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# The Commodification of Literature in Martial's Epigrams

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The Commodification of Literature in Martial's  
*Epigrams*

AN HONORS THESIS PRESENTED

BY

RITA BLACK

TO

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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## The Commodification of Literature in Martial's *Epigrams*

### ABSTRACT

The vision behind this thesis, centered on the epigrammatic poetry of Martial (born Marcus Valerius Martialis, 34-41 – c. 103 CE) and the themes within his satiric works, stem from a proposal previously for Roman Poetry and Poetry Books that sought to analyze the connection between Martial's intense focus on his reader (*lector*) and his fixation on the materiality of his text (known as *libellus* or "little book" throughout his many works) in order to identify Martial's literary and social motives. Martial's choices to not only publish his books for the general public but circulate these texts through booksellers lead to the characterization of Martial as one of the preeminent authors of innovative poetry in the Roman Empire. This thesis seeks to investigate, analyze, and discuss the relationships present in Martial's works between author and audience, text and its physical form, and poet and patron.

In analyzing the complexities of Martial's poetry and his own approach to literature and relationships, modern readers can gain insight into the world of classical poetry and art as well as the social dynamics, political tensions, and inherent economic disparities of ancient Rome. This thesis seeks to answer how these relationships between author and audience, poetry and its physical form, and patron and poet intersect in Martial's epigrams and become integral to the transformative nature of his work.

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X.XLVII

THE THINGS THAT MAKE A LIFE TO PLEASE,  
SWEETEST MARTIAL, THEY ARE THESE:  
ESTATE INHERITED, NOT GOT:  
A THANKFUL FIELD, HEARTH ALWAYS HOT:  
CITY SELDOM, LAW-SUITS NEVER:  
EQUAL FRIENDS AGREEING EVER:  
HEALTH OF BODY, PEACE OF MIND:  
SLEEPS THAT TILL THE MORNING BIND:  
WISE SIMPLICITY, PLAIN FARE:  
NOT DRUNKEN NIGHTS, YET LOOSED FROM CARE:  
A SOBER, NOT A SULLEN SPOUSE:  
CLEAN STRENGTH, NOT SUCH AS HIS THAT PLOWS;  
WISH ONLY WHAT YOU ARE, TO BE;  
DEATH NEITHER WISH, NOR FEAR TO SEE.

*SIR RICHARD FANSHAWE, C. 1660*

To my mom for all her love and support. Thank you for putting me through the best education possible. I wouldn't have been able to get to this stage without your countless sacrifices.

To Professor Raymond J. Starr for his unending support, understanding, and trust. Thank you for believing in me.

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This thesis, in all of its ups and downs, represents all of these values.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor Raymond J. Starr. He has been the most important figure during my time here at Wellesley since I took Beginning Latin my first year. Ray has supported me not only by advising me on this tumultuous thesis journey, but also academically and emotionally on this rough road. During my most difficult times, he gave me the confidence and support to push through.

This thesis would not exist if not for him.

Thank you to my thesis committee: Catherine Gilhuly, Bryan Burns, and Selwyn Cudjoe. Thank you for encouragement, insightful comments, and hard questions.

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THERE ARE SOME WHO SAY THAT I AM NOT A POET; BUT THE BOOKSELLER, WHO SELLS ME,  
THINKS THAT I AM.

14.194

*A Note On Translations*

Epigrams cited throughout this thesis have been translated and edited by D.R. Shackleton Bailey and published by the Loeb Classical Library.

*To whom, my little book, do you wish me to dedicate you? Make haste to choose a patron, lest, being hurried off into a murky kitchen, you cover tunnies with your wet leaves, or become a wrapper for incense and pepper. Is it into Faustinus' bosom that you flee? you have chosen wisely: you may now make your way perfumed with oil of cedar, and, decorated with ornaments at both ends, luxuriate in all the glory of painted bosses; delicate purple may cover you, and your tittle proudly blaze in scarlet. With him for your patron, fear not even Probus.*

3.2

# 1

## The Setting

THE ROOTS OF THE ROMAN BOOK TRADE are somewhat unknown. In his text, “The Circulation of Literary Texts In The Roman World,” Raymond J. Starr notes the existence of enduring evidence for the *circulation*, rather than the trade, of the written text.<sup>1</sup> This thesis (and related academic work elsewhere) define circulation and trade as two distinct modes of dissemination and distribution. In the context of this thesis, circulation is meant as a social exchange orchestrated between two parties, most often the poet and the poet’s patron and friends. Trade is defined and used in this text as economic exchange between sellers and buyers, or more broadly, consumers and markets.

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<sup>1</sup>Starr, Raymond J. “The Circulation of Literary Texts in the Roman World.” *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1987, p. 213.

Prior to the circulation of written materials, poets would expect their patrons to support private recitations for the small, elite sub-circles of Rome's aristocracy. The Roman patron, in almost all if not all documented cases, was a member of Rome's social and literary elite. The patron's role was to provide financial support and social benefits to their poets (as well as other artists) in return for personalized compositions and coveted early editions. Our poet Martial even writes of his own obligations as a poet confined to the recitation method of dissemination.

You ask me to recite to you my Epigrams. I cannot oblige you; for you wish not to hear them, Celer, but to recite them. 1.63

The development of the written text in its various forms had the ability to change the author-reader relationship in Ancient Rome. The circulation of literature, in effect, no longer required the audience to be a *listening* audience. The proffering of literature to the reader had a unique effect on the public readership in a way that oral presentation did not.

The social and literary elite were previously the originally intended audience of a poet and his poetry. The oral presentation only served to deny the general public access to this exclusive fraternity of poets and patrons. The limited guest lists of these recitations, often conducted at dinner events hosted by patrons, were composed exclusively of patrons and peers of similar status. But the development of the written poetry collection implied that the poet's audience could no longer be restricted to what Elaine Fantham in *Roman Literary Culture* calls the "expert reader." The dissemination of text in the written form ensured the expert reader accessibility to the text while transforming the way in which a poet identified, approached, and catered to his audience.

The poet's "audience" is not a catch-all term, Fantham argues.<sup>2</sup> The term "audience" implies in-person access, associating the presentation of the text with a recitation. In contrast, "readership" implies access *solely* through the written text. "Public," a term that will be used throughout this thesis, implies widespread and inclusive distribution potentially

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<sup>2</sup>Fantham, Elaine. *Roman Literary Culture: From Cicero to Apuleius*. JHU Press, 1999, pp. 7-8.

outside the elite circles of the poet and patron. Few poets had sought “public” fame, choosing instead to focus on notoriety within the “readership” and “audience” circles.

According to Starr, both formal and informal book circulation existed among the elite social circles of Rome. He writes, “Romans circulated texts in a series of widening concentric circles determined primarily by friendship, which might, of course, be influenced by literary interests, and by the forces of social status that regulated friendship.”<sup>3</sup> Historical records confirm the existence of a formal book trade in the time of Cicero and Catullus (approximately 106 BCE - 43 BCE). And yet Catullus regards the “public” with disdain, choosing instead to exclusively address the social and literary elite most often associated with the “readership” and “audience”:

Good Heavens, what a horrible and cursed little book! Which you surely sent to your Catullus so that he might die the very next day, the Saturnalia, the best of days! No no, It will not be like this for you, clever fiend. For when it is light, I will run to the booksellers’ shelves; the Caesii, Aquini, Suffenus; I will collect all such poison.<sup>4</sup>

When Catullus threatened his mischievous friend Calvus with revenge by rummaging through the bookseller’s shelves for Caesius and other “poisons,” he implies that the poet with a public reader is lesser than compared to the poet with an elite readership or audience.

Horace makes a similar comment, this time condemning the reader that might frequent a bookseller rather than a patron who would receive a text through a poet or friend within the elite social circles of Rome:

But unless hatred of your error makes the prophet lose his cunning, you will be loved in Rome till your youth leave you; when you’ve been well thumbed by vulgar hands and begin to grow soiled, you will either in silence be food for

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<sup>3</sup>Starr, p. 213.

<sup>4</sup>Catullus, 14.12-20.

vandal moths, or will run away to Utica, or be sent in bonds to Ilerda.<sup>5</sup>

Like poets before him, Catullus favored restricted fame, notoriety within the small circle of Rome's social and literary elite. The negative perception of popularity outside of this circle forbade Catullus from making the decision to publish his body of work for a wider audience. Catullus' attitude towards the public is ironic considering much of Catullus' fame was posthumous, due largely in part to the advent of the printing and mass distribution.<sup>6</sup>

Only with Ovid (43 BCE - 17 CE) do we see a poet of great fame enthusiastically address the "public" as his intended reader.

And now the work is done, that Jupiter's anger, fire or sword cannot erase, nor the gnawing tooth of time. Let that day, that only has power over my body, end, when it will, my uncertain span of years: yet the best part of me will be borne, immortal, beyond the distant stars. Wherever Rome's influence extends, over the lands it has civilised, I will be spoken, on people's lips: and, famous through all the ages, if there is truth in poet's prophecies, I shall live.<sup>7</sup>

Ovid introduces the concept of fame unrestricted by the social mores established by the literary elite of Rome. The next author to champion unrestricted fame to a greater extent than Ovid is our epigrammatist, Martial.

Fantham notes that the poet's written text had an alternate purpose apart from garnering support from the intellectual elite and securing future recitations or the monetary benefits of patronage. Without the advent of copyright law, the written collection ensured to some extent that the poet had control over his work or, at the least, the first draft.<sup>8</sup> Poetry books

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<sup>5</sup>Horace, *Epistles*, 10.20.9-13.

<sup>6</sup>Catullus, Gaius Valerius. *Catullus*. Ed. George P. Goold. Duckworth, 1983, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15.871-879.

<sup>8</sup>I use the gendered pronouns "he/his/him" here and throughout this thesis not as an insult towards the female poets of ancient Rome but because the canon of Roman poetry and associated scholarly work is and was, unfortunately, male.

(“books” here meaning both bookrolls/scrolls and codices) provided, to some extent, the autonomy and agency over a poet’s body of work that oral presentation could not.

In fact, Martial was one of the first Latin authors to coin the neologism *plagiarius*, meaning “kidnapper of books.”<sup>9</sup>

To you, Quinctianus, do I commend my books, if indeed I can call books mine, which your poet recites. If they complain of a grievous yoke, do you come forward as their advocate, and defend them efficiently; and when he calls himself their master, say that they were mine, but have been given by me to the public. If you will proclaim this three or four times, you will bring shame on the plagiary. 10.52

Martial complains that recitation opens the text to threat of plagiarism: “do I commend my books, if indeed I can call books mine, which your poet recites.” The physical agency or authorship, like the signing of a name indicating authorship or material proof of plagiarised text, was not guaranteed by the recitation.

Poets like Ovid who sought unrestricted fame typically employed three phases of distribution to reach the “general public”: the private recitation of the first polished draft to patrons, the gifting of copies to patrons and readers within the literary elite, and finally the collection and publication of poems in books to be made available to the literate public.<sup>10</sup>

One of the first texts to be purposefully released *and* addressed to the general public was Martial’s first book of epigrams known as the *Apophoreta*, the *Party Gifts*. The short-form nature and epithetic intention of the epigram ensured contextual accessibility to the general public in ways that long-form verse did not. Let’s take Statius and his lengthy *Silvae*, for example. Reading Statius is a task of extraordinary intertextuality. The *Silvae* uses literary allusions and intertextual references to engage with Horace, Ovid, and even Martial

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<sup>9</sup>Bently, Lionel, Jennifer Davis, and Jane C. Ginsburg. *Copyright and Piracy: An interdisciplinary critique*. Vol. 13. Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 275.

<sup>10</sup>Fantham, p. 16.

himself.<sup>11</sup> Where Martial's longest epigram is a mere forty-two lines (in keeping with the short-form poetic genre) and subjects ranging from sex to money to Emperor Domitian take precedence, Statius's *Silvae* contains poems with upwards of 100 lines, heavy with complex wordplay and mythological references. Statius' *Silvae*, rife with intertextuality, was not developed with the contextual accessibility the way Martial's *Epigrams* were.

The epigram had a long history of employment by established poets before Martial presented his Epigrams to the ancient world. To call Martial's body of work and the implications of his literary legacy "innovative" without calling attention to his predecessors is to commit scholarly injustice. As Horace followed the great Lucilius, who, Horace says, "rubbed down the city with much salt," (*Satires*, 1.10.3-4), Martial confers all responsibility for his mastery of the epigram on the likes of Meleager and Catullus.

*Hendecasyllabi, idyllia, eclogae, poematia, nugae* represent only a selection of labels given to the epigram genre of poetry. Pliny the Younger's *Epistulae*, a collection of letters written for publication in the 1st century CE, muse on the nature of the nature of the epigram, commenting on its plain and playful formula as well as its extensive use through classical history by "the greats."

