

Episode 75 The Library of Alexandria

Emily Einolander 00:21

Welcome to the Hybrid Pub Scout Podcast with me, Emily Einolander, and me Corinne Calasky, and guest host Chris Curran.

Chris Curran 00:31

Hi, everybody.

Emily Einolander 00:33

We're mapping the frontier between traditional and indie publishing and today we are exploring the concept of a universal library, focusing mostly on the ancient Library of Alexandria and its legendary and mysterious demise.

Corinne Kalasky 00:47

Our sources today include the Library of Alexandria center of learning in the ancient world, a collection of academic essays edited by Roy McCleod, an episode of the BBC radio show In Our Time from March 2009, the Vanished Library by Luciano Canfora, an episode of In Search of History about the Library of Alexandria, and a few other articles that will link on the website.

Emily Einolander 01:15

The Library of Alexandria was one of the largest and most historically significant libraries in the ancient world, located in where else Alexandria, on the northern coast of Egypt, it was attached to a larger research institution called the museum, which was dedicated to the Muses we're pretty sure it was established during the reign of told me the first and its destruction is the basis of enduring legend.

Chris Curran 01:43

However, there's a lot we don't know about the Library of Alexandria, including exactly where it was, what it looked like, when it was actually destroyed, and how it was actually destroyed. People have searched like crazy to try to answer those first two points. And there are lots of conflicting accounts about those second two.

Emily Einolander 02:07

I totally didn't know that until I started researching this. Like, I was just like, Okay, I'm going to look up the story of how the Alexandria Library burned down. And then it was like, well, we don't really know. And you hear people talk about it with so much certainty. And as if it's this discrete event that happened in time, and then as soon as you start looking into it, no,

Chris Curran 02:34

no, and yeah, that's why I've always been just kind of ambivalent toward the whole topic, because it's it. It sounds like it's more our, our modern understanding of it is, is more the product of, you know, romantics than it is like actual scholarship. Somebody out there, correct me if I'm wrong,

Emily Einolander 02:56

One of those giant historical games of telephone like you and I have discussed in the past.

Chris Curran 03:02

Absolutely.

Emily Einolander 03:03

So what do we actually know about the Library of Alexandria? Well, the city of Alexandria was founded by Alexander the Great around 332 BCE. When he died, one of his top generals took control of Egypt. Along with the assistance of an exiled Athenian governor named Demetrius of Thelerum. Ptolemy embarked on creating the greatest library in the world. His goal was to gather all the world's written knowledge, translate the text into Greek, and keep it in this one central place.

Chris Curran 03:39

It isn't known exactly what the library looks like. But we know there was the mosaic on which was more the research center. And then there was also the Bibleon. We know that there was a lecture hall, a dining hall, and a covered walkway. Some scholars have speculated that the books were placed throughout that complex.

Emily Einolander 03:59

I just picture Bart's books and Ojai, didn't you? And I go there together, Chris at some point. Yeah. Yeah. Crazy. Have you ever been there?

Corinne Kalasky 04:09

I have not. No, I've never been to Ohio. I'd love to go. I heard

Emily Einolander 04:13

one of those Instagram bookstores. Like as soon as Bookstagram started then. Bart's Books was all over it because it's all outdoors. Oh, and you know, there's just ledges over everything protecting the books from the occasional rain. Well, I guess there's a lot of rain at the moment. But everything's just out there. And you can wander around and enjoy the sunlight and enjoy the books. And there's cats of course. Oh, yeah. Because you know, you have bookstore cats, but if it's an outdoor bookstore, you have more cat reasons to have cats. True. True. That's incredible. Yeah, more cat reasons to

Corinne Kalasky 04:54

have a cat reason.

Chris Curran 04:56

It's fun. Please continue. Well, a priest or a director were called Eristatus that presided over the whole institution. Over the course of its prominence. Visiting scholars included Archimedes and Euclid.

