

# THE USED-BOOK TRADE IN THE ROMAN WORLD

RAYMOND J. STARR

IT IS COMMONLY ASSUMED that the Romans knew a used-book trade much like that of today.<sup>1</sup> Most of the ancient sources cited by modern scholars to prove the existence of a trade in used books, however, do not stand up to critical examination. In fact, although the Roman world appears to have had a small second-hand-book trade, that trade left almost no traces of itself in the surviving sources. It was probably restricted largely to school texts circulating outside the circles of aristocratic readers and writers who provide most of our surviving evidence. At most, a used-book trade potentially affected a comparatively small group: those lucky enough to have had a literary education but not wealthy enough (or inclined) to own or employ their own copyists or to buy many new books (see below, 155–156). For the aristocracy, the used-book trade was probably of very limited significance for the circulation of almost all literary texts.<sup>2</sup>

First, a word of definition: the phrases “used-book trade” and “second-hand-book trade” may seem at first to have a self-evident meaning, but that is deceptive. English distinguishes between “used” or “second-hand” books and “rare” books, but scholars writing in German would speak of an “antiquarischer” book trade, which embraces what one might call antiquarian books or rare books as well as simply used books. Different cultures place radically different values on “used” items and on “used” items of various types. In recent years, for instance, advertisements proclaim the virtues of “previously owned” luxury cars, wishing to avoid the negative associations called up by the phrase “used cars.” The status of a “used”

The following works will be cited by author's name alone: T. Kleberg, “Antiquarischer Buchhandel im alten Rom,” *Vetenskapssamhällets i Uppsala* 8 (1964) 21–32 (= Kleberg [1964]); T. Kleberg, *Buchhandel und Verlagswesen in der Antike*, tr. E. Zunker (Darmstadt 1967) from the orig. ed. (Stockholm 1962) (= Kleberg [1967]); A. J. Marshall, “Library Resources and Creative Writing at Rome,” *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 252–264; E. Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic* (Baltimore and London 1985); R. J. Starr, “The Circulation of Literary Texts in the Roman World,” *CQ* NS 37 (1987) 213–223.

<sup>1</sup>Marshall (253) suggests that “Romans came to know the dusty delights of second hand bookshops.” Cf. Rawson 50; O. A. W. Dilke, *Roman Books and Their Impact* (Leeds 1977) 27. The used-book market is not discussed at all in most handbooks, although see below, n. 3. Although it would qualify among the subjects E. J. Kenney calls “matters of speculation” (“Books and Readers in the Roman World,” in E. J. Kenney [ed.], *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature 2: Latin Literature*, [Cambridge 1982] 20), some progress is possible.

<sup>2</sup>For background on the circulation of literary texts in the Roman world, see Starr, with further references in notes.

object will depend on how the particular society values that kind of object and on how it values "usedness" in general, as well as on particular cultural circumstances, such as, in the case of books, the initial cost of paper and publication (in whatever form) and accessibility through public or private channels. As will be explored at the end of this paper, a Roman book was obviously something very different from a modern book, and the different cultural context heavily affects the nature of the Roman book trade. For now, it will be sufficient to define our terms as precisely as possible. This paper will confine itself to "used books" in the English sense of previously owned books bought by individual purchasers primarily for use as books to be read, as opposed to what I shall call "antiquarian" or "rare" books, books that have special value, for whatever reasons, as objects rather than simply as texts to be read.<sup>3</sup> This distinction is fluid and establishable only by the transaction in which a volume changes hands, since the seller may argue that he is selling an antiquarian treasure, while the prospective buyer may reply that the volume is much less valuable, merely an old, badly damaged book. The final price would determine the book's status, which could go up or down when the book changed hands the next time.

Many of the passages used by modern scholars to establish the existence of a used-book trade concern not "used books" as defined above but rather antiquarian books.<sup>4</sup> Gellius recalls that the *grammaticus* Fidus Optatus showed him *librum Aeneidos secundum mirandae vetustatis emptum in sigillariis viginti aureis, quem ipsius Vergili fuisse credebatur* (2.3.5) and elsewhere mentions that at a *libraria* in the *Sigillaria expositi erant Fabii annales, bonae atque sincerae vetustatis libri, quos venditor sine mendis esse contendebat* (5.4.1). Finally, in his wild attack on the ignorant book-collector Lucian insists that it would do the fool no good to buy many books in trying to overcome his lack of background and education, even if he should acquire copies made by Demosthenes himself of his own works and of Thucydides and the library Sulla sent from Athens to Italy, i.e., the library of Aristotle.<sup>5</sup> None of these texts is a normal used book; they are