Perhaps you are asking and looking out for a speech of mine, as you usually do, but I am sending you some wares of another sort, exotic trifles, the fruit of my playtime. You will receive with this letter some hendecasyllabics of mine with which I pass my leisure hours pleasantly when driving, or in the bath, or at dinner. They contain my jests, my sportive fancies, my loves, sorrows, displeasures and wrath, described sometimes in a humble, sometimes in a lofty strain. My object has been to please different tastes by this variety of treatment, and I hope that certain pieces will be liked by everyone. Some of them will possibly strike you as being rather wanton, but a man of your scholarship will bear in mind that the very greatest and gravest authors who have handled such subjects have not only dealt with lascivious themes, but have treated them in

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<sup>11</sup>Newlands, Carole E. *Statius: Silvae Book II*. 2011, pp. 23-24.



the plainest language. I have not done that, not because I have greater austerity than they—by no means, but because I am not quite so daring. Otherwise, I am aware that Catullus has laid down the best and truest regulations governing this style of poetry in his lines: “For it becomes a pious bard to be chaste himself, though there is no need for his verses to be so. Nay, if they are to have wit and charm, they must be voluptuous and not too modest.” Still there is one thing of which I think I should advise you, and it is that I am thinking of calling these trifles “Hendecasyllables,” a title which simply refers to the single metre employed. So, whether you prefer to call them epigrams, or idylls, or eclogues, or little poems, as many do, or any other name, remember that I only offer you “Hendecasyllables.”<sup>12</sup>

Yet the origination of this poetic genre is vastly different from the bodies of work we see from Martial and his predecessors. The term *epigrammata*, one which Martial himself favored, originates from the Greek *epi-graphein*, *epi-* meaning “upon” and *graphein* meaning “to write.” The intended use, easily garnered from the denotation of this term, was as traditional inscriptions on cult statues, monuments, and funerary markers. The birth of the epigram lay in brevity, suggesting that even as the epigram evolved beyond the cemetery and away from elegiac employment, the poetic device held onto the characteristics of inscriptions. Authors and poets alike favored the concise commentary, ascribing them to specific persons, objects, or events rather than commemoration of the dead.

The epigram genre flourished in both Greece and Rome, employed enthusiastically by a variety of poets and collected in anthologies or “garlands,” writes Craig Williams in his *A Martial Reader: Selections from the Epigrams*.<sup>13</sup> The 1st century BCE poet and collector of epigrams Meleager of Gadara is one of the few surviving voices in Greek epigrams from the early classical era who was featured heavily in the garlands. Meleager’s own *Garland* contained hundreds of elegiac and lyric epigrams. These pieces were subsequently excerpted and collected along with centuries of *epigrammata* to end up in the anthology of Constantine

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<sup>12</sup>Pliny, *Epistulae*, 4.14.

<sup>13</sup>Williams, Craig, ed. *A Martial Reader: Selections from the Epigrams*. Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2011, p. xv.

Cephalas and eventually in the Palatine Anthology (*Anthologia Palatina*). Alexander Dale called the expansive Palatine Anthology “the main source for our knowledge of Greek epigrams from the Classical to Byzantine periods” in *Lyric Epigrams in Meleager’s Garland*. The Palatine Anthology is datable to the tenth century CE, approximately 800-900 years after Martial’s death and contains an impressive 3,700 epigrams spread across fifteen books, a testament to the timeless and far-reaching epigram.

William Fitzgerald explains in *Martial: The World of the Epigram*, that “Meleager arranged poems in his anthology according to the four categories of erotic, epitaphic, anathematic (dedicatory), and epideictic (descriptive or narrative), all of which types feature in Martial.<sup>14</sup> Meleager’s organization emphasized the art of variation, juxtaposing different versions of the same theme, so that the reader might be treated, for instance, to thirty successive poems on the subject of the sculptor Myron’s famous cow.” He points to Martial’s first two books, the *Apophoreta* and *Xenia*, as examples. The *Apophoreta* derived its name from the presents hosts gave “to be carried away” by their guests at the Roman Saturnalia. The Greek-titled book is made up entirely of couplets, poems of two lines written in the same meter, meant to accompany their identified presents and curiously arranged by gifts given to the rich and poor, alternately. Similarly, the *Xenia* reads as a lengthy list of gift-tags, in this instance, exclusively reserved for livestock and ingredients for a feast. The remaining twelve books of the Epigrams vary significantly in topic and tone.

The Latin epigram, notably those made famous by our poet Martial, borrowed heavily from the Greek literary epigram and its characteristic themes. Among the multitude of authors represented in the fifteen books of the *Anthology*, Asclepiades, Callimachus, and Posidippus all predate Martial’s work. But among the Roman epigrammatists, Martial counts Lucilius, Q. Lutatius Catulus, Helvius Cinna, C. Licinius Calvus, Domitius Marsus, Albinovanus Pedo, Cornelius Lentulus, Gaetulicus, and most importantly, Catullus, whose influence on Martial’s epigrams is extensive. That is, Martial’s personal development of the epigram genre and his control of the poetic device was due in significant part to Catullus. What set Martial apart from the influence of Catullus was his desire to use the poetic device

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<sup>14</sup>Fitzgerald, William. *Martial: the World of the Epigram*. University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 40.

to reach a general Roman audience, a prevailing theme in the body of this thesis.

In his acknowledgment of the literary heritage passed down to him by the great poets of the Republican and Augustan periods, our poet Martial writes,

He acted honourably who exercises perverse ingenuity on another man's book:  
For the free plainness of expression, that is, for the language of the epigram, I  
would apologize, if I were introducing the practice; but it is thus that Catullus  
writes, and Marsus, and Pedo, and Gaetulicus, and every one whose writings  
are read through. If any assumes to be so scrupulously nice, however, that it is  
not allowable to address him, in a single page, in plain language, he may confine  
himself to this address, or rather to the title of the book. Epigrams are written  
for those who are accustomed to the spectators of the games of Flora. 1.1

Clarence W. Mendell writes of Martial's verse, "Vergil, Horace, Ovid he respects to the extent of offering them elsewhere warm tributes and of imitating them freely in details, but it is Catullus who is the model for the general type." A vehicle for both social commentary and the popular obscenity of ancient times, "satire was the youngest child and had always in fact something of a revolutionary genius for absorbing, or at least adopting new ideas."<sup>15</sup>

For the modern reader, Catullus is perhaps second only to Vergil as a household name. Martial makes use of his name in almost every book, regarding the notable poet with great respect. "Whenever I read a few distichs from my own compositions, you forthwith recite some bits of Marsus or Catullus" (2.41). Nearer to the end of the Epigrams, Martial becomes noticeably more confident in his praise of Catullus, culminating in epigram 10.78, a clear statement on Catullus' literary influence and Martial's boastful reverence for Catullus' impact on his popularity.

You are going, Macer, to the shores of Salona. Rare integrity and the love of  
justice will accompany you, and modesty follow in the train. A just governor

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<sup>15</sup>Mendell, Clarence W. "Martial and the satiric epigram." *Classical Philology* 17.1, 1922, p. 2.

always returns poorer than he went. O happy husbandman of the gold-producing country, you will send back your ruler with his purse empty; you will deplore his return, O Dalmatian, and escort him on his departure with mixed feelings of gratitude and sorrow. I, Macer, shall go among the Celts and the fierce Iberians, with deep regret for the loss of your companionship. But every page of mine that shall be circulated there, written with a pen made from the reeds of the fish-abounding Tagus, will record the name of Macer. So may I be read among old poets, and rank in your esteem as inferior to none but Catullus. 10.78

While similar in their taste for satiric devices, Martial and Catullus were vastly different. Catullus was both an epigrammatist and a lyric poet, using elegiac meters to illustrate emotions and literary allusions. Martial, to some extent, did not follow these rules that Catullus had laid out. While it almost seems inappropriate to use superlatives in cases of human behavior, Clarence W. Mendell makes the case for Martial's tone in *Martial and the Satiric Epigram*:

It is the rare poem with Catullus that approaches any objective treatment; with Martial such poems are not infrequent, and hardly ever does there appear any intensity in the work of the epigrammatist. This intense passion on the part of Catullus produces much of the lyric quality. Studying his poetry, however, from the point of the view of the searcher of types, the personality becomes more important than the intensity of feeling.<sup>16</sup>

The tone of Martial's work rejects the idea of subjectivity where Catullus embraces it. The "objective treatment" in the *Epigrams*, as Mendell suggests, uniquely embraces the general reader who would have less context for an interest in Catullus' personal tastes, emotions, and opinions. The objectivity of Martial's epigrams instead appeals to a public that has no desire or knowledge for the intertextual lyric quality Catullus employs.

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<sup>16</sup>Mendell, p. 3.

Martial's conception of the general reader, a literate Roman subject without ties to the literary elite of Catullus' preferred social circles, is an objective one solely because the reader is unknown. Without the exclusivity of the social and literary elite, the public remains nameless to our poet. Martial approaches this new literary reality with, as Mendell says, an "objective treatment" as well as in the materiality of his text. Where some predecessors like Ovid acknowledged the public and others like Catullus showed his disdain for a general readership, Martial established the materiality and accessibility of his body of work for the public reader. The content of Martial's work and the distribution of his texts are a direct result of his relationship with the public.

*If you are unwilling, Urbicus, to purchase my trifles, and yet desire to have a knowledge of my sportive verses, go find Pompeius Auctus. Though deeply imbued with law, and versed in the various usages of civil life, he is not only my reader, Urbicus, but my book itself. He so faithfully remembers and repeats his absent friend's compositions, that not a single letter of my pages is lost. In a word, if he had chosen, he might have made himself appear the author; but he prefers to assist in spreading my reputation.*

7.51

# 2

## The Reader

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AUTHOR, AUDIENCE, AND WORK has been shaped time and time again by technology. In the current framework of literary dissemination, the audience has a disproportionate amount of control over the reproduction of text thanks to digitization. Before this, during the Gutenberg age, authors and publishers controlled the circulation of text for centuries with the advent of the printing press. Relative to the Gutenberg age, the digital age is still in its infancy. Both eras are dwarfed by the ancient model of literary circulation.

Any analysis of the ancient model of textual production and dissemination in the Roman Empire begins with the construct of patronage. Patronage was a thoroughly Roman concept,

one predicated on the institution of *amicitia*, a term for friendship dependent on the principal of reciprocity. *Amicitia* existed beyond the confines of the patron-poet relationship, from the strictly hierarchical emperor-subject relationship to more relaxed yet still unequal interactions. The fundamental process of these social exchanges was as follows: either party gives the other a gift of goods or services. The gift-giver creates a bond of trust, rather than a contract, with the gift-receiver. The gift-receiver is obligated to reciprocate or risk the breaking of the bond and loss of status. Unlike with economic exchanges, no legal action could be taken against a party who does not reciprocate. The fear of public shunning was presumably enough to maintain the *amicitia* protocols. The emphasis on reciprocity in the web of social relationships that constituted ancient society enabled Roman friendship, and patronage, to be functional in its foundation.

In his 1997 *Friendship in the Classical World*, historian David Konstan describes Roman *amicitia* as a utilitarian system of exchange at a time in history where the economic market was not as sophisticated as the markets of modern societies.<sup>1</sup>

The reason, it is supposed, why friendship assumed so pragmatic a form in the archaic world is that it served as a matrix for relations that in modern societies are governed by autonomous economic and legal practices. The economy [of classical Rome] was inextricably embedded in a complex of social relations that included personal bonds.

Getting your hands on resources, anything from monetary to social capital, required leveraging friendship, one in which reciprocity more so than mutual affection was necessary for maintaining the relationship. Marcel Mauss sums up ancient Roman *amicitia*: “If friends make gifts, gifts make friends” in his 1967 publication, aptly named *The Gift*. In short, because the economies of ancient Rome did not have the market infrastructure and checks-and-balances of the modern economies that exist today, resources were often secured by means of the interpersonal relationship. The flow of material or transactional items created the social relationship, rather than the more contemporary opposite.

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<sup>1</sup>Konstan, David. *Friendship in the Classical World*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 4.

Yet Martial's representation of *amicitia* reveals the relationship to be "inherently contradictory," as Art L. Spisak notes in *Martial: A Social Guide*. The mutualism of *amicitia* was undermined by its exchange system, a system which (perhaps unintentionally) created uneven social interactions. Reciprocity, unless used in exactly equal exchanges between individuals of exactly equal status with exactly equal but different desires and with theoretically unending exchanges, is unequal. In short, the actions of giving and taking can only be equal under these extreme circumstances. In several poems, Martial argues that reciprocity, especially between patron and poet, sometimes ended poorly.

When the halls of the Pisos, and the thrice-illustrious house of the learned Seneca, were displaying long lines of pedigrees, I preferred you, Postumus, to all such high personages; you were poor and but a knight, but to me you were a consul. With you, Postumus, I counted thirty winters; we had one couch in common between us. Now, full of honours, and rolling in wealth, you can give, you can lavish. I am waiting, Postumus, to see what you will do for me. You do nothing; and it is late for me to look about for another patron. Is this, Fortune, your act? Postumus has cheated me. 4.40

Where Martial and his patron, Postumus, enjoyed the altruistic nature of friendship in the beginning, with Martial intimately supporting his then-friend, the friendship becomes more utilitarian and less equal when Postumus gains his wealth. "Postumus has cheated me" confirms the later relationship as transactional and therefore, prone to an inequitable ending. Martial even suggests that he valued Postumus above his other wealthy patrons, Piso and the younger Seneca, because their seemingly-altruistic relationship began as one of the genuine friendships he prefers.<sup>2</sup> Martial's distrust of both Postumus and *amicitia* can be summed by Cicero:

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<sup>2</sup>Peter White's 1972 dissertation, *Aspects of Non-Imperial Patronage in the Works of Martial and Statius*, counts upwards of 95 potential patrons addressed in Martial's *Epigrams*. Of these 95+, over 20 can be identified as of the senatorial or equestrian orders and at least 75 are described as wealthy and treated with some deference by Martial. Martial presumably encountered and addressed a number of patrons from whom he received temporary assistance.