According to one of the essays in the Library of Alexandria essay collection, it was part thinktank, part graduate school, part observatory, and part laboratory.

Emily Einolander 05:26

The library became a center for Babylonian, Egyptian, Jewish and Greek thought with the goal of collecting every, like I cannot stress enough every book in the world and translating it into Greek. And I know that I said that before, but just the vast scale of the ambition here, and the emphasis on making it all Greek and making sure they had every piece of the world's knowledge and their language was very important to them. The catalog of documents alone, so the card catalog, you could say, was 120 books long. In terms of actually getting all the world's books into this library, one of the oldest historical texts dates.

Corinne Kalasky 06:14

Demetrius of Thelaram, the president of the kings library received vast sums of money for the purpose of collecting together as far as he possibly could all the books in the world. By means of purchase and transcription, he carried out to the best of his ability at the purpose of the king, he was asked how many 1000s of books are there in the library, and he replied, more than 200,000. Oh, King, and I shall make an endeavor in the immediate future to gather together the remainder also, so that the total of 500,000 may be reached.

Chris Curran 06:50

The way that those purchases and transcriptions were carried out, was aggressive, to say the least, the main manner in which they acquired books was through trade, reaching the farthest corners of the world that the Greek traders could travel. However, officials also warmed up sealing books. One major method was having the ship inspectors take whatever books they found, when ships entered the harbor, they would promise to return copies of the books, but they would keep the originals in the books, that would usually be a receipt that said, from the ships,

Emily Einolander 07:23

Can you fucking imagine a person who has to ride all over the place in a boat? And then someone comes and takes your book? Like, what do I do now?

Chris Curran 07:35

And also, what's the turnaround on this?

Emily Einolander 07:40

Like, I gotta go?

Chris Curran 07:43

I mean, these are business people, right? These traders, they're business people, they're trying to keep us to a, you know, a timetable. Yeah. And, and then like, okay, so all of these things are hand written and hand copied. So what is, so let's take for, you know, let's take them at their word, the library at its word, and say that, you know, the copyists are trying to turn out this copy as quickly as they can. So can you imagine how logical especially if it needed to be translated?

Emily Einolander 08:14

Yeah, exactly. I feel like it's one of those things where it's like, you can get a rebate if you want, like, who actually gets.

Corinne Kalasky 08:28

That's true.

Emily Einolander 08:30

I have gotten the rebate for things a couple of times, but a lot of the time, you're like, Sure, I'll send in this box top for 25. Let's, let's, let's touch on this universal library thing, which we already kind of have. So, like we said, the universal Library is the central place where all knowledge is held, not just a little knowledge, all knowledge. Not necessarily, I think that the greater definition doesn't mean it all has to be in a single language, aka Greek here. But, Chris, do you think the Library of Alexandria was really a universal library?

Chris Curran 09:11

I wouldn't, I wouldn't say so. I mean, its mission is admirable. The way I understand a universal library is that all it is is entirely utopian. Right? A utopia, by definition cannot exist. And what I imagine is something that contains all of human knowledge is easily accessible. It's expeditiously accessible to all people regardless of station, regardless of ability, regardless of language, regardless of academic standing, regardless of any and all labels that one can ascribe to to an individual or to a community. So in answer to your question, no, I don't see it as such. I see it, as I see, this library of Alexandria is I see it more as a university and even like a private university, where there are accounts of, of the library that that scholars were invited to the institution, right. And so what I see is, you know, lecturers being invited or, you know, grad students being courted by some of the ivy League's, to come and pursue their PhDs or whatever, that's more of what I see. So do I see it as an institution that was open to all regardless of station? No. Greek society and Hellenic society. This is a Hellenic institution was highly stratified. Women were not considered citizens, right. The only citizens were landowning, then Greek society and Mediterranean societies at the time, almost all of them, but especially the Greeks and holiness, were slave owners. Were the slaves invited? No, were women invited? No, just saying, certainly not during the period of time that we know it existed.

