

READERS AND READING CULTURE IN THE HIGH ROMAN EMPIRE: A STUDY OF ELITE COMMUNITIES . By William A. Johnson . Oxford : Oxford University Press , 2010 . Pp . ix + 227 . Cloth, \$65.00 .

Johnson's book examines ancient reading practices from Trajan to Marcus Aurelius. Rather than imagining reading as a strictly cognitive act, Johnson instead sees it more broadly as "the negotiated construction of meaning within a particular sociocultural context." Johnson thus examines a series of "reading communities" to uncover how their attitudes toward books were both informed by and shaped their worldviews. Johnson shows that the *scriptio continua* of the bookroll and its costly aesthetic features ensured that the consumers of texts were limited. Yet restricting the book's accessibility was precisely the point for elites who used reading to create and reaffirm the values of high society. Chapters on Pliny, Tacitus, Galen, Aulus Gellius, Fronto, Lucian, and Egyptian papyri explore this point by revealing how aristocrats integrated reading into their daily regimens for aesthetic, intellectual, and moral edification. Whether done in private or performatively in groups, such reading practices were socially charged, providing the cultured with a program that, they believed, separated them from the *hoi polloi*. In an age of imperial dominance, these claims to exercise control over language and reading were an acceptable path for elites to reaffirm their status and honor. Johnson's insights into the social dimensions of reading represent an important contribution to discussions of elite culture and the techniques these social networks employed to fashion their identities.

David M. Reis

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