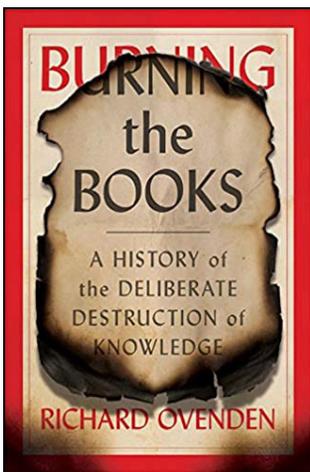


Dark Archives showcases the stories of a few confirmed books, which is less the author's failing and more a testament to the book's sometimes hazy—or intentionally private—provenance. The ABP “have yet to test an occult work that's turned out to be made from human skin.” There may be numerous reasons why Rosenbloom does not devote more than a few words to *Le Traicté de peyne...*, the mid-19th-century masochist allegory in the collection of New York City's Grolier Club. The world may never know if the risqué photo of *Éloge du sein des femmes* Rosenbloom saw in France is a real book (let alone an anthropodermic one). Ultimately, one's interest in this book will depend on whether the reader agrees with ABP's central claim that “tests could be useful for weeding out fakes in the private market, and any verified human skin book adds a lot to our understanding of the history of the practice.” Rosenbloom's work entertains with hints of Irene Adler, and *Supernatural*, but, ultimately, *Dark Archives* is a very personal memoir, chockablock with details, curiosity, and respectful handling of delicate content. —Diane Dias De Fazio, Kent State University

Richard Ovenden. *Burning the Books: A History of the Deliberate Destruction of Knowledge.* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020. 308p. \$29.95 (ISBN 978-0-674-24120-6).



Bodley's Librarian Richard Ovenden writes with a sense of urgency. Libraries and archives are under assault today, he argues, and our complacency is leading to alarming levels of reduced resources for our “storehouses of knowledge” (9). *Burning the Books: A History of the Deliberate Destruction of Knowledge* is a call for renewed support for memory institutions, specifically increased funding for digital preservation projects. Despite its title, Ovenden's book is not a history but rather a series of personal reflections on historical examples that cover the ways in which knowledge—in physical and digital formats—has been destroyed in the past. His narrative is largely guided by his intimate knowledge of the Bodleian Libraries' collections, which he references in most chapters of his study. Ovenden also confesses that he wrote *Burning the Books* in “anger at recent failures across the globe” (5) to adequately provide librarians and archivists with the resources they need to safeguard social memory for future generations.

Burning the Books is primarily organized in a chronological fashion with examples ranging from the ancient world to the early 21st century. While Ovenden looks at memory institutions in the Middle East and the United States, his primary focus is Europe. In chapters 1 and 2, he demonstrates that ancient peoples devised impressive ways of preserving knowledge. He holds up the Library of Alexandria as the “archetypal library of Western imagination” (29) but suggests its ultimate demise was underfunding and a lack of strong leadership. Ovenden jumps to the Reformation in the next two chapters, highlighting the massive number of books and manuscripts that were either burned or sold as scrap paper. In his assessment, the 16th century was “in many ways one of the worst periods in the history of knowledge” (62) that was only halted by the work of antiquarians and the preservation policies of men like Sir Thomas Bodley. Crossing the Atlantic in chapter 5, Ovenden reminds the reader that attacks on libraries—like when British troops burned the Library of Congress in 1814—are political acts designed to weaken other states.

Chapters 6 to 12 cover the turbulent 20th century. Ovenden looks at Germany's attack on the Louvain University Library in 1914 and their burning of Jewish books during the Holocaust. He also highlights how libraries and archives were targeted during conflicts in both Bosnia and Iraq. These examples demonstrate that the loss of documents needs to be considered a casualty of war, especially when the documents' destruction is linked to cultural genocide. Ovenden also tackles the ethics of curating private papers, using Franz Kafka and Philip Larkin as two examples. Self-censorship robs future generations of great research material, which is why silences in the record often speak just as loudly as preserved papers. Chapter 13 shifts to the digital world. Ovenden argues that large companies control cultural memory by privatizing the production and use of knowledge. Since they only offer storage to their users, he urges librarians and archivists to play a role in preserving digital content.

The final two chapters of *Burning the Books* serve as a two-tiered conclusion. Here Ovenden lays out five reasons why we need to guard against both the deliberate and unintentional destruction of knowledge. Libraries and archives, he claims, are important for education, diversity of thought, open societies, fact checking, and cultural identities. In a nutshell, they are central to vibrant democracies. Hence, in his telling, librarians and archivists heroically manage collections, dodge bullets during times of war to save documents, and demonstrate "astonishing levels of commitment and courage in saving things from destruction" (218). Ovenden's narrative sometimes verges on the hagiographic, but his reminder that "guardians of the truth" (219) do not always make frontpage news is important. As he stresses, the documents that information professionals preserve can be used to topple oppressive regimes and pass sentences in war crimes courts.

A troubling aspect of *Burning the Books* is that knowledge, books, and memory institutions are largely only a part of the history of Western civilization. While Ovenden highlights the contributions of Muslim repositories and briefly acknowledges that the destruction of knowledge was a "routine aspect of colonialism and empire" (232), the Americas are largely absent from his study beyond his chapter on the Library of Congress. In recent decades, several scholars have expanded the history of the book to include works such as Mesoamerican codices ("painted books") and Andean quipus (knotted strings). From a world history perspective, the colonization of the Americas saw the loss of knowledge at alarming rates as European settlers destroyed many of these alternative forms of record keeping.

Ovenden seeks to reach a wide audience with his book. He wants to inspire information professionals to soldier on in their work but not to become complacent. Beyond those within the fold, Ovenden also hopes to challenge a diverse reading public to contemplate the future of knowledge preservation. He joins other library directors at prestigious institutions who are working hard to combat the false idea that libraries and archives are irrelevant in the digital world. —Jason Dyck, *University of Western Ontario*

Emma Annette Wilson. *Digital Humanities for Librarians.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. 248p. Hardback, \$115 (ISBN: 978-1-5381-1644-9). <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538116449/Digital-Humanities-for-Librarians>

Emma Annette Wilson has pulled together a very approachable and packed resource for aspiring Master of Library Science (MLS) students and those new to digital humanities (DH). The book is as easy to follow as it is informative, providing a balance between the practicality of various digital humanities methodologies, the development of those methodologies, and