Emily Einolander 11:23

The thing you were saying about it being a utopian idea, I think is is a good framework to understand the way that people looked back at it, the romanticism and the references that people make to it is like, I can't think of who it was, it was possibly David Bowie, or one of those very, like, famous dead stars. When asked if there was a thing that they could go back to in history, they're like, I would go back to the Library of Alexandria and read all the books. And I'm like, you wouldn't be able to read the books at all. But, but I get like, I get the romantic idea of it. However, the more that I looked at it, the more I was like, huh, this is a program of cultural imperialism, like literally people were saying that about them. The BBC podcast that I listened to, In Our Time, one of the scholars compared Alexandria to British people living in India during colonialism, and that there was an impulse to create a center for Greek culture there because they weren't in Greece, and they wanted to make Alexandria more Greek. And so one of the

things that they did was they created essentially a State Library to kind of centralize all of that information, which I don't want to you know, I'm not trying to shit on it, of course, because I think that's that, you know, I like, I like centers of intellectual activity in general. I think they're important. I don't like the fact that libraries are attacked. But just the fact that this wasn't really a public place. This was a place that sort of asserted its dominance. And, and, and I didn't put this in the script, because there was just too much stuff. There was so much sniping and infighting between different libraries in different cities, that it was sort of at a level of, you know, not nationalism, but what would you call it, Chris? When it's the, you know, Athens versus Alexandria versus other cities?

Chris Curran 13:54

I would, I would totally consider it nationalism.

Emily Einolander 13:59

Okay. It's like college football for libraries. It's not supposed to be nodding sagely that I've ever said it was kind of awkward to hear those historians on the BBC. Like pining for colonial India, though, was like, Yeah, put it back in your pants, guys.

Chris Curran 14:26

Yeah, it's gross. Anyway, let's talk about theories around its destruction.

Emily Einolander 14:35

I think the Lighthouse of Alexandria did it. Best theory I've heard so far out of segments, it just shot fire at it from its said I am the only wonder in this city. That's Tony big enough for the both of us, You bastard. Just kidding. But as we were kind of discussing Right now the romanticism that we have today about the library wasn't necessarily the same. During its time. I found this amazing quote by Seneca for example that I would like you to read Corinne, how can we laugh my ass off and create a meme that I will post?

Corinne Kalasky 15:22

All right, what is the point of countless books and libraries whose titles the owner can barely read through in his lifetime? The sheer number of them burdens and does not instruct the one who wants to learn. And it is much better to entrust yourself to a few authors than to wander through many 40,000 books were burned in Alexandria. Let someone else praise this finest monumental royal wealth. Who says that it was the outstanding achievement of the good taste and care of kings?

Emily Einolander 15:54

I mean, is it just me or is that the funniest thing? Yeah, I was like, some stoic Instagram account needs to post that. Yeah, they should. It's like here's your daily stoicism. Daily. Why are there so many fucking books said it's gonna be my quote card that I put on Instagram. I love it. Perfect. So now that we have established that there wasn't a universal feeling of goodwill toward the universal library. There are actually three major theories about how the library was destroyed and who is responsible. There is more than three but there are three dramatic ones. If we're looking at it has a possibly discrete event in history. The first involves Julius Caesar. Chris, could you do a little breakdown of the Julius Caesar theory.

Chris Curran 16:57

Julius Caesar figures into everything. In 48 BC, Caesar was pursuing his former ally Pompey, with whom he was currently at war, the Ptolemies had been supporting Pompey and his war with Caesar but they did a pretty solid one and assassinated him soon after he arrived. By the time Caesar arrived when he got there, he was presented with Pompey severed head so so basically that was that

Emily Einolander 17:24

I also I wanted to note that he said in his own history that he cried a lot when he got Pompey's severed head and I just I'm like, maybe I you tried to make it sound like it was this very noble act that he was crying for like a an important figure and a person from his past, but I'm like, I would be crying out of terror. Either terror or jealousy. Someone else, like what was he gonna do not kill him? Yeah.

