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The Library tells the story of libraries and of the changing form and function of the book from era to era, whether clay tablets, parchment sheets, papyrus scrolls, glossy paper, recording tape or silicone chips. At the heart of the story of libraries and books is the story of the reader, who also has changed from era to era. Profusely illustrated, with fascinating is a comprehensive look at libraries that will interest book lovers and librarians.

The Library: An Illustrated History Details

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From Reader Review The Library: An Illustrated History for online ebook

Joy says

A very interesting history of the library for the non-scholar (like me). Illustrated with photos and drawings throughout. The book includes an index and a list of sources, as well as some suggestions for further reading. This is one of those books you might not want to read cover to cover, but that's all right - you can dip into it anywhere and find some fascinating reading as well as some really gorgeous pictures of books and the places where they live.

Najibah Bakar says

Printed on glossy paper with coloured images of books, libraries and their founders adorning its pages, this book is full of interesting facts about history of libraries all over the world, in diverse and different cultures.

With special focus on libraries in the USA and European countries, it opens readers' eyes to the long tradition and culture of book collecting and preservation of books as records of humanity and its achievements. Other nations such as Arab-Islam, Chinese, Mayan, and African, all have left their marks in the great history of libraries.

The struggle of the African-American to establish their own separate libraries due to racism may caught inner conscience, other than the destruction of libraries due to political or religious reasons. The enemy of books and libraries, i.e. fire, were too frequently mentioned in this book, indicating how fatal can it be to the collections if no serious considerations given to prevent the catastrophe.

Among the library founders worthy of further reading is Thomas Jefferson, who was a true book lover and one of the greatest mind of America. There are also other names of library founders and librarians interesting enough to be researched.

The glossy paper however, somehow is quite a nuisance when reading in certain types of lightings because of the glare. But the beautiful photos are really entertaining.

Simon says

I've always considered the library like a second home. It is everything I want and everything I need in my life, I swear. Except there is no food in a library, there are books about food, lots of books, but...not really any one can consume to retain their life.

I got this book from my library and read it on a whim just because I was curious to see the history of the place I love so much.

It was a dry read but mostly because my heart wasn't in it as it is in the real deal. I feel like living an experience is better than reading of one.

Now there are the books that can take a reader right inside and make them part of the story, those are books of power and wonder and they make reading an altogether different experience.

Orsolya says

For a true bibliophile, heaven on earth is either a library or bookstore (despite the modern technology of e-readers). Regardless of this love; most do not consider the history of libraries from conception to today. Stuart A.P. Murray addresses precisely this subject in, “The Library: An Illustrated History”.

Murray begins “The Library” by tracking the creation of libraries from ancient times throughout the centuries and explains the growth across the world and its regions. Early on, the text is gripping and interesting while also being informative and academic. It can not be denied that Murray has collected an abundance of research on the topic.

The striking issue at this stage is Murray’s tendency to weave off on tangents and jump back and forth chronologically. Sometimes, this *eventually* makes sense and Murray ties the discussions together; however, this isn’t always the case. The result of such writing is that “The Library” slows in pace and slackens in impact.

Another negative apparent in “The Library” is repetition both in facts and ideas. It would appear that this is due to a lack of proper organization or perhaps even to a poor editor as it is clear that the topic is not lacking in resources. Murray worsens this by oftentimes not even discussing libraries but instead focusing on books and the advent of writing.

“The Library” strengthens once it begins to appeal to American readers by highlighting the foundation of library systems in the states and also following the movement of librarian education worldwide. Murray’s style is more confident in this area making the topic more memorable.

The final section of “The Library” switches gears from library history and showcases the largest and most prestigious libraries in the world. Murray satisfies readers with a summary of each library’s history and expands on such details as circulation and patron demographics while supplementing with photos. The text is compelling and informative but is not overwhelming; serving to excite the reader towards libraries.

Although “The Library” provides a solid list of books, periodicals, and websites available on the subject for further reading; Murray’s sources used in his text appear to be predominately Wikipedia articles which is disappointing. It should be noted that “The Library” is glossy-paged and contains adequate illustrations making it a borderline coffee table book.

