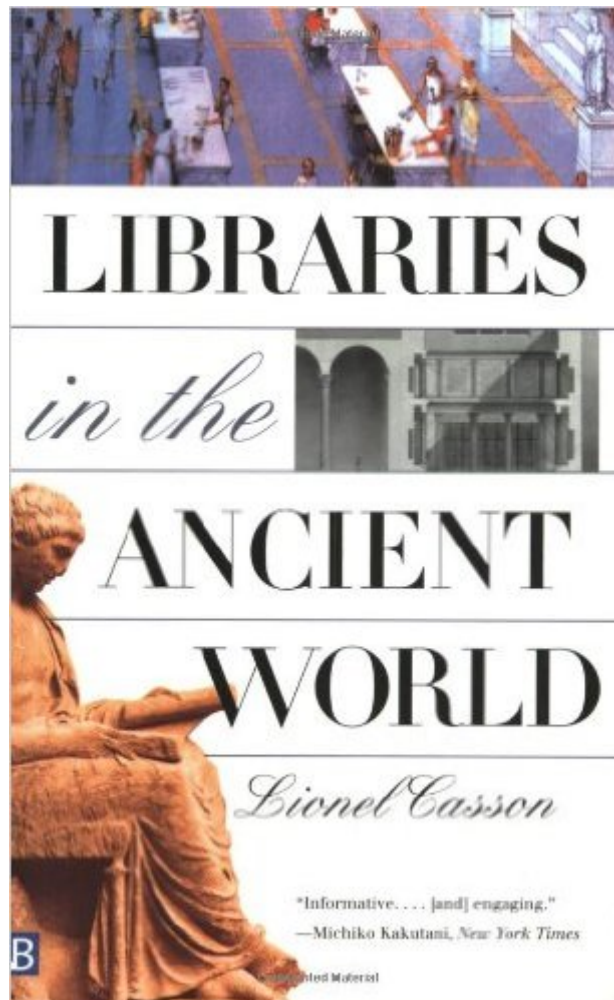


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# Libraries In The Ancient World



## Synopsis

The first libraries appeared in the Near East in the third millennium BC and continued to flourish throughout antiquity. This attractive study draws on a variety of sources to discuss library buildings, holdings, systems, users and patrons and explores the relationship between libraries and education, literacy and leisure. Subjects include the Library of Alexandria, public and private libraries in the city of Rome, ancient publishing and early monastic libraries.

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## Customer Reviews

There were libraries before there were books. A fascinating survey, *Libraries in the Ancient World* (Yale University Press) by Lionel Casson, explains how the libraries were similar and different from our own, and how they managed without printing and without books as we know them. The similarities are reassuring and often delightful. We suspect there were Egyptian libraries, but we have never found one, because there are no masses of papyrus documents; such collections may have been lost in fires. The Sumerians, however, had written records were in cuneiform letters, pressed into clay. Some of the collections of these tablets offered the privilege of borrowing, and librarians then seem to have been bothered by two of the same problems that beset librarians now, theft and damage. Tablets bore warnings or curses calling upon the services of the local gods: "Whoever removes the tablet... may Ashur and Ninlil, angered and grim, cast him down, erase his name, his seed, in the land", "He who carries it off, may Adad and Shala carry him off!", and "Who

rubs out the text, Marduk will look upon him with anger."It was the Greeks who instituted libraries with aims similar to our own, shelves full of books on a wide range of subjects, available to readers who could come in and consult them. There was a demand for books, and by the fourth century BCE, bookselling was a flourishing industry. The booksellers probably employed scribes to turn out copies of works. There were no such things as royalties or author's rights. Rome conquered all, but Greece held intellectual sway over the Romans, who continued the library tradition.

In this amazingly complete 150-page volume, renowned author Lionel Casson, takes us on a wonderful journey of discovery of the role of libraries in the ancient world, from their origins in the Near East in 3000 BC through their evolution until the fall of Roman Byzantium in 1453 AD. Written in a lively prose, this well-researched, fact-filled book explains when, where, why, and how the forerunners of today's modern libraries were created and developed, treating in detail topics such as: \*How did they acquire their materials?\* \*How were they physically organized?\* \*Which, if any, system of cataloguing they used?\* \*Who had access to their holdings?\* \*How they solved problems like theft and damage of their collections?\* \*What was their connection with the rise and fall of education?\* The author also presents a concise account of the history of books from clay tablet to papyrus roll to parchment codex to our modern day volumes. He shares fascinating insights into the development of writing and the evolution of writing technology, including: \*What was the purpose of writing?\* \*Which topics were more commonly written about?\* \*Which materials were used and why?\* \*Who did the writing?\* The best part of this book is the entertaining and charming way in which the author illustrates his exposition. By employing captivating anecdotes from sources contemporary to the facts, literary sources that have survived to this day, and archaeological finds combined with modern technology that make possible the reconstruction of ancient library buildings, he makes what would otherwise be a very boring topic feel like a true adventure.

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