Chris Curran 17:55

Our boy Julius are no, Gaius. Gaius was his name was like his actual name. He was his greatest. He was his own best propagandist. He was his greatest fan, moving along. So, Caesar then managed to get himself embroiled in a succession dispute between Cleopatra and her brother Ptolemy 13. Legend says that Cleopatra wrapped herself in a rug. Well, that was then delivered to Caesar. So they could then have some negotiations. I mean, they really, they really weren't negotiations. But you know, Cleopatra. Also.

Emily Einolander 18:38

Why not? Oh,

Chris Curran 18:42

that's why not,

Emily Einolander 18:42

you know if you can have a party with your business. Yeah. Why not have some sex too? Yeah. Yeah. Theoretically,

Chris Curran 18:52

beautifully said.

Emily Einolander 18:54

Thank you. I am an orator.

Corinne Kalasky 18:57

You are indeed. Yes.

Chris Curran 18:59

So to Ptolemy's chagrin, Caesar stuck around and took Cleopatra aside, which was a pretty big escalation in the war between the two siblings. Caesar was soon attacked on both land and sea by the Ptolemaic forces. To get out of their tight spot, phasers been set fire to 60 six-zero ships at the

Ptolemies fleet that we're adding are at the port of Alexandria. Then the fire spread to the actual city and the library. Perhaps one description from the history Lupin said the

Corinne Kalasky 19:33

fire soon blazed up. Its spread to the rigging into the depths which used resin the fire spread beyond the ships. The house nearest to the waterside, caught by the wind, hastened the calamity. The flames were driven by the gusts and ran like meteors along the rooftops. The disaster drew most of the besieging force away from the palace to defend the city.

Emily Einolander 19:55

Some good writing Luke? Yeah. Ran Like meteors along the rooftops. Both historians Deion Cassius and Orusius reported that the fire damaged some 40,000 scrolls of excellent quality. However, Caesars own account does not mention destroying any nearby grain or books warehouses because that would probably make him look bad, right? Yep, optics, but he focuses on the fact that the chips got destroyed. Canfora author of the vanished library speculates that Oruseus in particular, likely would have specified whether those scrolls would have come from the great library. But Plutarch, who lived about 100 years after the event took place was the historian who outright said the fire quote, spread from the dockyards and destroyed the great library, and quote, the historian Strabo lamented in somewhere between 20 to 25 ce about the unfortunate loss of the library capital L. Though he didn't make a clear statement, that Caesar was the one to burn it down. However, that would imply that the destruction happened during this timeframe. So it's not the you know, it's not the most unrealistic, whatever. So now, the belief that Caesar was responsible for the total destruction of the Library of Alexandria is one of the more popular ones, at least for those of us who like drama. Because of that many searches for the ruins of the library have been conducted as close to the Mediterranean Sea as possible, but no dice so far.

Chris Curran 21:34

Caesar has been so maligned over... I'm not defending Caesar,

Emily Einolander 21:40

I mean, you can. I really don't care one way or the other. I came to bury Caesar, not defend him.

Chris Curran 21:50

Oh, that was, that was good. That was well done. Um, but he has been so maligned for so long for many different things. And I don't know, I don't know how I feel about it. I mean, I could, I could totally see him doing it, I could totally see it being anti Caesar propaganda.

Emily Einolander 22:16

I also feel that if that is the most popular theory, the symbology of the library burning down doesn't quite have the same profundity that people who look at it romantically give it. You know, because it sounds incidental, when we talk about Caesar being the one to burn it down, because it's like, Ah, he was in the middle of a battle, and he set fire to a bunch of ships. And then, you know, in the kerfuffle, it burned to the ground, not like I am going to set this center of intelligence and the world's Research Center in the University Library, I'm going to set it on fire to stick it to the Greeks, and the world and smart people everywhere. Like that. But if this is the true story, then it doesn't have that weight that people seem to

give it. There are other theories that kind of are more in the vein of what I was just talking about, and you're about to introduce one of them.