“The Library” isn’t as strong as expected but it is a solid overview/look into the development and progression of libraries and reading. Despite some of its weaknesses, the text will excite readers interested in the topic and is suggested for bibliophiles and library-lovers of all ages.

Barb Middleton says

Of the 123,000 libraries in the U.S., almost 100,000 are in public schools. Libraries have been around since ancient civilizations, but in the U.S. libraries have been supported and increased as a result of peaceful times, philanthropists, democratic ideals and more. The rise of the middle class in America meant demands for education and knowledge and libraries were interwoven into existing democratic ideals. It was believed that freedom of thought and the ability to think for oneself was necessary in a democratic society made up of educated, informed citizens. In his book, *The Library: an Illustrated History*, Stuart Murphy looks at libraries from ancient Mesopotamia to modern times. He examines libraries in the East and West in this beautifully illustrated book full of information about fascinating people and anecdotes. Many funny and interesting stories make this book easy-to-read from the book-cursing scribes to Mark Twain's hysterical and witty comment to the librarian that requested him to defend his offensive book, *Huckleberry Finn*. He told her to put it next to the equally violent and offensive book, *The Bible*.

I'm not sure if anyone would find this book interesting except book lovers, book collectors, and librarians. Maybe an English teacher because libraries are linked with world literature. The last chapter is on famous libraries all over the world. I always drag my husband into libraries when we travel so I particularly liked this section. The book doesn't go into great depth but gives an overview. This made me want to read up on some of the famous people in history that ruled countries.

I did have problems with the author jumping forward and backwards in history with the narration. The book is not chronological and for my random brain I got lost as to where I was in time. In one chapter they were talking about the Boston Town Library from 1800-1850's and then at the end they wrote about the first public library in 1653. It would have been better to place the information on the first public library at the beginning of the chapter. Maybe the author used an unorganized timeline to be funny. The majority of librarians tend to be obsessive about organization.

Ian Colby says

Needed more pictures and less prose. The content of each chapter isn't quite organized enough or even on topic. Also, it seems like I have to fact check some of their assertions about certain stories. Pictures of libraries were cool.

Megan says

A lovely book with lots of beautiful pictures and good information. However, there are also numerous little nitpick-type errors that detract from the good points. You'd be better off reading *Library: An Unquiet History* for more accurate, more detailed, and more interesting information, and just checking this one out for the pretty pictures.

Heidi says

Beautifully illustrated. The pictures alone are worth reading this book.

JoAnn/QuAppelle says

For a book and library lover like myself, this book is the ultimate! Murray has compiled wonderful information and illustrations into one volume that is a real treasure trove.

I loved the vignettes about unknown people, obscure events, and objects related to libraries (Sister Juana of Mexico; chained books; when and where the first papermaking mills were; all of the steps a scribe had to take prior to starting to write a document; and so much more). These little tidbits of information were so interesting.

The old illustrations (many were etchings) fascinated me, as did the photos of writing and books from long ago. It was interesting to follow the long and circuitous path of public libraries...how what we have today came to be.

I especially enjoyed the final section entitled "Libraries of the World". My dream would be to travel all over the world visiting these libraries. Sigh!

Aaron says

It probably isn't surprising that I am interested in library history. In fact, this isn't the first one I have read, but it is one of the best.

The book starts in ancient times, focusing at the early libraries found in Mesopotamia and Sumer before moving on into Egypt and other well-known cultures. What is interesting is the book doesn't just focus on the library, but highlights developments in the creation of paper, the printing process, literacy rates, and the educational environments in various locations around the world throughout history.

One thing I really appreciated is that the book lived up to the promise of the title. Throughout the whole narrative, there are beautiful graphics and reproductions of related documents that help provide depth to the coverage of the topic. The illustrations include works of art, pictures of the libraries being discussed, and illustrations or photographs of the important people being highlighted in the narrative.