<sup>3</sup>See Kleberg (1967) 58, and L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1974) 27–28. Kleberg (1964) discusses the "antiquarischer" book trade; he draws some distinctions between different types of noncurrent texts, but his treatment is hampered because he uses the modern world of books in creating a model for the ancient book trade (e.g., 21–22), a problem which vitiates the value of the discussion of F. Reichmann, "The Book Trade at the Time of the Roman Empire," *Library Quarterly* 8 (1938) 40–76, esp. 65–67 on the book trade.

<sup>4</sup>The three passages in this paragraph are all cited as evidence by Marshall 253, n. 7.

<sup>5</sup>*Ind.* 102 (as cited by Marshall 253, n. 7) = 3–4 in the OCT. Kleberg (1964) 27 also cites Gellius 13.31 and 18.4, scenes which take place in bookshops. In neither case is it completely clear that the books in question were found in the shops, although it is more likely in 13.31. Even there, however, it is an antiquarian book.

all antiquarian texts, some of them even thought by the ancients to be autograph copies.<sup>6</sup>

The marketability of antiquarian books led some dealers to practice active fraud. Dio Chrysostom (21.12) comments that booksellers, knowing that antique books (τὰ ἀρχαία τῶν βιβλίων) are valued because they are "better written and on higher quality paper," bury wretched modern volumes in grain so that the books take on a color similar to that of old volumes (τοῖς παλαιοῖς) and can be sold as old books (ὡς παλαιά). The passage definitely demonstrates a demand for volumes that are not new, but the reasons he cites—better writing and better paper—suggest an extremely limited (and easily fooled) market interested not in used books but in extremely old books. Such enterprising techniques, however, were not always required if the customer was sufficiently naive. Lucian (*Adversus indoctum* 1) heaps scorn on the ignorant book-collector because

μάλιστα δὲ οὐδὲ τὰ κάλλιστα ὦνῃ, ἀλλὰ πιστεύεις τοῖς ὡς ἔτυχεν ἐπαινοῦσι καὶ ἔρμαιον εἶ τῶν τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐπιγυδομένων τοῖς βιβλίοις καὶ θησαυρὸς ἔτοιμος τοῖς κατήλοις αὐτῶν. ἢ πόθεν γάρ σοι διαγῶναι δυνατόν, τίνα μὲν παλαιὰ καὶ πολλοὺ ἄξια, τίνα δὲ φαῦλα καὶ ἄλλως σαπρά, εἰ μὴ τῷ διαβεβῶσθαι καὶ κατακεκόφθαι αὐτὰ τεκμαίροιο καὶ συμβούλους τοὺς σέας ἐπὶ τὴν ἐξέτασιν παραλαμβάνουσ; ἐπεὶ τοῦ ἀκριβοῦς ἡ ἀσφαλοῦς ἐν αὐτοῖς τίς ἡ ποία διάγνωσις;

Here the customer does not seem to be falling for an elaborate ruse, but simply for fast talk from the dealer.<sup>7</sup>

Other passages used to document a used-book trade concern books that are merely damaged or in poor condition, not used or second-hand books (see Kleberg [1967] 59–60). First, Gellius 9.4.1–5:<sup>8</sup>

*cum e Graecia in Italiam rediremus et Brundisium iremus egressique e navi in terram in portu illo inclito spatiaremur, . . . fasces librorum venalium expositos vidimus. atque ego avide statim pergo ad libros. erant autem isti omnes libri Graeci miraculorum fabularumque pleni, res inauditae, incredulae, scriptores veteres non parvae auctoritatis . . . ipsa autem volumina ex diutino situ squalebant et habitu aspectuque taetro erant. accessi tamen percontatusque pretium sum*

<sup>6</sup> See J. E. G. Zetzel, "Emendavi ad Tironem: Some Notes on Scholarship in the Second Century A.D.," *HSCP* 77 (1973) 225–245, who discusses forgeries. In general, see W. Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum: Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung* (Munich 1971); on medieval *Fälschungen*, see H. Fuhrmann, *Einfluss und Verbreitung der pseudoisidorischen Fälschungen von ihrem Auftauchen bis in die neuere Zeit* 1 (Stuttgart 1972, *Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae historica*, Band 24.1) ch. 1, "Über Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Überlegungen zum mittelalterlichen Wahrheitsbegriff," 65 ff.