Chris Curran 23:20

Short answer Richins. So in 391, that's 391 of the Common Era. Theodosius the first ordered the destruction of all pagan temples, as Christianity was then the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Emily Einolander 23:40

Oh, yeah, the Romans are in charge. Now. Did we mention?

Chris Curran 23:43

Oh, yeah, the Romans Guys, guys, as we started talking about Caesar, do we wish that we shouldn't bring up the Romans

Emily Einolander 23:51

Slot A into slot B.

Chris Curran 23:54

Um, one of the stories is that the library was destroyed during that purge. Specifically, there were orders to wipe out the Temple of Serapeum. Bad Alexandria, which had at one point contained the Serapion the quote unquote, daughter library, Library of Alexandria, or the branch do you use maybe yeah, like to use modern parlance branch or the I don't know if it's the same thing though.

Emily Einolander 24:15

Annex. It's an annex.

Chris Curran 24:26

Let's go with an annex. Yeah, I like that. Yeah. Um, but so there's, there's no evidence that the great library still existed at this point. If it did, it was also pagan, in that it was dedicated to the Muses, so it's an extrapolation that it would be destroyed in this purge of paganism. theodosius also established the Nicene Creed around that time.

Emily Einolander 24:48

I just wanted to harass you, Catholic, former Catholic friends with the Nicene Creed. Oh, I

Corinne Kalasky 24:54

Remember how that one started? It's like, Go Chris. Oh, God.

Chris Curran 25:00

I believe in one God, the Father, almighty, maker of heaven and earth, all that is seen and unseen.

Corinne Kalasky 25:04

Yeah,

Emily Einolander 25:06

et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and the life of the world to come. Yes.

Corinne Kalasky 25:11

Amen. That's right now I remember Thank you, Chris.

Chris Curran 25:16

I believe he had one son, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God begotten, not made one and being with the Father.

Corinne Kalasky 25:26

For us men and for salvation, He came down from heaven. Something

Emily Einolander 25:34

the Holy Spirit

Chris Curran 25:36

of the Virgin Mary died, and then he, I don't know, we danced or something

Emily Einolander 25:42

went to heaven. I don't know. That was better than I ever could have dreamed.

Chris Curran 25:52

Hopefully, it's right. It's the whole all and response thing. It's once when once when you get started, you can just kind of check out and your mouth will just do all that work. You don't have to think about it.

Emily Einolander 26:04

Like we could probably just like seeing all of the madrigal songs we knew in high school right now. Okay, then, and then there's the Muslim invasion theory. This is another. If you're noticing a pattern of politicized narratives here. Congratulations, you're paying attention. So this is the latest on the historical timeline story of the destruction of the library has to do with the Arab conquest of the seventh century. The story was that Caliph Omar gave the order to destroy the remaining books in the library, although there they acknowledged that some had already been destroyed previously. This excerpt comes mostly from the dialogue of John Filipinas.

Corinne Kalasky 27:05

But the Caliph, unmoved by this vast collection of learning apparently stated quotes they will either contradict the Qur'an in which case they are heresy, or they will agree with it, so they are support superfluous and quote, the manuscripts were then gathered together and used as fuel for the 4000 bathhouses in the city. In fact, there were so many scrolls that they kept the bathhouses of Alexandria heated for six months. A lot. Holy moly.

Emily Einolander 27:33

That's also funny, right. They probably disagree with the Koran, but also if they agree with the Koran, like we don't need it. Yeah. Like, it's so much of an afterthought. It's like the, you know, I really want to take a bath. Like, this is the center of knowledge, can you fuckers I can't. All I know is there's a lot of sand under my nails. So, as far as I could see, modern scholars agree that the Library of Alexandria was either non-existent or hanging on by a thread at that point, it was no longer the research and cultural center, it used to be and had sort of fallen into obscurity. Edward Gibbon author of decline and fall of the Roman Empire was one of the main debunkers of the story, but he also placed the responsibility solely on the shoulders of Christians, which is also an oversimplification, and possibly not true at all. Ah, so we have these three very distinct theories. But there's also you know, the boring theories, the more nuanced theories. Chris is a historian and a librarian, would you talk to us about some of the environmental factors that may have affected the survival of books at the library of Alexandria?

