part in this phenomenon. Learned exchanges became the norm for everyday discussions, writing and intellectual conversations, for example, when people were out walking in the fields or accidentally met friends on the way somewhere. Characteristic of this later period is that scholars were more interested in collecting existing learned works than in doing original research. Aulus Gellius's *Noctes Atticae*, discussing a large variety of subjects, serves as an excellent example of such scholarship of the second/third century A.D. Another famous Roman scholar was Pliny, who left an enormous legacy of invaluable works on a wide variety of topics.

Educated and learned Romans found reading a perfect way to relax. However, from Gellius we learn that education could be furthered in many other ways too: by attending recitals in various places, such as libraries and at the baths; by having a learned discussion while visiting an ill friend; or while having a relaxing walk. Intellectual activities, wherever and of whatever kind, were considered an acceptable form of occupation for the free time of a learned man.

Travelling was considered to be an inherent part of a learned man's education. Whether it was formal education at a foreign university; holding administrative posts in the provinces; or merely travelling to various Greek lands to add to one's geographical and historical knowledge, travelling was never regarded as time wasted. It broadened knowledge and insight, and enriched scholars.

In conclusion: generally Romans of the upper classes, and also others who were climbing the social ladder, were anxious to extend their knowledge. For educated Romans, there were many opportunities to do so, to become learned, and to be regarded as scholars.

Everything was available: books, libraries, educated friends, recitals, opportunities for travelling and relaxation. From this paper, one may deduce that the Romans often made enthusiastic use of all such opportunities. They valued literature and were willing to try hard to know more of it. It was a period in history when people went out of their way to become learned, and made a conscious effort to add to the knowledge and skills they had through experience and education. They made full use of their opportunities to do so.

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- ¹ *Noctes Atticae* pr. 12. See, also, Amiel Vardi "Genre, Conventions, and Cultural Programme in Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*" in Leofranc Holford-Strevens & Amiel Vardi (eds.) *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius* (Oxford, 2004) at 182.
- ² Gellius pr. 12.
- ³ Gellius pr. 23.
- ⁴ Cicero compiled lists of various professions from which, interestingly, it may be deduced that shopkeepers did not enjoy high status, although one may assume that bookshop owners were educated people. See, however, J.P.V.D. Balsoon *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (London, 1969) who states, at 135, that "shopkeepers of every kind" are amongst the few occupations not proudly recorded in existing epitaphs.
- ⁵ A *librarius*, according to C.T. Lewis & C. Short (*A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, 1966 at 1061) was either (1) a transcriber of books, a copyist, a scribe (cf. Cicero *Att.* 12.40.1; Seneca *Contr.* 1.7.18; or (2) a bookseller (cf. Seneca *Ben.* 7.6.1; Gellius 5.4.2 and 18.4.1). *Bibliopola* is the common name for the retail trader (cf. Plinius *Ep.* 1,2 *fin.*; 9.11.2; Martialis 4.72).
- ⁶ E. Fantham *Roman Literary Culture from Cicero to Apuleius* (Baltimore, 1996) at 14.
- ⁷ Fantham (n. 6) at 15.
- ⁸ Fantham (n. 6) at 15.
- ⁹ Fantham (n. 6) at 15.
- ¹⁰ See Fantham (n. 6) at 15, 37; C. Holleran *Shopping in Ancient Rome. The Retail Trade in the Late Republic and the Principate* (Oxford, 2012) at 48.
- ¹¹ H.S. Stuart Jones *Companion to Roman History* (Oxford, 1912) at 337.
- ¹² Fantham (n. 6) at 15.
- ¹³ Stuart Jones (n. 11) at 337.
- ¹⁴ Holleran (n. 10) at 246.
- ¹⁵ See Martialis 4.72.2; 13.3.4; Pliny *Ep.* 1.2.6. See, also, Frederic G. Kenyon *Books and Readers in Ancient Greece and Rome* 2 ed. (Folcroft Library Editions, 1971) at 84.
- ¹⁶ Holleran (n. 10) at 55. See Suetonius *Aug.* 57.1; Gellius 18.4.1; CIL VI 448; 761; CIL X 3981.
- ¹⁷ Holleran (n. 10) at 246.
- ¹⁸ See, eg., Cicero's friend Atticus (*Att.* 12.6); the Sosii brothers, well-known through Horace (*ArsP.* 345, 346) and Ovid; and Dorus, referred to by Seneca (*Ben.* 7.6).
- ¹⁹ See, eg., Pliny *Ep.* 4.7; Martial *Ep.* 2.8.

