



A Social History of Books and Libraries from Cuneiform to Bytes

Patrick M. Valentine

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While the importance of writing has often been recognized, the role of books and especially that of libraries has just as often been slighted. Knowledge, once generated, has to be communicated, preserved, and accessible. Books in their varying formats—from clay tablets to scrolls and manuscripts to pixels—have been instrumental in spreading knowledge, although relatively little attention has been given to the story of books themselves.

A Social History of Books and Libraries from Cuneiform to Bytes traces the roles of books and libraries throughout recorded history and explores their social and cultural importance within differing societies and changing times. It presents the history of books from clay tablets to e-books and the history of libraries, whether built of bricks or bytes. Following an introduction that sets the theoretical basis for the historical importance of books and libraries, chapters alternate between the history of the book and the history of libraries. Included within the chapters are short excursions on some particular development, such as book emblems or cataloging. Case studies are given as thematic illustrations of libraries everywhere.

Patrick M. Valentine argues that social and cultural forces have been more influential in determining the nature and status of information, books, and libraries than has technology. But *A Social History of Books and Libraries* is far from a jeremiad against technology; rather it presents history within the subtle yet shifting context of time and place. Although written primarily for librarians and library students, it will also be of interest to a wider audience of scholars and those interested in books, libraries, and cultural history.

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