
Librarians should not be deterred by the nondescript title, especially since so little scholarly research exists on the historical roots of the profession. The Oral Antecedents of Greek Librarianship seeks to fill a significant gap in the literature of librarianship. Wright attempts to deal with the antecedents of the Alexandrian library movement by focusing on the transition of classical civilization from an oral to a written tradition. Here, the author believes, can be found the origins of the library. This hypothesis is intriguing and entitles Wright to take his reader on a historical journey that recounts the function of information in classical society from preliterate times to classical Greece.

On the way, he introduces several unusual observations, some of which relate directly to his theme, others of which digress from it. One strong observation compares Homer to the librarian in terms of the information function of each within their societies—a unique argument that is well defended. Another observation of considerable merit details the heavy influence Oriental bibliographic methodology had on the Greeks. A third observation, however, involves Wright’s defense of the “inventionist” against the “evolutionist” theory of writing. This one makes for a nice story, but hardly worth the lengthy effort in terms of his theme.

Of particular concern to this reviewer is Wright’s heavy reliance on a few secondary sources, especially the works of S. H. Butcher, Rudolph Pfeiffer, and Chester C. Starr. It is obvious the author bought the ideas of all three, but his hopes that lengthy quotes from their works will serve to convince his own readers fall short of their mark. This is especially true for chapter Four, where Pfeiffer is referred to or quoted in nearly half the 246 footnotes.

The writing style is frequently burdened...