- ²⁰ See Cicero *Q.Fr.* 3.4.5 and 3.5.6; Strabo, who mentions poor quality copying by Apellicon of Teos (13.1.54); and Seneca *Ira* 2.26.2.
- ²¹ William V. Harris *Ancient Literacy* (London, 1989) at 224.
- ²² See Gellius 2.3.5; 5.4.1; 18.9.5.
- ²³ *Librarius* has a dual meaning: *bibliopola*, however, only denotes bookseller, while *librarius* can mean either a copyist or a bookseller.
- ²⁴ Cf. Catullus 55.3-4.
- ²⁵ Cf. Holleran (n. 10) at 248.
- ²⁶ See Cicero *Phil.* 2.21on *tabernae literariae*. Cf., too, Horatius *Sat.* 1.4.71; Martialis 1.3.1 and 1.117.10.
- ²⁷ Gellius 18.4: *variā et miscellā et quasi confusaneam doctrinā*. Cf., too, Gellius *pr.* 5-9.
- ²⁸ Cf. Quintilianus 1.8.18-21; Seneca *Ep.* 88.37.
- ²⁹ See Leofranc Holford-Strevens *Aulus Gellius* (London, 1988) at 21.
- ³⁰ Gellius 3.10.17.
- ³¹ Harris (n. 21) at 225.
- ³² Cf. Fantham (n. 6) at 36.
- ³³ Fantham (n. 6) at 37.
- ³⁴ Kenyon (n. 15) at 85.
- ³⁵ See Gellius 18.5.11. Cf., too, Kenyon (n. 15) at 85; Fantham (n. 6) at 71.
- ³⁶ Fantham (n. 6) at 14.
- ³⁷ Fantham (n. 6) at 8.
- ³⁸ Fantham (n. 6) at 16. During the second century, some of the important authors provided a good description of their cultural milieu, and it is clear that reading was as important as oral performances were.
- ³⁹ The term “culture”, used in a narrow sense, indicates the fields of learning, education, habits and taste: see Averil Cameron *The Later Roman Empire AD 284 - 430* (London, 1993) at 151.
- ⁴⁰ Fantham (n. 6) at 34.
- ⁴¹ Frederic Kenyon *Libraries and Museums* (London, 1930) at 11-12.
- ⁴² See Plutarch *Luc.* 42. Cf. Kenyon (n. 15) at 81.
- ⁴³ See Plutarch *Luc.* 42.
- ⁴⁴ Plutarch *Luc.* 41.1.
- ⁴⁵ See Cicero *Fin.* 3.2.7.
- ⁴⁶ See Suetonius *Caes.* 44: “To open to the public the greatest possible libraries of Greek and Latin books.”
- ⁴⁷ Stuart Jones (n. 11) at 138.
- ⁴⁸ Clarence Eugene Boyd *Public Libraries and Literary Culture in Ancient Rome* (Chicago, Illinois, 1915) at 1.
- ⁴⁹ Boyd (n. 48) 2.
- ⁵⁰ See Pliny *HN.* 35.2.9.
- ⁵¹ See Pliny *HN.* 35.2. 9; Suetonius *Aug.* 29.
- ⁵² See, further, Boyd (n. 48) at 24.
- ⁵³ Pliny *HN.* 35.2.9.
- ⁵⁴ See Stuart Jones (n. 11) at 139; Pierre Grimal *The Civilization of Rome* (London, 1963) at 274. Cf., too, Dio Cassius 53.1; Suetonius *Aug.* 29; Ovid *Tristia* 3.1.59-72.
- ⁵⁵ See Suetonius *Gram.* 20. His writings, covering an impressively wide field of scholarship, have been lost. He wrote a treatise on agriculture, a commentary on Virgil, and historical, archaeological and (possibly) religious works. He was a teacher and apparently had time for research and teaching. See, also, Donald Dudley *Roman Society* (Harmondsworth, 1970) at 171-172.

