clerk is to read them, for purposes of comparison, to the actors playing the roles, and they are not to depart from them.

In other words, an authoritative version of each play was to be kept on file, and the actors were to follow it, under penalty of law. One of the Ptolemies, as we shall see, through deceit and vast expense got his hands on these official versions; they represented the kind of holdings he wanted in his library.

It is time to turn to the story of that library.

3

The Library of Alexandria

The library of Alexandria, founded around 300 B.C. or a few decades later, was the first of its kind, and throughout ancient history remained the greatest of its kind. Yet it seems to have suddenly sprung into being. Its nearest match in size, Ashurbanipal's library, was for the king's use and specialized in materials for his particular needs. The collection Aristotle put together, despite its extent and variety, was strictly personal, a tool for his multifarious studies. The library of Alexandria was comprehensive, embracing books of all sorts from everywhere, and it was public, open to anyone with fitting scholarly or literary qualifications. What caused such an institution to rise at just this time? Why in Alexandria, a city that was not much older than the library itself?

The spectacular campaign of Alexander the Great that won for him an empire stretching from his homeland in Macedon to the western border of India transformed the Greek world. Until then most Greeks had been citizens of city-states—mini-nations consisting of a city and its immediate surroundings. Each had its own politics and culture, each was focused upon itself and fiercely independent. Alexander's conquests brought an end to this. Thereafter virtually all the city-states were within one or another empire, subject to or tightly controlled by an autocratic ruler.

Alexander's death in 323 B.C. triggered a relentless struggle in the select group of Macedonians who had served as his top-ranking officers; highly capable and ruthlessly ambitious, each was out to get his hands on as much as he could of what his former commander had ruled. Soon after 300 B.C. a sort of balance had

been achieved. The empire Alexander had put together had been torn into three large chunks: the dynasty of the Antigonids, with their capital in the homeland of Macedon, controlled Greece; the Seleucids, with capitals at Antioch and at Seleuceia near Babylon, controlled most of Asia Minor, Syria, and Mesopotamia; and the Ptolemies, with their capital at the city that Alexander had founded in 331 and named after himself, controlled Egypt. The period of this new world of large Greek empires is known as the Hellenistic Age; it lasted until the end of the first century B.C., by which time the Romans had finished swallowing it up.

The culture of the city-states had been insular, built on and reflecting the little worlds their citizens inhabited. The Hellenistic Age engendered a culture that spilled over narrow geographical boundaries, one more or less common to Greeks wherever they lived. The city-states had had no great funds at their disposal, only what local resources could produce; the rulers of the Hellenistic kingdoms had imperial treasuries to call upon. It was an age whose intellectual interests were inevitably broader than before—and whose rulers could afford to subsidize these interests.

In the division of the territorial swag, the Ptolemies came out best. Egypt was far richer than the lands of their rivals. For one, the fertile soil along the Nile produced bounteous harvests of grain, and grain was to the Greek and Roman world what oil is to ours; it commanded a market everywhere. For another, Egypt was the habitat par excellence of the papyrus plant, thus ensuring its rulers a monopoly on the world's prime writing material. All the Hellenistic monarchs sought to adorn their capitals with grandiose architecture and to build up a reputation for culture. The Ptolemies, able to outspend the others, took the lead. The first four members of the dynasty concentrated on Alexandria's cultural reputation, being intellectuals themselves. Ptolemy I (305–282 B.C.), was a historian, author of an authoritative account of Alexander's campaign of conquest. And he must have at least dabbled in mathematics, for it was he who, on asking Euclid whether there wasn't a shorter way to learn geometry than through *The Elements*, got the celebrated reply, "There is no royal road." Ptolemy II (282–246)

was an avid zoologist, Ptolemy III (246–222) a patron of literature, Ptolemy IV (222–205) a playwright. All of them chose leading scholars and scientists as tutors for their children. It is no surprise that these men sought to make their capital the cultural center of the Greek world.