<sup>7</sup> But where did the dealer get the volume? Is it possible that there was a wholesale trade in used books, which were then sold at retail fraudulently as antiquarian books? The theory seems strained, although possible. The question is beyond proof.

<sup>8</sup> Used as evidence by B. Baldwin, *Studies in Aulus Gellius* (Lawrence, Kansas 1975) 17, and by Dilke (above, n. 1) 27–28.

*et adductus mira atque insperata vilitate libros plurimos aere paucio emio eosque omnis duabus proximis noctibus cursim transeo.*

These books share two important features common to what we today call used books: low price and poor condition. Nothing in the passage, however, suggests that the volumes were used books. Gellius says explicitly that the books' poor condition resulted *ex diutino situ*. He comments that the *scriptores* were *veteres*, but that, of course, has nothing to do with whether the books were used, nor does it necessarily mean that the books were copies made even close to their authors' lifetimes. If Gellius found the books specifically in a bookshop, which is not clear,<sup>9</sup> perhaps the bookseller had had the books for some time and had not succeeded in selling them, hence their poor condition.

Second, Statius *Silvae* 4.9,<sup>10</sup> where Statius humorously complains to Plotius Grypus:

*tu rosam tineis situque putrem,  
quales aut Libycis madent olivis  
aut tus Niliacum piperve servant  
aut Byzantiacos colunt lacertos;  
nec saltem tua dicta continentem*

...

*sed Bruti senis oscitationes  
de capsula miseri libellionis,  
emptum plus minus asse Gaiano,  
donas.*

(10-14, 20-23)

Like the books Gellius bought at Brundisium, Plotius Grypus' gift to Statius is merely in poor condition, especially, again, with respect to *situ*.

Two other passages are cited by modern scholars. First, Gellius tells us that *commentarium de proloquiis L. Aelii . . . studiose quaesivimus eumque in Pacis bibliotheca repertum legimus* (16.8.2).<sup>11</sup> Although this passage is good evidence for a library in the Forum of Vespasian,<sup>12</sup> it proves nothing about used-book shops. Presumably, Gellius' search was conducted in his friends' libraries and in the public libraries of Rome.<sup>13</sup> Second, Libanius

<sup>9</sup>Kennedy (above, n. 1) 20. Kennedy also notes that the episode may never have actually happened.

<sup>10</sup>Discussed by Kleberg (1964) 27-28.

<sup>11</sup>Used by Marshall 253, n. 7, where Gellius 18.1.11 is also cited, although its relevance to used books is not clear.

<sup>12</sup>See C. E. Boyd, *Public Libraries and Literary Culture in Ancient Rome* (Chicago 1915) 16-17; recently, L. L. Johnson, "The Hellenistic and Roman Library: Studies Pertaining to Their Architectural Form" (diss., Brown Univ., Providence 1984) 99-101.

<sup>13</sup>Numerous parallels could be cited; on the use of friends' collections, see, e.g., Cic. Att. 8.11.7 (SB 161), with Shackleton Bailey's note, *ad loc.*, and, for more examples, R. Sommer, "T. Pomponius Atticus und die Verbreitung von Ciceros Werken,"

provides a colorful story in his autobiographical First Oration (1.148–150).<sup>14</sup> He was especially fond of his copy of Thucydides because of its small writing and the ease with which it could be carried.<sup>15</sup> He praised the book so much that he attracted burglars. He caught some of them in the act, but finally a thief succeeded, even starting a fire as a diversion to aid his escape. Libanius sent descriptions of the book to his friends, and, in a recognition scene straight out of New Comedy,<sup>16</sup> a teacher recognizes the book in the hands of a student who had purchased it, and it is triumphantly recovered by its rightful owner. The stealing and subsequent sale of a valuable text from a well-known professor, however, hardly qualifies as evidence for any systematic trade in used books.<sup>17</sup>

Two passages comprise virtually all the surviving ancient evidence for the sale or purchase of individual volumes or of comparatively small numbers of volumes, the natural stock of a used-book dealer. Even in these passages, however, the interpretation is far from definite. First, lines 10–13 of Horace *Epist.* 1.20, addressed to his book as though to a young slave:<sup>18</sup>

