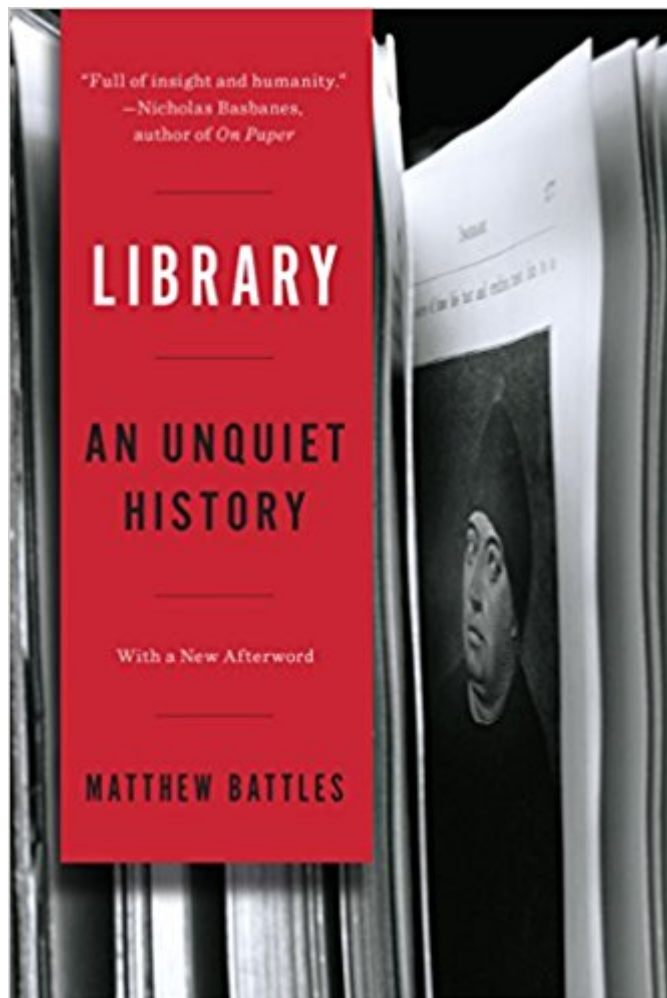


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# Library: An Unquiet History



## Synopsis

“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

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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 Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This important and useful book surveys libraries over 4500 years and 5 continents, from a consistent but dynamic perspective. This helps tactically by demonstrating how the 21st century tension between the views of libraries as collections of books or as digitized, Internet-wide materials has played out cyclically over at least 500 years in struggles over who gets to participate, and to be heard, in politics and culture. Borges, a librarian before becoming the great 20th century author, is aptly presented up front as a guide to the tour, reprising Dante's Virgil.

Am going to visit Leuven after reading this book! A fascinating book woven together by a rivetting storyteller. I've reread it several times; it's hard to shelve it for good! Absolutely gripping reading. An

Unquiet History manages to cover a great expanse of time without becoming vague and generic, and without becoming too dense for the lay reader. The bibliography is super, too, and a well for more reading on the topic. I absolutely love this book and highly recommend it.

A great read for history buffs and especially those interested in the great libraries throughout history. I was never bored.

Battle has written a book about libraries -so, about books put together and creating a new, chemical reaction- that has a non very common feature in this class of books: direction. Most of the books about books or related issues tends to be just catalogues of anecdotes, information, curiosities and sometimes even trivia. That's not bad. It can be very entertaining. But Battle has done more than that. With an excellent sense of style and elegance, -but also with a very hidden sense of humor titilating almost out of sight here and there- always suggestive and often very penetrating, he offer a clear vision not just of histories about libraries, but the History about relationships between the Library as institution and the ideas about it that have been developped in different phases of cultural history. The multifacetic substance of the library is presented, then, as never before and in no way just in the stratosphere of theory and speculation, but taking the reader to specific places and libraries, people and events, tragedies and personalities, bookmen and burning books-men. Great reading.

Ordered as a gift and it was well received and liked.

A wonderful read... The author has a ease with his subject and a entertaining style that makes it a joy delve into.

Great Purchase!

This book was purchased for school. But is was shipped well and the quality of the product was perfect. I highly recommend this to people who love the history of books and libraries.

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