They had to start from scratch. Alexandria was a brand-new city with a population consisting mostly of soldiers and sailors of the Ptolemies' armed forces, bureaucrats and clerks of their administration, and the mixed bag of traders, businessmen, craftsman, swindlers, and whatnot, who see opportunity in, as it were, a fresh playing field. Intellectuals had to be blandished into coming to a place that to all outward appearances was a cultural wasteland. The Ptolemies offered such irresistible inducements that in the course of the third century B.C., the period of the city's cultural zenith, they were able to gather there a stellar community. From Athens, Ptolemy I got not only Euclid but also Strato, the foremost physicist of the age, and Ptolemy III got Eratosthenes, the geographer whose calculation of the circumference of the earth was astonishingly accurate. Herophilus, pioneer in the study of anatomy, after training at the renowned medical center on Cos where Hippocrates had practiced, set himself up at Alexandria. Even the great Archimedes was coaxed into leaving his native Syracuse for a short stay there.

What helped mightily in enticing intellectuals to the city was the founding by Ptolemy I of the famous Museum. In ancient times, the word museum normally referred to a religious establishment, a temple for the worship of the muses; Ptolemy's creation was a figurative temple for the muses, a place for cultivating the arts they symbolized. It was an ancient version of a think-tank: the members, consisting of noted writers, poets, scientists, and scholars, were appointed by the Ptolemies for life and enjoyed a handsome salary, tax exemption (no inconsiderable perquisite in the Ptolemaic kingdom), free lodging, and food. There was no danger of funds running out since the institution had an endowment granted by Ptolemy I when he set it up. For its quarters he turned over an area in the palace, including a room where the members

could dine together. They were, in short, spared the lowly details of daily life in order to spend their time on elevated intellectual pursuits—just like their counterparts in today's think-tanks. And, as today, the members did not always agree with each other; one wag described them as

> the scribbling bookworms who are found
> in Egypt's populous nation,
> in endless debate as they flock around
> the muses' feeding station.

On top of all their personal benefits, this pampered group had at their disposal a priceless intellectual resource: it was for them that the Ptolemies founded the library of Alexandria.

It was the brainchild of Ptolemy I, even though it may not have come into being until the reign of his son. By the time of Ptolemy III, there were two libraries, the major one in the palace directly serving the members of the Museum, and a "daughter library" located in the sanctuary of the god Serapis not far from the palace. We know nothing about the physical arrangements except the negative fact that neither had a building to itself. The main library very likely consisted of a colonnade with a line-up of rooms behind, a feature common in contemporary palaces; the rooms would serve for shelving the holdings and the colonnade provide space for readers. The other library probably had a similar arrangement.

The very first problem the Ptolemies faced was acquisitions. Egypt boasted a long and distinguished culture, and there were books aplenty throughout the land—in Egyptian. There were Greek books to be bought in Athens and Rhodes and other established centers of Greek culture, but not in newly fledged Alexandria. The Ptolemies' solution was money and royal highhandedness. They sent out agents with well-filled purses and orders to buy whatever books they could, of every kind on every subject, and the older the copy the better. Older books were preferred on the grounds that, having undergone less recopying, they were that much less likely to have errors in the text. The agents followed orders so energetically that, claims one ancient authority, to fill the

demand they created there arose a new industry—the forging of "old" copies. What they couldn't buy the Ptolemies commandeered: for example, they confiscated any books found on ships unloading at Alexandria; the owners were given copies (one advantage the Ptolemies did have was plenty of papyrus paper for copying), and the originals went to the library. Ptolemy III was so intent on getting his hands on Athens' official versions of the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides that he was willing not only to lay out an enormous amount of money but to resort to swindling in the bargain. He asked to borrow the precious rolls to have copies made of them. The city fathers must have had suspicions, for they insisted he post a bond of fifteen talents—a huge sum, the equivalent of millions of dollars—to ensure their return. He had copies made all right, a deluxe set on papyrus paper of the finest quality—and sent these back instead of the originals. There was nothing the Athenians could do except keep the bond.

Newly acquired books were stacked in warehouses while they went through a preliminary accessions procedure. Rolls usually had a tab attached to one end bearing the author's name and ethnic. The ethnic was essential, because Greeks had only one name and, many of the names being common, different people often had the same name. At the warehouse further identification was added to the tabs to help distinguish copies of the same work from each other. Some were marked with their provenance; thus the books that had been seized on the docks were inscribed *ek ploiôn* "from the ships." Others were marked with the name of the editor or the former owner.