*carus eris Romae donec te deserat aetas.  
contrectatus ubi manibus sordescere vulgi  
coeperis, aut tineas pasces taciturnus inertis  
aut fugies Uticam aut victus mitteris Ilerdam.*

Ps.-Acron *ad* 1.20.9 takes the final line to mean *fient ex te opistographae epistolarum*, but his interpretation is unlikely, since the other fates Horace

---

*Hermes* 61 (1926) 389–422, at 398, and Starr 216–218; on the use of public libraries, see, e.g., Fronto *Ep.* 4.5.2, p. 62 Van Den Hout.

<sup>14</sup>Used as evidence by A. F. Norman, "The Book Trade in Fourth-Century Antioch," *JHS* 80 (1960) 122–126, at 122.

<sup>15</sup>Norman, *op. cit.* 124, suggests on the basis of the description of the writing that the book may have been originally copied in the previous century. Excessively small writing leads to complaints in Sen. *Dial.* 4.26.2; cf. Lucian, *Vit. Auct.* 23.

<sup>16</sup>See A. F. Norman's note *ad* 148 in his edition, *Libanius' Autobiography (Oration I)* (Oxford 1965).

<sup>17</sup>This drama demands the inclusion of two much later parallels, taken from N. G. Wilson, "Books and Readers in Byzantium," in *Byzantine Books and Bookmen* (Washington, D.C. 1975) 4: "Michael Choniates, after losing his library in the sack of Athens in 1205, recovered some of his books and gave instructions to two of his friends to look out for a few particularly prized volumes that had not yet been found again: Euclid's *Elements* and Theophylact's commentary on the Pauline epistles, the latter being written in Michael's own hand . . . [in the fifteenth century] Constantine Lascaris recovered in Messina a text of Greek tragedy that he had lost eighteen years before." Wilson's dry conclusion (*ibid.*) also merits quotation: "It remains, of course, a question whether these two coincidences should be regarded as typical experiences in the life of any Byzantine bookman."

<sup>18</sup>Cited by Rawson 50; discussed by Kleberg (1964) 28. Cf. Reichmann (above, n. 3) 64, who indulges in speculation about the economic importance of "expanded export business" on the basis of Hor. *Ars P.* 345 (*hic meret aera liber Sosis, hic et mare transit*), on which see C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: The Ars poetica* (Cambridge 1971) *ad loc.*

imagines for the book all preserve it as a book, in whatever shabby condition. The lines may imply the export of damaged or merely old or out of fashion books to provincial cities and may not necessarily involve used books as defined above.<sup>19</sup> *vinctus*, easily understood with reference to the slave, suggests bundles of rolls, like the *fascēs librorum* Gellius sees at Brundisium. Horace may be referring to copies, perhaps now in poor condition, made by booksellers in anticipation of sales that did not materialize and not to used books. That interpretation, however, could be challenged. The passage describes the book as a handsome young slave, who will be *carus* at Rome so long as age does not remove his good looks. As his youth deserts him, he slips down the social ladder into more sordid affairs until he is eventually sold abroad. The amatory image of repeated, progressively more degrading affairs might imply the book repeatedly changing hands through sale. This passage, then, might be evidence, however tentative, for a trade in used books. The parallel between *vinctus* here and *fascēs librorum* in the Gellius passage might be a tenuous argument to draw the Gellius passage into this context.

Only one other piece of evidence exists, in a very minor source and previously unnoticed. Here, too, the interpretation must be approached very skeptically. The late Roman or early Byzantine jokebook, the *Philogelos*, preserves this joke:<sup>20</sup>

σχολαστικὸς εὐτράπελος ἀπορῶν δαπανημάτων τὰ βιβλία αὐτοῦ ἐπίπρασκε· καὶ γράφων πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ἔλεγε· Σύγχειρε ἡμῖν, πάτερ, ἥδη γὰρ ἡμᾶς τὰ βιβλία τρέφει.

