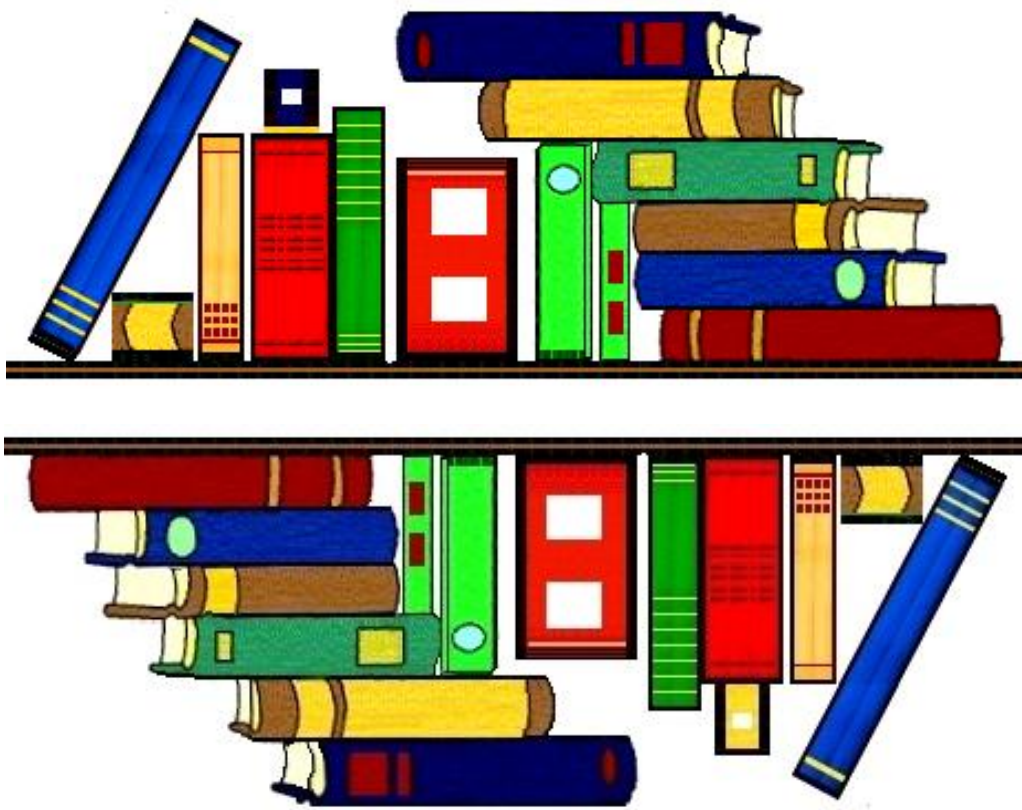




Bernd Rohrmann

Essay about books

Past ~~ Presence ~~ Prospect



June 2016

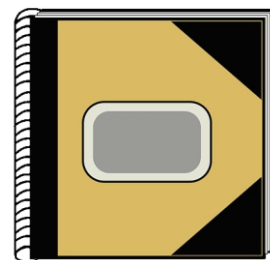
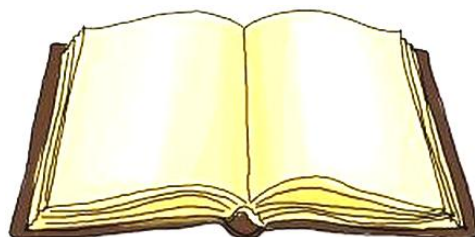
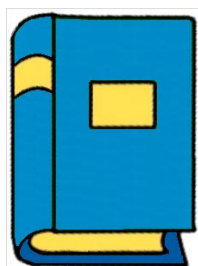
~ Book ~ βιβλος ~ Buch ~





❓ *What is it, a book?*

An array of sheets which contain texts or images and which are fastened together on one of the four sides with cords or glue is called a "book". Each side of a sheet (also labeled leaf) is a page.

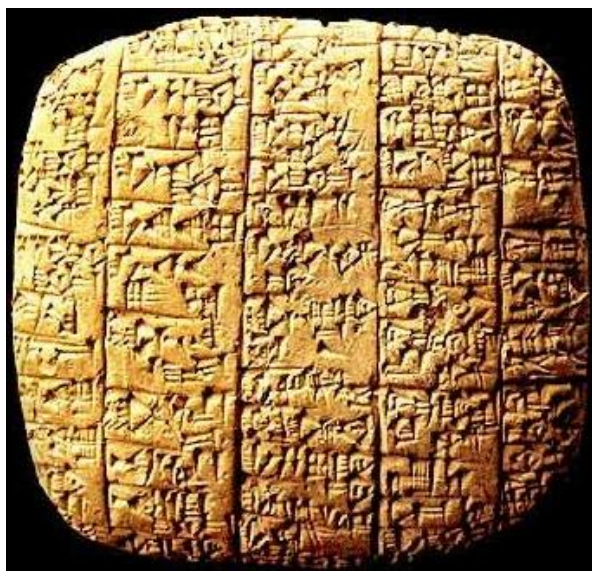


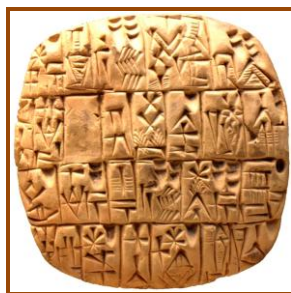
Quite a few books have only on one side of their sheets information, especially those presenting pictures.

Books are physical devices, not electronic ones - yet some people only know "e-books", not real ones ...

❓ *When was the book invented?*

To create a book requires two things - that people can write the words of their language, and that they have a gadget on which to put the message. This happened about 4500 years ago in Mesopotamia - however, those gadgets weren't books as described above. They were clay tablets covered with cuneiform script, stored in temple rooms or palaces of kings.





The oldest finding was at the Sumerian city of Nippur; the largest one in Nineveh, the former capital of the Akkadian/Assyrian empire.

First the task was to record trade activities, yet over time literary and religious texts were written down as well. The most famous one is the Babylonian "Epic of Gilgamesh".

At about the same time, 2600 BC, it began in Ancient Egypt that documents were written on papyrus and stored in governmental and temple record spaces.

Papyrus is a very different device, it is a thick paper-like material made by weaving the stems of the papyrus plant, then pounding the woven sheet with a hammer-like utensil. Papyrus eventually became the dominating tool, distributed by Phoenician traders to Syria, Greece, Roman empire, Persia and so on.