The policy was to acquire everything, from exalted epic poetry to humdrum cookbooks; the Ptolemies aimed to make the collection a comprehensive repository of Greek writings as well as a tool for research. They also included translations in Greek of important works in other languages. The best-known example is the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament (the name, meaning "seventy," derives, with some rounding off of the figure, from the tradition that there were seventy-two translators). Its prime purpose was to serve the Jewish community, many of whom spoke

only Greek and could no longer understand the original Hebrew or Aramaic, but the enterprise was encouraged by Ptolemy II, who no doubt wanted the work in the library. The library almost certainly had a copy of the chronological list of the pharaohs that an Egyptian priest named Manetho translated from Egyptian into Greek.

Ptolemy II saw to it that special attention was given to the classics of literature—the works of the great Athenian dramatists, of Homer, and other older poets. The library became particularly strong in Homer, and for good reason: Homer was *the* poet, revered by all Greeks no matter what city or area they were from; they looked upon his epics as we do the Bible. For centuries generations had listened in rapture to bards reciting them; from the sixth century B.C. on, when the poems were finally committed to writing, they were also read and, even more important, used as schooltexts for children. But no official version had ever been created. By the time the library was amassing its collection, multitudinous copies existed with multitudinous differences in the texts they presented: omission of lines, addition of lines, transposition of lines, variation of wording, and so on. The library accordingly acquired multiple copies, distinguishing them in the ways described above, especially by provenance: it owned a copy "from Chios," another "from Argos," another "from Sinope," and so on. Such holdings made possible one of the first endeavors of Alexandrian scholarship, the establishment of a standard text for these most cherished works of Greek literature.

The rolls in the main library totaled 490,000, in the "daughter library," 42,800. This tells us nothing about the number of works or authors represented, since many rolls held more than one work and many, as in the case of Homer, were duplicates. Nor do we know what was the division in function between the two libraries. The main library, located in the palace, had to be primarily for the use of the members of the Museum. The other, in a religious sanctuary with more or less unrestricted access, may well have served a wider group of readers. Perhaps that is why its holdings were so much smaller: they were limited to works, such as the basic classics of literature, that the general public would be likely to consult.

At the head of the library was a Director appointed by the court, an intellectual luminary who often had the additional assignment of serving as tutor to the royal children. The first to hold the post was Zenodotus, famous as a pioneer in establishing a sound text of the Homeric poems. He was perforce a pioneer in library science as well, since it must have been he who set up the system the library used for shelving its holdings. We cited above Strabo's statement that Aristotle "had taught the kings in Egypt how to arrange a library"; presumably Zenodotus adapted what Aristotle had worked out for his collection to suit this much larger one. His first step must have been to sort the rolls according to the nature of their contents—verse or prose, literary or scientific, what classification of literary, what classification of scientific, and so on. The tabs gave authors' names and whatever other identification had been added during the accessions procedure but often no title; many a roll contained more than one work, and many works, such as compilations of poetry could hardly be given a simple title. When a title was lacking, Zenodotus had to unroll and pass an eye over the text. His next step was to assign rooms, or parts of rooms, to the various categories of writings that he had decided upon. And then he put the appropriate works on the shelves—arranging them by author in alphabetical order.

This brings us to one of the great contributions that we owe to the scholars at the library of Alexandria—alphabetical order as a mode of organization. So far as we know, Zenodotus was the first to have employed it, in a glossary of rare words that he compiled. Since the indications are clear that from the beginning the library's holdings were shelved alphabetically, the natural conclusion is that Zenodotus, having found the system useful for his glossary, applied it to the collection. The alphabetization went only as far as the first letter. This was the practice of all ancient scholars for all purposes for centuries; apparently such a minimal arrangement satisfied their needs. Not until the second century A.D. does fuller alphabetization make an appearance.

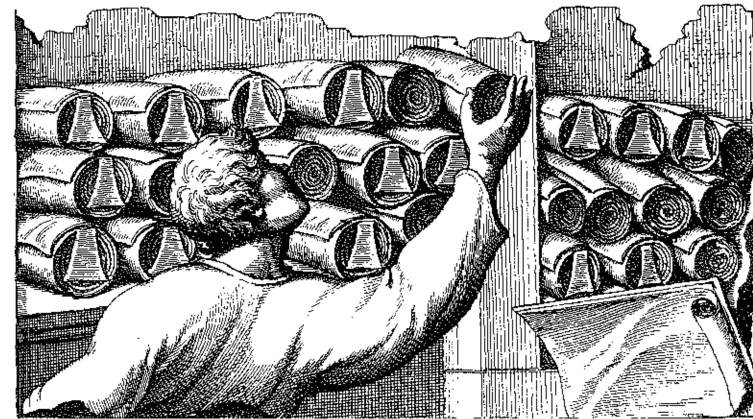
Zenodotus, as he put in place the library's initial organization, must have recruited the staff it required—sorters, checkers, clerks,

pages, copyists, repairers, and so on. There must have been dozens of these essential employees—but we have no information at all about them, we can only surmise their existence. Like so many of the white-collar workers in the Greek and Roman world, the great majority very likely were slaves.