This joke raises a number of questions, all of them important for our topic and none of them answerable. To whom are we to imagine the speaker sold his books? An individual, perhaps a fellow student? A bookshop? Was the sale of schoolbooks, since that is what seems to be involved here, ordinary or unusual? Finally, if the books are to be thought of as sold to a bookstore and if such sales were ordinary, *where* and *when* was the practice common? Throughout the Roman world? Only in the Greek east? Throughout the Imperial period? Only in the late Roman and early Byzantine period, from which the *Philogelos* appears to originate (although, of course, jokes might float unrecorded for hundreds of years)? In spite of the range and seriousness of these questions, it seems excessively skeptical not to imagine a situation along the following lines: in major cities there may have existed shops that dealt in, perhaps among other things, previously

<sup>19</sup>See E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957) 358–359, with n. 1 on 359; cf. Rawson 50.

<sup>20</sup>*Philogelos* 55; the text is taken from the edition by A. Thierfelder, *Philogelos der Lachfreund* (Munich 1968). The authorship and date of the jokebook are uncertain; see the introductory discussion, iv–viii, in B. Baldwin, ed., *The Philogelos or Laughter Lover* (Amsterdam 1983, London Studies in Classical Philology 10). In Baldwin's translation: "A witty young egghead sold his books when short of money. He then wrote to his father, 'Congratulate me, father, I am already making money from my studies.'"

owned copies of the books commonly used in schools.<sup>21</sup> Since at least the Roman school curriculum became more and more standardized with the passage of time until it eventually settled on Vergil, Terence, Sallust, and Cicero,<sup>22</sup> such shops may have arisen comparatively late and not affected the circulation of many different authors or titles, but they might have met a steady demand from students for those few texts. Such shops would have provided a service, but their importance in the circulation of more than a very few literary texts would have been very limited.

Whole libraries, however, did change hands.<sup>23</sup> Cicero's *Letters* provide a glimpse of how this might happen. When Cicero was equipping his Tusculan villa, he asks Atticus, *et velim cogites, id quod mihi pollicitus es, quem ad modum bibliothecam nobis conficere possis* (Att. 1.7 [SB 3]). Atticus apparently purchased a library in Greece, since Cicero writes to him a few months later, *bibliothecam tuam cave cuiquam despondeas, quamvis acrem amatorem inveneris*.<sup>24</sup> Somewhat later Cicero again writes to say, *libros tuos conserva et noli desperare eos <me> meos facere posse* (Att. 1.4.3 [SB 9]). It is perhaps not fanciful to imagine Cicero eventually acquiring the collection from Atticus: the second half of the discussion in *De divinatione* between Cicero and Quintus takes place in the library of Cicero's Tusculan villa (Div. 2.3.8), as part of *De finibus* is set in the library of the Tusculan villa of Lucullus.

Some years later Cicero acquired another library *in toto*, this one as a gift rather than as a purchase, but again with the assistance of Atticus, to whom he explains that L. Papirius Paetus, a friend for whom Cicero had done some favor, had given him the books bequeathed to Paetus by his relative, Ser. Claudius, a wealthy literary man. *nunc si me amas, si te a me amari scis, Cicero implores Atticus, enitere per amicos, clientis, hospites, liberos denique ac servos tuos, ut scida ne qua depereat. nam et Graecis iis libris quos suspicor et Latinis quos scio illum reliquisse mihi vehementer opus est*.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup>This possibility for the Byzantine period is speculatively broached by Wilson (above, n. 17) 8, in discussing the high cost of books, the small size of private libraries, and the books read in Byzantine schools. Wilson suggests that further study of school-masters' correspondence may someday help answer the question. Libanius' copy of Thucydides might conceivably have been handled by such a dealer, although the description of the book as a valuable and prized copy suggests that a dealer in rare books would be more likely.

<sup>22</sup>See H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, tr. G. Lamb (Madison 1982) from the third edition (Paris 1948) 277–278.

<sup>23</sup>See below, and cf. Marshall 253, n. 7; 255, with n. 18 on whole libraries.

<sup>24</sup>Cic. Att. 1.10.4 (SB 6). See Shackleton Bailey's note *ad loc.* and, on the chronology, his introductory note on 1.7 (SB 3).

<sup>25</sup>Cic. Att. 1.20.7 (SB 20); see Shackleton Bailey's note *ad loc.* See also Cic. Att. 2.1.12 (SB 21).

