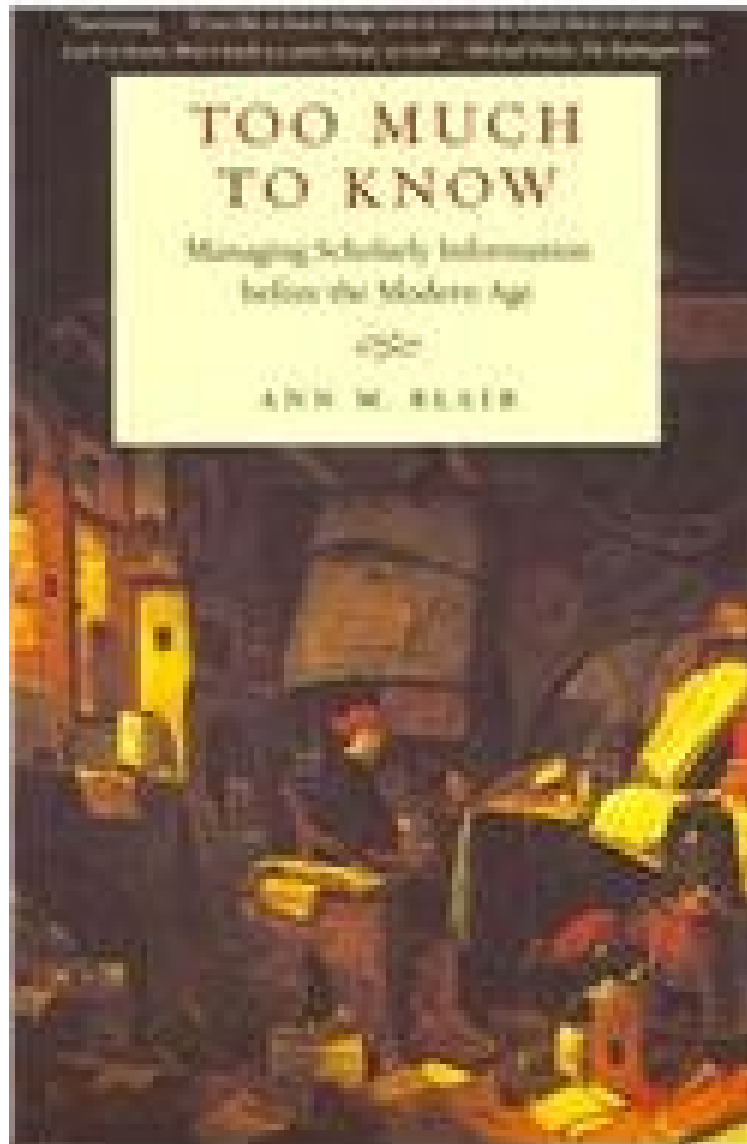


(Free) Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age

Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age

Ann M. Blair

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Ann M. Blair : Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. GREAT BIBLIOGRAPHIC THINKING WRITING!By James PericoniAnn Blair astonishes always, with a combination of rich research and shrewd insights into how people read thought about reading in other cultural eras, with an enthusiasm that is contagious. One of the best thinkers and writers in a field that is chock a block with smart people - among whom she stands at the top. Brava, Professor Blair!12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. professional history of reference books and their technologyBy S. MatthewsI am not sure that the long list of blurbs that appear on the page for this book do it any favours. To read them you would think (I did) that this is a choice morsel of up-the-intellectual-market poolside reading; i.e. fascinating-in-itself. It isn't. This is a scholarly contribution to the history of reference books and book structuring technology, written in efficient and scholarly, but definitely not sparkling prose. It is never going to be lauded as gripping, and if you do not have an active interest in the minutiae of early modern intellectual culture, then you are surely going to come to a juddering halt inside a dozen pages in your attempt to read it. This is not to run the book down - it is just to represent it fairly. If, on the other hand, you do have an active interest in [...etc] then there is worthwhile stuff here to add to your pile; just don't plan on starting the pile here. Certainly, Prof. Blair has done an intimidating amount of work in the archives in preparation - just thinking about it is enough to make me feel like removing my imaginary glasses and rubbing my eyes.Recommended with those caveats.P.S., One particular thing that I found surprising - I mention this because I was expecting it from early on - it seemed to be signposted, but it never appeared - is that while Prof. Blair discusses attempts to track the use of reference books in early scholarly work, she is fairly pessimistic about how possible this is. I immediately thought of Jean Seznec's 'the survival of the pagan gods', which has some lovely and to me very striking work on tracking the use of reference books over time. If you plan on reading 'too much to know', then it would be worth taking a look there too (or maybe Prof. Blair thinks Seznec is misguided, but she does not take time out to dismiss him - he is not in the bibliography).22 of 24 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant.By Noah EfronAnn Blair is a historian of staggering erudition, on the one hand, and breath-of-fresh-air common sense, on the other. *Too Much to Know* describes the long and complicated history of things that often don't seem to have a history at all, like information overload, and the effect of new media on how we think, and more. Blair shows how many of the unnerving effects of the internet, for instance, were discussed anxiously in past centuries as well, and attributed to other technological innovations. But her point is not that the impact of today's technologies are just like those of earlier technologies (the view expressed by Abe Simpson: "Why the fax machine is nothing but a waffle iron with a phone attached!"). She shows that people in earlier centuries faced challenges that were at once their own - a product of their unique circumstances - and at the same time not entirely unlike those that we face today. After reading this book, you understand a lot more about early modern European culture. And you also understand a bit more about our own culture. Which is why, to my mind, this is as good as historical writing gets. There's great humanity in this book, and wisdom.

The flood of information brought to us by advancing technology is often accompanied by a distressing sense of information overload, yet this experience is not unique to modern times. In fact, says Ann M. Blair in this intriguing book, the invention of the printing press and the ensuing abundance of books provoked sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European scholars to register complaints very similar to our own. Blair examines methods of information management in ancient and medieval Europe as well as the Islamic world and China, then focuses particular attention on the organization, composition, and reception of Latin reference books in print in early modern Europe. She explores in detail the sophisticated and sometimes idiosyncratic techniques that scholars and readers developed in an era of new technology and exploding information.

"Fascinating. . . . If you like to know things, even in a world in which there is already too much to know, Blair's book is a mini-library in itself."Michael Dirda, *The Washington Post*