- ⁵⁶ Kenyon (n. 15) at 82. Many owners of private libraries collected thousands of books that were never read. Such libraries served only as adornments to the owners' houses: see Seneca *De Tranquillitate animi* c. 9.
- ⁵⁷ Stuart Jones (n. 11) at 139.
- ⁵⁸ Grimal (n. 54) at 273.
- ⁵⁹ Ammianus *Res Gestae* 16.10.15-16.
- ⁶⁰ Joseph A. Howly "Why Read the Jurists? Aulus Gellius on Reading Across Disciplines" in Paul J. du Plessis (ed.) *New Frontiers. Law and Society in the Roman World* (Edinburgh, 2013) at 28-29.
- ⁶¹ Stuart Jones (n. 11) at 139.
- ⁶² Stuart Jones (n. 11) at 141.
- ⁶³ Balsdon (n. 4) at 148-149.
- ⁶⁴ F.F. Abbott *The Common People of Ancient Rome. Studies of Roman Life and Literature* (New York, 1965) at 180-181.
- ⁶⁵ See Cicero *Fin.* 3.2.7-10.
- ⁶⁶ Balsdon (n. 4) at 149.
- ⁶⁷ Gellius 5.21.9; 11.17.1f; 13.20.1; 16.8.1f.
- ⁶⁸ See Pliny *Ep.* 1.16.8 (to Silius Italicus).
- ⁶⁹ Cf. Juvenal *Sat.* 2.4-7.
- ⁷⁰ See Ovid *Tristia* 1.59-72.
- ⁷¹ *Satira* 1.128.
- ⁷² See Suetonius *Aug.* 31. Cf., too, Ammianus 23.3.3.
- ⁷³ Tacitus *Ann.* 6.12.
- ⁷⁴ See Boyd (n. 48) at 41-51.
- ⁷⁵ See Cicero *Pro Archia* 5.
- ⁷⁶ When the library of Pergamum came into the hands of the Romans Antony thereupon presented it to Cleopatra: 200,000 volumes!
- ⁷⁷ See Boyd (n. 48) at 53. At 54-57 he also gives a complete list of all the categories of books etc. to be found in the libraries.
- ⁷⁸ See Ovid *Tr.* 3.1.63-64; Gellius 13.20.17.
- ⁷⁹ Boyd (n. 48) at 57-58. See, further, Cicero *Fin.* 3.2.7-10.
- ⁸⁰ See Horace *Epist.* 1.3.16-17; Gellius 16.8.2.
- ⁸¹ Kenyon (n. 15) at 85.
- ⁸² Fantham (n. 6) at 16.
- ⁸³ M. Rostovtzeff, *Rome* (London, 1967) at 251.
- ⁸⁴ Rostovtzeff (n. 84) at 250.
- ⁸⁵ J. Carcopino *Daily Life in Ancient Rome. The People and the City at the Height of the Empire* (London, 1967) at 277. See, also, A.R. Hands *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (London, 1968) at 141, 143; Balsdon (n. 4) at 27-28. Further SHA *Severus Alexander* 39.3-4.
- ⁸⁶ Boyd (n. 48) at 63.
- ⁸⁷ Vopiscus *Probus* 2.1.
- ⁸⁸ Janet DeLaine "Baths" in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* 4th ed Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth & Esther Eidinow (eds.) (Oxford, 2012) at 226. See, also Balsdon J.P.V.D. (ed.) *The Romans* (London, 1965) at 276
- ⁸⁹ Martialis 3.44.12.

