

Guy, Donna J., “Libraries & the Cultural Record,” *Biblioteca digital*

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officially or otherwise, from his extensive participation with the institution. To the larger point, why *would* the Athenaeum have gone so far as to take an official position on such a divisive political question? To have done so surely would have risked destroying the fragile balance of the Athenaeum as refuge from political debate (such official agnosticism was surely not out of place among the Athenaeum's counterpart institutions). It is easy to criticize the leaders of such institutions from our twenty-first-century vantage point, but an explanation for their official silence, rather than an indictment of it, might have offered a more productive approach.

In her final chapter Wolff ably deconstructs the fascinating and complex debate in the early 1850s about whether the Athenaeum should allow itself to be absorbed by the nascent Boston Public Library. Pitting Josiah Quincy, Jr., the last of the Athenaeum's original founding members (who argued with much brilliant vituperation that changing the Athenaeum's mission would betray the principles and abuse the memories of its founders), against George Ticknor (who argued that most Athenaeum shareholders already thought of the institution as serving a public purpose), this struggle culminated in a vote by the Athenaeum's members to keep the institution separate. Wolff declares the Athenaeum in the wake of this decision a "cultural cul-de-sac—a resilient institution that continued to attract substantial funding in spite of its limited reach and discreet image" (147). For historians of libraries and library culture, this may be the most useful part of the book.

As a case study of how the vision of an institution meets reality and is shaped by realities, the Boston Athenaeum is remarkably useful, and Wolff's *Culture Club* offers a fine entry point for future scholars. While the entire panoply of uses envisioned by its founders never came to pass, I suspect those hardy souls would, even after more than two hundred years, easily accommodate themselves today to its comfortable environs, good books, and fine art. As the founders wrote in their early *Memoir*, so the Boston Athenaeum remains: "auxiliary to literature and to business; useful to the publick, and honourable to its founders and patrons" (1).

A note: Many of the themes explored by Wolff are treated in Richard Wendorf, ed., *The Boston Athenaeum: Bicentennial Essays* (Boston: Athenaeum, 2009), which also includes a version of Wolff's sixth chapter on the public versus private debates of the 1850s.

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Los orígenes de la Biblioteca Pública de Buenos Aires: Antecedentes, prácticas, gestión y pensamiento bibliotecario durante la Revolución de Mayo (1810–1826). By Alejandro E. Parada. Buenos Aires: Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliotecológicas, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, UBA, 2009. 343 pp. \$20.00.

Parada is the preeminent historian of library science in Argentina. Director of the Biblioteca de la Academia Argentina de Letras, he also is the author of five other books on diverse aspects of the history of Argentine public and private libraries and librarians of the first half of the nineteenth century. *Los orígenes* deals with the history of private libraries at the end of the colonial period in Argentina and their role in the creation of the Biblioteca Nacional in 1812, shortly

after Buenos Aires declared independence from Spain. (It took until 1816 and the Congress of Tucumán to get the other provinces of the Argentine interior to declare their loyalty to the independence movement.) While that is the stated purpose, Parada has in fact written a masterful history of library science in Argentina, informed by an acute reading of the relevant historiography on the National Library.

Parada begins his work not in 1812 but rather in the historiography of the book and its social context in the European world, placing great emphasis on the historians who have used the library as a focus of the social construction of civilization through the print medium. He also is keenly interested in the symbolic link between a public library and the formation of a new nation-state that promised (although did not always deliver) greater freedoms.

Influenced by the work of the French *Annales* school, Parada demonstrates his wide-ranging knowledge of the world history of libraries not only in elite history but also in the history of the everyday life of the Argentine National Library, from operations matters to budget concerns. Parada also devotes considerable space to the history of library science and library history in Argentina and thus takes his time getting to the actual history of the public library.

Prior to the National Library, most of the libraries of any size belonged to religious institutions and wealthy individuals. In the convents and monasteries most books never entered into circulation outside the walls of the establishment and tended to focus on religion and philosophy. Important clerics, usually foreigners, brought their own private libraries to the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, as Argentina was called during the colonial period. These books were needed: until the viceroyalty was founded in 1776, late in the colonial period, Buenos Aires was a backwater town on a river where smuggling was the only form of commercial trade.