Chris Curran 29:04

Um, so I am currently an expert in papyrus preservation, um, and so I had to do a little bit of digging on this. But so most of these scrolls would have been written on papyrus, that was the you know, the vellum thing wasn't, you know, wasn't common practice in the Mediterranean at the time. So, Papyrus is a read, the reads are stripped. And in order to, in order to make this in order to make this writing instrument. They're, they're cut, and then they're woven together and glued. frequently. These different pieces are glued together using resin made from their own. It's not sad. I don't think they are sad but you know what I'm talking about the goop made by the plant itself. One of the major causes of degradation for more Papyrus is actually going to be external, it's not going to be any necessarily environmental. Papyrus sure is going to degrade over time just like anything, it's going to become brittle and, and you know, as it dries out, but the one of the major concerns that most people will, that that specialists who deal in this brought up over and over again is that the major cause of degradation of papyrus is going to be organic fungi, bacteria, insects, the University of Pisa was, you know, very adamant on that. So, could it have been, you know, could be, could these documents have been destroyed over the course of these eons? By, you know, other other organisms? Sure. So, it's, it's also important to consider that, you know, much of what was written on these documents may have may have lost there may have lost their relevance, right, we were talking about, you know, and all of these other theories that we brought up are very true when you have the dissolution of the of the wider Roman world, right. But, you know, the Roman Roman collapse was something that was a process that had gone on for 200 years. And so when that turmoil you can only imagine, you know, what that would have led to as funding for such, you know, institutions would would mean, you also, we also brought up the the topic of the mind, dynasty, the, or the caliphate sorry, um, you know, going through North Africa, and I'm, I'm pretty partial to, to that idea. It is, however, worth mentioning that, I think you have the, the Middle Eastern world at the time, being referred to as like, the houses of wisdom and everything that these are the these are the, this is the part of the world that was preserving a lot of ancient knowledge. And there was a lot of let's call it state interest in doing so. And so I, on one side, I can kind of see where, you know, the where the Muslim invasion, let's call it,

Emily Einolander 32:32

I just like it, because it sounds like the Beatles

Chris Curran 32:36

Kind of bought that. But, yeah, I can see where I can see where that comes in. And I can see one side of that. Sure. But then I can also think like, no, there was a heavy emphasis on the preservation of the Greek Greek knowledge at the time

Emily Einolander 32:49

Of Greek specifically knowledge?

Chris Curran 32:53

About Mediterranean knowledge. Okay. Okay, about Mediterranean knowledge. But I do have, I have a book, The Archimedes, Codex, medieval prayer books, and palimpsests used and preserved, you know, in the, in the Arabic speaking world, that were that were instrumental in preserving knowledge and Greek knowledge, such as this Archimedes text that was lost in Western history, wow, for for centuries and wasn't rediscovered, you know, well into the early 2000s, late 1990s. Anyway, okay. So I can kind of see where I think the muscle in theory has some benefits, but some cons to it as well. The established narrative is either Caesar or Christian. I don't know. I'm hardly an expert in this field.

