

BOOK REVIEWS

ARCHIVES IN THE ANCIENT WORLD By Ernst Posner
Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1972. SBN 674-04463-0
\$ U.S. 10.00

Repeated use of superlatives is bad style, but difficult to avoid in reviewing such a book as this. The few harsh words in a later paragraph are of little significance against the scope of the task Posner set himself and the success he achieved.

He takes as his subject the great civilisations of the Mesopotamian and Nile valleys, the eastern Mediterranean, Greece and Rome. The first chapter deals with the clay tablet archives of many countries from the Persian Gulf to Greece, concentrating on physical aspects of creation and preservation. The other chapters are divided more or less according to national cultures – Pharaonic Egypt, Greece, Persia, Greco-Roman Egypt, Republican and Imperial Rome, with a short 'postlude' on the Parthian and Neo-Persian empires. In these he is able to go into greater detail on the administrative background to the records, doing the reader the compliment of assuming that he is thoroughly conversant with Roman history!

The work is descriptive rather than interpretative, but it is interesting to note signs of continuity or similarity between different countries, and fascinating to discover common ground with our ancient colleagues.

With such a mass of information, this is not an easy book to assimilate. The reader's task is not made easier by the author's tendency to leap back and forth in time, sometimes illustrating one era by the practices of a few centuries later.

Posner modestly apologises for not having studied the ancient texts – practically the whole work is based on secondary sources. However, the bibliography of these sources fills 36 pages, and represents about a century's writing on ancient archives, in half a dozen European languages. As one might expect, references in footnotes and bibliography are impeccable. The index, in spite of its rather complex design, works easily.

One does not go searching for mistakes, although there must be some. The few noticed are minor. Mention on page 148 of 'the Australian Torrey System' is presumably a reference to Robert Richard Torrens. In comparing Posner's description of the Capitol and the building of the Tabularium in Rome (p.174-178) with the relevant plan (figure 34) it becomes apparent that he gets his directions well and truly mixed up.

Why do so many good books have bad maps? It is irritating to turn so often in vain to the map in search of places mentioned in the text, and astonishing to find that about three quarters of the towns on the map are not indexed, and so presumably are not mentioned in the text! Differences in nomenclature used by author and cartographer account for, but do not excuse, a few of these omissions. The map in question is probably a good one in its original context,

but in a book of this standard, one might reasonably expect a map, or even a series of maps, drawn to illustrate this, and not someone else's, text.

The general design presents a few surprises. Very wide outside margins, which at first sight appear extravagant, make the format almost square, but enable the reproduction of marginal diagrams and magnificent photographs at the right places in relation to the text. Consistent blending of asymmetry and regularity, together with typography, printing and binding that are almost flawless, make a book that is handsome to look at and easy to handle.

John Love

Music Librarianship and Documentation
Report of the Adelaide Seminar, 1970
Available from Department of Adult Education, University of Adelaide
ISBN 85578 072 X \$2.50

For those of us who attended the seminar on Music Librarianship and Documentation in Adelaide in 1970 it has been a long wait for the publication of the papers given. As a result of the seminar an Australian/New Zealand Branch of the International Association of Music Libraries was formed with representatives in each state, with the exception of the Northern Territory.

The aim of the directors of the seminar was "the consolidation of music librarianship in the community and to highlight both immediate and long range prospects of music documentation" (Preface) To my mind the seminar fulfilled its aims admirably. It highlighted the prospects of music librarianship and put the whole idea onto a firm footing with the formation of the Branch of the I.A.M.L. Subsequent meetings have been held in Sydney as part of the 1971 Library Association Conference and there are plans for a meeting at the 1973 Perth conference.

The publication is an agreeable size and attractive typescript but the first misprint is in the table of contents! Areas of interest covered by the speakers were far-reaching and could not be described as conservative, e.g. music library service for the mass media, the work of the music department of the Commonwealth Film Unit and the use of computer aids in music librarianship and documentation. Papers also covered the housekeeping topics of librarianship as related to the field of music – interlibrary loans, classification schemes, the establishment of an Australian National Archive for music and other similar topics. Because very little has been published about music librarianship in Australia all papers are interesting to read if only to satisfy curiosity and to discover what it is that is so fascinating about the particular field. Music librarians seem rarely to move into other fields of librarianship.

To assist with the usefulness of the publication, the several appendices illustrate a potted history of resources and services offered by music libraries in Australia and New Zealand, a copy of the programme of the seminar from which it will be noted that participants were kept hard at work for most of their stay in Adelaide, and a list of participants. From conversations and contacts made, I found the seminar extremely useful and entertaining. Margaret A. Cooper