If people think that friendship springs from weakness and from a purpose to secure someone through whom we may obtain that which we lack, they assign her, if I may so express it, a lowly pedigree indeed, and an origin far from noble, and they would make her the daughter of poverty and want.<sup>3</sup>

As Martial notes, some patron-poet relationships had replaced autonomy in favor of exchange. Horace, who writes frequently of his patron Maecenas, sought to preserve his individual autonomy in the patron-poet relationship. Peter White argues that this is due in part to Maecenas' occupation; his quasi-political duties meant there was no need to assemble at his home and escort him to the forum or form the laudatory "cliques" associated with orators and senators alike. In *Satires* 2.6, Horace laments his morning duties rushing to his patron's side but takes pride in his position as one of Maecenas' few traveling companions.

Some fifteen years later in *Epistles* 1.7, Horace considers the continuation of his friendship with Maecenas, demonstrating his autonomy as he sets conditions for the relationship, "*quodsi me noles usquam discedere...*" ("But if you are unwilling for me ever to leave you..."). But not unlike Martial and Juvenal and Statius, Horace could not avoid the transactional nature of the patron-poet relationship. In essence, "no strings attached" did not exist within Rome's social exchange system. As Martial writes,

Since, in this month of December, in which napkins, and elegant shoe-fastenings, and wax-tapers, and tablets, and tapering vases filled with old Damascene plums, fly about in all directions, I have sent you nothing but my little books, the offspring of my study, I may seem to you stingy or rude. But I hate the crafty and mischievous arts of presents. Gifts are like fish-hooks; for who does not know that the greedy char is deceived by the fly which he swallows? Whenever the poor man abstains from making presents to his rich friend, Quintianus, he shows a liberal spirit. 5.18

The dependence on reciprocity established the Roman economy as one developed on a

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<sup>3</sup>Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 29.

system of gift exchange for some time, deeply embedded within the social, political, and economic relationships of the Empire and Republic. Poets like Martial who dedicated poems or verses to patrons were considered “praise poets” (a term used by various scholars including Spisak), the implication of which meant to imply that the poet in question sold their skill for mere *sesterces*. The praise poet’s verse was socially reprehensible, a flagrant display of immodesty and likened to a parasite.<sup>4</sup> To make the transactional nature of the patron-poet relationship so obvious was vulgar. Yet some self-proclaimed praise poets like the Greek professional poet Pindar envisioned his praise as a gift to the patron, a suitable exchange for the entertainment and gifts offered to him by his hosts. Pindar, and our epigrammatist Martial, saw gift exchange as vital to the stability and civility of society in a way that we might see a traditional transactional economy.

Unlike basic commodity exchange in the modern free market, gift exchange depended wholly on a personalized relationship between two people. Aristotle writes of friendship as “...not based on stated terms, but the gift or other service is given as to a friend, although the giver expects to receive an equivalent or greater return, as though it had not been a free gift but a loan.” The obligation of return was integral to the reciprocal friendship. A refusal to give, to invite, to repay, is the rejection of a friendship and the dissolution of the social contract. Martial himself writes in Book 5 of his epigrams,

*Laudatus nostro quidam, Faustine, libello  
dissimulat, quasi nil debeat: imposuit.*

A certain person who was praised in my book, Faustinus, plays innocent, as if he owed me nothing. He has cheated me! 5.36

The refusal of reciprocity was an affront to the social order that was reliant on this interpersonal gift exchange. Martial’s shameless naming of individuals, most of whom were presumably patrons or wealthy friends associated with the elite circles that supported poets

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<sup>4</sup>Peirano, Irene. *The Rhetoric of the Roman Fake: Latin Pseudepigrapha in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 163.

not unlike Martial, was a definitive and assertive reminder to this community of patrons that the wealthy elite must actively support the individuals they seek entertainment from.

With even greater context, Martial's words take a disparaging tone. Gift exchange was reliant on the exchange and trade of gifts in equal measure. In another epigram, in this instance addressed to the Emperor Domitian (or *Caesar*), a important patron, Martial underlines what Seneca called the "worst of all crimes": ingratitude.<sup>5</sup>

This vice, however, exists, and not a small one, although it be but one, that the poor man cultivates friends who simply treat him with ingratitude. Who bestows any portion of his wealth upon his old and faithful friend, or whose train is accompanied by a knight whom he has helped to create? To have sent at the time of the Saturnalia a silver spoon of small weight, or a gaudy toga worth ten scruples, is extravagant liberality; and our proud patrons call such things presents. Perhaps there may be one, who will chink out a few gold pieces. But since these men are not our friends, be you, Caesar, a friend to us; no virtue in a prince can be more pleasing than generosity. 5.19

The gift given with greater value or sentiment than the gift previously accepted claimed some fleeting social superiority. For Martial to claim that his gifts to his patrons go unnoticed or unreciprocated meant that these patrons, the addressees in his epigrams, lose credibility within this ancient economy. Martial has power within the community to discredit patrons with his works. The naming of Faustinus as a "cheat" or, worse yet, cheap, would not go unnoticed by those who frequent Martial's books. And to Martial's advantage, his generosity when faced with glaring ingratitude is praised by the emperor, earning him both the ear and affection of Domitian.

Martial was without a doubt dependent on the "affections" of patrons like Domitian and the senatorial and equestrian elite. These affections, expressed in concrete form in a client's allotted dole given by the patron, was known as a *sportula* in the late 1st and 2nd centuries

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<sup>5</sup>Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, 10.4.

CE.<sup>6</sup> Clients were expected to escort their patrons throughout the city's forum as a physical display of their wealth and social status; a larger throng implied greater nobility. Under the empire, the patron was required to bestow on his client an established *sportula*, traditionally in the amount of *centum quadrantes* or 100 *quadrantes*, once the client had presented himself to the patron in the morning, according to Juvenal.<sup>7 8</sup>

In Martial's time, the *sportula* was most often distributed in the evening as payment. Martial's nightly dole was presented as payment for his services as part of the escort, a pompous example of the emerging transactional economy. In contrast, Juvenal's collection of payment in the morning was an expectation, extended to traditional clients like poets and servants and the less traditional like *praetors* and tribunes (Juvenal, *Satires*, I.117-128). Martial makes no mention of this. The allotment system of the *sportula* presumably underwent some change in the narrow sliver of time between Domitian's death in 96 CE and Juvenal's greater literary activity in the late 1st century.<sup>9</sup>

The distinction here between "payment" and "expectation" could be important. Martial expressed an extreme distaste for the payment system under Emperor Domitian's rule, as evidenced above. It's worth wondering if Martial would have disliked the transactional patron-client relationship so greatly had the *sportula* been an expectation accepted by well-to-do statesmen rather than a payment for a service traditionally done by clients. With or without speculation about Martial's feelings on the matter, the poet was very forthright with his simultaneous disdain for the social protocol of the patron-client relationship and his reliance on the patron's benefaction. He reminds the audience that patronage, not publishing, earned him his livelihood:

It is not the idle people of the city only that delight in my Muse, nor is it alone  
to listless ears that these verses are addressed, but my book is thumbed amid

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<sup>6</sup>Smith, William. *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology by Various Writers*. Vol. 2. John Murray, 1872, pp. 1054-55.

<sup>7</sup>Friedländer, Ludwig. *Roman Life and Manners under the Early Empire*. Vol. 4. G. Routledge Sons, 1913, p. 80.

<sup>8</sup>Stephenson, Henry Major, ed. *Selected Epigrams of Martial*. Macmillan, 1907.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid

Getic frosts, near martial standards, by the stern centurion; and even Britain is said to sing my verses. Yet of what advantage is it to me? My purse benefits nothing by my reputation. What immortal pages could I not have written and what wars could I not have sung to the Pierian trumpet, if, when the kind deities gave a second Augustus to the earth, they had likewise given to you, O Rome, a second Maecenas. 11.3

Martial repeatedly criticizes the dynamics of power-asymmetry associated with patron-poet relationships. Where his poetic counterparts like Statius cluttered their verse with the historical, literary, and mythological exempla that appealed to their wealthy and educated clientele, attempting to align their social and literary ideals with those of their patrons (and the friends of their patrons), Martial boldly published his critique of the patron's role. His critique almost mirrored that of Samuel Johnson's famous 1755 public letter to Lord Chesterfield, in which he renounces patronage:

Is not a patron my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it: till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron, which providence has enabled me to do for myself.

The patron, and often the "institution" of the patron, becomes Martial's torment, eventually pushing him to find alternate paths toward fame.

William Fitzgerald, in *Martial: The World of the Epigram*, describes the patrons named in Martial's works as "heterogeneous," ranging from an Emperor to a centurion, among the other indistinguishable and common names of the exclusive patron groups. However, unlike Catullus and Horace whose patrons formed close factions, Martial's patrons are individuals.

Perhaps this is purposeful. Fitzgerald notes that the individuality had the potential to be a genius marketing ploy:

Martial's book is a place where patrons like to find their names, and it is also a place from which the anonymous readership can look in on the lives of their social superiors. We readers are delivered to the houses of the high and mighty, even the highest and mightiest, both as voyeuristic tourists and as respectful *salutatores*. Martial's fame among the anonymous masses supports the fame of his honored addressees, for his circulation is ultimately theirs.<sup>10</sup>

The individuality of the patron only added to the undefined rules and regulations of the patron-poet relationship, magnifying the relationship as one based on an inequitable transaction and Martial's position as a "poet-for-hire." This position, as well as Martial's fixation on the transactional nature of his relationship with his patrons, become part of his self-representation as a writer who brazenly eschews the patron-poet relationship in theory but remains dependent on the benefaction of his wealthy supporters. However, it is very clear: Martial *does* use the traditional patronage system.

Martial's open criticism of the patron-poet relationship comes in many forms. Some critiques developed from the "othering" that Martial felt as a poet.

Seeing that I am invited to dinner, and am no longer, as before, to be bought, why is not the same dinner given to me, as to you? You partake of oysters fattened in the Lucrine lake; I tear my lips in sucking at a limpet. Before you are placed splendid mushrooms; I help myself to such as are fit only for pigs. You are provided with a turbot; I with a sparulus. The golden turtle-dove fills your stomach with its over-fattened body; a magpie which died in its cage is set before me. Why do I dine without you, Ponticus, when I dine with you? Let it be of some profit to me that the sportula exists no longer; let us eat off the same dishes. 3.60

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<sup>10</sup>Fitzgerald, p. 228.

His position at the dinner table is made apparent when he realizes his own dinner is different, lesser than, compared to the wealthy Ponticus'. The belittling of Martial because of his position within the patron-poet relationship results in his open criticism of the uneven relationship.

Other criticisms come from Martial's idea that money separated him from the patron's status. The financial benefaction of the Patron came at a great price: the pride of the poet.

When I did not know you, I used to address you as my lord and king. Now,  
since I know you well, you shall be plain Priscus with me. 1.112

Because I now address you by your name, when I used before to call you lord  
and master, do not regard me as presumptuous. At the price of all my chattels I  
have purchased my cap of liberty. He only wants lords and masters who cannot  
govern himself and who covets what lords and masters covet. If you can do  
without a servant, Olus, you can do without a master. 2.68

One morning, Caecilianus, I happened to salute you simply by your name,  
without calling you, "My Lord." Does any one ask how much that freedom cost  
me? it has cost me a hundred farthings. 6.88

Martial's disdain for the patron-poet relationship as well as his own financial dependence on patronage remain a common theme through each successive book. The same sentiment exists between epigram 1.112 and epigram 6.88, yet the books are years apart. Martial must accept money to preserve his livelihood, a reality he feels uncomfortable showing. The financial benefaction of the patron feels like chains, he writes: "At the price of all my chattels, I have purchased my cap of liberty."

Poets like Martial and the Juvenal (writing the *Satires* some twenty-odd years after the *Epigrams*), who resented the pageantry of their duties at recitations and dinner parties, were presented by their patrons as extensions of their wealth and influence. Martial's role as some

human continuation of his patron's influence across society and the arts is documented by Martial himself in the description of his duties when the patron calls. He is called on to greet, escort, and offer entertainment at the whim of his patron, exhausting himself with the necessary duties associated with maintaining the benefactor's favor.

Before dawn I see friends who don't return my greetings and I offer congratulations to many; nobody offers any to me, Potitus. Now my signet ring seals a document at the temple of Diana the Light-bringer, now the first hour snatches me for itself, now the fifth. Now a consul or a praetor and the bands that escort him home have hold of me, often I listen all day to a poet. Nor can one say no to a barrister with impunity, nor to a rhetor or a grammarian, if they should ask. After the tenth hour I wearily seek the baths and the hundred farthings. Pollio, when will a book get done? 10.70

Juvenal mirrors Martial's disgruntled sentiments decades later in his *Satires*. Even Statius' protracted *Silvae* show evidence of similar activities necessitated by the rewards of a patron's good graces. However, Luke Roman, in comparing Statius and our epigrammatist, illustrates the implications of Martial's outward disdain for the patron-poet relationship when he writes in *Poetic Autonomy*,

Whereas Statius fashions an elegant, heightened materiality of artifice and splendour to suit his patrons' distinctive tastes, Martial delves into the material side of existence both as an acute inquiry into human degradation, and as a new polemical riposte to the Augustan conception of literature's transcendent value.<sup>11</sup>

In his open disavowal of the patron-poet relationship, Martial managed to directly and unapologetically critique the Roman literary society and the perception of the exclusivity of poetry as the ideal authority of art and literature.

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<sup>11</sup>Roman, Luke. *Poetic Autonomy in Ancient Rome*. Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 302.



Martial's criticism of the ideal Roman patron-poet relationship is continually supported by his addressing of his poetry to the *lector* or general audience. Martial and his epigrams consistently subvert the notion that poetry in all of its physical and literary forms can only be given to the educated elite of Rome or circulated within the elite social, artistic, and intellectual exchanges. This "alternate" audience becomes one of his paths to fame. In his quest for unrestricted fame, Martial chooses to publish his body of work to the public, effectively commodifying the literary book.