Cicero's excitement was justified, since various hints suggest that Ser. Claudius' library was probably a rich one.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, Cicero may have acquired a third and even more valuable library, that of Aristotle and Theophrastus (see Marshall 259–260). Sulla the Dictator took the books when he seized Athens (Plut. *Sulla* 26.1) and presumably left them to his son Faustus. Because of financial trouble, Faustus may have sold the library to Cicero if that is the explanation of Cicero's comment to Atticus from Cumae: *ego hic pascor bibliotheca Fausti*.<sup>27</sup>

Certainly Cicero's friend Trebatius found Aristotle's *Topics* at Cicero's villa at Tusculum and asked him about them, which ostensibly led to the writing of Cicero's *Topica*.<sup>28</sup> A recent discussion, however, rightly throws suspicion on the acquisition: surely if Cicero had actually acquired the legendary library of Aristotle he would have let it be known so clearly and so often that we would have heard of it.<sup>29</sup>

Used-book dealers are so common today that initially it seems odd that such a trade may not have been especially important in the Roman world. But that lack of widespread significance follows naturally from three factors.

First, it is hard to imagine from whom individual used volumes would have been obtained. Poor school-masters might supply either individual volumes or entire collections, depending on their degree of destitution. In one poem, Palladas writes of selling Callimachus and Pindar while still hoping to avoid permanent penury (*Anth. Pal.* 9.175), but in another poem he declares that he is changing his occupation and selling "the tools of the Muses, the books of many groans" (*Anth. Pal.* 9.171). Even at a very optimistic estimate of the number of school-masters and a very pessimistic estimate of their fates, however, such a source would be of very minor importance. School-children, as noted above, might have provided a source for a few texts, but hardly enough in number or variety to support a used-book

<sup>26</sup>He and his father-in-law L. Aelius Stilo are mentioned by Suetonius as eminent scholars of *grammatica*, although they fell out when Ser. Claudius pirated a work of his father-in-law before it was released to the public (Suet. *Gram.* 3.1–3). Gellius (3.3.1) mentions that he made a list of which Plautine plays were genuine.

<sup>27</sup>Cic. *Att.* 4.10.1 (SB 84) (April, 55). See *Att.* 9.11.4 (SB 178) (March, 49) for Faustus Sulla's financial troubles, and Plut. *Cic.* 27.3. The sale to Cicero is not unquestionable, however (see below), although most scholars agree it probably took place; see Marshall 259–260 and Shackleton Bailey on *Att.* 4.10.1 (SB 84).

<sup>28</sup>See Cic. *Top.* 1.1–5 and *Fam.* 7.19 (SB 334), a letter to Trebatius to accompany the work, with Shackleton Bailey's note *ad loc.*

<sup>29</sup>See Rawson 41. P. T. Pütz, *De M. Tulli Ciceronis bibliotheca* (diss., Münster 1925) 7–8, thinks Cicero used Faustus' library but does not raise the possibility of acquisition. P. Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen von Andronikos bis Alexander von Aphrodisias* 1 (Berlin 1973) 37–39, leaves open the question of purchase or mere use. The most recent discussion is by C. Lord, "On the Early History of the Aristotelian Corpus," *AJP* 107 (1986) 137–161.



trade. It is probably unrealistic to picture an upper class Roman disposing of single volumes to a used-book dealer, since books were high-prestige items that apparently were kept rather than disposed of.<sup>30</sup> Two special cases, however, might lead to the sale of a whole library or of some large part of one. First, under *distractio bonorum*, when a *clara persona* such as a senator or his wife was being sued for debt, it was possible for a special *curator* to be appointed to set aside a portion of the person's property for sale to pay the debt and thereby avoid the *infamia* of bankruptcy.<sup>31</sup> *distractio bonorum*, however, would presumably not yield significant supplies of books. Second, the practice of leaving fractions of one's estate in one's will has probably sometimes led to the selling of whole estates and the division of the proceeds. This too would probably not provide very many volumes to a used-book dealer, even assuming that the books were not left specifically to a friend known to share the testator's love of literature.

Second, the Romans who bought *substantial* numbers of books would have been wealthy enough that they would have had little need for any potential economy of price offered by a hypothetical used-book dealer. Many of their books would have been copied by their own slaves in their own homes, in any case. Freedmen might also copy books for their former masters as part of their *operae*.<sup>32</sup> The book trade was a luxury trade (Starr 219–220). Even a restricted used-book trade, however, might have been somewhat useful to those who wanted books but did not own or employ a copyist. This group might be comparatively large in absolute numbers even if small as a proportion of the whole population.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup>On books as sources of prestige, see, e.g., Pliny *Ep.* 3.7.8 (on Silius Italicus); Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 2.9.4; Sen. *Dial.* 9.9.4–7; in general, see, most recently, R. J. Starr, "Trimalchio's Libraries," *Hermes* 115 (1987) 252–253. Architects were expected to take considerable care in designing private libraries to preserve books (Vitr. 6.4.1). On not disposing of books, see Amm. Marc. 14.6.18, who laments that degeneracy reached such a point that *bibliothecis sepulcrorum ritu in perpetuum clausis*, where the context clearly indicates that he means private and not public libraries. People might close their libraries, but they would not get rid of the books.