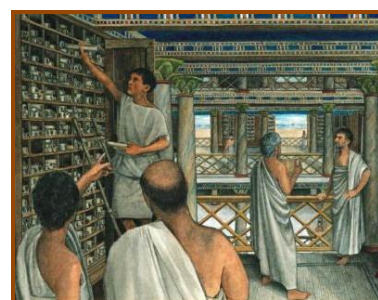
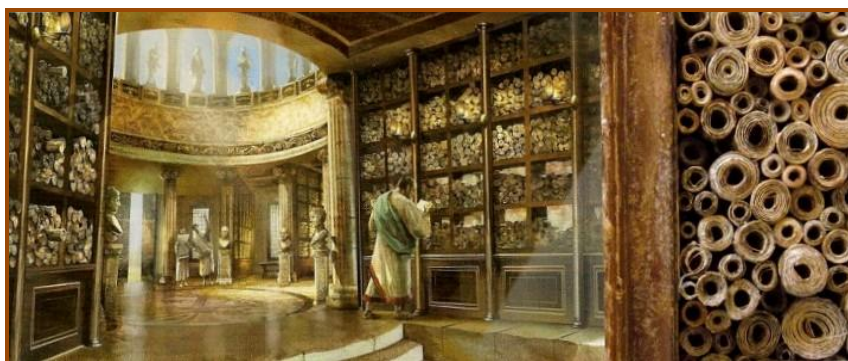
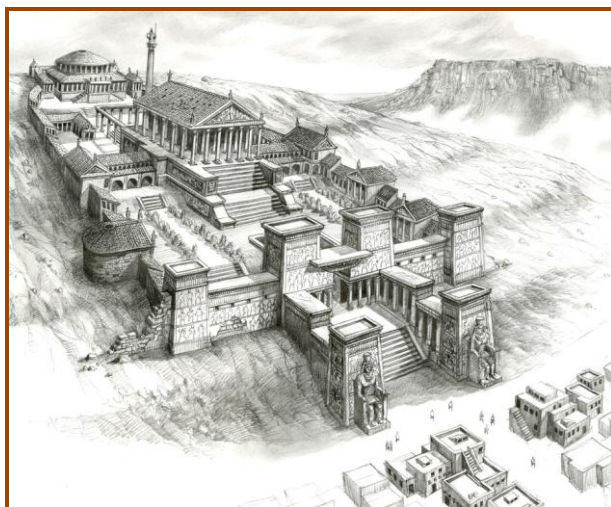
This document style was maintained for several thousand years, and over time any kind of issue was covered in messages on papyrus.

❓ *Which role played libraries?*

From earliest times onwards, books - clay tablets or papyrus documents - were stored in library-like establishments. The largest ones were Niniveh in Mesopotamia, and Edfu in antique Egypt. They were mostly set up by religious institutions, and were not public facilities. Private people or associations also took care of book-like documents.

At a later time, the most famous library was in Alexandria in Egypt, the city designed as the capital of the empire of Alexander the Great. This library was created from 288 BC onwards. It was part of the "Musaeum of Alexandria".

Below is a model of how the whole place may have looked like.



Around 400 AD, this magnificent library evaporated.

When the Arabic empire grew, its capital was Baghdad. And there the "House of Wisdom" (9th-13th century) was founded by the famous Caliph Harun al-Rashid (who reigned 786-809), including a massive library.



An arabic translation institute dealt with the books from the Roman realm, Greek, Egypt, and Persia as well.



By the middle of the ninth century, Baghdad's House of Wisdom had the largest selection of books in the world.



Yet in 1258 it was completely destroyed by a Mongol army, shame!

At about 1300, the center of the Mali empire in northern Africa, Timbuktu, began to flourish, based on the trade in salt and gold. The largest of its mosques, the mosque of Sankoré, developed into some kind of a muslim university, a "Madrasah", and Timbuktu became the centre of book trade in Africa. This, and the thousands of students buying and reading them, lead to an amazing volume of books.

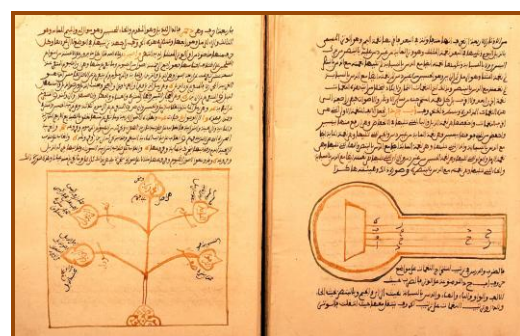
However, Timbuktu never had a formal library. Most books were actually stored in private households. Nearly all of the manuscripts were written in Arabic. Altogether the number of books in various collections is estimated as half a million.

Many families had well-made boxes for them, which were maintained over centuries.





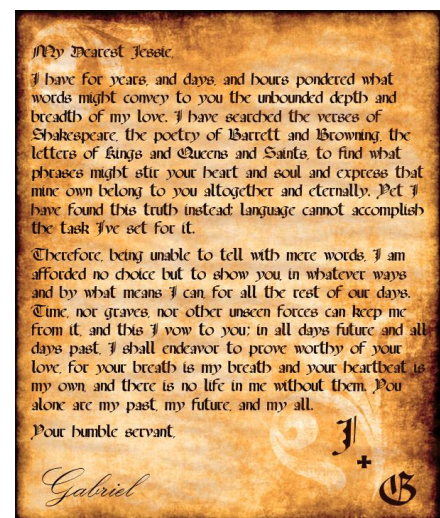
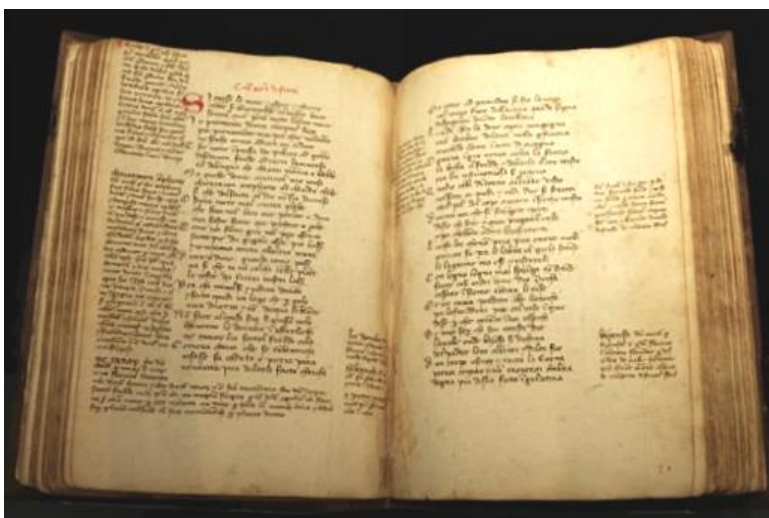
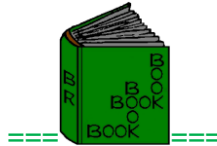
The collections in Timbuktu contain exceptionally beautiful arabic books, which finally became well-known and included in library documentations.



At the end of the Mali realm, Timbuktu entered a long period of decline, and today it's not a mighty town anymore, in spite of its fame. Yet 1988 it became a World Heritage site. And since 2005 several universities run projects to investigate, conserve and utilize the books.

❓ How was papyrus replaced?

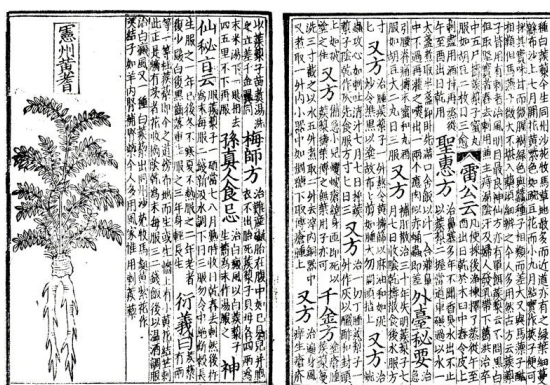
In Europe, at the demise of the Roman Empire, papyrus was difficult to obtain from Egypt, and eventually parchments became the main writing material. Its made from animal skin, mainly sheep, calfs and goats.



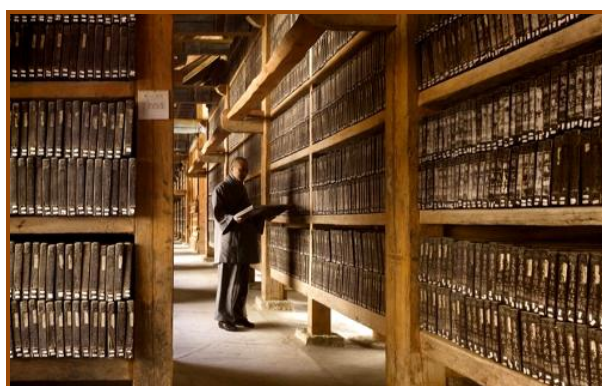
Until about 1600 this technology stayed in use, at least in European countries..