*The advertisement of the codex format first of all gives an impression of portability and hence mobility. The lightness and portability of the text, according to this reading, corresponds to the triviality of its content. The text does not demand the consecration of the reader to its depths of meaning, but is easily adapted to whatever the reading is doing.<sup>a</sup>*

Luke Roman

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<sup>a</sup>Roman, Luke. *Poetic Autonomy in Ancient Rome*. Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 309.

# 3

## The Book

MARTIAL'S WORKS EXISTED IN AT LEAST TWO DISTINCT FORMS: the bookroll or scroll and the codex, the latter of which is often considered a turning point in the evolution of literary materiality. In this chapter and subsequent chapters, the term "codex" will refer to books in the material codex form while "book" will continue to mean "general collections of work."

The definition of the codex must first begin with the history of the bookroll or scroll. By 1100 BCE, the Egyptians were exporting a form of paper made from the native papyrus plant to the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean, having learned to manufacture the paper product as far back as 3000 BCE. The abundance of the papyrus plant in Egypt effectively

allowed for a monopoly over the production and export of papyrus throughout antiquity.<sup>1</sup>

The production of papyrus paper was straightforward: long thin strips of papyrus were placed side by side and laid horizontally over another swath of vertically-laid papyrus strips to be pressed and dried into sheets. The flexible sheets were glued with flour paste along the vertical axis, often twenty to a roll, and rolled up for easy storing. Scribes used a pen and ink to write in parallel columns along the vertical axis. Completed rolls were finally divided up into “books” with identifying tabs.

Literature produced on bookrolls was written in the *scriptio continua* format, a style of writing without spaces or standard punctuation that required thorough training to be read comfortably.<sup>2</sup> Both writing and reading took on the same method of rolling and unrolling: the left hand rolled inwards, tucking in the column previously read while the right hand rolled outwards to get to the next column. In contrast to later literary media that often valued mass production over artistic skill, the scroll was intended and produced for the elite in both its material beauty and its difficulty of access.

In essence, the bookroll or scroll format symbolized what it meant to be educated in ancient Rome. The reading of a bookroll would often be performed by a professional *lector* to friends or as entertainment during a dinner reception. This *lector*, a slave trained for the purpose of public reading, is not to be confused with Martial’s general addressee *lector*. However, even when not used in this context, the bookroll remained a symbol of education, wealth, and the intellectual aesthete. This presentation of the bookroll becomes even more apparent with its use in iconography, contributing to the association of bookrolls/scrolls with the high culture of Rome.<sup>3</sup>

William A. Johnson calls the bookroll, “analogous in many respects to statuary in a garden, or to the luxurious plate on which dinner is served in an elite household.”<sup>4</sup> The bookroll, as a

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<sup>1</sup>Casson, Lionel. *Ancient Trade and Society*. Mich., 1984, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Johnson, William A. *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities*. Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 18-20.

<sup>3</sup>Johnson, p.26.

<sup>4</sup>Johnson, p. 22.

literary medium manipulated with artistic skill and revered as an icon of elitism, becomes increasingly associated with art and high culture. This is particularly surprising to the modern viewer who is more likely to see books and reading material as more utilitarian than decorative. The aesthetics of the bookroll and the intellectuality of the owner play into the luxury of the roll. The bookroll allowed the aristocratic owner to insert aspects of affluence and what Johnson called “aesthetic refinement” into everyday life. Just as a wealthy Roman preferred to be served from an elaborate dinner plate in front of guests, entertaining guests by reading from a bookroll demonstrated a kind of grandeur that later literary media simply did not.

While Greece saw the first authors who recited the contents of their books to audiences and patrons near the beginning of the fifth century BCE, Ancient Rome’s wealthy and literary elite held somewhat socially exclusive rights to the initial recitation and distribution of a poet’s work. When the book of poems was occasionally desired by an individual or friend, copies were made from the original roll. Eventually, formal “booksellers” emerged in addition to these informal personal copyists. Without the modern invention of “copyright” or “intellectual property,” these booksellers did not require permission or authorization from authors to copy and sell manuscripts to the public.

The codex was a decidedly less “clunky” version of the wooden tablets used by ancient Mediterranean civilizations. Wooden tablets coated in wax were used for writing most often by scribes and schoolchildren for notetaking. When more space was needed, the tablets were bound by cord on one edge and kept together as an ancient notebook of sorts. With the emergence and increasing popularity of parchment, sheets of prepared animal skin not unlike papyrus paper, a light “notebook” was developed by the Romans by substituting parchment paper for the wooden tablets coated in wax. This invention, created quite some time before the end of the first century CE, allowed for increased volume as both sides of the parchment could be used (rather than one side of the papyrus bookroll) and new ideas of accessibility and portability.<sup>5</sup> By 500 CE, this new medium or “codex” overtook the bookroll as the popular method of distributing text while the roll remained in decreased capacity as

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<sup>5</sup>Roman, Luke. “The Representation of Literary Materiality in Martial’s Epigrams.” *Journal of Roman Studies* 91 (2001): 127-128, 135.

mainly for transcribing official and legal documents.<sup>6</sup>

Martial mentions the codex at least six times in his text. The majority of these mentions occur in Book 14, the aforementioned *Apophoreta*:

The *Iliad*, and the story of Ulysses, hostile to the kingdom of Priam, lie deposited in these many folds of skin. 14.184

How small a quantity of parchment holds the great Maro. His portrait ornaments the first page. 14.186

If this parchment be your companion on a long journey, you may imagine that you are travelling with Cicero. 14.188

The voluminous Livy, of whom my bookcase would once scarcely have contained the whole, is now comprised in this small parchment volume. 14.90

This mass, which, as you see, consists of a great number of leaves, contains fifteen books of the verses of Naso. 14.92

Each mention notes the advantages of the codex over the bookroll. It's lighter and smaller ("How small a quantity of parchment holds the great Maro"), presumably compared to the bookroll.

Note 14.188 in which Martial touches upon the portability of the codex. Some may argue that the codex is no more portable than the scroll. Yet the portability may not lie necessarily in the ability to pick up and transport the physical text but in the ability to hold a text in one hand and *stop and start* as one does while traveling. The construction of the bookroll does

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<sup>6</sup>Schwartz, Amy, and Casson, Lionel. "Libraries in the Ancient World." New Haven: Yale UP, 2002. pp. 124-125.

not make this so easy. Imagine one wants to make note of a passage in a bookroll of epigrams. Unless the passage is at the very beginning of the collection or the very end, one would have to roll and unroll the bookroll to find the passage. The portability of the codex positioned it separately from the bookroll in the bookselling market. While uniquely portable, the codex still commanded a part of the market reserved for the social and literary elite: the luxury trade.

Booksellers were a part of the luxury trade in Rome, along with traders who dealt in silks, perfumes, spices and dyed fabrics. Based in the center of the city near the ancient forum, booksellers catered to select buyers: those with extensive private libraries, those seeking to add to their collection of literary wealth, or those desiring personalized copies of their favorite manuscripts. The market for and the trade in books are especially important when studying Martial's choice to not only produce his texts in the codex form but to advertise and sell these texts through bookshops.

The bookshop was integral to Martial's alternative path to fame. Martial is considered one of the first elite poets to utilize the bookseller to the extent he did, advertising his products available in various forms and naming his favorite booksellers throughout his book of epigrams. Some epigrams like 1.2, discussed at length in the next chapter, give specific directions to Martial's preferred booksellers. Perhaps this choice was to benefit the reader before the advent of Google Maps. Or maybe Martial had inadvertently begun the first "Your Ad Here" advertising campaign. In either scenario, Martial maintained a close relationship with the bookseller and his shop. To understand the impact of the bookshop, we must first establish the foundation of Rome's economy and public attitudes towards economic trade.

Economic historians have traditionally focused on the macro economy of Ancient Rome, choosing to study agricultural production, maritime trade, and the financial market over the marketplace consumption habits of the populace. Claire Holleran, in her careful analysis of the retail trade of Rome in the late Republic, cites the reason for this neglect of economic history as a result of the documented disdain for retailers.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Holleran, Claire. *Shopping in Ancient Rome: The Retail trade in the Late Republic and the Principate*. Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 5.

In his moral treatise, *De Officiis*, Cicero argues that while large scale trade can be excused, small scale trade is to be considered vulgar and corrupt as its profits are sought through “misrepresentation.”<sup>8</sup>

Now in regard to trades and other means of livelihood, which ones are to be considered becoming to a gentleman and which ones are vulgar, we have been taught, in general, as follows: Vulgar we must consider those also who buy from wholesale merchants to retail immediately; for they would get no profits without a great deal of downright lying; and verily, there is no action that is meaner than misrepresentation. Trade, if it is on a small scale, is to be considered vulgar; but if wholesale and on a large scale, importing large quantities from all parts of the world and distributing to many without misrepresentation, it is not to be greatly disparaged.<sup>9</sup>

While Cicero’s account can be considered the most notable, many authors, both Roman and Greek, viewed small trade merchants as immoral and yet important to the infrastructure of the Roman city. Arguments can be made to suggest that this sentiment followed for booksellers as well. The bookselling trade was far from wholesale. In fact, consider that, as a luxury good, books were copied and sold in limited supply. A bookseller was only one agent of the book trade and more often than not, only a secondary or tertiary channel for acquiring texts. For example, if a customer had exhausted their personal collection and that of their network, they might have sought a bookshop within the consumer market of Rome to find a copy of a text to have a copy made in turn. The sale of select, customizable copies meant that bookshops lacked the “off-the-shelf” immediacy of modern bookstores.<sup>10</sup> Coupled with the rarity of bookstores holding multiple copies of a text, the bookselling trade is considered by scholars to exist primarily on the small scale that Cicero criticizes in his treatise.

This belief in the inherent greed and dishonesty of retailers continued throughout history and well into the twentieth century, in part due to Christian-era religious concerns

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<sup>8</sup>Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1.150-151.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Starr, p. 220.

associated with Jesus's account of retailers in the Near East.<sup>11</sup> These beliefs dictated who bought books, at what price, and for what purpose. Public sentiment towards the book trade proves significant in the history of the bookselling retail market, the bookseller's customer, and finally Martial's own involvement in the book trade.

The book trade in ancient Rome is an ideal example of the specialization of trade in the late Republic and early Empire. The retail system of Rome underwent various changes in response to shifting demographics and socioeconomic advancements. The transactional economy had become increasingly monetized with an increasing population, leading to standardized coinage and simplified exchange between buyers and sellers. Advancements in infrastructure like the construction of private and state-sanctioned commercial buildings, known as "*tabernae*" or "shops", had a transformative effect on the retail and trade system of Rome.

*Tabernae*, in their development, were fundamental to retail distribution in Rome. Throughout this flourishing period in Roman history, the retailers of the Roman city went from selling their wares around the coast (likely the result of the proximity to maritime traders) and as curbside hawkers to fixed and seasonal shops in the marketplace where manufactured goods could be purchased directly from a merchant, craftsman, or retailer.<sup>12</sup>

*Tabernae* were a central component of the retail network, their popularity stemming from their flexibility; the average *taberna* could adapt to the changing topography of a growing urban city. Whether for selling medical remedies or bread, the *taberna* was adaptable for the owner or tenant's use.

Various sources point to a special characteristic of *tabernae*: clustering. Bookstores in Rome, as well as all other manners of shops, clustered in particular streets. One such street was the Vicus Sandalarius, not far from the Colosseum, frequented by Aulus Gellius and the physician Galen.<sup>13</sup> The Vicus Tuscus, as mentioned by Horace in his *Epistles*, was home to

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<sup>11</sup>Holleran, pp. 5-6.

<sup>12</sup>Holleran, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup>Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 18.4.1; cf. Galen, *De Libris Propriis*, 19.8.4.



many bookshops.<sup>14</sup> Catullus is less specific, yet alludes to an area dedicated to the city's booksellers when he wrote,

I beg you, if I may without offence,  
show me where is your dark corner.  
I have looked for you in the lesser Campus,  
in the Circus, in all the bookseller's shops,  
in the hallowed temple of great Jove.<sup>15</sup>

Even our poet Martial describes a cluster of shops along the Argiletum, a main street leading to the forum, in which a reader might find his little books.<sup>16</sup> Texts from as early as Catullus suggest the presence of several centrally located bookshops in close proximity to one another. The likely conclusion is that shops clustered by material sold. In effect, clustering was dependent on various factors, most noticeably frequency of purchase, price, and the relative socioeconomic status of the buyer.<sup>17</sup> Common items were sold throughout the city of Rome since most everyday goods, like fresh food and wine, were at a constant level demand by the public. The locations of standard yet less frequently purchased items like furniture and shoes were closer together, allowing the buyer to know where to go to buy and browse items from various merchants. Clustering made navigating the retail marketplace more intuitive for the consumer and more competitive for the retailer. In their operation, the *tabernae* of the ancient marketplace demonstrated a sophisticated system of retail trade in Rome's commercial centers.

The development and construction of *tabernae* were a result of the Roman government's emphasis on commercial infrastructure. The Republic and Rome's emperors, in dictating the construction of specialized marketplaces, were vital in the growth of what Holleran calls "elite consumption" in Ancient Rome, a particular area of the retail economy dedicated to the sale of luxury items like silks, dyes, perfumes, spices, and books.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Horace, *Epistles*, 1.20.1-2.

<sup>15</sup>Catullus, 55.4.

<sup>16</sup>Martial, *Epigrams*, 1.3.1.

<sup>17</sup>Holleran, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup>Holleran, p. 57.

