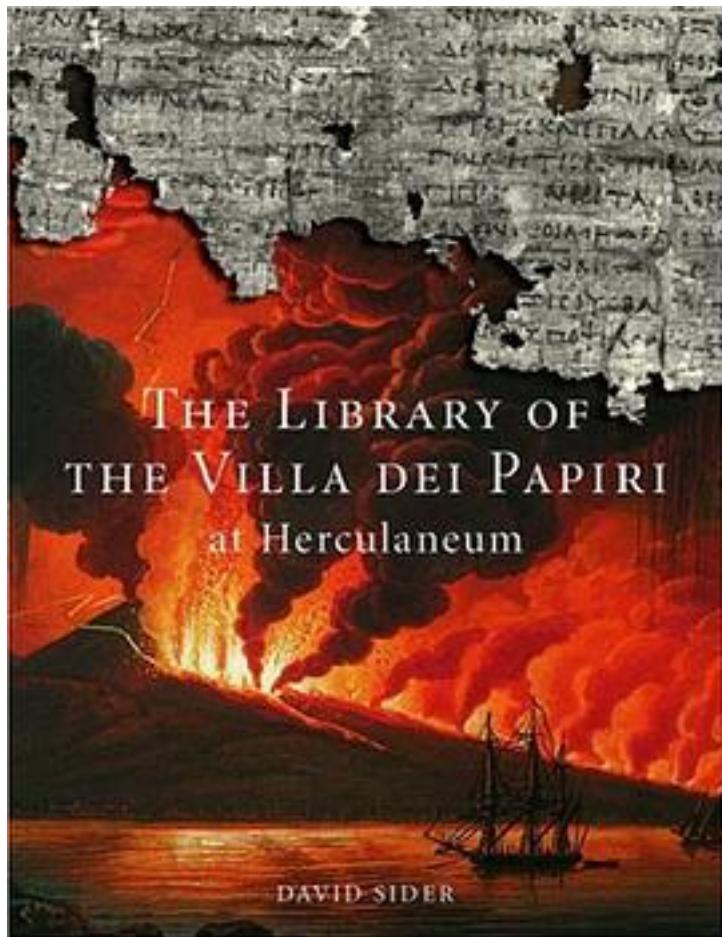


The Library of the Villa Dei Papiri at Herculaneum



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The eruption of Mt. Vesuvius that destroyed Pompeii in A.D. 79 also buried nearby Herculaneum. Over time the location of the small town was forgotten, but shortly after its rediscovery in the 1730s, "excavations" - more properly, treasure hunts - were

organized to unearth ancient sculpture. The richest finds were from a villa that came to be called the Villa dei Papiri, because it also yielded upward of a thousand papyrus rolls - the only library ever to have been recovered from the classical world. To the great excitement of contemporaries, the papyri held out the tantalizing possibility of the rediscovery of lost masterpieces by classical writers. Written for the general reader, this introduction to the ancient library describes the long and difficult history of attempts to unwind the damaged rolls. Sider discusses the texts that have been deciphered and puts them in the context of literacy and Roman society of the time. He describes the form of books in antiquity and the papyrus sheets on which they were written, and he provides an account of attitudes toward books in Greece and Rome and surveys private and civic libraries in the ancient world.

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