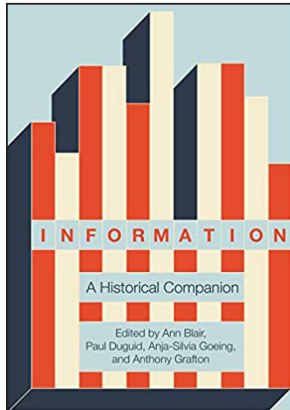


considerable further reading in addition to their works cited in each chapter; after finishing the book, it was my inclination to return to some of the source texts for the pedagogies that were tantalizingly introduced here. — *Althea Lazzaro, Seattle Central College*

Information: A Historical Companion. Ann Blair, Paul Duguid, Anja-Silvia Goeing, and Anthony Grafton, eds. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021. 904p. Hardcover, \$65.00 (ISBN 978-0-6911-7954-4).



At nearly 900 pages, *Information* offers a wide-ranging treatment of its subject. Thirteen opening chapters, followed by more than 100 topic entries, trace the “emergence across history of new information practices, technologies, and institutions” focusing particularly on “moments of confrontation and transition.”

Several themes run through the opening section. The centrality of geography to information is established in the opening chapter as Anthony Grafton revisits the Silk Road, a pre-modern information highway, multilingual in its cultural sweep. In Grafton’s concise words, “Information made the Silk Road.” Along the route, “cultural practices and styles moved as far—and as erratically—as words, transmitted by the artisans who made them, by the products that embodied them, and, above all, by missionaries and other migrants.” Such erratic transmission of information may be found in any of the book’s chapters, and most of the topical entries that follow them.

Yet people have always felt the need to organize and control information. Such impulses lead to bureaucracy, another of the book’s themes. The often clunky but always imposing machinery of archival control lurks beneath nearly all of modern information. The volume’s commentary on official recordkeeping includes everything from ancient Rome’s *acta diurnal* (chapter 1) to the rise of the European information state (chapter 6) to “managerial capitalism” (chapter 8).

The first section of *Information* fittingly ends with a chapter entitled “Search,” which foregoes the chronological scheme of the prior 12 chapters to conclude theoretically with issues of discoverability. What good is all the voluminous information now freely available to much of the world if one cannot locate it? This coda, authored by Daniel Rosenberg, reminds us that information is still not free despite the promise of the latest “information age.” Proprietary platforms such as Google quickly seized the best search engine models, ensuring that, despite its initial promise, our access to information now depends upon a few corporatized networks.

Human anecdotes punctuate the otherwise technological narratives, making each chapter a highly readable treatment of its topic. The chronological progression lends an overall arc to the first section that is impressive for any edited work running 13 chapters and covering millennia in the process. Chapters are enriched with thematic elements that layer the temporal with accompanying issues of the time. “Documents, Empire, and Capitalism in the Nineteenth Century” is a typical example of such interpretation of a period in information development. Such combinations help the various authors advance political points of view that subtly echo much of today’s accepted thinking; there are few controversial claims in these opening essays. In fact, the reader could be excused for concluding that even in today’s world the encroachment of information into our everyday lives has few consequential implications. This sterility is to be expected of such a broad project, and few of the work’s likely readers may anticipate

a diatribe. Still, the sense of unease occasioned by today's information creep becomes a sort of elephant in the room where such a hefty volume resides.

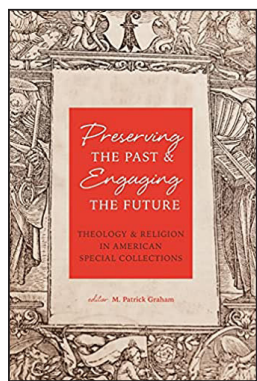
Reading *Information*, it is easy to forget that the current moment is so heavily burdened by doubts about the veracity of anything or anyone purporting to be informative. The recent swell of divisive politics and a pandemic have stripped information of nearly all its remaining neutrality. Though this atmosphere of doubt is hardly a 21st-century phenomenon, the text, with a few exceptions, elides the issue of veracity in its historical survey. The chapters that do deal with these issues are some of the most intriguing and prescient. Richard R. John and Heidi J.S. Tworek deal most directly with the subject in chapter 11, entitled "Publicity, Propaganda, and Public Opinion." Aside from covering the requisite "yellow journalism," the authors delve into more nuanced topics such as the 1920s debate over propaganda. In the wake of WWI, John and Tworek tell us, even two progressives like John Dewey and Walter Lippmann split over the role of the press in eliciting "civic engagement." While each man championed objectivity in public information, Dewey believed "journalists were high-profile players in an ongoing contest to interest the public in the public interest. For Lippmann, in contrast, journalists should remain discreetly on the sidelines and patiently counsel elites."

In many ways, the real treasure of the volume are the entries comprising a glossary of information-related topics. There are even several delightful surprises ("Photocopiers" and "Landscapes and Cities"). Some topics ("Lists" and "Journals") are given comparatively short shrift, and librarians will be surprised to find no entry at all for "Information Literacy."

More than 700 pages into the volume, the entry entitled "Reading Against the Grain" provides a blueprint for interrogating history. With *Information* as a guide, any historian, archivist, or close examiner of the world will have the training and means to "read against the grain" of the past, recognizing that the book's subject, and its context, must always be vigorously questioned. As good archival thinkers, *Information's* readers "should ask questions about how our archives, as collections and institutions with their own histories and realities, shape the pasts we study and the stories we tell."

Information is destined to become a standard reference for every serious historian of the subject and a myriad of related ones. —Ron McColl, West Chester University of Pennsylvania

Preserving the Past & Engaging the Future: Theology & Religion in American Special Collections. M. Patrick Graham, ed. Chicago, IL: American Theological Library Association, Atla Open Press, 2021. 270p. Paper, \$35.00 (ISBN 978-1949800166). doi:10.31046/atlaopenpress.43.



Preserving the Past & Engaging the Future: Theology & Religion in American Special Collections is a fine collection of essays that demonstrates the practical work and value of special collections in libraries for religion scholarship and cultural heritage.

Editor M. Patrick Graham is a giant in the field of religious studies libraries and special collections, having retired in 2017 from the Pitts Theological Library at Emory University after a long and successful career. His subject expertise, as well as his genial nature and knack for building community, makes him the perfect person to have gathered these collected essays.

The 10 chapters are divided into three sections: "Special Collections Retrospective," "Special Collections at Work in Teaching and Research," and "Collection