Domitian, emperor and patron to Martial, was a proponent of commercial infrastructure and aided in the construction of one of the largest bazaars in ancient Rome: the Horrea Piperataria. Built near the Via Sacra, the large imperial warehouse was the center of retail for pepper (*piperataria*) and spices from Egypt and Arabia.<sup>19</sup> Ovid writes of the Via Sacra's allure in the *Amores*, recommending the main street housing the city's jewellers and precious gem dealers as the place to buy gifts as tokens of an imaginary lover's affections.

*ille viri videat tōtō vēstīgia lectō  
factaque lascivīs livida colla notīs;  
mūnera praecipuē videat quae mīserit alter:  
sī dederit nēmō, Sacra roganda Via est.*

See that he discovers the evidence of another's pleasure in your bed;  
let him count the bruises on your throat.  
But above all else, show him the gifts other admirers have sent you.  
If you haven't any, go shopping on the Via Sacra.<sup>20</sup>

Propertius's mistress Cynthia was supposedly also fond of the wares sold on the Via Sacra, as well as Horace, as evidenced in his *Satires*.<sup>21</sup> The Via Sacra, as well as the Horrea Piperataria, demonstrated the clustering phenomenon of manufacturers and retailers in Rome's marketplace. The concentration of luxury retailers on the Via Sacra and Horrea Piperataria was therefore an extension of this practice, allowing wealthy Romans and their slaves to find less commonplace goods without having to stray far from the immediate vicinity of the forum. The building of government-supported infrastructure like the Horrea Piperataria indicated an influential population of wealthy consumers, enough to have a significant effect on the topographical planning of Rome's retail market. The wealthy elite's purchasing, not unlike the modern 1%, engulfed that of the majority of the population of

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<sup>19</sup>In 191 C.E., the Fire of Commodus destroys Templum Pacis, Horrea Piperataria, and Temple of Vesta (Richardson 1992: 455.)

<sup>20</sup>Ovid, *Amores*, 1.8.97-100.

<sup>21</sup>Horace. *Sat.* 1.9.1; Propertius, *Elegiae* 2.24.14.

Rome. The “conspicuous consumption” of luxury goods fueled a significant part of Rome’s retail trade.<sup>22</sup> The Via Sacra and Horrea Piperataria, the centralized import markets - buildings so influential that they changed the city’s topographical landscape - served as physical manifestations of Rome’s sophisticated retail and transactional economy.

Wealthy consumers, Rome’s social and economic elite, were the primary purchasers of luxury goods. As part of the elite’s private acquisition of libraries and literary collections, books were part of the world of luxury and used as indicators of wealth and educational status.<sup>23</sup> As a result, booksellers were often located in the center of the city and the Via Sacra or similar bazaars. In the early Republic, the circulation of books was confined to small literary circles. A bookseller manufactured and sold books to specific clientele with particular tastes. Later on in the Republic and notably during Domitianic rule, bookshops became gathering spaces for the artistically-inclined elite.<sup>24</sup> Domitian’s sponsoring of infrastructure for social welfare (including public libraries) led to these gathering spaces being established within other locales.<sup>25</sup> Martial directs his readers to various bookshops, all with different proprietors, Secundus, Atrectus, and Tryphon being the three addressed in the *Epigrams*. Holleran suggests that Martial’s references to these specific booksellers and their shops were an indication of their popularity in the city, rather than some ancient form of broadcast advertising. In referring to each shop owner by name and speciality, Martial established himself as a notable author, one so popular that his work was available in customizable editions by Rome’s booksellers.<sup>26</sup> To any reader, Martial’s knowledge of the most favored bookshops of Rome and his inclusion on their shelves verified his status within the literary elite.

The market of booksellers was small, restricted by the interconnected literary and social elite. Private acquisition elicited private circulation, meaning books given as gifts or copied from a borrowed edition were just as significant a portion of circulation as books sold by

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<sup>22</sup>Holleran, p. 255.

<sup>23</sup>Holleran, p. 246.

<sup>24</sup>Holleran, p. 246-7.

<sup>25</sup>A more detailed discussion of libraries, both public and private, comes in the next chapters.

<sup>26</sup>Holleran, p. 247.

booksellers, if not greater.<sup>27</sup> Hence, booksellers remained specialized operations, producing copies of texts at the behest of individual buyers. The lack of mass publication production tells us that ancient Rome's retail trade lacked a centralized copy and circulation system.<sup>28</sup> And so libraries - both private and public - played a significant role in making the intellectual spirit of classical civilization accessible.

Just as for the bookshops of Rome, the fundamentals of the ancient Roman library, including its construction, benefactors, and visitors, are worthy of discussion. The ancient library and its patrons present key information on Rome's reading culture and the origins of book collecting.

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<sup>27</sup>Holleran, p. 247.

<sup>28</sup>Starr, p. 220.

# 4

## The Private Library

T. KEITH DIX, IN HIS ESSAY “Beware of promising your library to anyone’: Assembling a private library at Rome,” divides private acquisitions into three groups: purchases, inheritance, and “miscellaneous acquisitions,” a term he uses to describe both dedicatory works and the borrowing/lending of books.<sup>1</sup> Organizing the private library into a study of acquisition provides a more detailed illustration of the bookseller’s shop and its clientele, as well as the market for first and second-hand texts.

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<sup>1</sup>Dix, T. Keith. “Beware of promising your library to anyone’: Assembling a private library at Rome.” *Ancient Libraries*. Ed. Jason König, Katerina Oikonomopoulou, Greg Woolf: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

#### 4.1 PURCHASING

Purchasing texts for the average aristocratic private library, known as a *bibliotheca*, became customary for wealthy Romans. The earliest references to private acquisitions for a *bibliotheca* come from Cicero in 67-66 BCE in his letters to Titus Pomponius Atticus. The title of Dix's essay comes from a specific letter in the *Epistulae* in which Cicero writes to Atticus, "Beware of promising your library to anyone, no matter how ardent a wooer you may find. I am putting all my little gleanings aside to pay for this stand-by for my old age."<sup>2</sup> In the first and second centuries CE at Rome, *bibliothecae* became integral parts of the emperor's residence. Acquiring books for the residential library in order to cultivate an air of culture was popular in the Roman world and galvanized by the imperial households.

Martial relates in Book 7 of his *Epigrams* that extensive libraries in the villas of the Roman elite communicated affluence rather than the more noble values of education, research, and the preservation of high culture. In his dedication to the library of Julius Martialis, he writes,

Library of a charming country retreat, whence the reader can see the  
neighbouring town, if, amid more serious poems, there be any room for the  
sportive Thalia, you may place even upon the lowest shelf these seven books  
which I send you corrected by the pen of their author. This correction gives  
them their value. And do you, O library of Julius Martialis, to which I dedicate  
this little present, you that will be celebrated and renowned over the whole  
globe, guard this earnest of my affection! 7.17

Martial's words give even more evidence for the cultural significance of the private Roman library when given the context of Cicero's periodic accounts of his acquisitions for his own personal book collection. Cicero asks Atticus on three separate occasions to "promise" the personal collection to him. *Depsondeas*, in its strongest translation, meaning "you may promise, betroth, pledge or devote," signals to the reader that Cicero seeks possession of

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<sup>2</sup>Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, 1.10.4, c. May 67 BCE.

Atticus' library in the form of a good-natured gift, or transaction in this case. Cicero's plan to purchase an entire collection of books, already assembled by the original owner, rather than constructing his own personal library, is not uncommon for the elite book-collector. Evidence in the *Epistulae* suggests that Cicero acquired a substantial collection at auction, specifically the library of Faustus, writing "I am here devouring the library of Faustus."<sup>3</sup>

Even with the admitted lure of purchasing entire collections of previously-owned books presumably with some attractive provenance, booksellers remained an additional "stocking" resource for those seeking to install private libraries in their homes. When Cicero's brother, Quintus Tullius Cicero, was abroad in Gaul and wanted Cicero to acquire a collection for his new town house, Cicero replied:

As for filling the gaps in your Greek collection, trading in books, and purchasing Latin ones, I'm keen on getting it done, the more so as it will serve my interest too. But I don't even have anyone to handle that for me. There are not things for sale (nothing satisfactory, anyway), and they can't be made to order except by a painstaking professional. Still, I will put Chrysippus on it, and have a talk with Tyrannio.<sup>4</sup>

Cicero, in his letters to his brother, "presupposes," in the words of Dix, the existence of the book selling market and the bookshop throughout his accounts of his private libraries while considering them as a last resort in his quest for a library. In fact, the passage shows his reluctance to deal with the first-hand bookseller, arguing that Quintus' ideal library would require the work of a copyist, a bookseller, and a third-party consultant (namely Tyrannio, an accomplished *grammaticus* or grammarian). Cicero argues that the book market of the mid-first century is a fledgling one at best ("there are not things for sale (nothing satisfactory, anyway)...") and he himself would not set foot in a bookshop, insinuating that a bookshop is not a place someone of his stature would dare to go. Chrysippus, Cicero's loyal (yet manumitted) and educated slave, would handle Cicero's requests at the bookshops of the

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<sup>3</sup>Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, 4.10.1, April 22, 55 BCE.

<sup>4</sup>Cicero, *To Q. Tullius Cicero*, 3.4.5.

Roman bazaar's himself.<sup>5</sup>

Holleran alludes to the circulation system of second-hand books, running seemingly parallel to the aforementioned circulation of newly-copied texts. Second-hand texts were prized for their age and previous ownership. Horace provides one perspective on second-hand books in his *Epistles*, addressing the letter to his book itself with usual self-deprecating humor.

You seem, my book, to be looking wistfully  
toward Vertumnus and Janus, in order, forsooth,  
that you may go on sale, neatly polished with the  
pumice of the Sosii. You hate the keys and seals,  
so dear to the modest; you grieve at being shown  
to few, and praise a life in public, though I did not  
rear you thus. Off with you, down to where you  
itch to go. When you are once let out, there will  
be no coming back. "What, alas have I done?  
What did I want?" you will say, when someone  
hurts you, and you find yourself packed into a  
corner, whenever your sated lover grows languid.  
But unless hatred of your error makes the  
prophet lose his cunning, you will be loved in Rome  
till your youth leave you; when you've been well  
thumbed by vulgar hands and begin to grow soiled,  
you will either in silence be food for vandal moths,  
or will run away to Utica, or be sent, bound, to  
Ilerda. Your monitor, from whom you turned away  
your ear, will then have his laugh, the man who  
in anger pushed his stubborn ass over the cliff: for

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<sup>5</sup>White, Peter. "Bookshops in the Literary Culture of Rome." *Ancient Literacies*. Ed. William A. Johnson, Holt N. Parker: Oxford University Press, 2009.



who would care to save an ass against his will? This fate, too, awaits you, that stammering age will come upon you as you teach boys their A B C in the city's outskirts.<sup>6</sup>

Horace tells of an alternate fate for the second-hand book, one decidedly less glamorous than a private collection or library. Horace's book, showing the effects of use and age, will instead be used in provincial grammar lessons.

Second-hand texts and other previously owned goods were sold on the outer edges of the *Saepta Iulia*, an expansive building constructed by Agrippa in 26 BCE and favored in Domitianic Rome for its luxury bazaar.<sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> Adjacent to the Pantheon, the *Saepta Iulia* was originally intended as a voting place for the *Comitia Centuriata* but became a recreational venue for gladiatorial games and similar events. Domitian commissioned restorations after extensive fire damage destroyed parts of the building. Agrippa's original stone tablets and paintings, coupled with Domitian's magnificent restorations and bazaar, attracted hordes of the public to the popular meeting place.<sup>9</sup> Martial illustrates a scene of the marketplace from the eyes of Mamurra, who wanders through the bazaar viewing slaves on display, ivory ornaments, and tortoise-shell adorned couches.

Mamurra, after having walked long and anxiously in the squares, where golden Rome ostentatiously displays her riches, viewed the tender young slaves, and devoured them with his eyes; not those exposed in the open shops, but those which are kept for the select in private apartments, and are not seen by the people, or such as I am. Satiated with this inspection, he uncovers the tables square and round; and asks to see some rich ivory ornaments which were displayed on the upper shelves. Then, having four times measured a dinner-couch for six, wrought with tortoise-shell, he sorrowfully regretted that

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<sup>6</sup>Horace, *Epistles*, 1.20.

<sup>7</sup>Martial, *Epigrams*, 2.14.5.

<sup>8</sup>Holleran, p. 249.

<sup>9</sup>Holleran, p. 249.

it was not large enough for his citron table. He consulted his nose whether the bronzes had the true Corinthian aroma, and criticised the statues of Polyclitus! Next, complaining that some crystal vases had been spoiled by an admixture of glass, he marked and set aside ten myrrhine cups. He weighed ancient bowls, and inquired for goblets that had been ennobled by the hand of Mentor. He counted emeralds set in chased gold, and examined the largest pearl ear-pendants. He sought on every counter for real sardonyxes, and cheapened some large jaspers. At last, when forced by fatigue to retire at the eleventh hour, he bought two cups for one small coin, and carried them home himself. 9.59

Martial mocks Mamurra who feigns status and wealth as he peruses the wares on display. Mamurra ultimately fails at his ruse, buying two cups of wine (or wine-cups) and bringing them home himself without the help of slaves. Holleran suggests that wealthy patrons of the Saepta Iulia or similar bazaars would have their slaves carry their purchases home or had them delivered by the seller, emphasizing the bazaar as one primarily frequented by the elite.<sup>10</sup> Martial addresses another “pretender” of the bazaar. This time, the unnamed man is initially perceived to be wealthy with his escort of companions and slaves. Yet he is forced to pawn a ring for eight sesterces to buy his dinner.