In the library's early years, when the holdings were relatively limited, it was enough to have a system that enabled a user to find what he was looking for by going to a given room, or to a given set of shelves in a room, and running his eye over the tabs of the rolls lined up there in rough alphabetical order. Indeed, the system was enough for inveterate users even when the library was at full strength. The story is told that Aristophanes of Byzantium, who was Director from ca. 200 to 185 B.C. and who "working daily with the utmost drive and diligence systematically read through all the books," when serving as a judge in a competition of poets held before the king, disqualified all but one on the grounds of plagiarism. Called upon by the king to prove his case, he rushed to the library and "relying just on memory, from certain bookcases produced an armful of rolls."

This bravura feat may have been possible for the likes of an Aristophanes of Byzantium, but after the collection had reached a certain size, ordinary readers needed the sort of help locating works that they enjoy today. It was supplied by a figure of towering importance not only in the history of the library of Alexandria but in the history of scholarship, a man who combined an ability to write creative poetry with a willingness to submit to the grinding drudgery of compiling hundreds of lists involving thousands of entries—Callimachus of Cyrene.

His birthplace, Cyrene, a seaport on the coast of Lybia west of Alexandria, was at the time under the rule of the Ptolemies. His family, of high rank, was in reduced circumstances. He made his way to the capital and took a job as teacher in an elementary school in a suburb there. He somehow came to the attention of Ptolemy I, who invited him to join the court's coterie of intellectuals; by Ptolemy II's reign he was its dominant figure. He may have succeeded Zenodotus as Director of the Library; if not, he certainly



3.1 Line drawing of a relief of the Roman period showing rolls, most with identifying tabs, stacked on a shelf in three levels.

was in charge of it in some capacity, for, so far as we can tell, he was the man responsible for its cataloguing.

As a scholar, Callimachus' greatest achievement was a monumental compilation, the *Pinakes* "Tables" or, to give it its full title, *Tables of Persons Eminent in Every Branch of Learning together with a List of Their Writings.* It was a detailed bibliographical survey of all Greek writings; it filled no less than 120 books, five times as many as Homer's *Iliad.* What made such a project possible was the existence of the library of Alexandria, on whose shelves all these writings, with rare exceptions, were to be found. And there is general agreement that the compilation grew out of, was an expansion of, a shelf-list of the library's holdings that Callimachus had drawn up.

The *Pinakes* has not survived; however, we have enough references to it and quotations from it in scholarly work of later centuries to provide a fair idea of its nature and extent. Callimachus divided all Greek writers into categories—"tables," to use his terminology. These no doubt were by and large the same as the categories according to which the library's holdings were shelved and hence were those of his shelf-list. He made an initial basic division into poetry and prose, and broke each down into subdivisions. For poetry there was a table of dramatic poets, with a breakdown into

a sub-table of writers of tragedy and another of writers of comedy; a table of epic poets; a table of lyric poets, and so on. For prose writers there was a table of philosophers, of orators, of historians, of writers on medicine, even a "miscellaneous table" (this is where cookbooks were listed). Each table contained names of authors in alphabetical order (by the first letter alone, of course). Each author had a brief biographical sketch that included father's name, birthplace, and sometimes a nickname—useful details for distinguishing him from other writers with the same name. Here, for example, is an entry for the famous astronomer Eudoxus which, if not exactly in Callimachus' words, derives from them:

> Eudoxus, father Aeschines, of Cnidus; astronomer, geometer, physician, legislator. He studied geometry under Archytas and medicine under Philistion of Sicily.

After the biographical sketch came a list of the author's works in alphabetical order—which in many cases must have gone on for column after column. A list of Aeschylus' plays is preserved that very likely goes back to Callimachus'; it runs to seventy-three titles. Euripides' entry must have had around that number, and Sophocles' well over a hundred. There is a list extant of the complete works of Theophrastus, the prolific savant who on Aristotle's death became head of Aristotle's school; it probably derives ultimately from Callimachus' entry and contains no fewer than 219 titles.