A very different type of books was created in China, Korea and Japan: text pages carved into wood leafs. Those leafs sheets were also used for printing on paper.



Buddhist "tripitaka" texts, carved into thousands of wood blocks, sized 70 cm in width and 24 cm in length, 13th century, were stored in a Korean library.



Another culture, the Mayas, also produced books, in handwritten style - yet these were almost completely destroyed when Spanish armies got hold of middle and souther America.



❓ *When did paper became the device for books?*

The fundamental change in making books came with paper. The pulp papermaking process was developed long time ago in China, during the 2nd century AD. Around 500 paper was eventually used for written books.

Only much later paper was exported to the Arabic realms and Europe, first via Baghdad and then through the Muslim kingdom in Spain. Once water-powered paper mills were set up to produce cheap paper, first in Cordoba around 1100, paper step by step replaced parchments.



However, for luxury book editions, and certainly for the mantelpiece of books, parchments stayed in use.

❓ *Was there a crucial event in the book history?*

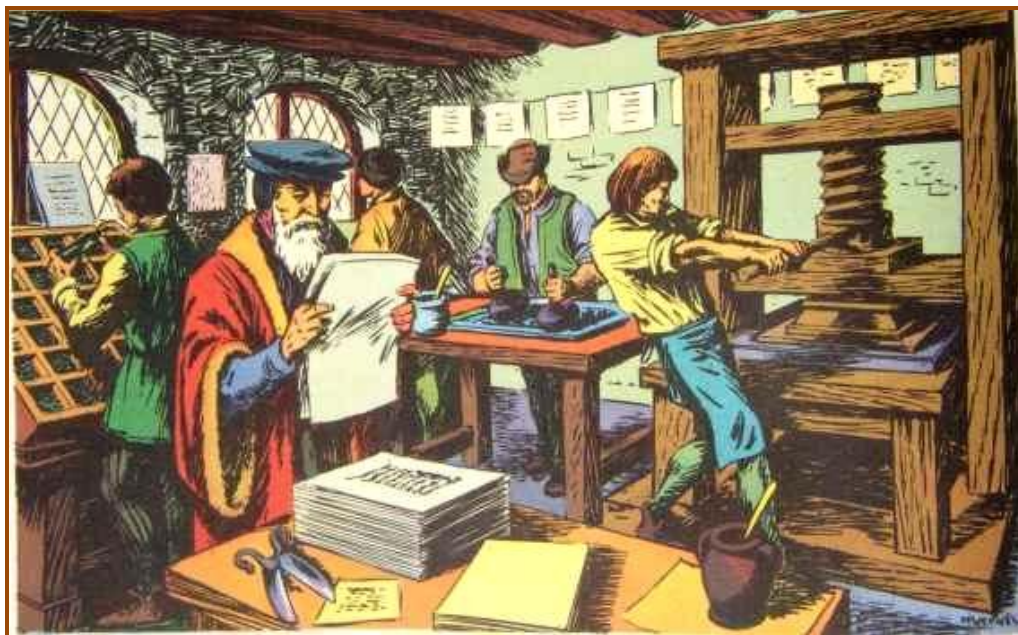
Yes indeed. The first incident may have been the invention of Bi Sheng in China, creating movable types of earthenware circa 1045 - however, that's not fully confirmed.

In 1377, in Korea a Buddhist document was printed, the earliest known printing technology with movable metal type. This did not get known much though outside eastern Asia.

The crucial event in the history of books was clearly Johannes Gutenberg's invention of printing books, using a printing press with movable types. This began in 1439, and in 1450 this revolutionary technique was fully developed. His workshop was in Mainz in Germany.



For both, the development of science and the education of the public, it had immeasurable impact that any kind of book could now be printed repeatedly. His prints could contain both text and images.



An important part of his work, certainly for Europe, was that he also printed the Christian bible.

❓ Which impact had it that books could be printed?

Until Gutenberg's innovation, each book was a single handwritten piece. Most of them belonged to monasteries, and were out of reach for the general public.



Writing books, that is, producing texts and images, was hard work and required the skills of an artist. This work was mostly done by monks.

In this context the availability of printed books to almost everyone was a staggering cultural change: Books became a public tool - even more so when they were written in German or French or Spanish language, rather than in the church's latin.

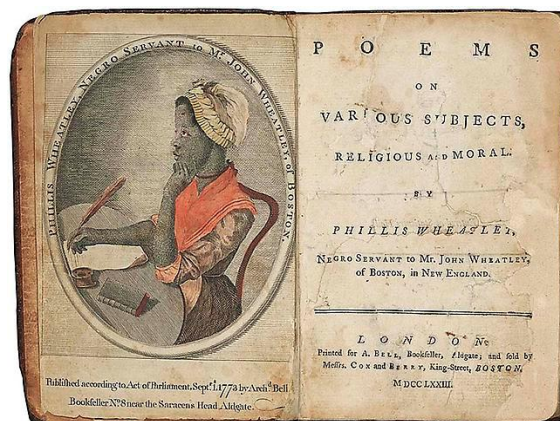
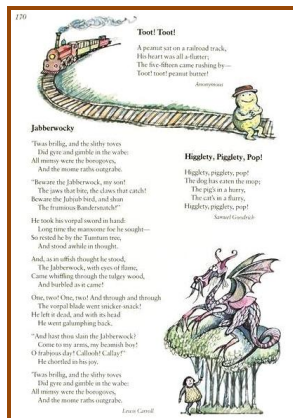
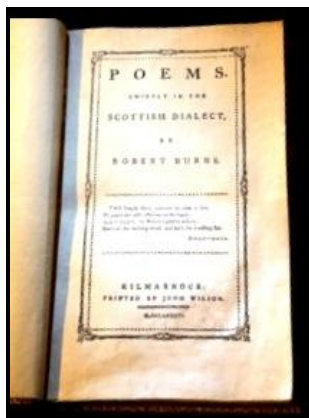
In philosophical terms - printing books was essential for ending the medieval period of humankind.

How about the impact on novels and poetry?

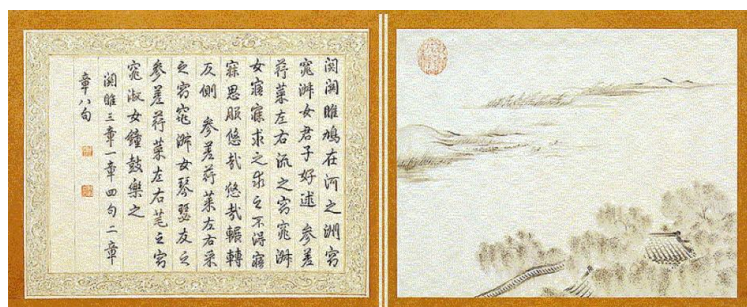
Most authors, whether they write reports or novels or decrees or poems, want to publish their work. This was difficult and expensive when books were handmade on papyrus or parchment - yet now they could be printed and distributed in large numbers.



Even the combination of texts and pictures, a feature of many novels or poems has become so much easier with printable books.



Books for children - in earlier times restricted to high-society people - were now provided for many more.



Poetry books and illustrated novels have also a long tradition in China and Japan.

