



Library: An Unquiet History

By Matthew Battles

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“Engrossingly saturated with fascinating lore, colorful anecdotes and deft portraits.”?Hilarie M. Sheets, *New York Times*

Through the ages, libraries have not only accumulated and preserved but also shaped, inspired, and obliterated knowledge. Now they are in crisis. Former rare books librarian and Harvard MetaLAB visionary Matthew Battles takes us from Boston to Baghdad, from classical scriptoria to medieval monasteries and on to the Information Age, to explore how libraries are built and how they are destroyed: from the scroll burnings in ancient China to the burning of libraries in Europe and Bosnia to the latest revolutionary upheavals of the digital age. A new epilogue elucidates the preservation of knowledge amid the creative destruction of twenty-first century technology. 10 illustrations

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Library: An Unquiet History By Matthew Battles Bibliography

- Rank: #89333 in Books
- Brand: Battles Matthew
- Published on: 2015-07-27
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.30" h x .70" w x 5.50" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 272 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Battles, a contributor to Harper's and a Harvard librarian, offers a distinguished portrait of the library, its endurance and destruction throughout history, and traces how the library's meaning was questioned or altered according to the climate of the time. In accessible prose, Battles recounts the building and burning that have marked the library's long history. The Vatican Library built by Pope Nicholas V set the standard during the Renaissance, and the one built by the Jews in the Vilna ghetto during WWII showed the importance of books to a community under siege. Meanwhile, the mythic third-century B.C. book burnings by Chinese emperor Shi Huangdi were an effort to erase history, as was the catastrophic destruction of millions of books by the Nazis in the spring of 1933. Dynamic characters lend this history a novelistic tone: Julius Caesar began the library movement in Rome; Antonio Panizzi, an Italian revolutionary and exile, turned the library of the British Museum into one of the world's greatest in the 19th century; more recently, Nikola Koljevic, a scholar turned Serb nationalist, directed the siege of Sarajevo that led to a book burning at the Bosnian National and University Library. Battles also enlightens readers regarding the evolution of bookmaking, the card catalogue and the role of the librarian, including the most famous of all, Melvil Dewey, whose decimal system was only a small part of his influence. This always compelling history illustrates Battles's theme: despite the rule of barbarians or megalomaniacal kings, angry mobs and natural disasters, people's hunger for books has ensured the library's survival. 11 illus.

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From [Booklist](#)

Battles, a rare book librarian at Harvard, takes the reader on a world tour of the library from ancient times to the present digital age, making stops in Nineveh and Alexandria, Athens and Baghdad. He considers the book culture and important collections of medieval Europe, which were assembled and maintained by popes and monks, and the founding of the first "public" library--by Cosimo de' Medici in 1444. Among the other "librarians" who capture his interest are classicist Richard Bentley, who in 1694 was appointed Keeper of the Royal Library; Antonio Panizzi, who produced the first catalog of the British Library (the first volume, covering the letter A, took seven years to complete); Melville Dewey, creator of the decimal classification system and founder of the American Library Association; and Herman Kruk, head of the Vilna ghetto library. The book is less a formal history than an exploration of the concept of library and how it evolved. Battles writes in an engaging way, and his book will be appreciated by librarians and book lovers. *Mary Ellen Quinn*

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Review

"Huge in scope . . . engaging."

- **BookPage**

"A must for every home or institutional collection."

- **Kirkus Reviews**

"Elegantly written....A great read, flowing over many time periods and geographic regions."

- **Library Journal**

"Matthew Battles knows his way around the stacks as well as anyone. . . . This book is a delight."

- **Nicholas Basbanes**

“Battles turns an all-seeing telescope on the most spectacular galaxy in our intellectual heavens?that magnificent constellation of books we call a library?and brings into focus the brightest stars and blackest holes in its dynamic history.”

- **Richard Lederer, author of A Man of My Words**

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Paul Gay:

Now a day people that Living in the era exactly where everything reachable by connect to the internet and the resources inside it can be true or not need people to be aware of each information they get. How many people to be smart in having any information nowadays? Of course the answer is reading a book. Reading through a book can help people out of this uncertainty Information specifically this Library: An Unquiet History book because this book offers you rich data and knowledge. Of course the info in this book hundred per cent guarantees there is no doubt in it you may already know.

Robert Arnett:

A lot of people always spent their free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them household or their friend. Do you know? Many a lot of people spent many people free time just watching TV, or even playing video games all day long. If you wish to try to find a new activity this is look different you can read a new book. It is really fun in your case. If you enjoy the book you read you can spent the whole day to reading a reserve. The book Library: An Unquiet History it is rather good to read. There are a lot of people that recommended this book. These people were enjoying reading this book. Should you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy often the e-book. You can m0ore easily to read this book from a smart phone. The price is not too costly but this book provides high quality.

Barbara Wheat:

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