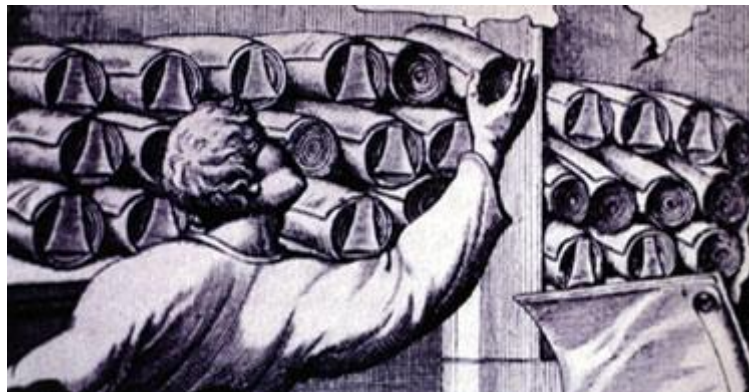




*Please read carefully the following text extracts and think about the questions listed below. We will be discussing them in class, so please bring with you a copy of this handout.*

**1. Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 26D:**

“...And forsooth the youth learn these doctrines from me, which they can buy sometimes (if the price is high) for a drachma in the orchestra and laugh at Socrates, if he pretends they are his own, especially when they are so absurd!”

**2. Plutarch, *Lives, Lucullus* 42:**

“But what he did in the establishment of a library deserves warm praise. He got together many books, and they were well written, and his use of them was more honourable to him than his acquisition of them. His libraries were thrown open to all, and the cloisters surrounding them, and the study-rooms, were accessible without restriction to the Greeks, who constantly repaired thither as to an hostelry of the Muses, and spent the day with one another, in glad escape from their other occupations. Lucullus himself also often spent his leisure hours there with them, walking about in the cloisters with their scholars, and he would assist their statesmen in whatever they desired. And in general his house was a home and prytaneium for the Greeks who came to Rome.”

**3. Seneca, *De tranquillitate animi* 9, 4-9:**

“Even for studies, where expenditure is most honourable, it is justifiable only so long as it is kept within bounds. What is the use of having countless books and libraries, whose titles their owners can scarcely read through in a whole lifetime? ... Forty thousand books were burned at Alexandria; let someone else praise this library as the most noble monument to the wealth of kings, as did Titus Livius, who says that it was the most distinguished achievement of the good taste and solicitude of kings. There was no “good taste” or “solicitude” about it, but only learned luxury – nay, not even “learned” – since they had collected the books, not for the sake of learning, but to make a show, just as many who lack even a child’s knowledge of letters use books, not as the tools of learning, but as decoration for the dinning-room... What excuse have you to offer for a man who seeks to have book-cases of citrus-wood and ivory, who collects the work of unknown or discredited authors and sits yawning in the midst of so many thousand books, who gets most of his pleasure from the outsides of volumes and their titles?...”

#### **4. Lucian, *The ignorant book-collector* 1-4:**

“Let me tell you, that you are choosing the worst way to attain your object. You think that by buying up all the best books you can lay your hands on, you will pass for a man of literary tastes: not a bit of it; you are merely exposing thereby your own ignorance of literature. Why, you cannot even buy the right things: any casual recommendation is enough to guide your choice; you are as clay in the hands of the unscrupulous amateur, and as good as cash down to any dealer. How are you to know the difference between genuine old books that are worth money, and trash whose only merit is that it is falling to pieces? You are reduced to taking the worms and moths into your confidence; their activity is your sole clue to the value of a book; as to the accuracy and fidelity of the copyist, that is quite beyond you... Are we to understand that you possess literary discernment without the assistance of any study?... but you will scarcely have the assurance to call yourself an educated man; you will scarcely pretend that your acquaintance with literature is more than skin-deep, or give us the names of your teacher and your fellow students?... No; you think you are going to work off all arrears by the simple expedient of buying a number of books. But there again: you may get together the works of Demosthenes, and his eight beautiful copies of Thucydides, all in the orator's own handwriting, and all the manuscripts that Sulla sent away from Athens to Italy,--and you will be no nearer to culture at the end of it, though you should sleep with them under your pillow, or paste them together and wear them as a garment; an ape is still an ape, says the proverb, though his trappings be of gold. So it is with you: you have always a book in your hand, you are always reading; but what it is all about, you have not an idea; you do but prick up asinine ears at the lyre's sound. Books would be precious things indeed, if the mere possession of them guaranteed culture to their owner. You rich men would have it all your own way then; we paupers could not stand against you, if learning were a marketable commodity; and as for the dealers, no one would presume to contest the point of culture with men who have whole shopfuls of books at their disposal. However, you will find on examination that these privileged persons are scarcely less ignorant than yourself. They have just your vile accent, and are as deficient in intelligence as one would expect men to be who have never learnt to distinguish good from bad. Now you see, *you* have merely bought a few odd volumes from them: they are at the fountain-head, and are handling books day and night. Judge from this how much good your purchases are likely to do you; unless you think that your very book-cases acquire a tincture of learning, from the bare fact of their housing so many ancient manuscripts.”

#### **5. Jerome, *Letters* 22:**

“But to-day you see many women packing their wardrobes with dresses, putting on a fresh frock every day, and even so unable to get the better of the moth. The more scrupulous sort wear one dress till it is threadbare, but though they go about in rags their boxes are full of clothes. Parchments are dyed purple, gold is melted for lettering, manuscripts are decked with jewels: and Christ lies at their door naked and dying.”

- What do the different views outlined above tell us about the practice of collecting books?
- Why were Greek books particularly appreciated among Romans?
- What do we learn here about the private book market and the distinction between collectors?
- What were the criteria that defined good and bad practices by collectors?