



Summary :

In Hellenistic years the foundation of libraries was part of the Successors' attempt to make the cities of their kingdoms centres of Greek culture. The most important library of Hellenistic years in Asia Minor and the greatest rival of the Library of Alexandria was the royal Library of Pergamon, founded by Eumenes II Soter (197-158 BC). In Roman period the libraries of the eastern provinces were designed in accordance with western standards, at the same time maintaining elements of the local architectural tradition. A splendid example of Roman architectural monument is the Library of Celsus in Ephesus (2nd century BC), whose architectural design was followed by the library built in Nysa (2nd/3rd century AD).

Date

Hellenistic and Roman period.

Geographical Location

Asia Minor

1. Introduction

The Hellenistic kingdoms are particularly interested in fostering education and sciences. The Ptolemies and the [Attalids](#) are known to have been competing for the foundation of libraries. Although markedly smaller, the royal library of [Pergamon](#), founded by [Eumenes II Soter](#) (197-158 BC), rivalled in fame that of Alexandria. Several other cities in Asia Minor seem to have had public and private libraries, mainly in the Roman period. Among these cities were Edessa, Halicarnassus, Heraclea Pontica (in Bithynia), Cnidus, Mylasa, Priene, Prusa, Sinope, Smyrna, Teos, Tarsus and, of course, Pergamon, [Ephesus](#), [Sagalassos](#) and [Nysa](#), three cities where archaeological research revealed buildings considered to have served as libraries. The number of public libraries in Pergamon in Roman years is estimated to have been amounting up to eight.¹

The majority of the libraries were part of a wider complex: a sanctuary or some [gymnasium](#).² The great library of Pergamon was annexed to the [sanctuary of Athena](#), the goddess of wisdom, while later (in the years of Emperor Hadrian, 117-138) the native Flavia Melitene offered a library with a limited number of books to the [Asclepieion](#), the sacred health centre outside the city of Pergamon. The [library of Nysa](#) (2nd/3rd century AD) and possibly the libraries in [Mylasa](#) and [Halicarnassus](#) belonged to the complex of a great gymnasium.³

2. Architectural Style and Interior Facilities

2.1. Hellenistic Libraries

The architectural design and interior facilities of Hellenistic libraries must have followed the standards of the great Library of Alexandria. The remains of the Library of Pergamon provide a clear picture of the libraries of Hellenistic years in Asia Minor. However, local libraries must have been smaller and plainer. The architectural design of the library is characterised by the existence of a large room leading to a [portico](#). The size and decoration indicate that the room served as a place for meetings, lectures and receptions. The statue of some god must have stood along the central axis of the room. The walls possibly had niches in the form of [aedicolae](#) for wooden bookcases. Next to the great, or royal, libraries there were smaller subsidiary rooms (book stores) for storing the rolls in movable bookcases or boxes (*kivotoi*), as well as a banquet room and a living quarter (according to the oikos at the Museum of Alexandria).

Particular care must have been taken to protect the books from dampness and light the room. Papyrus rolls or parchments were kept in closed bookcases, located within safe distance from the walls, while the windows must have had a mechanism that closed them in case of rain or wind. The readers were allowed to take the rolls to the portico and read them in full light. The interior must have been



completed with seats and tables.⁴

2.2. Roman Libraries

The Roman libraries of the eastern provinces retain several features of their predecessors. They are not in the style of the double library of Rome with two rooms, where the Greek and the Latin writers can be found in separate rooms. They had a principal room and, often, a big niche at the end, where stood the statue of the god or some deified emperor.⁵ On either side of the statue there were symmetrically arranged, quite often on 2 or 3 levels, bookcases within niches. Access to the highest bookcases was through wooden balconies, supported on the columns of the ground floor. The room had tables for the readers – a novelty of the Imperial years. As a result, Roman libraries remind of modern reading rooms rather than Greek libraries. The most famous roman libraries discovered in Asia Minor are the Library of Celsus in Ephesus, the [Library of Sagalassos](#) and the Library of Nyssa.

According to [Vitruvius](#), the ideal library has eastern aspects. The room was lighted by windows, filled with glass, and possibly by auxiliary lamps. The artistically decorated facade of the [Library of Celsus](#) in Ephesus had 3 protected eastern entrances that allowed better lighting of the room. The need for increased protection of the rolls against dampness may have led to the construction of an external and an internal wall, between which there was a wide passage ([peristasis](#)).⁶

3. Content and Organisation of the Collections

The size of the collection varies according to the character of the library. The library of the Attalids is estimated to have had approximately 200,000 books, that of Nysa 10,000 and that of Celsus 3,000. Of course, there were much smaller and local libraries, supported by private sponsorship. The most important books of the collections were the works of Greek classical writers (such as Homer, Euripides, Herodotus and Aristotle) and, probably, local writers. Nothing is known about works of Latin writers. Given that no twin rooms have been preserved, like those of Rome, the collections must have been in only one language.⁷

In order to find books the citizens and the clerks of the libraries turned to either the bookstores of big cities or had copies made by professional scribes. The influential citizens followed even violent methods. The heirs to the library of Aristotle are said to have hidden the books under the ground in order to save them from the greedy kings of Pergamon.