<sup>31</sup>*distractio bonorum* was available only to the elite, as *Digest* 27.10.5 (Gaius, *Libro nono ad edictum provinciale*) shows (cf. *Digest* 27.10.9 [Neratius, *Libro primo membranarum*]). On *distractio bonorum*, see G. Wesener, *RE Supp.* 9 (1962) cols. 27–32, s.v. "*distractio bonorum*"; P. Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1970) 186–187, 236; R. J. A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome* (Princeton 1984) 40.

<sup>32</sup>See *Digest* 38.1.49 (from Gaius, *De causis*), which speaks of a freedman *librarius* assigned *librorum scribendorum operas*. This instance might be part of a commercial enterprise, but that seems relatively unlikely in the context, since the other, simultaneously performed task assigned to the freedman is house-sitting for the other of his two patrons.

<sup>33</sup>In general, cf. W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge 1989), about literacy in the Greek and Roman world.

Third, and even more important, since books were copied by hand, the supply of a particular title was not restricted to a specific number of copies in a publisher's printing run.<sup>34</sup> If one wanted a copy of a book, one had a copy made, provided, of course, that a text was available to copy.

What happened to the texts that today would become the stock of a used-book dealer, the books that the owner no longer wanted to keep if only for reasons of status and display? Three possibilities suggest themselves. First, the text might simply be thrown away or perhaps given to a friend who was interested in it. Both of these options exist for a modern used book. Second, the text might be reused, whether by removing the original text and then writing a second text on it or by turning the roll over and using the back.<sup>35</sup> That option does not exist for a modern printed book except in the radical form of recycling the text for pulp, from which new paper and hence a new book might someday be made. Third, the text could be cut up and the backs of the pieces used for non-literary purposes, such as writing business letters, as ps.-Acron imagines would happen in the passage from Horace's *Epistles* (ad 1.20.9; see above, 152). The Heroninus archive, for instance, contains correspondence written on the back of the third book of the *Iliad*, Demosthenes' *De corona*, a New Comedy, and a philosophical work.<sup>36</sup> The very fact that ancient bookrolls, since they had writing on only one side, were reusable for other texts may have contributed to the lack of a broadly significant used-book trade in the Roman world.<sup>37</sup>

DEPARTMENTS OF GREEK AND LATIN

WELLESLEY COLLEGE

WELLESLEY, MASS. 02181

<sup>34</sup>Words like "publisher," "edition," and "out of print" should not be used with reference to Greek and Roman texts, since they have little meaning in a world of handmade copies. See Sommer (above, n. 13) 389-422; P. Petit, "Recherches sur la publication et la diffusion des discours de Libanius," *Historia* 5 (1956) 479-509; B. van Groningen, "ΕΚΑΘΕΙΣ," *Mnemosyne* 16 (1963) 1-17; J. E. G. Zetzel, *Latin Textual Criticism in Antiquity* (Salem 1981) 232-235; Starr.

<sup>35</sup>See E. G. Turner, *Greek Papyri: An Introduction* (Princeton 1968, corr. ed. with add., Oxford 1980) 6, with further references.

<sup>36</sup>For details, references, and discussion, see E. G. Turner, "Writing Materials for Businessmen," *BASPR* 15 (1978) 163-169, esp. 166-168, and W. Clarysse, "Literary Papyri in Documentary 'Archives,'" *Studia Hellenistica* 27 (1983) 43-61, at 47. Turner also suggests (167) that it is possible that paper dealers might have sold used texts for reuse for writing materials.

<sup>37</sup>My thanks go to Wellesley College for supporting my research. An earlier version of this paper was presented at an annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South. I received helpful comments from my colleagues at Wellesley, T. Keith Dix, Barry Baldwin, and the anonymous referees of *Phoenix*.