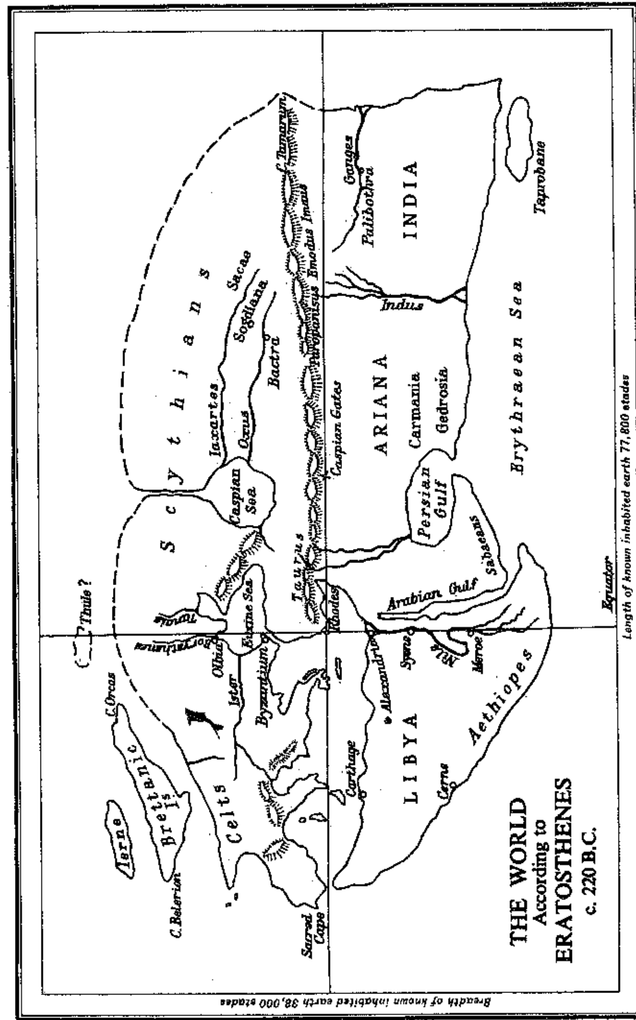
A key problem that confronted Callimachus was how to handle entries that involved more than one category. In the case of Aristophanes, for example, this did not arise: a writer only of comedies, he was listed on the table of such writers (no doubt up near the top since his name began with alpha). But where did Callimachus put himself, author of both prose and poetry and of different kinds of each? Did he list himself in multiple places, complete with biographical notice? Did he use cross references? We have no way of knowing.

Lists of writings of one or another kind had been drawn up before. Callimachus' "tables" were the very first to be comprehensive: he provided a systematic presentation, on one set of rolls, of

all writings in Greek, literary, scientific, even functional, such as cookbooks. He was able to accomplish this because he could consult well-nigh all of them, right there in Alexandria's library. In turn, he furnished a key to the vast collection: from his *Pinakes* users could determine the existence of any particular work; from his shelf-list they could determine its location. He had created a vital reference tool.

Zenodotus and Callimachus, the dominant figures of the opening phase of Alexandrian scholarship, the first half of the third century B.C., both focused on literature. The next great figure, Eratosthenes, who served as Director from ca. 245 to 205 B.C. and dominated the second half of the century, made his mark in science. As it happens, he was learned in many other fields as well—too many, according to backbiting colleagues at the Museum, who dubbed him *Beta*, "No. 2," that is, the man who spread himself so thin over a number of areas that he was unable to be No. 1 in any single one. Not true: Eratosthenes qualified, no question about it, as *Alpha* in geography. He wrote at least two books on the subject; neither has survived but from discussions of them in later geographers we know much of what was in them. Skilled in astronomy and geometry, he enlisted both in the service of geography to determine the size of the globe and to fit the known lands on it. We have already referred to his astonishingly accurate figure for the circumference of the earth. The known lands, in his map of the world, form a vast oblong mass that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to an ocean closing off India to the east. The library's holdings not only enabled him to digest the writings of his predecessors but supplied him with fresh information on areas they had scarcely known. For India, the limit of geographical knowledge to the east, he was able to consult the accounts left by members of Alexander's expedition. For Africa's east coast, another remote area, he was able to consult the reports of the teams the Ptolemies sent down as far as Somalia to hunt elephants for the army's elephant corps.