He, whom you see walking slowly along with careless step, who takes his way, in violet-coloured robes, through the middle of the square; whom my friend Publius does not surpass in dress, nor even Cordus himself, the Alpha of Cloaks; he, I say, who is followed by a band of clients and slaves, and a litter with new curtains and girths, has but just now pawned his ring at Claudius' counter for barely eight sesterces, to get himself a dinner. 2.57

While we cannot be sure that the bazaars mentioned here are indeed the Saepta Iulia, the sentiment would surely be the same. Martial's accounts of the bazaar suggest that shoppers could not only buy second-hand goods but were able to pawn luxury items in exchange for

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<sup>10</sup>Holleran, p. 250.

money. These bazaar's and likely the Saepta Iulia's inventories thus included pawned and sold items as well as goods purchased at estate sales or auctions, including partial and whole libraries.<sup>11</sup>

Antiquities were popular throughout Rome's retail and economic history and owning cultural pieces with provenance signified both taste and wealth. Second-hand and antique goods, especially of books, served a vital purpose of material redistribution throughout the community of elite consumers. These collections were highly regarded as pieces of history along with their literary and artistic merit. As a result of the specific clientele and these specialized items, prices in the second-hand good market were by no means fixed. Marketplace auctions aided in matching item to transactional value. The auction, public and transparent by nature, mitigated public mistrust of the seedy retail trade. Sellers could ensure that a favorable but fair price was met for their goods while buyers could publicly display their wealth and taste while avoiding distrustful retailers.<sup>12</sup> The auction served as a perfect balance between fair trade and public extravagance.

The convenience of the auction, and its rewards (a private book collection with notable provenance, for example) were not lost on Cicero. The author, in so many words to Atticus and his brother Quintus, reveals the reluctance of the elite to purchase first-hand books for their private collections in the first century BCE. Cicero, vastly wealthy and popular, admits his preference for the gifted or inherited collection, the next mode of acquisition to be discussed.

#### 4.2 GIFTING AND INHERITING

Large collections of books were, more often than not, either bought at auction or inherited. Cicero mentions an extensive collection which he was to inherit in 60 BCE from Lucius Papirius Paetus' relative residing in Greece, Servius Claudius. Cicero, impatient for the arrival

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<sup>11</sup>Holleran, p. 250.

<sup>12</sup>Holleran, p. 254-255.

of Paetus' library, seemingly had no specific knowledge of the library's contents, writing,

Lucius Papirius Paetus, an honest man and our friend, has bestowed on me those books which Servius Claudius left. Since your friend Cincius said that it is permitted to me to take them by the Cincian Law, I said that I would gladly accept them if he brought them. Now if you love me, if you know that you are loved by me, work through your friends, clients, guests, your freedmen of course and your slaves, that not even a sheet be lost. For both those Greek books which I suspect, and the Latin books which I know he left, I really need. But more and more every day, whatever time is given to me from legal work, I relax in those studies. You will do me a great favor, a great favor, I say, if you are as diligent about this as you are accustomed to be about those matters which you think I really want.<sup>13</sup>

Paetus, as I wrote to you before, has bestowed on me all the books which his kinsman left. The gift of his is placed on your diligence. If you love me, take care that they are preserved and are brought to me. Nothing can be more welcome to me than this. And please diligently preserve both the Greek and especially the Latin ones. I will believe that this little present is from you.<sup>14</sup>

Cicero says nothing about his intentions for Claudius' collection containing both Greek and Latin works, apart from their placement in his "study." Dix notes that a previous Greek acquisition from Atticus came with the intention of furnishing Cicero's villa at Tusculum. Private libraries acted as symbols of intellectual and social status, the more expansive the *bibliotheca*, the more illustrious the provenance, and the more notable the works the greater the presumed social standing of the owner. Vitruvius, author of *De Architectura*, detailed (among other things) the need for the Augustan nobility to install beautiful libraries in which to conduct professional and personal business.<sup>15</sup> He writes,

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<sup>13</sup>Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 1.20.7.

<sup>14</sup>Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, 2.1.12.

<sup>15</sup>Vitruvius, *De Architecture*, 6.5.2.

For advocates, and men of literature, houses ought to be still handsomer and more spacious, to allow the reception of persons on consultations. But for nobles, who in bearing honours, and discharging the duties of the magistracy, must have much intercourse with the citizens, princely vestibules must be provided, lofty *atria*, and spacious *peristylia*, groves, and extensive walks, finished in a magnificent style. In addition to these, libraries, *pinacothecæ*, and *basilicæ*, of similar form to those which are made for public use, are to be provided; for in the houses of the noble, the affairs of the public, and the decision and judgment of private causes are often determined.<sup>16</sup>

With the added stimulus of imperial libraries, literary patronage and book collection grew during Martial's time in the first and second centuries CE. Satirists like Lucian of Samosata insinuated in their text that the intentions behind the construction of some noble *bibliothecae* were, in so few words, "ignoble."<sup>17</sup> He ridiculed the *Ignorant Book-Collector* for his "bibliomania," the buying and collecting of books *en masse*, for the precise purpose of attracting the attention of the emperor and intellectual nobility.<sup>18</sup> Lucian heaps scorn on the Syrian book-collector in his diatribe, writing,

But I am talking nonsense. The cause of your bibliomania is clear enough; I must have been dozing, or I should have seen it long ago. This is your idea of strategy: you know the Emperor's scholarly tastes, and his respect for culture, and you think it will be worth something to you if he hears of your literary pursuits. Once let your name be mentioned to him as a great buyer and collector of books, and you reckon that your fortune is made. Vile creature! and is the Emperor drugged with mandragora that he should hear of this and never know the rest, your daylight iniquities, your tipplings, your monstrous nightly debauches? Know you not that an Emperor has many eyes and many ears? Yet your deeds are such as cannot be concealed from the blind or the deaf. I may

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<sup>16</sup>M. Vitruvius Pollo, *De Architectura*, 6.5.2.

<sup>17</sup>Lucian, *Adversus Indoctum et Libros Multos Ementem*, 22-24.

<sup>18</sup>Lucian of Samosata, *Adversus Indoctum* or *The Ignorant Book-Collector*, in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, trans. by Fowler, H W and F G. Oxford, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905. Vol. 3, pp. 275-276.

tell you at once, as you seem not to know it, that a man's hopes of the Imperial favour depend not on his book-bills, but on his character and daily life. Are you counting upon Atticus and Callinus, the copyists, to put in a good word for you? Then you are deceived: those relentless gentlemen propose, with the Gods' good leave, to grind you down and reduce you to utter destitution. Come to your senses while there is yet time: sell your library to some scholar, and whilst you are about it sell your new house too, and wipe off part of your debt to the slave-dealers.<sup>19</sup>

Lucian and Vitruvius, in their contrasting views of the mass collection of books and intentions of the Roman book-collector, give evidence for the popularity among the intellectual elite of actively seeking out collections to be inherited and bought for the sole purpose of status.

#### 4.3 TEXTS OF DEDICATION

The dedicatory text had two different acts, one of *publicare* or "making public" and one of presentation in which a patron or friend is addressed with the intention of the poem or book being dedicated to them. The publishing of a text occurred without the invention of the printing-press. The copying of a manuscript involved an original text, or a copy, and a skilled copyist. Without copyright law, the author lost all control of the text as soon as it left his own hands. As a result, the decision to publish a work was essentially the author's act of giving or releasing the text from their own possession.<sup>20</sup>

Martial occasionally entrusted his works to a bookseller, who would employ a copyist to make copies for his shop. In his first book to be published, the *Xenia*, written during the Saturnalia of 84 CE and published soon after, Martial refers the reader to the bookseller

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<sup>19</sup>Lucian of Samosata, *Adversus Indoctum*, 22-24.

<sup>20</sup>Nauta, Ruurd R. *Poetry For Patrons: Literary Communication in the Age of Domitian*. Vol. 206. Brill, 2002, p. 121.

Tryphon (13.3) and does so again almost four years later in the fourth book of the *corpus* of his epigrams (4.72).<sup>21</sup>

The whole multitude of mottos contained in this thin little book will cost you, if you purchase it, four small coins. If four is too much, perhaps you may get it for two, and the bookseller, Trypho, will even then make a profit. These distichs you may send to your entertainers instead of a present, if money is as scarce with you as it is with me. 13.3, 84 CE

You beg me, Quintus, to present you my works. I have not a copy, but the bookseller Trypho has. “Am I going to give money for trifles,” you say, “and buy your verses while in my sober senses? I shall not do anything so ridiculous.” Nor shall I. 4.72, c. 88 CE

For a collection of works from his youth, a collection he calls his “trifles,” Martial instructs the reader to seek out Quintus Pollius Valerianus, presumably another bookseller carrying Martial in his inventory.<sup>22</sup>

If, reader, you wish to employ some good hours badly, and are an enemy to your own leisure, you will obtain whatever sportive verses I produced in my youth and boyhood, and all my trifles, which even I myself have forgotten, from Quintus Pollius Valerianus, who has resolved not to let my light effusions perish. 1.113

In the first book of the body of his volumes of epigrams, he identifies the location of Secundus, a bookseller from which you could buy his codices. This epigram is incredibly important. Not only does Martial advertise Secundus the bookseller, he notes that Secundus sells the codex format of his written work (“buy a copy of which the parchment leaves are

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<sup>21</sup>Martial, *Epigrams*, 13.3, 4.72.

<sup>22</sup>Martial, *Epigrams*, 1.113.

compressed into a small compass,") *and* gives evidence for the centrality of the Roman bookshop ("behind the Temple of Peace and the Forum of Pallas").<sup>23</sup>

You who are anxious that my books should be with you everywhere, and desire to have them as companions on a long journey, buy a copy of which the parchment leaves are compressed into a small compass. Bestow book-cases upon large volumes; one hand will hold me. But that you may not be ignorant where I am to be bought, and wander in uncertainty over the whole town, you shall, under my guidance, be sure of obtaining me. Seek Secundus, the freedman of the learned Lucensis, behind the Temple of Peace and the Forum of Pallas. 1.2, 86 CE

In the same book, mirrored in the second to last position, Martial directs Lupercus to another bookseller, Atrectus in the Argiletum.<sup>24</sup>

Whenever you meet me, Lupercus, you constantly say, "Shall I send my servant, for you to give him your little book of Epigrams, which I will read and return to you directly?" There is no reason, Lupercus, to trouble your servant. It is a long journey, if he wishes to come to the Pirus; and I live up three pairs of stairs, and those high ones. What you want you may procure nearer at hand. You frequently go down to the Argiletum: opposite Caesar's forum is a shop, with pillars on each side covered over with titles of books, so that you may quickly run over the names of all the poets. Procure me there; you will no sooner ask Atrectus,—such is the name of the owner of the shop,—than he will give you, from the first or second shelf a Martial, well smoothed with pumice-stone, and adorned with purple, for five denarii "You are not worth so much," do you say? You are right, Lupercus. 1.117, c. 86 CE

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<sup>23</sup>Martial, *Epigrams*, 1.2.

<sup>24</sup>Martial, *Epigrams*, 1.117.



The mirroring of these texts in Book I opens Martial's text up to questioning. What is the plausibility of his first book being sold in at least two bookshops in 86 CE, so near to the beginning of his fame? Many historians, including Craig Williams and Mario Citroni, hypothesize that in 93 CE Martial published a second edition of books 1-12 of his *corpus*, the current body of the *Epigrams* to that point, excluding the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*.<sup>25</sup> This second edition may or may not have coincided with the publication of the second book, rather unusually, in the parchment codex form.<sup>26</sup> The republishing of a book would not be unusual for Martial. Like Ovid and his *Amores*, Martial is no stranger to revisions. In 98 CE, Martial published a revised edition of book 10, explaining his decision in the (now) second epigram.

The labour, which I bestowed upon this tenth book, being too hurried, made it necessary that the work, which had slipped from my hands, should be revised. You will read here some pieces which you have had before, but they are now repolished by the file; the new part will be the larger; but be favourable, reader, to both; for you are my true support; since, when Rome gave you to me, she said, "I have nothing greater to give you. By his means you will escape the sluggish waves of ungrateful Lethe, and will survive in the better part of yourself. The marble tomb of Messale is split by the wild fig, and the audacious muleteer laughs at the mutilated horses of the statue of Crispus. But as for writings, they are indestructible either by thieves or the ravages of time; such monuments alone are proof against death." 10.2, 98 CE

Craig Williams points to the first epigram of book 1, in which Martial writes, "The man whom you are reading is the very man that you want, Martial, known over the whole world for his humorous books of epigrams..." in a tone of "self-advertising hyperbole," arguing that the publishing of the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* in 84-85 CE was not enough to warrant worldwide fame in 86 CE, the assumed date of the publication of book 1.<sup>27</sup> The following

<sup>25</sup>Martial, and Mario Citroni. *M. Valerii Martialis Epigrammaton Liber Primus*. La nuova Italia, 1975.

<sup>26</sup>Williams, Craig, ed. *A Martial Reader: Selections from the Epigrams*. Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2011, pp. xiv.

<sup>27</sup>Williams, pp. 40-41.

discussion assumes, for the sake of argument, that Williams and Citroni's hypotheses hold truth and the mention of both Secundus and Atrectus in book 1 may in fact be due to the republishing of books 1-2.

The epigrams of Martial's *Xenia*, *Apophoreta*, and *corpus* suggest that our poet relinquished his works or at least parts of them to at least four booksellers. Without the promise of profit from sales, Martial's choice to publicize his booksellers and their whereabouts is opportunistic, a clever shot at ancient advertising. Eager for worldwide fame, Martial understood that his patrons were not the only means of distribution in the ancient world. The supplementary path to fame required Martial to relinquish his text to these outside parties. But it was not only to booksellers to whom a book was given. Martial, like Horace with his patron Maeceanas and Cicero with Atticus, was no stranger to the "presentation poem."

