Thomas Hendrickson

Ancient Libraries and Renaissance Humanism: The De bibliothecis of Justus Lipsius.
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Thomas Hendrickson's translation and study of Justus Lipsius's seminal 1602 text *De bibliothecis* is the twentieth volume of Brill's *Texts and Sources in Intellectual History*. It consists of a contextual introduction, a discussion on the text and its translation, and then the translation itself. Hendrickson follows with extensive notes on and elucidations of individual passages, including biographical sketches of authors mentioned in the text, paraphrases, quotes, etc., organized according to the chapter structure of the original. The volume closes with a substantial bibliography, including works used by both Lipsius and Hendrickson.

Lipsius, a Flemish humanist, is a difficult subject—his early years studying at the Jesuit college in Cologne make him interesting to scholars of Jesuit studies, but his religious fluctuations and intellectual accomplishments garner him a larger audience. Hendrickson provides a brief biographical summary, but focuses his attention most clearly on the treatise *De bibliothecis*, the title of which he translates as “A Treatise on Libraries.” Though it is quite short, Hendrickson calls it “the first monograph on library history” (1). Its initial aim was practical. Lipsius hoped that Charles, Duke of Croÿ and Aarschot (1560–1612), a patron of the University of Leuven, would donate his library to that university. Although, in this sense, the treatise was a failure, the work has influenced the study of library history since it was issued, though it was eclipsed after the end of the nineteenth century by Karl Dziatzko's 1897 article “Bibliotheken,” in volume three of the Pauly-Wissowa *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. The main reason *De bibliothecis* remained the dominant source for the history of libraries is its treatment of the ancient libraries of Egypt, Greece, Asia Minor, and Rome (city and empire).

In a brief historiographical survey dating back to Callimachus's lost third-century BCE *Pinakes*, Hendrickson explains the way that the history of libraries—both as a standalone discipline and as a part of the study of literature, intellectual trends, and political context—has been written and used. Lipsius's text, both historical and political in subject, makes this a logical approach, and it is well executed. Some of the scholarship Hendrickson draws from was known to Lipsius, and he was particularly responsive to the work of Livy, Seneca, Petrarch, Fulvio Orsini, and Michael Guilandinus (especially the last two). Thus *De bibliothecis* is polemical in more ways than one. In addition to its obvious attempt to persuade a particular prince of the importance of a particular gift in making said prince appear powerful and generous, Lipsius

tried to persuade his readers of the general importance of collecting knowledge, rather than collecting important-looking objects (a practice that he disdained: books were meant to be read, not displayed to impress). He also made an intriguing decision: by excluding consideration of the Bible and the church fathers, Lipsius turned attention away from viewing religious subjects as the purpose of learning—Christians had often been hostile toward the (secular) written word—and in so doing away from understanding libraries as supportive of religious authority. His argument was that libraries and scholars contributed to the political authority of the ruler.

The main point of this volume is the translation of and commentary on the treatise. Before now, only one English translation was attempted, at the beginning of the twentieth century. A version, by John Cotton Dana (included in Dana and Henry Kent, *Literature of Libraries in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* [Chicago: McClure, 1906–7]), relied heavily on a French translation by Gabriel Peignot (*Manuel bibliographique: Ou essai sûr les bibliothèques anciennes et modernes, et sur la connaissance des livres, etc.* [Paris: Villier, 1800]), which had been edited to reflect the anti-monarchical tone of the time. Since, as Hendrickson notes, “one of the primary purposes of the *DB* was to encourage princes to fund libraries” (2), Dana’s and Peignot’s translations were not faithful to the original. Translations into Dutch and Spanish are also problematic and exclude the Latin text. The one known translation into Italian is better, but also does not include the full text. Thus, a new critical edition has been needed for some time. Hendrickson argues that other factors make it still more necessary, as archaeology, the rediscovery of ancient texts, and expanded scholarship on reading have changed the way that contemporary scholars understand books and book collecting.

The translated text (printed opposite the original Latin), and two epitomes, occupy pages 60–163. A commentary, which provides background information, follows. The translation is lively, faithful to Lipsius’s much discussed, and difficult to characterize, style. The humanist directly addresses his audience in more than one way, using intimate language and parenthetical rhetorical questions, but also by continually reminding the imagined royal reader of the importance of creating and maintaining a library (and by extension, the imagined non-royal reader of the importance of having a ruler who appreciates libraries).

This book is aimed at a specialist audience, with interest in classical studies, Renaissance literature and philology, history of the book, and the study of royal power, not merely because the casual reader will have less interest in the original text than the translation, but also because Hendrickson occasionally neglects to define technical terms. It includes several very useful tables,

particularly table 5.1, “Ancient Sources in the *De bibliothecis*,” found on pages 33 to 38, and multiple indexes (of manuscripts, of inscriptions and papyri, of ancient authors and works, and a general index).

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