Emily Einolander 33:55

Well, and nobody can agree on it either. Yeah, so maybe the library's destruction was death by 1000 cuts, or maybe like four burns? Well, three burns, and then six months worth of burning. But this isn't to say that libraries aren't burned down Cataclysm quickly all at once. In fact, there is an entire list of destroyed libraries. It's a page on Wikipedia, with columns that say year method of destruction, reason for destruction. For example, we mentioned the Serapion, which was the the annex, or the daughter library, that was definitely a politically motivated district direction. That was definitely a politically motivated destruction of both the temple and a library. If we're assuming that it's structured in a similar way to the Great Library, which, you know, the books and the museum museum were kind of meshed together is what it sounded like to me. The point is, the symbology exists for a reason of a destroyed library. Just because the Library of Alexandria itself may have fallen apart bit by bit, and not necessarily have been completely destroyed in one go that we know everything about doesn't mean that people don't use destruction of libraries as an act of violence against certain ideals or states or institutions. So, let's move on to the rhetorical and political sides of all of this.

Chris Curran 35:43

So, the Christian destruction of the library is a theory that was popularized by Edward Gibbon countering the theory that the Muslims had burned down the library. Again, the Serapion was definitely burned at this point, which would be where all of this blurring comes from. The Christian theory has been very pointedly used as a symbol of suppression of science and knowledge by religious zealots sound familiar? This whole knowledge versus control principle often pops up coincidentally, with the discussion of library destruction. Here's an excerpt from the banished library that sort of encapsulates this idea.

Corinne Kalasky 36:22

The history of the libraries of antiquity often ends in flames. Fire, along with earthquakes is said by Galen to be one of the commonest causes of the destruction of books. Buyers do not spring up without

cause. It is as if a greater force were intervening to destroy an organism that can no longer be controlled or checked. Impossible to check the an infinite capacity for growth, the library's displayed impossible to control their contents, given the equivocal, often forged nature of the material that poured into them.

Emily Einolander 36:53

That's basically what we were talking about, right? This whole thing that he's saying here is is what you think of when someone brings up the Library of Alexandria as a what is the word Totem?

Chris Curran 37:08

Oh, I like that. Yeah.

Emily Einolander 37:11

It it makes you immediately think of people burning knowledge, people taking knowledge away from the public, and no matter what the basis that we know, the actual library to have been, that's what it is symbolically. But here's a little epilogue. There is a new library of Alexandria called the biblioteca Alexandrina, which bills itself as a revamp or an homage of the ancient library. It is a joint venture between the founding director, Ismail Serageldin, UNESCO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and Alexandria University. It's an 11 storey circular building. And the writer I used as a source said it looked like a tilted block of cheese. So naturally, it's designed by a Scandinavian architect. Because they love their tilted blocks of cheese. It is 80,000 square meters with enough shelves to hold 8 million volumes of books. There's a main reading room, a specialized rare book section, art galleries, conference center, planetarium Science Museum, antiques Museum, and then of course, a tribute to a former Egyptian president because you can't have a State Library without some homage to the state. Well, Chris, thanks. This has been really fun.

Chris Curran 38:34

Yeah, it's been very fun for me too. I always love coming and seeing you guys and chatting about all manner of historical books. Yeah.

Emily Einolander 38:45

Do you have anything that you want to plug or shout out?

Chris Curran 38:51

Um, one thing I say this isn't a personal blog. This is a, you know, a plea for a lot of librarians and library staffers, in different parts of our country. Support them. They work hard to support you and your community. They are professionals. Their interest is to provide information to everybody. So folks like moms for liberty, you can suck it. Yes. And drag queen storytimes are amazing. But the point I'm getting at is that libraries are under attack right now. And an attack against an attack against a library and attack against freely accessible information. damages us all, irrevocably. That's my plug for today. Support your library, support your library workers and continue to fight for information access.

Emily Einolander 39:59

Yeah, the The core of this understanding of knowledge being under attack and obliterated for political reasons is despite the nuances is true and is the thing that happens. And it's happening right now. So, so yes, support your libraries and speak out against people who are calling for destruction of them, essentially, literally, like literally being gutted. Right now, in different places in the country. I think you and I are lucky enough to live in places where that isn't quite as bad knocking on wood. Yeah. But it is something to be hyper aware of not just aware of right now. So thanks for tying that together for us, Chris.

Chris Curran 40:55

Yeah, what I'm here for.

Emily Einolander 40:57

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