By the way, some authors carry an empty book with them, and whenever they have a poetic idea, they can write it down straight away.



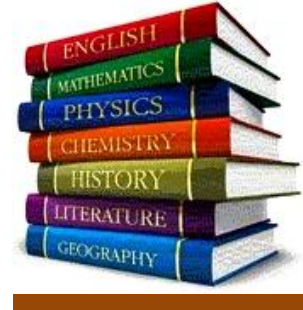
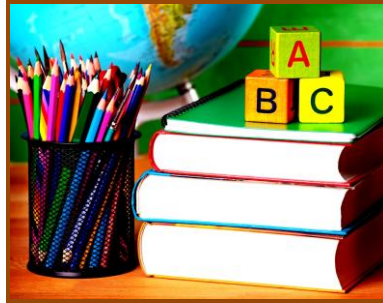
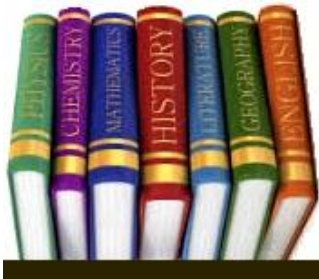
❓ How about the impact on education?

That's obviously immense. As reasonably cheap books which can get printed in large numbers are available almost everywhere, it has become easy to provide students in schools and in universities with learning material.

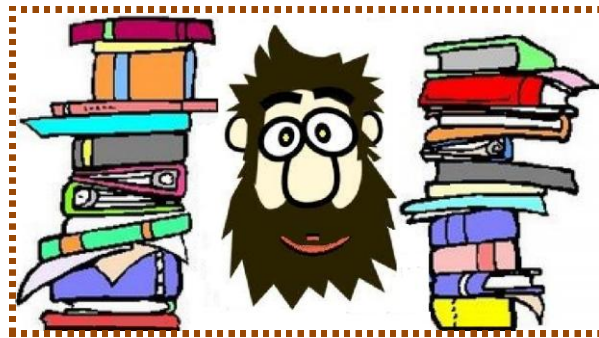




A very large amount of knowledge, and certainly all research, is presented in books or in journals.

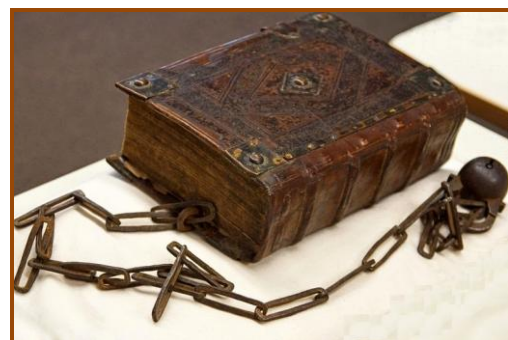


Many students are inclined to hate schoolbooks, no way to and would rather indulge in science fiction lit or crime stories - -

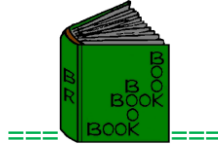


yet over time most realize that there's no way to succeed in exams without books books books!

An almost ironic feature of books for students in early times was this: Libraries worried that valuable books got stolen!



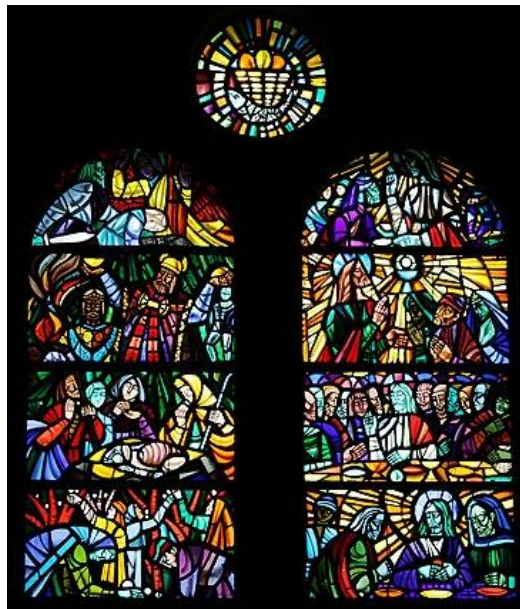
To avoid this, each book was chained!

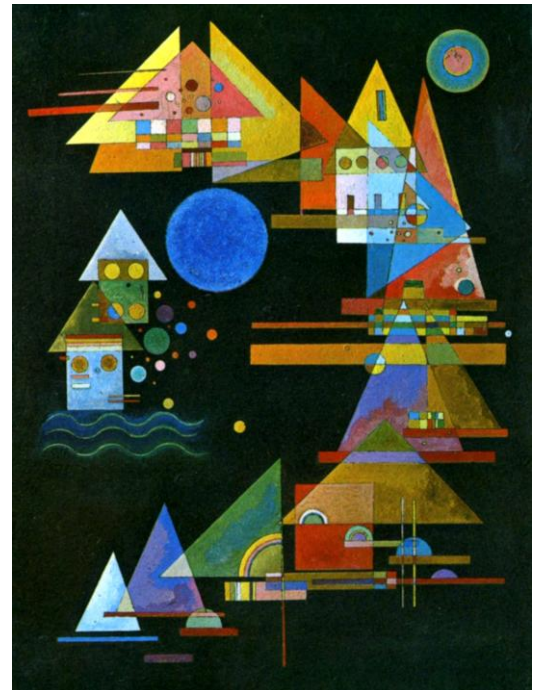


❓ *How about the impact on art?*

For thousands of years, pieces of art, especially paintings, could only be inspected in the places where they were located - in temples, palaces, churches, town halls and so on. And many were out of reach completely, e.g., those in non-public castles or in far-away countries. And quite a few were blocked for 'moral' reasons!

Yet now, if a drawing (or at later times a photography) could be made, this "painting of a painting" could be printed in a book. Here are some examples:



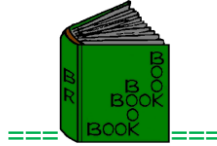


This means, as books can be distributed over the world, that now about everyone can look at these paintings and study them, for example in a library, or they could even buy such a book. Furthermore, art became accessible to students in schools, colleges and universities. And by the way, that's why I can show you this art right here! That some artists, such as Picasso or Magritte or Kandinsky, became so famed is certainly influenced by books about their work.

Moreover, some paintings, especially drawings, sketches and cartoons, are created straightaway for publishing in books.