Two noted scholars who followed Eratosthenes, both Directors of the Library, Aristophanes of Byzantium from ca. 205 to 185 B.C.



3.2 Eratosthenes' map of the world. His knowledge extended westward to the Atlantic Ocean and eastward to India.

and Aristarchus from ca. 175 to 145, brought the focus back to literature and language and made this half-century a golden age for research in these fields.

Zenodotus, the library's first Director, had taken the initial steps in establishing a sound text of Homer's works by comparing and analyzing the differing versions of the poems in the various copies available, much as Shakespearean experts do with the various versions in the quarto and folio editions of the plays. Aristophanes and Aristarchus carried on in greater depth and for other poets—Hesiod, Pindar, the lyric poets. And Aristarchus presented his findings in commentaries, books in which he cited given passages and then followed each passage with comments—on its meaning, on any unusual terms or expressions in it, on whether the words were genuinely the author's, and so on. He even dealt with a writer of prose, Herodotus, in this way. Such commentaries, exploited by generations of subsequent commentators, are the ancestors of today's multifarious annotated editions, from the beginning Latin student's text of Caesar to the latest "key" to Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Another area of literary scholarship that they furthered was lexicography. The rare and archaic words that turned up in Homer and the other older poets had always interested Greek intellectuals. The first formal attempt to treat them was made by a poet-scholar, Philitas, who lived around 300 B.C. He compiled a work called *Miscellaneous Words*, in which he commented, in no systematic arrangement, on a mix of such terms. It was a great success, becoming so well-known that it was as familiar to the average person as, say, Webster's Dictionary is today. Thus, in a comedy staged at least half a century after Philitas' time, there is a scene in which a host, who is planning to give a dinner party, tells how the caterer he hired discussed the menu in such fancy and archaic language that "no one on earth could understand him; . . . you'd have to get the complete works of Philitas and look up the meaning of every word." Zenodotus, following in Philitas' footsteps, made a similar compilation and introduced, as we noted earlier, the great improvement of putting the entries in alphabetical order. Aristophanes of Byzantium took the next logical step: in a work called

Lexeis, or "Words," he included words of all kinds, current as well as old, that in some way called for comment or explanation. Like so many of the scholarly products of this age, it has not survived and we know about it only through later references. Here is an extract from a glossary that, dating some four centuries after his time, perhaps ultimately goes back to his work; even if it doesn't, it is in his tradition:

> *melygion* A Scythian beverage. Glaucus, in the first book of The Description of Places Lying toward the Left of the Black Sea: "When the drivers agreed, he dismissed the assembly, and they, dispersing each to his own house, prepared the melygion." This drink is more intoxicating than wine. It is made of honey boiled with water, with the addition of a certain herb; for their country produces much honey and also beer, which they make out of millet.
>
> *melôdia* Obsolete term for "tragedy." See Callimachus' Commentaries.

The first entry treats an unusual term, a loan-word from some language spoken in the region of the Black Sea. It starts with a succinct dictionary definition, adds—just as in our great *Oxford English Dictionary*—an example of its use, and closes with amplifying details. The second entry treats an obsolete meaning for a common term, and provides the source of the information (none other than the eminent Callimachus).

Studies in language and literature continued to be the prime concern during the last phase of scholarship at Alexandria, from the second half of the second century to 30 B.C., when Rome's occupation of Egypt brought the reign of the Ptolemies to a close. The results were summed up in the works of Didymus, so indefatigable a scholar that he turned out 3,500 books according to one authority, 4,000 according to another, and earned the nickname *Chalkenteros* "Bronze-Guts," that is, the sort of guts it took for such a prodigious output. Bronze-Guts lived during the second half of the first century B.C., toiling in the library while the western world was being torn apart by Rome's civil wars. He produced commentaries ga-

lore: on the *Iliad;* on the *Odyssey;* on the plays of the comic poets, especially those of Aristophanes; on the plays of the tragic poets, especially Sophocles; on the orations of Demosthenes. He drew up numerous glossaries, not on all words as had Aristophanes of Byzantium but on particular types: glossary to the comic poets, glossary to the tragic poets (this ran to at least twenty-eight books, longer than the *Iliad*), glossary of difficult words, glossary of metaphorical terms, glossary of words corrupted in meaning.