The book collections were possibly organised according to the ideas of Alexandrian scholars about the arrangement of books. Catalogues of contents were sometime compiled at the library of Pergamon, although they cannot be compared with those compiled by Callimachus for the library of Alexandria.⁸

No doubt libraries had their qualified staff, although little is known about them. According to information about other libraries, the majority of the staff must have been slaves. However, there were some freedmen or even freemen as well – at least those destined for senior offices. Finally, the post of the director was introduced in the library of Pergamon.⁹

1. Competition between Ptolemies and Attalids: Casson, L., *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven – London) Στάκος, Κ., *Βιβλιοθήκη: από την Αρχαιότητα έως την Αναγέννηση και σημαντικές οσμάνιστικές και μοναστηριακές βιβλιοθήκες 3000 π.Χ. - 1600 μ.Χ.* (Athens 1996), p. 94. About other cities of Asia Minor, see Platthy, J., *Sources on the Earliest Greek Libraries* (Amsterdam 1968), pp. 153-168, 177. Στάκος, Κ., *Βιβλιοθήκη: από την Αρχαιότητα έως την Αναγέννηση και σημαντικές οσμάνιστικές και μοναστηριακές βιβλιοθήκες 3000 π.Χ. - 1600 μ.Χ.* (Athens 1996), p. 124. About Pergamon, see Hoepfner, W., 'Die Bibliothek Eumenes' II in Pergamon' and 'Pergamon – Rhodos – Nysa – Athen: Bibliotheken in Gymnasien und anderen Lehr- und Forschungsstätten', in Hoepfner, W. (edit.), *Antike Bibliotheken* (Mainz am Rhein 2002), pp. 41-52, 67-68.

2. Libraries may be included even in palaces or luxurious private residences, see Hoepfner, W., 'Bibliotheken in Wohnhäusern und Palästen', in Hoepfner, W. (edit.), *Antike Bibliotheken* (Mainz am Rhein 2002), pp. 86-96.

3. Hoepfner, W., 'Zu griechischen Bibliotheken und Bücherschränken', *AA 111* (1996), p. 36; Casson, L., *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven – London 2001), p. 58. Mylasa and Halicarnassus: Callmer, C., *Antike Bibliotheken* (OpArch 3, Leipzig 1944), p. 184.



4. About architecture and fittings, see Hoepfner, W., 'Die Bibliothek Eumenes' II in Pergamon', in Hoepfner, W. (edit.), *Antike Bibliotheken* (Mainz am Rhein 2002), pp. 41-52, with a brief presentation of the rest of the views on the way the scrolls were stored as well as of the function of the large hall. The connection of the large hall behind the northern stoa of Athena's sanctuary with the large library of Pergamon is questioned. According to others, the hall served as a symposium place, which Hoepfner does not reject, but after the library was closed. He also connects this second function of the library with the presence of the platform. See also Johnson, L.L., *The Hellenistic and Roman Library: Studies Pertaining to their Architectural Form* (Diss. Univ. Brown 1984), from p. 44 on, p. 186; Strocka, V.M., 'Noch einmal zur Bibliothek von Pergamon', *AA* 115 (2000), pp. 155-165. About the house, Hoepfner, W., 'Zu griechischen Bibliotheken und Bücherschränken', *AA* 111 (1996), pp. 27, 36 and Johnson, L.L., *The Hellenistic and Roman Library: Studies Pertaining to their Architectural Form* (Diss. Univ. Brown 1984), pp.182-184 believe that the niches were intended for statues and not for bookcases.
5. Plinius saw the statue of Trajan at the Library of Prousa: Platthy, J., *Sources on the Earliest Greek Libraries* (Amsterdam 1968), p. 166; Callmer, C., *Antike Bibliotheken* (OpArch 3, Leipzig 1944), p. 184.
6. Vitruvius. *De arch.* 1.2.7. About libraries in Roman provinces, see Hoepfner, W., 'Pergamon – Rhodos – Nysa – Athen: Bibliotheken in Gymnasien und anderen Lehr- und Forschungsstätten' and 'Die Celsus-Bibliothek in Ephesos: eine kaiserzeitliche Bibliothek mit zentralem Lesensaal', in Hoepfner, W. (edit.), *Antike Bibliotheken* (Mainz am Rhein 2002), pp. 67-80, 123-126; Στάκος, Κ., *Βιβλιοθήκη: από την Αρχαιότητα έως την Αναγέννηση και σημαντικές ουμανιστικές και μοναστηριακές βιβλιοθήκες 3000 π.Χ. - 1600 μ.Χ.* (Athens 1996), pp. 123-130; Casson, L., *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven – London 2001), pp.109-123; Strocka, V.M., 'Römische Bibliotheken', *Gymnasium* 88 (1981), pp. 302-303, 320-329. On the other hand, he supports that in this peristasis there were water pipes and, as a result, the walls were wet. Johnson, L.L., *The Hellenistic and Roman Library: Studies Pertaining to their Architectural Form* (Diss. Univ. Brown 1984), pp.182, 188, supposes that the peristasis was used for supporting a vaulted roof.
7. The Library of Alexandria had at least the double number of works than the Library of Pergamon: Casson, L., *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven – London 2001), p. 36. Strocka, V.M., 'Römische Bibliotheken', *Gymnasium* 88 (1981), p. 302. About the collection of Pergamon, Nisa and Celsus, see Hoepfner, W. 'Pergamon – Rhodos – Nysa – Athen', 'Bibliotheken in Gymnasien und anderen Lehr- und Forschungsstätten', in Hoepfner, W. (edit.), *Antike Bibliotheken* (Mainz am Rhein 2002), pp.49, 77; Casson, L., *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven – London 2001), pp. 112, 116.
8. Casson, L., *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven – London 2001), pp. 49, 52, 56-57, 78-79, supposes that the catalogues of contents were compiled according to those of Callimachus; Στάκος, Κ., *Βιβλιοθήκη: από την Αρχαιότητα έως την Αναγέννηση και σημαντικές ουμανιστικές και μοναστηριακές βιβλιοθήκες 3000 π.Χ. - 1600 μ.Χ.* (Athens 1996), p. 92.
9. Casson, L., *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven – London 2001), pp. 37-38, 94-98 (assistants at the libraries of Rome); Στάκος, Κ., *Βιβλιοθήκη: από την Αρχαιότητα έως την Αναγέννηση και σημαντικές ουμανιστικές και μοναστηριακές βιβλιοθήκες 3000 π.Χ. - 1600 μ.Χ.* (Athens 1996), p. 93.