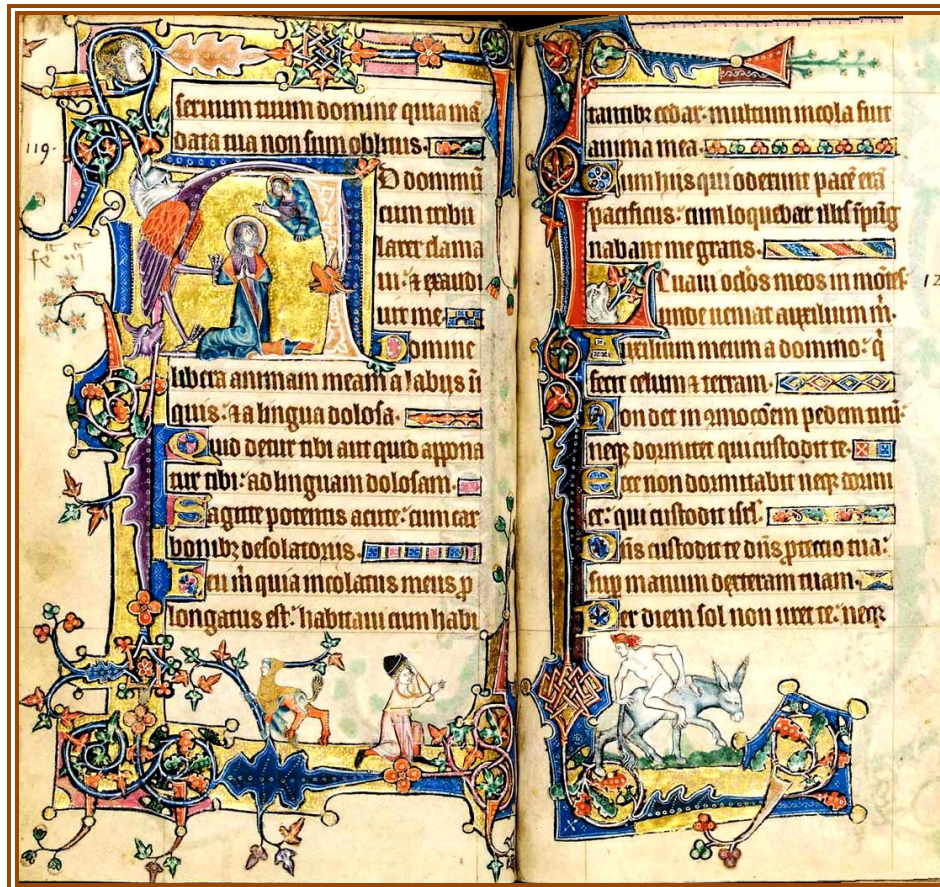
Finally, some paintings are so large and so complex that only their presentation in a book, with overall views and detailed sections, enable a thorough inspection. The very famous work by Hieronimus Bosch, "The garden of earthly-delights (1540) is an example for this (see next page).





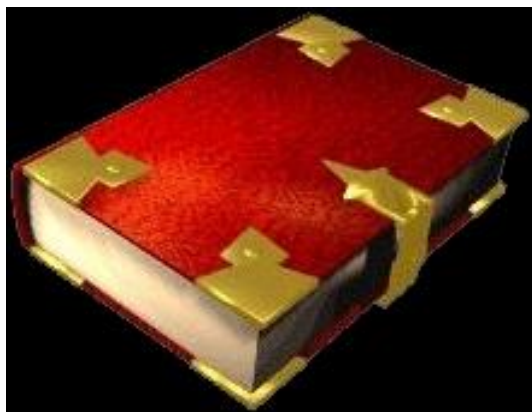
❓ Can books be pieces of art themselves?

Before the invention of printing, every book was hand-written - any kind of religious books, above all the Christian bible and the Muslim quran, yet also a wide variety of texts about history or science. All contained finest visual art.





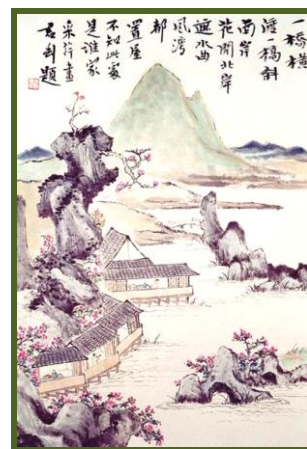
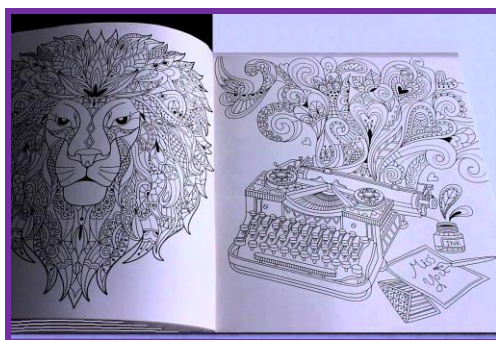
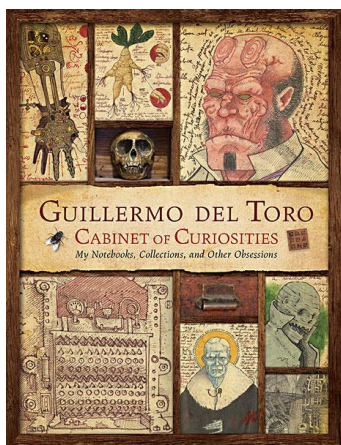
Many books were art because of their highly elaborated cover - the cover was an art by itself.



Some very valuable books could even be locked with a key, thus made them unreadable!

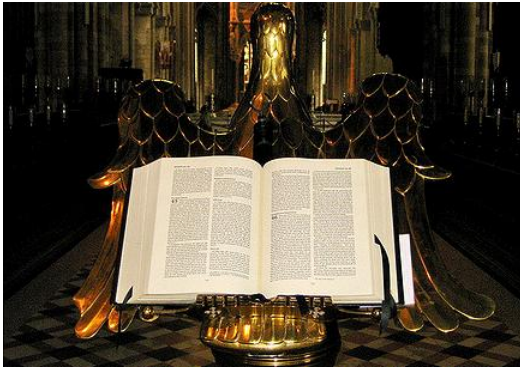


Some 'arty' books present special images on the outer frontpage, others have drawings or paintings or cartoons inside.



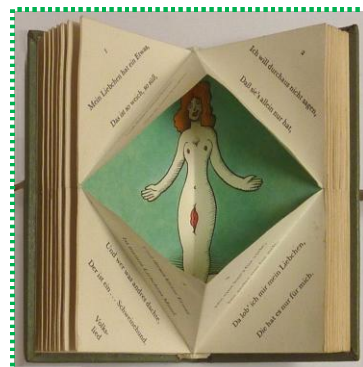
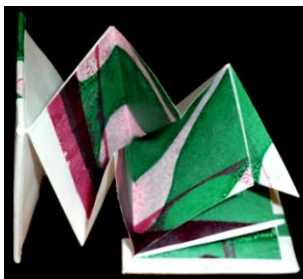
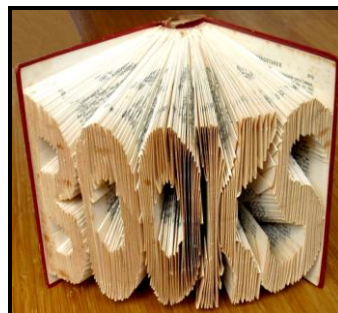
For a long time, special books have their own 'table' - especially those which are used to present their content to an audience. This especially true for the bible and the quran.





❓ Can folding cleverness create 'arty' books?

A special type of fine art books are based on folding pages - a style which flourished during the last century and is still in use. This is a very different and thus unique way of making books, it's "book art" in a divergent fashion.



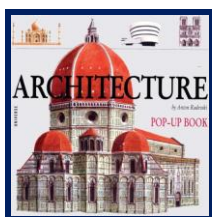
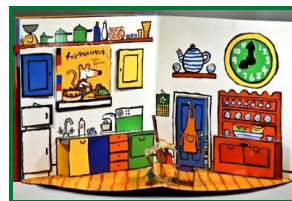


My personal favourite is this very cute folding booklet. When you open it, a square is shaped, which has texts on the four outer sides, and a little pic is inside!

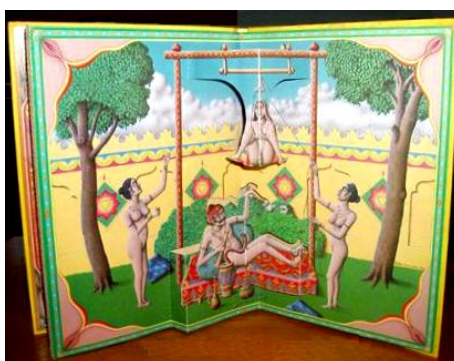
There are folding books which are much more than just folded pages - a section of a page pops up, and therefore they are indeed called pop-up books.