For the educated elites of Buenos Aires, Facundo Prieto y Pulido and his wife's 1794 donation of their library—the third largest in the city—to La Merced Convent, with the specific purpose of making the books available to the public, must have augured a great future for the now bustling port city. Prior to their gift, the family lent books to their friends and kept a log of who borrowed what and when. In contrast with religious orders, the Prieto y Pulido collection was far more varied in topics, with a strong emphasis on science, medicine, and philosophy. Furthermore, even a few women borrowed books, and it is likely that many shared the books borrowed by their husbands; this practice would disappear with the formation of the National Library, which did not lend books. The downside to their revolutionary lending library was that their friends often did not return the books, and when the collection was finally donated to the convent, it probably was to alleviate the Prieto y Pulido family of the need to keep asking friends to return them. Prior to 1812 the library at the convent was the only “public” library in Argentina, and for Parada, the partial list of books lent and to whom provides crucial information regarding book circulation and the great desire of *porteños* (residents of Buenos Aires) to learn about science, medicine, and other new ideas about the world.

The creation of the Biblioteca Nacional as part of the nation-building project of the First Triumvirate government of Buenos Aires province began in 1811, a difficult political moment for the emerging nation, as it would not be until 1816 that the rest of the provinces declared independence at Tucumán. With

limited funds and few personnel, the fledgling library relied on the generosity of local elites to contribute books, along with those confiscated by the liberal government as it closed down or secularized religious institutions. Based upon documents uncovered by Parada, the first *reglamentos*, or ordinances, had to deal with everyday problems such as when the library should open, how the budget should be used, and so on. A close reading of this and other documents by the author indicates that the library basically created a book budget by selling unusable or duplicate volumes to private parties, demonstrating that early libraries had the same kind of budgetary problems seen today. This is an excellent contribution to the history of early library science by an eminent specialist.

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The Vatican Library and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: The History, Impact, and Influence of Their Collaboration (1927–1947). By Nicoletta Mattioli Háy. Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2009. 749 pp. €150,00 (paper). ISBN 978-88-210-0849-8. Illustrated.

One of the great centers for ancient and medieval manuscripts as well as for early printed books, the Vatican Library nevertheless hardly seemed fit for scholarship and consultation when Pope Leo XIII began the process of modernizing it in 1884. Under its German-born director, Franz Ehrle (1895–1914), the project slowly gathered speed but faced many obstacles. An American visitor claimed that the library was “a miser’s treasure” buried under red tape and weighed heavily down by bureaucratic inertia (11–12 n. 12). But the real problems, according to this dissertation from Indiana University completed in 1991 by the Italian American librarian Nicoletta Mattioli Háy, were the lack of cataloging to facilitate access and the scattering of its riches into separate physical collections based on provenance rather than subject.

The Vatican Library was not unique in lacking a single or comprehensive catalog, but, somewhat surprisingly, it requested American help in the 1920s and 1930s. The papal librarians were conscious of the need for reform but also wanted to free it from competing European entanglements, and the Americans seemed a likely source of funding. This was only shortly after the great period of Carnegie largess, while the Carnegie Endowment under Nicholas Butler was receptive partly for personal reasons. The amounts eventually granted would seem very small even for that age but did bring American academic cataloging methods and interest in patron-based service to a continent aware of American public libraries but not much else. Prior to the 1920s French influence had been greater at the Vatican, since Italy was considered hostile and Germany predominantly Protestant. The Americans, it might be said, were more neutral, farther away, and richer. For their part, as William Warner Bishop of the University of Michigan wrote, the Americans believed that the Vatican Library’s prestige merited their effort to help, despite difficulties of distance and language. Bishop wanted to rescue it from the influence of the Bibliothèque nationale (“No more backward library exists” [103]). Bishop is indeed one of the heroes of this book, along with the French priest and later cardinal Eugène Tisserant and the Italian Giovanni Mercati, who also became a cardinal.

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