Each chapter focuses on a time period, such as ancient times, the early Middle Ages, the late Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Colonial Period in America, early America, and modern times. Much of what is covered in relation to American history was familiar since I teach it in one of my classes, but it was presented in a refreshing way.

What I really liked was that Stuart also highlighted the development of libraries elsewhere in the world, including the Islamic world, Africa, Asia and South America. It was interesting to learn that Ethiopia was a major learning center as well as India, China, Korea and MesoAmerica having strong traditions of writing and librarianship without the often assumed Western influence.

The final chapter introduces brief descriptions and photographs of many of the largest and most important libraries in the world today.

Anyone looking for a nice overview of the topic will find this to be a good option. The only complaint that I have is that it is pretty heavy. Because of the illustrations, the book is published with high-glossy pages. It makes the illustrations more impressive, but it is a little rough on the wrists.

Shane says

If you already have an existing interest in the history of libraries, then you'll find this book worth reading, otherwise you won't.

There were lots of good little tidbits and facts that were enlightening, and I especially enjoyed the sections of ancient, medieval, and Renaissance libraries; I personally lost a little interest when the chronicle moved on to more modern libraries.

The side-pictures and illustrations were nice, although this book definitely had the feel of one where multiple authors wrote it: different sections seemed to repeat information and sometimes seemed to jump around randomly in geography or chronology.

Cassidy Charles says

Yes, I read a library book about libraries.

Let me just say, *The Library: An Illustrated History*, by Stuart A.P Murray, is not as illustrated as you might think. The illustrated portion was, more or less, an afterthought from the author. I can only guess that one would need to put a spin on a book about libraries to get the book to sell.

Alexandria, Egypt is an addition to my "Places to go" list because of this book. How could I forget the city of the first library? Well, I am not sure, but all is well now.

Jennifer says

A near-perfect cross between a reference book and a coffee table conversation piece, Stuart Murray's *The Library: An Illustrated History* offers a wide-ranging, well-written overview of the institution from back-before-books-were-a-thing to the late 2000s.

With a foreword from Nicholas Basbanes (Mr. *Bibliomania* himself) and a brief introduction by UT Austin Professor Emeritus of Library History Donald Davis which outlines just how ambitious the work is (spoiler alert: very), this *Library* opens with the creation of writing and moves steadily forward through the Classical and Middle Ages into the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment, taking care to hopscotch across continents to include information about libraries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. While the focus from there swings toward the institution in the United States during the 1700s-1900s, it cuts back to a more international perspective in the final chapter on present day libraries, librarians, and archives before closing with an extensive collection of snapshot histories of libraries from around the world.

While the text is accessible and chock full of trivia guaranteed to make an appearance at your next book nerd cocktail party, its somewhat haphazard chronological arrangement within broadly defined eras can leave the reader confused about which trends or events came first and which overlapped. Worse, there's absolutely zero textual notes, so good luck tracking down any of the fascinating factoids without reading your way completely through the list of suggested further readings Murray provides at the end. Readers interested in the images, which are frequently lovely and gorgeously reproduced if not always directly tied to the adjacent text, will fare better, as a meticulous sourcing is provided for those, likely for Creative Commons licensing

reasons.

Though a bit frustrating if read for purely research reasons, Murray's *Library* nevertheless stands as a lovely and entertaining monument to a beloved institution, and one which will appeal to librarians and civilians alike.

Jen says

I had to do a presentation in class on this book. Otherwise I wouldn't have known this book existed.

This is a great book. I loved it. It's full of pictures of libraries around the world and artifacts found from ancient libraries.

It's a comprehensive look at the history of libraries and books and how books changed throughout the millennia. You will learn a lot of interesting facts reading this book.

It's a must-read for all library lovers and book lovers. It's a very fast read, as well.

Megan says

I enjoyed reading about the history of libraries. It had nice pictures and good information. Some interesting things I liked reading about were how the books were so valuable they were chained to the shelves and stolen as war prizes, and how books were lost time after time because paper burns.

Since I am not an expert on ancient history, I would have appreciated some maps of the areas being discussed. I could have also used a timeline of library events as the book jumped back and forth between geographical areas and time.