A wide variety of topics is presented in pop-up style: Travels, landscapes, gods, ships, houses, etc. Some are just for fun. Both kids and adults are targetted.



A special issue is architecture, presenting single buildings to whole urban areas.



And yes, all sorts of erotic enterprises are covered as well in pop-up books, many!



I cannot finish this section about 'books as art' without presenting a fabulous painting of Arcimboldo from 1566, "The librarian" - here it is!





? What is the role of books re comic strips?

Comic strips are stories created as a sequence of pictures to which text is added, either presenting what the people in the story are saying, or background information. Originally they were published within newspapers, in the 'entertainment' section, as one strip per day or per week. Here is a modern one.



Fully developed tales are labelled graphic novels, or simpler, pictured stories. They are crafted in many American, European and Asian countries.

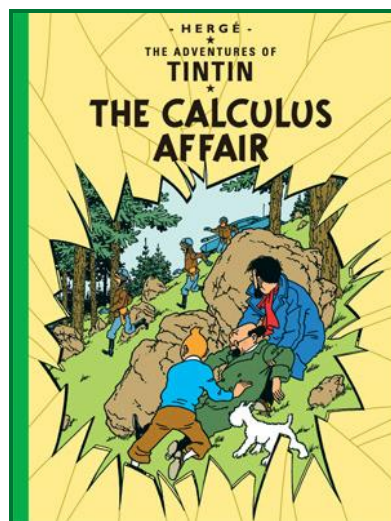
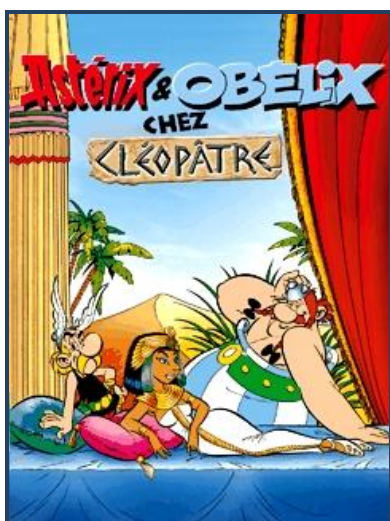
By the way, even quite a few of Agatha Christie's well-known crime books were recently converted into graphic novels!

The target group are either kids or adults. Topics include funny events and phantasy stories; science fiction is a frequent issue. Within adult comics, common are historic events, crime stories and 'naughty' episodes; of these, plain sex and various types of pornography are a market on its own.

One of the early fun comic strips was "Katzenjammer Kids", published in USA. The idea goes back to Busch's "Max und Moritz" in Germany. In Norway it appeared as "Knoll og Tott" - and this was the first comic strip I encountered!



Popular comic strips get mostly published as book. Some were designed as books straightaway, such as Asterix & Obelix and Tintin.



For both about 25 novels were created, and of both millions of books were printed. Officially they are books for kids, yet only adults will fully appreciate how fine the drawings and how jocular the texts are, especially in Herge's work.



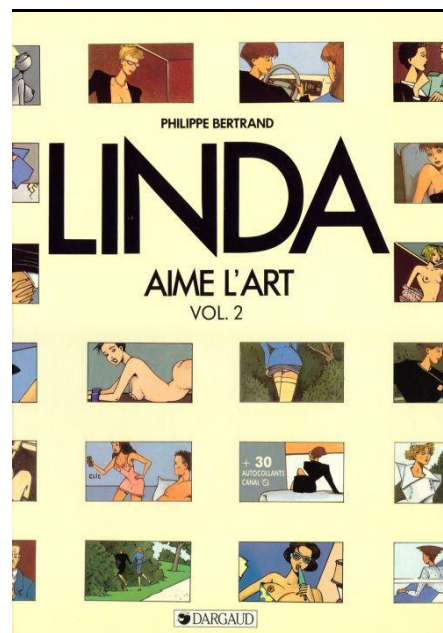
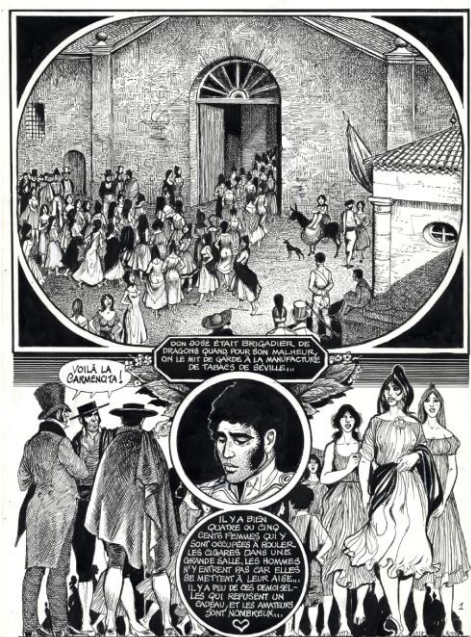
So, every bookstore has, and must have, graphic novels on offer. Plus, all larger cities will have shops specialized on comic strips.

The 'naughty' comic strips and graphic novels are a different matter though, because they have to be hidden from kids, and they may clash with moral principles.

Almost all are all produced and traded as books, and the quality of the stories, the drawings and the printing varies widely, from cheap & simple products to works which are so professionally made that they appear liketrue art.

High standards in erotic graphic novels are achieved in countries such as Austria, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Spain.

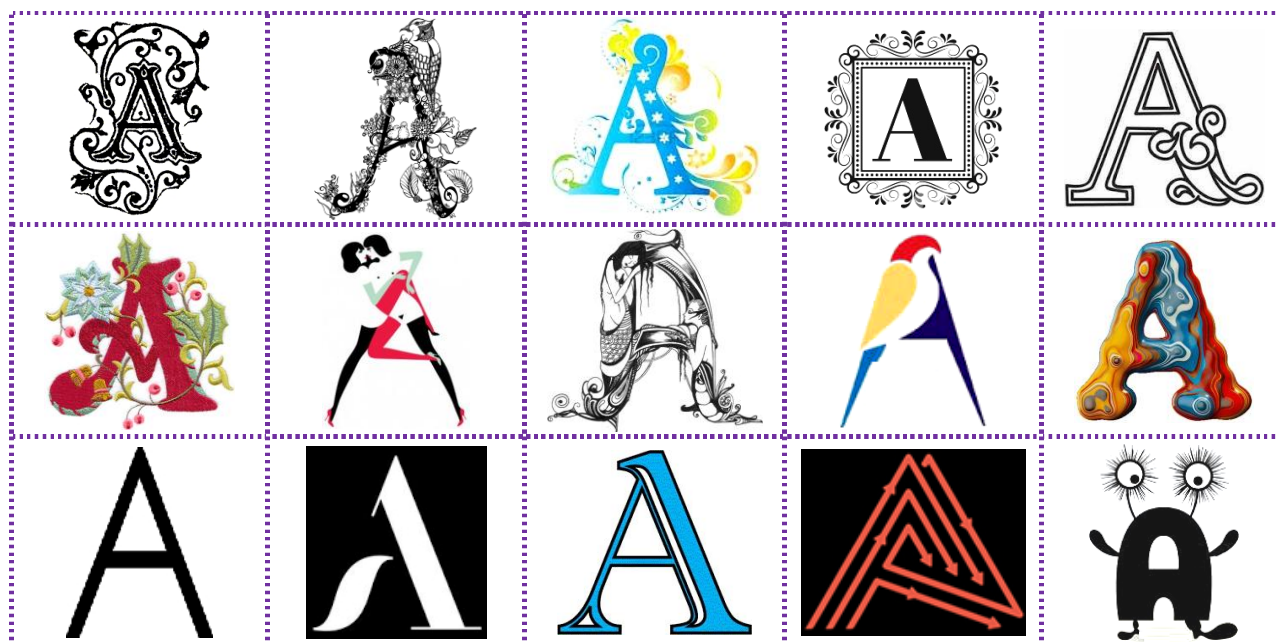
For obvious reasons I have to be careful with showing images from such books - so here are just three examples.