The first two phases of Alexandrian scholarship had produced such indispensable tools of scholarship as the authoritative text edition, the commentary, the glossary; the last phase added one more—the grammar. The author was Dionysius Thrax, "Dionysius the Thracian." He was so-called because his father had a name that sounded Thracian; actually he was a native of Alexandria, one of the few scholars treated here who was. He was a pupil of Aristarchus, and when, in a political upheaval around the middle of the second century B.C., his teacher was forced to quit the city, he left too and spent the rest of his life at Rhodes. All the scholars of Alexandria, and particularly Dionysius' teacher, had dealt in one way or another with elements and aspects of Greek grammar. Dionysius' contribution was to organize the material into a coherent whole and thereby to bring into being the first grammar book. Unlike so many of the products of Alexandrian scholarship, it has survived and we know what is in it. In a mere fifty pages Dionysius presents a succinct survey of the Greek language, starting with the letters of the alphabet and going through the various parts of speech and their forms, including the declensions of nouns and conjugations of verbs. It remained the standard grammar for Greek schoolboys for over a millennium, until the twelfth century A.D. The Romans based their Latin grammars on it, and through these it became the model for all modern grammars.

How long did the library of Alexandria last? Only until 48 B.C., when it was destroyed by fire, say some. Not at all, say others; it was merely damaged then, and not seriously.

In 50 B.C. Caesar crossed the Rubicon and precipitated the great

civil war between him and his opponents headed by Pompey. Two years later, at Pharsalus in northern Greece, Caesar won a decisive victory, and Pompey fled to Alexandria. Caesar, with but a handful of ships and men, chased after him. By the time he arrived Pompey had been treacherously killed, but Caesar elected to stay on. Cleopatra, daughter of the recently deceased Ptolemy XII, was squabbling with her brother over who was to get the throne, and Caesar was interested in backing the cause of this captivating and accomplished young woman. When the Alexandrian mob was incited against the Romans, the political situation exploded into violence, and Caesar, with his meager forces, found himself in a difficult and dangerous spot. He barricaded himself in the palace area, which was near the waterfront, and at one point, to avoid the risk of "being cut off from his ships, he was forced to ward off the danger with fire, and this, spreading from the dockyards, destroyed the great library." So writes Plutarch in his life of Caesar. The historian Dio Cassius has a somewhat different version: "Many places were set on fire, with the result that, along with other buildings, the dockyards and the storehouses of grain and books, said to be great in number and of the finest, were burned." His words have been taken to mean that the destruction did not involve the whole library but was limited to books that happened to be in storehouses along the water. This is reinforced by other considerations. The bronze-gutted Didymus was active in the years after 48 B.C., and his vast and varied output would have been impossible without at least a good part of the resources of the library at his disposal. And the library was surely in existence during Antony's dalliance with Cleopatra, the years leading up to the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. because it was rumored that Antony gave the 200,000 books in the library of Pergamum, a city within his sphere of command, as a gift to his inamorata, a gift that could only have been intended for the Alexandrian library. Plutarch, who reports the incident, comments that his source is not very trustworthy, but the story, whether true or not, could not have been told if the library had ceased to be. And there are indications that the library was in active use under subsequent Roman emperors, for there is a record of an imperial

appointment of a director to it and Claudius (A.D. 41–54) built an addition to it (see Chap. 7).

The later Ptolemies, those who held the throne from the middle of the second century B.C. on, were confronted with increasing social unrest and other problems and the library no longer enjoyed the attention their predecessors had lavished on it. Indeed, some of them used the directorship as a political plum: Ptolemy VIII (145–116) gave it to an officer of the palace guard and Ptolemy IX Soter II (88–81) to one of his political supporters.

After Rome took over Egypt in 30 B.C. the emperors kept both the Museum and the library going. But membership to the Museum was now awarded, for the most part, not to men of learning but to men who had distinguished themselves in government service, in the military, even in athletics—the equivalent, in a way, of today's honorary degrees. The same possibly happened in the case of the directors of the library, if we can generalize from the one example we know about: Tiberius Claudius Balbillus, who served sometime around the middle of the first century A.D., was an administrator, government official, and military man.

The end of the library probably came in A.D. 270 or so, when the emperor Aurelian, in the course of suppressing the insurgency of the kingdom of Palmyra, engaged in bitter fighting in Alexandria. During the struggle the palace area was laid waste including, presumably, the library.