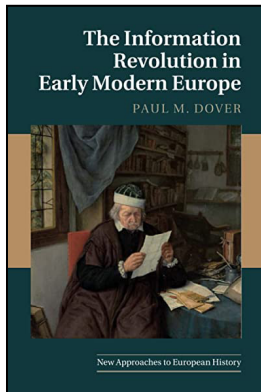


## Book Reviews



**Paul M. Dover.** *The Information Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 342p. Paperback, \$29.99 (ISBN: 978-1316602034).



Millions of documents and digital objects are searchable in online discovery tools and databases. It is no wonder that a common concern of researchers today – whether first-year undergraduates or seasoned professors – is information overload. Paul M. Dover, however, suggests that struggles searching for and keeping track of information are nothing new. In *The Information Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Dover argues that early modern Europeans placed greater emphasis on information management in the face of increasing amounts of data, which were piling up in mounds of paper in both bureaucratic and personal settings. Instead of viewing the post-Gutenberg period as an “age of print,” Dover says that we should see it as an “age of paper” (5). He questions the binary between manuscript and

print cultures and contends that paper was the driving motor of a new information revolution.

Dover divides his study into eight chapters. The first two are a reflection on paper as a material object and its informational functions. Paper—originally made from rags—was far cheaper than the traditional mediums of parchment and vellum. As paper mills expanded from the 1230s onward, paper became more widely available and thus transformed Europe into “a culture of paper” (40). Europeans, as a result, were not as concerned with writing things down, which placed them in a predicament that Dover calls one of the “paradoxes of paper” (39). They had greater liberty to record a wealth of information for everyday transactions and for future generations, but as they exercised their newfound freedom, they faced the daunting tasks of storage, sorting, and searching.

Chapters 3 and 4 look at the role paper played in the rise of capitalism and the expansion of the early modern state. Merchants and monarchs generated paper trails of letters and other documents in their everyday affairs, making writing both a commercial and political activity. As the biggest consumers of paper, businesses and governments became information managers and, subsequently, produced paper tools like notebooks, registers, inventories, and indexes to administer their expanding archives. Dover claims that paper technologies created “virtual courts” and communities across Europe and around the world. Indeed, without paper European companies and empires would not have been able to maintain the same levels of communication and control across such vast distances.

The fifth chapter is yet another corrective to Elizabeth Eisenstein’s printing revolution. Manuscript book production had already been increasing in the late medieval period thanks to the availability of paper, and print should not be conflated with books. Dover recognizes that there was a “quantitative revolution” (152) given the major increase in the number and variety of books post-Gutenberg, but he provides a crucial reminder that printers produced a wide range of loose sheets for a diversity of purposes, indulgences being one important example. Print also led to more manuscripts as early modern scholars jotted down notes, copied printed

texts, and still purchased manuscript “publications.” Dover rightly describes the early modern period as a “new age of manuscript” instead of simply as an “age of print” (181).

Chapters 6 and 7 look at how increasing levels of paper contributed to changing views of the natural world and of the self. Naturalists’ combination of observation, description, and reading generated a range of note-taking techniques—loose-leaf manuscript reading notes, paper notebooks, and commonplace books—designed to augment the memory. Men and women across various social classes and professions exchanged letters and began to produce what Jacques Presser has called ego-documents, things like diaries, travel narratives, spiritual reflections, and family books. In scientific and domestic spheres, then, Europeans had a “preservative instinct” (242) that transformed them into managers of information. For this reason, Dover favours an information revolution over a scientific one and sees increasing levels of correspondence as an epistolary revolution.

No book can possibly cover everything about paper in early modern Europe, but Dover glosses over two important areas worth highlighting. Throughout his book, writing and managing information is primarily an urban affair. Beyond one brief reference to the Tuscan peasant Benedetto (243), most Europeans, who were illiterate and would not have had mounds of papers in their homes, are largely absent from his discussion. Dover understands the complementary relationship between textuality and orality and notes how notaries connected the illiterate to written culture, but he fails to explain in detail the roles peasants (who are absent from the index) participated in the information revolution and how they were influenced by it.

Dover also fails to adequately address the relationship between information management and empire building. He draws on a few examples from the Spanish empire, but he overlooks what I would call—drawing on the work of Walter Mignolo—the “darker side” of paper. European forms of paper expanded as European empires fanned across the globe and destroyed alternative forms of record keeping among various Indigenous communities. In their place, European missionaries, churchmen, and colonial officials jotted down notes and published a wide range of observations about local cultures that in several cases were only available in Europe.

*The Information Revolution in Early Modern Europe* is a helpful synthesis of many of the changes that took place in the information landscape of early modern Europe. Scholars of the early modern period, information science, and printing will need to read this book. Undergraduate and graduate students will appreciate Dover’s connections between the past and the present as digital technologies have made “archivists and information managers out of us all” (283). — Jason Dyck, University of Western Ontario

**Community College Library: Reference and Instruction.** Janet Pinkley and Kaela Casey, eds.

Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association, 2022. 317 p. Softcover, \$98.00. (\$88.20 ALA members) (ISBN: 978-0-8389-3768-6).

*The Community College Library: Reference and Instruction* is the next in a series of collected works aimed at increasing research and scholarly writing specific to community college libraries. Along with another recently released collection on assessment, *CCL: Reference and Instruction* highlights a wide range of teaching strategies, outreach efforts, critical looks at practice in the community college, and partnership opportunities. Each of the twenty-four chapters is relatively short and infused with both informal anecdotes and ties to the greater body of in-