Ruurd R. Nauta differentiates between presentation poetry for the emperor and presentation poetry for non-imperial persons. Peter White's analysis of Martial's dedications disagrees, but, to be comprehensive, the following analysis will discuss both.

In the years before Martial began publishing on a regular basis starting in 84 CE, it was likely that he offered single poems to Domitian before they were published, just as he did to non-imperial persons. One such example occurs in Book 4 in the first epigram.

O auspicious birth-day of Caesar, more sacred than that on which the  
conscious Ida witnessed the birth of Diotaeon Jupiter, come, I pray, and prolong  
your duration beyond the age of Pylian Nestor, and shine ever with your  
present aspect or with increased brilliancy. 4.1

The Emperor Domitian was born on the 24th of October in 51 CE Nauta notes that book 4 of the *Epigrams* was published on the Saturnalia of December c. 88 CE, two months after the emperor's birthday. Presumably, Martial wrote the celebratory piece and presented it as a gift to Domitian on his birthday and published the book months later.<sup>28</sup> However, in the context

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<sup>28</sup>Nauta, p. 365-367.

of private libraries, the presentation of unpublished but whole collections to the emperor is more relevant. Martial speaks of collections in a poem from book 2, addressing Caesar (Domitian),

You who are the certain safety of the empire, the glory of the universe, from whose preservation we derive our belief in the existence of the gods; if my verses, so often read by you in my hastily composed books, have succeeded in fixing your attention. 2.91.1-4

*Totiens*, meaning “so often,” the plural *libelli* (“little books”), and the descriptive *festinatis* (“hurried”) give the notion that Martial presented either unpublished collections or collections written for specific occasions to Domitian. Whether he continued this practice after the publishing of his *corpus* is doubtful, but Nauta argues that occasion-specific collections were not presented to non-imperial persons as they were for Domitian.<sup>29</sup> Nauta’s argument agrees with White’s 1974 analysis, with White citing that both isolated epigrams and personalized collections for non-imperial addressees were more often than not presentation poems followed by satiric or playful epigrams meant for entertainment.<sup>30</sup> The informality of these collections meant that the collections or pieces were never required to be complete; “writers sometimes chose excerpts from a continuous work, or selections from a corpus of poems,” he writes.<sup>31</sup> White theorizes that these presentation poems were included out of order in the final published books of Martial’s *corpus* but can still be identified as presentation poems even out of their original places. The general school of thought around presentation poems says that they stand at the beginning of a book to indicate to the recipient that the book is being offered to them. Martial’s *Epigrams* follow more of a “near-beginning” position on presentation poems. In Book 4, Martial dedicates the tenth epigram to Faustinus, yet Horatianus, Bassa, Fabianus, Malisianus, Hyllus, Euphemus, and Fabulla are all addressed in poems before Faustinus’ dedication.<sup>32</sup> Nauta points to the poem’s wording as Martial writes,

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<sup>29</sup>Nauta, p. 108.

<sup>30</sup>White 1974, p.44-48.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>32</sup>Martial, *Epigrams*, 4.1-10.

While my book is yet new and unpolished, while the page scarcely dry fears to be touched, go, boy, and bear the little present to a dear friend, who deserves beyond all others to have the first sight of my trifles. Run, but not without being duly equipped; let a Carthaginian sponge accompany the book; for it is a suitable addition to my present. Many erasures, Faustinus, would not remove all its faults; one sponging would. 4.10

The earlier addressees cannot be the dedicatee of book 4 because Martial wishes that Faustinus be the first to see his “trifles” (*nugae*) or *librum*, the entirety of his book. “First sight” implies that others will have the book soon after Faustinus, suggesting other editions or versions will follow. Faustinus is therefore the dedicatee of Book 4 or some collection of poems in the *librum* even though Martial’s address to him comes ten poems into the book, an unusual place for a presentation poem at first glance. As Peter White writes, “Therefore Martial did not need to amass enough epigrams for a whole book, but could periodically take a selection from his work, presumably with a care for the taste of each particular patron.”<sup>33</sup> Over forty presentation poems exist in Martial’s *corpus*, excluding those to Domitian and other imperial addressees.

For this reason, Martial’s presentation poems and dedicatory texts are complex. Martial addresses poems in one book to different people and, in multiple instances, addresses a book itself to different addressees. Book 2 is dedicated to Decianus in a prefatory letter, yet the letter is immediately followed by an epigram to the book itself, as well as a laudatory poem to the emperor Domitian. The dedication of a *book* is almost always performed by Martial with prefatory letters (as in book 2) or epigrams that in some way dedicate the collection to an individual while the dedication of a *poem* can be done with a simple address, to, for example, Horatianus, Bassa, Fabianus, Malisianus, Hyllus, to Euphemus, or Fabulla. Statius, Pliny, and Horace all employed the same technique. T. Keith Dix, in König’s anthology, gives evidence for “complimentary copies,” works dedicated to Cicero from prominent authors and received by Cicero.<sup>34</sup> The “complimentary copy” and “presentation poem/book” became essential

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<sup>33</sup>White 1974: p.44.

<sup>34</sup>König, p. 219-220.

parts of the private library, a subtle reminder of the shared intellectuality of ancient Rome's elite.

Though motivated by the intellectual nobility of Rome, the private library was not without fault. As extensions of personal wealth and status, the *bibliotheca* was not for use by the general literate public. Yet the modes of acquisition and the construction of the private library established a foundation on which the public library could be built. So in an act of cultural benefaction for the advancement of the city, the emperors of ancient Rome developed the public library.

# 5

## The Public Library

PLINY THE ELDER comments,

But it was the Dictator Caesar that first brought the public exhibition of pictures into such high estimation, by consecrating an Ajax and a Medea before the Temple of Venus Genetrix. After him there was M. Agrippa, a man who was naturally more attached to rustic simplicity than to refinement. Still, however, we have a magnificent oration of his, and one well worthy of the greatest of our citizens, on the advantage of exhibiting in public all pictures and statues; a practice which would have been far preferable to sending them into banishment

at our country-houses.<sup>1</sup>

A wealth of cultural property had been building within Greco-Roman society for centuries. High culture and the appreciation of high art pushed the social elite to publicly exhibit these exemplars of the Empire's wealth and cultural supremacy. Pliny the Elder detailed in his *Historia Naturalis* the growing imperial sentiment away from the privatization of art and literature. Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, Roman official and architect, spoke on the value behind displaying "pictures and statues" to the public, contributing to the perception of artistic prestige.<sup>2</sup> Roman literary culture responded in kind with the advent of public libraries. The new libraries of Augustan Rome asserted their role as public champions of the Roman literary culture. Imperial officials, seeing the stockpile of cultural property building among the literary and artistic elite, decided that a public display of what had previously been sequestered in country villas and private collections was to be the next manifestation of Roman high culture.

Public libraries, beginning with the *Atrium Libertatis* ("Hall of Freedom") constructed by Asinius Pollio between 39 and 28 B.C., were very much the grand private library of the Republic made public.<sup>3</sup> Their development from private collections implied that they were, for all intents and purposes, the personal libraries of the elite and imperial officers and that the visitor was, more often than not, the Roman aristocrat and the associated scholar.<sup>4</sup> The planning, architecture, form, and audience of the public library made it what Nicholas Purcell calls "one of the most important buildings of Republican Rome."<sup>5</sup> He argues that the "Hall of Freedom" was in fact the building scholars identify as the *tabularium* or "Record Office." The building, in particular, acted as the Roman censor's base, regulating citizenship for non-Romans, manumitted slaves, and freedmen. The *Atrium Libertatis*, a building of "prominence, security, and grandeur in the heart of the city," as Purcell notes, also functioned as a venue for the Senate's meetings and the location of public contracts and the texts of laws,

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<sup>1</sup>Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, 35.9.26.

<sup>2</sup>Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, 35.9.1-26.

<sup>3</sup>Pliny, *HN* 7.115: *bibliotheca, quae prima in orbe ab Asinio Pollione ex manubiis publicata Romae est.*

<sup>4</sup>Houston, George W. *Inside Roman Libraries: Book Collections and Their Management in Antiquity*. UNC Press Books, 2014, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup>Purcell, Nicholas. "Atrium Libertatis." *Papers of the British School at Rome*, vol. 61, 1993, pp. 125-155.

insinuating that the expansive building was indeed tied into the political affairs of Rome.<sup>6</sup> But the *Atrium Libertatis* is perhaps best known for another collection of texts.

Asinius Pollio's reconstruction of the *Atrium Libertatis*, funded by the victor's *manubiae* or "spoils" of his Illyrian triumph of 40 or 39 B.C.E, featured the first ever *bibliotheca* dedicated as a public monument.<sup>7</sup> Greek portraits and other works of fine art accompanied the Greek and Latin collections in the library, contributing to the *Atrium's* broad theme of high culture. Augustus followed suit in 28 B.C. and dedicated his temple of Apollo on the Palatine hill, which included Greek and Latin libraries. The "grandeur" of the *Atrium Libertatis* and Augustus' Palatine *bibliotheca* in the context of what was initially developed and used for the purposes of government affairs created a functional public setting like none other. Considering the relatively small percentage of the population that was literate, the library would presumably cater to a small and familiar clientele. Yet the combination of the magnificence of the *bibliotheca* (and associated artwork) and the *Atrium's* stately functions established public libraries as cultural centers for the people of Rome and the authors of its past and present.

The architecture of the public library contributed to its intentions as a public cultural center. Literary references tell us that the Roman library featured lofty ceilings and expansive, open floor space. For example, Tiberius commissioned a fifty-foot-high bronze statue of Apollo to be installed in his *bibliotheca* in the Temple of the Deified Augustus.<sup>8</sup> The temple libraries usually employed the same general planning structure. The *bibliotheca*, often adjacent to the main structure of the temple or attached by colonnades, had three sections for Greek, Latin, and archival or legal texts. Separate rooms were built for both storage and reading while public spaces (like the colonnades) or meeting rooms could be used for readings of an author's work.<sup>9</sup> Bookrolls were stored in pigeonholes built into wall-mounted cases.<sup>10</sup> Augustus' Palatine library and those of Trajan's forum and of Celsus at Ephesus

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<sup>6</sup>Purcell, p. 144.

<sup>7</sup>Purcell, p. 145.

<sup>8</sup>Harris, Michael H. *History of libraries of the western world*. Scarecrow Press, 1999., p. 62.

<sup>9</sup>Harris 1999: p. 62

<sup>10</sup>As codices began to replace bookrolls, standard shelves replaced the defunct pigeonholes.



featured functional wide doorways meant to entice both light and passers-by to enter.<sup>11</sup> These entrances, making visible the cupboards/shelves of books, the statuary and prized Greek portraits, and skilled architectural fittings, invited the *populus Romanus* into the imperial space. And so, visiting the public library was not only restricted to the learned senatorial elite and intellectual but counted among the audience the illiterate who might take advantage of the library in a unconventional manner.

Here is where we can describe Martial as innovative and transformative in the realm of traditional Roman poets partaking in traditional social relationships. Martial took advantage of the transformation of the traditional reading culture of Ancient Rome to further his fame. With the construction of public libraries and his advent/usage of the codex, he intended his form to be read by an audience that wasn't traditionally catered to, "traditional" as in the sense of a neglected readership. But it's important to note that Martial used the traditional bookrolls/scrolls but he *also* used the codex form when choosing to disseminate his work. Martial saw an alternate market, one that had the potential to set him on his way to unrestricted fame in a way that the patron of the socioeconomic elite seemingly had no interest in facilitating.

Pliny's letters provides overwhelming evidence for an opinion that he and Martial shared: that literature is, and was meant to be, disseminated widely in books.

The work is absolutely finished, and if you polish it any more you will only impair it without making it shine the more brightly. Do let me see your name on the title page; do let me hear that the volumes of my friend Tranquillus are being copied, read, and sold.<sup>12</sup>

The book, he says, is meant to be copied and read, implying a greater and more inclusive readership than one desired by Catullus. And even more significant than this, the book is meant to be *sold*. Pliny argues in his *Epistulae* what Martial put into fruition, the commodification of literature.

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<sup>11</sup>Bowie, Ewen. In *Libraries for the Caesars*. König et al, p. 262-263.

<sup>12</sup>Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, 5.10.

*Five books had been enough; six or seven are surely too many: why, Muse, do you delight still to sport on? Be modest and make an end. Fame can now give me nothing more: my book is in every hand. And when the stone sepulchre of Messala shall be ruined by time, and the vast marble tomb of Licinus shall be reduced to dust, I shall still be read, and many a stranger will carry my verses with him to his ancestral home.*

8.3

# 6

## The Commodity

THE CIRCULATION OF LITERATURE in ancient Rome built and maintained the elite circle of intellectual patrons, one which made reading culture the exclusive exchange they envisioned it to be. The commodification of literature attempted not to undo this established system, but to make known the economic aspects of literary production and dissemination that, in their foundation, included a more inclusive, literal, reading public. In other words, the social and literary elite treated literature as *Literature* (with a capital L) where Martial treats literature as *literature*.

This distinction is crucial. Martial's decision to commodify literature was innovative in that it made the book, previously a symbol of wealth and status, into an object of economic

exchange, starting with the author himself. Such a significant social and economic shift was transformative in the intellectual hierarchy that was ancient Rome's class system.