These are by G. Pichard, by P. Serpieri and by P. Bertrand, whose style is very contemporary. Interestingly, artists like those three often work in both worlds, that is, classical and 'naughty' literature.

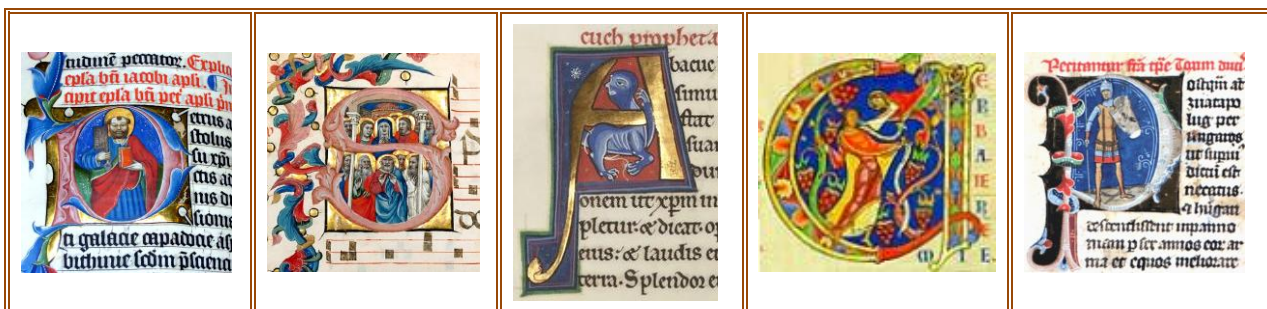
❓ How about the letters used in printed books?

Since several hundred years, books are not generated - and partly painted - by hand anymore. The nature of producing documents with computer programs means that about every kind of alphabets can be used when creating a text. There are thousands existing nowadays - below are just 15 examples, shown for the letter "A".





Here you see how in historic hand-made books it was common that the first letter is a piece of art - being much larger than the normal text and enriched with paintings.



This is not the case in chinese books because there is no alphabet-based language. However, for important words often larger writing of letters is used, and pictures may be added to that page.



Also different are arabic texts, because at least in the Quran images of humans are not permitted for religious reasons.



Other symbols are intensly exploited though around the text section. And for important sentences the enormous potential of the arabic writing for calligraphy is utilized.



The vast majority of texts - which may be for books or manuscripts or essays or memos - are produced on PCs, and the pertinent programs, such as WinWord, offer quite a number of fonts which are then realized by the persons printer. Each font can be utilized in "normal", "bold" and "italics" style, and a wide range of font sizes (from 3 up to 48) can be selected; the most common ones are "11" and "12".

On the following page is a list which contains all fonts which I use.

Some explanations:

- <> All texts created on computers are made with graphical modes, which means that the width of a letter can be adapted to its shape.
- <> As visible in the list, the actual size of "font size 11" varies considerably across fonts; often higher size than 11 is needed to achieve good readability.
- <> The fonts  have a fixed character size, i.e., all symbols have the same width. This is related to how texts were produced on mechanical typewriters.
- <> The fonts  are designed to look reasonably similar to handwriting. *If handwriting shall be used with high readability, Lucida seems to be the best option.*
- <> *Fontlery Brown* and *Monotype Corsiva* are fonts which shall present old-fashioned style, as in early times of printing books.
- <> The poorest readability have tiny Garamond and TimesNewRoman, the default font of Microsoft
- <> A common modern font is Aria. In recent reviews (i.e., 2015) Calibri is rated as very good.
- <> The fonts used in this essay "Books" are marked with **B** in the list.



WinWord fonts available on my computers

Note: Mostly provided by MS, however, several installed by me.

↔ MAIN FONTS

Arial {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Arial italic {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Calibri {12}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Book Antiqua {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	1234567890	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
CenturyGothic {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Comic Sans MS {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	1234567890	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Economica {12.5}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	1234567890	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Economica italic {12.5}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	1234567890	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Fontleroy Brown (18)	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	1234567890	¢ §* ? `	
Garamond {12.5}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Gotham Nights [15]	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	1234567890	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Kristen ITC {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	1234567890	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
LucidaSans {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
LucidaSans italic {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Monotype Corsiva {14}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
MS-SansSerif {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Segoe UI {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	1234567890	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Tahoma {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
TimesNewRoman {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Verdana {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
Verdana italic {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	

↔ FONTS IN HANDWRITING STYLE

BradleyHand {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
ComicSans {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
LucidaHand {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
TempusSans {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	

↔ FONTS WITH FIXED ~ EQUAL CHARACTER SIZE

Consolas {11}	abcdexyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
CourierNew {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
FixedSys {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	
LucidaConso1 {11}	abcde~xyz	ABCDE~XYZ	123456789	@#\$\$%&*+<>?[]	

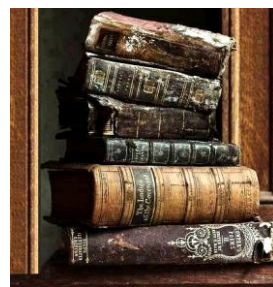
////



❓ *What to do with damaged books?*

Damaged books

So far in this essay, the history and all the remarkable facets of books have been described. Yet there is another, very different issue: Books can get 'ill', or even 'die'.



Consequently, procedures to deal with damaged books are known and applied for a very long time, and especially libraries and history museums use them professionally.





The main reasons for the harm of books are:

- ◇ Broken binding/spine
- ◇ Torn pages
- ◇ Stains on pages
- ◇ General over-use
- ◇ Humidity impacts
- ◇ Water damage
- ◇ Insects which eat books.

To discuss all this would need to be an own book, so just a few matters will be handled here.

Broken binding/spine

Books are usually created by binding the pages and installing a spine which functions as a cover. The outcome may get damaged over time.



Damaged pages

Pages may have stains – just bothersome ones, or stronger impacts which reduce the readability of the text.



Water damage

Beside fire, by far the worst effects result from water. Pages, for long time made from paper, lose their form if 'watered', and consequently the whole book is not in proper shape anymore – ultimately it falls apart.





Even high humidity in book storage areas can create such effects. If a library hasn't a decent roof, rain will certainly have bad impacts.

Actually my own library was once exposed to water – because of severe building errors in the neighbouring house, water run down the wall behind the bookshelves, not a lot yet persistently (symbolized by blue lines in the photo below). Thereby all books touching the wall got damaged, urghhh!



Once I realized this, all damaged books were collected and stored in a dry room, and then the type of impairment was analyzed. This included:

- :: bent, but no damage to the content of the pages
- :: texts or photos damaged, mostly by stains
- :: pages glued together, thereby wedging the book.