Bibliography :

| | |
|--|--|
| | Callmer C., <i>Antike Bibliotheken</i> , Leipzig 1944, OpArch 3 |
| | Casson L., <i>Libraries in the Ancient World</i> , New Haven - London 2001 |
| | Cavallo G., <i>Le biblioteche nel mondo antico e medievale</i> , 2, Roma – Bari 1989 |
| | Hoepfner W., "Zu griechischen Bibliotheken und Bücherschränken", <i>AA</i> , 111, 1996., 25-36 |
| | Hoepfner W., "Die Bibliothek Eumenes' II in Pergamon", Hoepfner, W., <i>Antike Bibliotheken</i> , Mainz 2002, <i>Antike Welt</i> : Sonderbd., 41-52 |
| | Hoepfner, W. (ed.), <i>Antike Bibliotheken</i> , Mainz 2002, <i>Antike Welt</i> : Sondernum. |
| | Hoepfner W., "Pergamon – Rhodos – Nysa – Athen: Bibliotheken in Gymnasien und anderen Lehr- und Forschungsstätten", W. Hoepfner, <i>Antike Bibliotheken</i> , Mainz 2002, <i>Antike Welt</i> : Sonderbd., 67-8 |
| | İdil V., "Die römischen Bibliotheken in Kleinasien. Die Celsusbibliothek in Ephesos und die Bibliothek in Nysa", |



| | |
|--|---|
| | H. Friesinger, F. Krinzinger, <i>Ephesos. Der neue Führer. 100 Jahre österreichische Ausgrabungen. 1895-1995</i> , Wien 1999, 437-441. |
| | Johnson L.L. , <i>The Hellenistic and Roman Library: Studies Pertaining to their Architectural Form</i> , Univ. Brown 1984, PhD Dissertation, Department of Classics |
| | Platthy J. , <i>Sources on the Earliest Greek Libraries</i> , Amsterdam 1968 |
| | Strocka V.M. , "Römische Bibliotheken", <i>Gymnasium</i> , 88 , 1981, 298-329 |
| | Strocka V.M. , "Noch einmal zur Bibliothek von Pergamon", <i>AA</i> , 115, 2000, σελ. 155-165. |
| | Tonsberg J. , <i>Offentlige Biblioteker I Romerriget I det 2 Jarhundrede e. Chr.</i> , Copenhagen 1976 |
| | Στάικος Κ. , <i>Βιβλιοθήκη: από την Αρχαιότητα έως την Αναγέννηση και σημαντικές ουμανιστικές και μοναστηριακές βιβλιοθήκες 3000 π.Χ. - 1600 μ.Χ.</i> , Αθήνα 1996 |

Webliography :

| | |
|--|--|
| | Ancient Libraries, an evolving Bibliography http://classics.uc.edu/~johnson/libraries/library_biblio.html |
|--|--|

Glossary :

| | |
|--|---|
| | aedicula Small pedimental naiskos, either a free-standing construction or integrated into a larger building's facade. |
| | peristasis The collonade surrounding a building. |
| | stoa, portico, the A long building with a roof supported by one or two colonnades parallel to its back wall. |
| | Vitruvius Roman architect, engineer and author of the treatise, <i>De architectura</i> , compiled partly from his own experience and partly from work by famous Greek architects. He lived in the 1st century BC. |