This commodification was no accident. Martial is one of few authors who explicitly refers to the partitioning of his works in codices throughout his text, making it seem to most that Martial was aware of and most likely planned the presentation of his poetry in its modern form.<sup>1</sup> The production of Martial's books, in a form that supported portability, easy use, and broader distribution, could have been a deliberate move by either bookseller or author. But Martial gives us extensive evidence to show that the decision was indeed his own.

Martial presents his intentions quite clearly in his epigrams. Sometimes he notes the ability of the text to travel, noting their physical accessibility. Other times he addresses their portability, noting the ease with which readers put down and pick up their codices. Martial acknowledges that both portability and accessibility beget widespread distribution, making known his intentions for his work to be read across borders, classes, and genders. Writing from Spain, he says,

You, my book, who used lately to be sent from Rome to foreign lands, will now go as a foreigner to Rome; setting out from among the people of the gold-producing Tagus, and from the rude Salo, a potent land that gave birth to my forefathers. But you will not be a foreigner, nor can you be justly called a stranger, now that the lofty city of Remus contains so many of your brethren. Seek, as of right, the venerable threshold of the new temple, where their sacred abodes have been restored to the Pierian choir. Or, if you prefer, enter by the Subura first; there are the lofty halls of my friend the consul. The eloquent Stella inhabits the laurel-crowned mansion; Stella, the illustrious quaffer of the spring dedicated to Ianthe. There is a Castalian spring, proud of its glassy waters, which they say the nine sisters have oft-times sipped. He will circulate you amongst the people, and the senators, and the knights, and will read you

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<sup>1</sup>Winsbury, R. *The Roman Book: Publishing and Performance in Classical Rome*. London: Duckworth Press, 2009, pp. 15-18.

himself with eyes not altogether dry. Why do you ask for a title-page? Let but two or three verses be read, and all will exclaim, Book, you are mine. 12.3

The translation here uses “he will circulate” as a translation for *dabit*, meaning “to give” or “to offer.” Martial’s use of *dabit* represents a very significant gesture. Henry G. Bohn in his 1897 translation of Martial’s epigrams chose to omit many of Martial’s more crass verses. Of the omissions he wrote in his introduction, “To read Martial is to walk with him along the streets of ancient Rome; but few of us need accompany him when he jumps into the sewers.”<sup>2</sup> The content, materiality, and accessibility of Martial’s text allowed the reading public to become a part of a social relationship with Martial in a way that previously only patrons and those within the elite circulation network were privy to. The publishing, marketing, and *selling* of Martial’s text did indeed allow the public to “walk with him along the streets of ancient Rome.” It seems to be a bonus, albeit a purposeful one, that selling the book leads to the text venturing outside of Rome and into the hands of foreign stranger:

It is reported (if fame says true) that the beautiful town of Vienna counts the perusal of my works among its pleasures. I am read there by every old man, every youth, and every boy, and by the chaste young matron in presence of her grave husband. This triumph affords me more pleasure than if my verses were recited by those who drink the Nile at its very source, or than if my own Tagus loaded me with Spanish gold, or Hybla and Hymettus fed my bees. I am then really something, and not deceived by the interested smoothness of flattery’s tongue. I shall henceforth, I think, believe you, Lausus. 7.88

It is not the idle people of the city only that delight in my Muse, nor is it alone to listless ears that these verses are addressed, but my book is thumbed amid Getic frosts, near martial standards, by the stern centurion; and even Britain is said to sing my verses. Yet of what advantage is it to me? My purse benefits nothing by my reputation. What immortal pages could I not have written and

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<sup>2</sup>Bohn, Henry George, ed. *The Epigrams of Martial*. G. Bell Sons, 1897, p. i.

what wars could I not have sung to the Pierian trumpet, if, when the kind  
deities gave a second Augustus to the earth, they had likewise given to you, O  
Rome, a second Maecenas. 11.3

His books are popular in Vienna, where he is read by “every old man, every youth, and every boy, and by the chaste young matron in presence of her grave husband” (7.88). His unrestricted fame extends to “the Getic frosts, near martial standards, by the stern centurion; and even Britain is said to sing my verses” where he admits that no region from any distance awards him any benefits apart from those to his reputation (11.3). He emphasizes this in Book 7, writing, “I am then really something.”

Perhaps Martial rests some of his self-worth on his fame or on how far-reaching his name is. And perhaps Martial believes so greatly in the written text, in the economic exchange of written texts, and in the ways he can market his written text to be used and intended as a object for sale. “Book, you are mine,” he writes in 12.3. The book here, written in Spain and well-traveled, is an object of his possession, a commodity created and circulated to the public.

We cannot ignore that his actions (maybe likely not his intent) were innovative. In this context, I mean “innovative” to imply not just advanced but revolutionary, a disruption of a status quo or standard. We can wax poetically for pages about Martial’s deepest and most profound visions for the future of literature. But the heart of the matter, the central theme of this thesis, is that Martial successfully established a new system of literary exchange that was everything elite literary culture was not. It was inclusive. It was reliant on economic exchange, a system that any person in the general public could partake in if they had money. Where elite reading culture was personal, existing between poets and patrons and homogeneous circles of noblemen, the commodified system was impersonal. Books were bought and sold without an intended reader or recipient. Where the elite literary circles place value on the performance poetry, both artistically and as a show of wealth and privilege, many jokes or references in the *Epigrams* crucially depend on the reader experiencing the book by themselves, without a slave *lector* or the performative nature of a recitation.

You who are anxious that my books should be with you everywhere, and desire

to have them as companions on a long journey, buy a copy of which the parchment leaves are compressed into a small compass. Bestow book-cases upon large volumes; one hand will hold me. But that you may not be ignorant where I am to be bought, and wander in uncertainty over the whole town, you shall, under my guidance, be sure of obtaining me. Seek Secundus, the freedman of the learned Lucensis, behind the Temple of Peace and the Forum of Pallas. 1.2

Book 1 illustrates not only a codex made of parchment paper but articulates the way in which the reader experiences the text. “One hand will hold me,” he writes. Recall that the act of reading a bookroll requires two hands, one to unroll and one to re-roll the length of papyrus. The reading experience here requires only one hand, allowing the argument that the book in hand is indeed a codex.

One could argue that what happened to a book of epigrams once it had reached Vienna or Britain, whether read to oneself or bought and sold to another, may not be equally as important to Martial as the fact that it had reached these far lands. Yet the method of reading is important in the context of Martial’s intended relationship with his general readership. In Book 3, Martial warns a female reader that the poems are taking a raunchier turn,

Thus far this book is written entirely for you, chaste matron. If I know you well, you were laying down the long book from weariness; now you will read diligently to the end. 3.68

Some twenty epigrams later, he addresses her again:

I forewarned and admonished you, chaste matron, not to read this part of my sportive book: and yet, you see, you continue to read. But if chaste as you are, you go to see the acting of Fanniculus and Latinus, read on; these verses are not more shameless than the pantomimes. 3.86

There is no audience, no slave *lector*, only the matron alone with her book of epigrams in her own hands.

Martial's work does not rely solely on an implied relationship between wealth and literary culture, or on the idea of the book trade as a last-choice resource reserved for the wealthy. He markets his body of work to the public by naming his known booksellers, complete with addresses, nearby landmarks, and noticeable details. His ancient, in-text advertisement is meant for the reader who buys books from a book shop, or even in a broader context, a consumer who buys items from the marketplace. Martial's literary motives, fame and recognition, are not unlike those of Ovid. However, the relationship between literary production, patronage, textual dissemination, and materiality lends itself to an economic interpretation of literary culture. The rewriting or redefinition of literature as an object of the transactional economy was innovative in that it simultaneously disrupted the idea of the book as an object of status and established the book as a commodity for the masses. To be an item of public consumerism was to no longer be an item of private elitism.

Martial repeatedly highlights the economic context of his poetry:

You beg me, Quintus, to present you my works. I have not a copy, but the bookseller Tryphon has. "Am I going to give money for trifles," you say, "and buy your verses while in my sober senses? I shall not do anything so ridiculous." Nor shall I. 4.72

In this instance, Martial waives the traditional social patron-patron relationship for the transactional buyer-seller relationship. Yet even though Martial is neither a buyer nor a seller, his vision of the economic exchange of literature symbolizes his role in the relationship.

That, although I could write on serious, I prefer to write on amusing topics, is your fault, kind reader, who read and repeat my verses all over Rome. But you do not know how much your favour costs me. If I were to plead causes at the temple of the scythe-bearing god, and to sell my words to persons trembling

under accusation, many a seaman whom I had defended would send me jars of Spanish wine, and the lap of my toga would be stained with all sorts of coin. But, as it is, my book is merely a guest and sharer of revels, and my page affords amusement for which I receive no pay. Not even the poets of old were content with empty praise; in those days the smallest present made to the immortal bard (Virgil) was Alexis. "You write charmingly," you say, "and we will reward you with praises for ever."— Do you pretend not to understand my hints? You will, I suspect, make me a lawyer. 5.16

Martial reiterates here his uninvolvedness in the buyer-seller relationship: "my page affords amusement for which I receive no pay." In fact, in spite of the dissemination of his work due in part to the codex, Martial believes he would become a beggar:

The whole multitude of mottos contained in this thin little book will cost you, if you purchase it, four small coins. If four is too much, perhaps you may get it for two, and the bookseller, Tryphon, will even then make a profit. These distichs you may send to your entertainers instead of a present, if money is as scarce with you as it is with me. 13.3

Tryphon, mentioned twice between books 4 and 13 (written years apart), provides the public with cheap trifles. Here, Martial emphasizes his disinterest in the profit of his book sales. Part of his dissatisfaction with the patron-poet relationship lay in the lack of financial fulfillment. However, the focus of the bookseller and the codex is to disseminate and distribute, not make a profit. The economic exchange of literature is not for his own monetary benefit but for the benefit of his name.

Pompullus has accomplished his end, Faustinus; he will be read, and his name be spread through the whole world! So may the inconstant race of the yellow-haired Germans flourish, and whoever loves not the rule of Rome! Yet the writing of Pompullus are said to be ingenious; but for fame, believe me, that



is not enough. How many eloquent writers are there, who afford food for mites and worms, and whose learned verses are bought only by cooks! Something more is wanting to confer immortality on writings. A book destined to live must have genius. 6.60

“Something more is wanting to confer immortality on writings. A book destined to live must have genius.” Almost every elite Roman author mentions immortality. Ovid wishes for his verses to be read after the funeral fires have consumed him, a “triumph over death,” he says.<sup>3</sup> Martial wants his name and his book carried across the land, a physical manifestation of his “genius.” Perhaps Martial is hinting to the reader that only a genius like himself could make literature and the trade of literature a part of Rome’s economy. Is there anything more immortal than the commodification of literary culture and the development of literature as a viable component of ancient Rome’s economy?

Whether referring to his books in the first or the third person, Martial repeatedly makes reference to their status as commodities in almost every book. The book as an object of the consumer’s demand does not confer any sense of elitism because the book is subject to the public’s consumerism, wholly separate from the social elite of Rome. As a result, the books themselves could become nothing more than commodities. As Martial says of Tucca, “for you want to sell [my books], not to read them.”

Even in the contemporary literary market, a copyright-based book culture, authors and publishers (not one and the same as in the ancient world) have struggled to reconcile the commercial demand of connecting or relating with broader audiences and the artistry and aesthetics of literature. Martial produces and markets his body of work to seemingly adhere to this commercial framework, a framework that some authors like Catullus or Statius refused or struggled to fit into. Yet, uniquely conscious of his general readership or public audience, his predilection for unrestricted fame, his tone of commodification, and his mode of poetry (the epigram), Martial’s literary goals seem almost in line with the structure and purpose of Twitter. Direct address, distinctive aesthetic, lack of intertextual knowledge, and

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<sup>3</sup>Ovid, *Amores*, 1.15.

a focus on dissemination are the building blocks of Twitter's media platform. Martial writes,

Rome, city of my affections, praises, loves, and recites my compositions; I am in every lap, and in every hand. But see, yon gentleman grows red and pale by turns, looks amazed, yawns, and, in fact, hates me. I am delighted at the sight; my writings now please me. 6.61

Martial's obsession with public visibility is unlike other authors' desires for fame. Rooted in action-oriented practicality, they do not take on the imaginary tone of other authors' dreams of fame. Horace's desires in his *Odes* are mythological and illusory. He envisions himself as a bird in flight, a metaphor for his yearning for fame.

A two-formed poet, I will be borne through the clear sky on wings neither slight nor common, nor will I delay in lands for a long time and greater than envy I will abandon the cities. The Colchians will know me, who hide their fear of the Marsian friend, and the Dacians and the farthest Gelonians will know me, the skilled Spaniard and the drinker of the Rhone will hear of me...<sup>4</sup>

Yet Martial confronts his need for visibility by subverting the long-held methods of textual diffusion. Just as the Gutenberg age, the digital age of literary dissemination, and the advent of Twitter were in ways innovative and/or disruptive, Martial's choice to commodify the previously non-commodified was subversive.

We can definitively say that Martial's literary choices awarded him the fame he sought. His body of work, the *Epigrams*, has been read by many across the world for millennia. And with this conclusion, we can refute what Pliny wrote so confidently,

I have just heard of Valerius Martial's death, which gives me great concern. He was a man of an acute and lively genius, and his writings abound in equal wit,

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<sup>4</sup>Horace, *Odes*, 2.20.

satire, and kindness But his poems will not long survive their author, at least I think not, though he wrote them in the expectation of their doing so. Farewell.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed Martial was right. “A book destined to live must have genius.”

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<sup>5</sup>Pliny The Younger, *Epistulae*, 37.

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