As such impacts are pretty common if books get wet/very-wet, I'll outline what I did:

- ✗ *Action:* wet yet undamaged books put 3 days in strong book press.
Outcome: damage reduced yet not fully fixed.
- ✗ *Action:* damaged texts or photos scanned, dealt with using picture-editing programs, then copy placed into the book.
Outcome: okay if small-scale damage.
- ✗ *Action:* For seriously damaged books: copied the whole book, all pages incl the covers. Bad pages treated, as above. Then stapled it.
Outcome: Not impressive but at least provided readable content.



>< *Action*: For completely damaged books: bought a new one.
Outcome: Perfect if the book was available -- yet a lot were not!
 Then tried to find & buy a similar book.

Many repairs focussed on the book's frontpage - here is a decent result.



Many many books died because the libraries in which they were stored perished. The first 'super library' was the Biblioteka Alexandrina, which was established around 280 B.C. Yet this exceptional institution collapsed around 500 years later, and a common (yet unproven) view is that it was set on fire.



Death versus survival of books

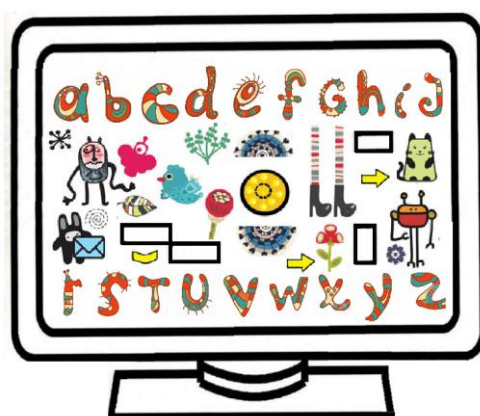
The most recent example for destroyed libraries with millions of books: WorldWar-2, widely bombed Italy and especially Germany.

So, books may die in any context from tiny to vast. And this confirms that books, the true essence of 'culture', must be intensely protected.



❓ *What are the effects of computers?*

Of course very very many! Computers brought the creation and the production of books to a new level which 50 years ago was unthinkable. That the whole process is now steered by these machines is one factor, that letters and tables and pictures are handled as image elements is the other one.



It is far easier than in previous times to generate any kind of layout of book pages and to place any kind of text pieces and figures into them.

So, the inventiveness of book makers is certainly very much encouraged - but how about the impact on the books themselves, the *real* ones?

❓ *Will the genre of books survive?*

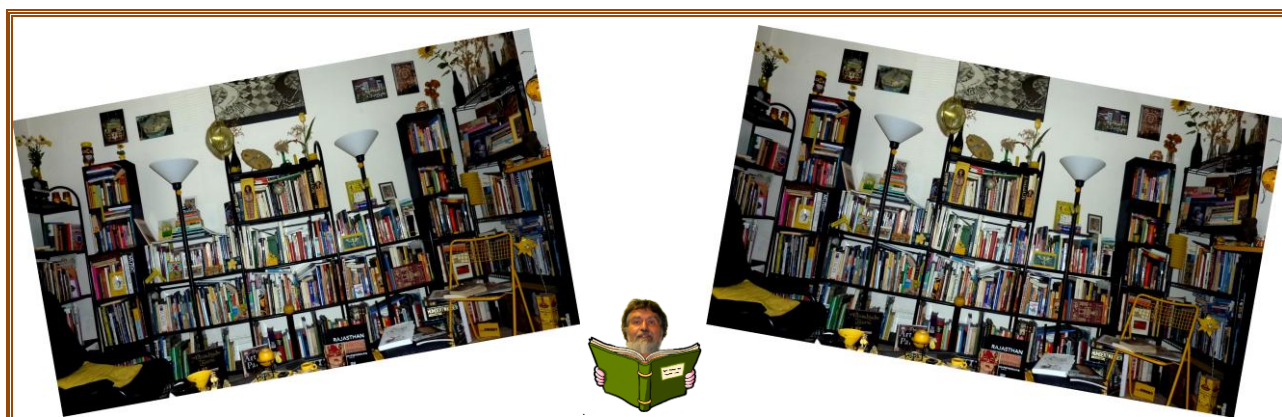
My first - and most scaring - thought is that books, the 'physical' ones, are not needed anymore, because about every tome is available on internet websites, plus, very many books can be read on electronic reading tools, called e-reader, such as Kindle or Kobo or Nook.





Furthermore, a lot of people, especially younger ones, are not interested in books at all, because they are steered by smartphones and dominant systems such as Facebook or Twitter. This also means that in such systems messages must be rather short and simple.

So may be I am kind of obstinate, having a whole library of books, and even love that?

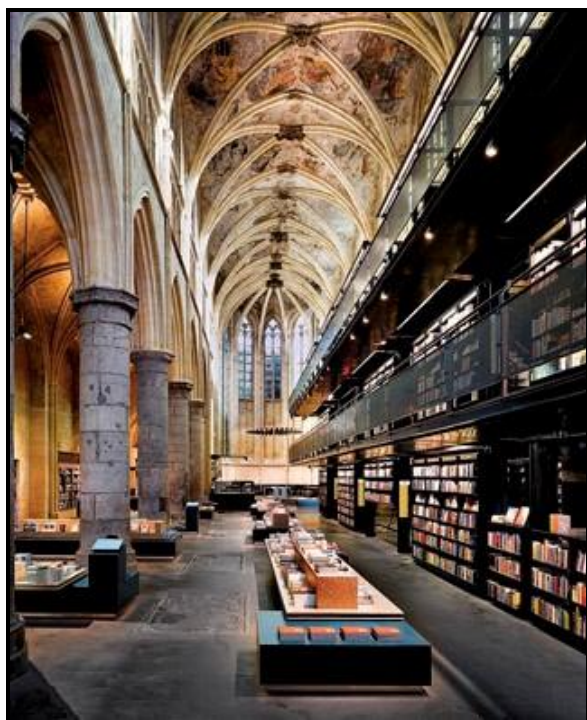


Topics include countries, travels, art, architecture, humour, and 'arty' books, like foldable ones. Plus, lots & lots of crime novels, urghhh.

There is no doubt that at least pessimists wonder whether the genre of books will survive in our century. A core problem is that making 'real' books is damned costly, compared to producing electronic ones.

Nevertheless, what is in favour of books, which are after all a crucial feature of societies for thousands of years?

- * Large-format books with full-page colour images can not be enjoyed on smartphone or e-reader screens - only the actual book is visually exciting.
- * When reading a book it is very easy to switch repeatedly forwards or backwards or to apply stickers to pages of special interest.
- * Special books can be a true gift or donation.
- * Bookstores, if they are more than just places to sell something, if they have character, can be social venues. To amuse you, below is the most unique one I have ever visited, it is in Maastricht/Netherlands. And my favourite bookstore (a bit of phantasy) is presented as well.
- * Only physical books can get some adornment, such as glued-on pieces or flowers, and they can be signed by the author or the one who makes a gift.
- * Books are targeting single people yet also schools, research facilities and public libraries. This sounds good, although the budget for libraries seems to go down - the pertinent institutions have a tough context, going after what people should do versus their actual attitudes?



Finally, internet bookstores, such as Amazon or AbeBooks of course have an impact. On one hand, buying books has become easy and cheap; on the other hand, a lot of bookstores have collapsed under this competition. The overall outcomes of this is hard to assess.

Ironically, the less modern a country is, and the more conservative in ethics, the better seems the chances for

books

to stay what they have been for so many years, a crucial ingredient of humankind.

All in all, my own viewpoints regarding books are neither optimism only nor pessimism only, and I tried to feed in big bunches of - realism.