- ⁹⁰ See Robert A. Kaster “Scholarship” in Alessandro Barchiesi & Walter Scheidel (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies* (Oxford, 2010) at 492 according to whom “scholarship” may be described as “writings meant to preserve or elucidate Roman cultural memory in non-narrative, non-mimetic form with a commitment to the truth”.
- ⁹¹ Kaster (n. 90) at 494.
- ⁹² See Suetonius *Tib.* 70.3.
- ⁹³ See Suetonius *Claud.* 41.3; Tacitus *Ann.* 11.13.3 and 11.14.5.
- ⁹⁴ Kaster (n. 90) at 497.
- ⁹⁵ Kaster (n. 90) at 497. See, also, Gellius *pr.* 12.
- ⁹⁶ For example, without Atticus’ *Liber Annalis* supplying many missing chronological details, Cicero’s *Brutus* would not have achieved such a synthesis of Roman oratorical history.
- ⁹⁷ Kaster (n. 90) at 498-499.
- ⁹⁸ Plutarch *Luc.* 42.1-2.
- ⁹⁹ In 60 B.C., through the good offices of his friend Papirius Paetus, Cicero acquired the library of one of Paetus’ relatives who happened to be the Servius Clodius whom Suetonius considers to be one of the two founders of literary scholarship. Cicero brought the library safely to Rome from Greece with the help of another friend, Atticus. See Cicero *Att.* 1.20.7; 2.1.12.
- ¹⁰⁰ Kaster (n. 90) at 499.
- ¹⁰¹ See Suetonius *Tib.* 56.
- ¹⁰² Gellius 2.22.
- ¹⁰³ Gellius 14.5.
- ¹⁰⁴ Gellius 19.13.
- ¹⁰⁵ Kaster (n. 90) at 501.
- ¹⁰⁶ Kaster (n. 90) at 501.
- ¹⁰⁷ Vergil and Terence dominated poetry and Sallust and Cicero prose.
- ¹⁰⁸ Holford Strevens (n. 29) at 21. This corresponded with the tastes of the times as is shown by the miscellanies of Plutarch, Aelian and Athenaeus.
- ¹⁰⁹ Holford Strevens (n. 29) at 27.
- ¹¹⁰ Gellius 20.10.6.
- ¹¹¹ Gellius 18.10.8.
- ¹¹² Teresa Morgan “Educational values” in Holford Strevens & Vardi (n. 1) at 191.
- ¹¹³ Fantham (n.6) at 143-144.
- ¹¹⁴ Fantham (n. 6) at 144-145.
- ¹¹⁵ Pliny *HN. pr.* 12-16.
- ¹¹⁶ Fantham (n. 6) at 188.
- ¹¹⁷ Cf. Pliny *HN.* 1.9.
- ¹¹⁸ He was, at different times, the emperor’s director of research (*a studiis*) and of libraries (*a bibliothecis*) under Trajan.
- ¹¹⁹ Fantham (n. 6) at 190
- ¹²⁰ Balsdon (n. 4) at 148.
- ¹²¹ Amiel Vardi “Genre, Conventions, Cultural Programme in Gellius’ *Noctes Atticae* in Vardi & Holford Strevens (n. 1) at 182.
- ¹²² Gellius *pr.* 12.
- ¹²³ Vardi (n. 122) at 183.

¹²⁴ See Gellius 7.17; 9.14.3; 11.17; 13.20; 16.8.2; 19.5.4. For bookshops see Gellius 5.4; 13.31; 18.4.

¹²⁵ Gellius *pr.* 13. See, further, Teresa Morgan (n. 112) at 190.

¹²⁶ Balsdon (n. 4) at 233.

¹²⁷ Balsdon (n. 4) at 234-235.

¹²⁸ See Cicero *Att.* 1.4.3; *Att.* 1.20.1; 2.1.11.

¹²⁹ Balsdon (n. 4) at 235.

¹³⁰ Boyd (n. 48) at 69.

¹³¹ Vitruvius *De Architectura* vol. 1 *pr.* 3. The translation is by Frank Granger in the Loeb edition (my emphasis).

¹³² See W.W. Fowler *Rome* (London, 1967) at 98. In Rome, there was another relevant factor: in terms of Roman culture, possessing wealth may have created a sense of obligation. This was undoubtedly also one of the original motives for men to make donations, since the spirit of devotion to the state and the community was a characteristic of Romans in the Republican period. Even during the Empire it was still possible, in the municipalities, “to depend upon the deeply ingrained republican feeling that a gentleman’s business was public service, and that the greatest rewards of life came from public esteem”.

¹³³ Among the upper classes, nouveaux riches and slaves.