texts were preserved in the palaces and university libraries of the eastern empire, it was in monasteries that a dedication to reading and libraries was reborn.

The big technological breakthrough in ancient books was the adoption of the codex, which developed from wooden writing tablets bound together to form a notebook. Parchment soon replaced wood, although papyrus codexes also existed for a time. The Roman satirist Martial (first century A.D.) refers to the new format in the lines:

This bulky mass of multiple folds
all fifteen poems of Ovid holds.

The codex was more compact, durable, and convenient to use but did not completely replace the traditional roll for several centuries. The fact that Christians used the codex exclusively probably expedited its victory.

Casson’s is not the first history of ancient libraries. James Westfall Thompson’s Ancient Libraries (1940) is a standard, and H. L. Pinner’s The World of Books in Classical Antiquity (1958) is a charming little work for the general reader. But Libraries in the Ancient World is surely the best current work on the subject. Several studies of the Library at Alexandria have appeared lately, and the British Library recently published a gigantic illustrated work, The Great Libraries: From Antiquity to the Renaissance, by Konstantinos Sp. Staikos. But Casson’s book would be the choice for the reader who wants not only to learn about ancient libraries, but also to experience the humanity of the people who lived in societies so different, and yet so close, to our own.—Jean Alexander, Carnegie-Mellon University.


Day begins this important new book by writing, “No historical account of information in the twentieth century can turn away from the problem of how a rhetoric, an aesthetic, and consequently, an ideology of information has come to shape late modern history and historiography.” He argues “not only that the history of information has been forgotten but also that it must be forgotten within any ‘metaphysics’ or ideology of information, because information in modernity connotes a factuality and pragmatic presence ... that erases or radically reduces ambiguity and the problems of reading, interpreting, and constructing history.” Day leads the reader through a careful and close reading of the texts of eminent theorists and philosophers, from Paul Otlet and Suzanne Briet to Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin, to reveal the rhetorical and historical devices that link science to information in theory and practice.

Although sensitive, at times, to historicism, Day’s approach to the topic of information is not one of narrative history. A substantial portion of the book is devoted to an inquiry into the rhetorical strategies utilized by the European Documentalists Otlet and Briet, Warren Weaver, Norbert Wiener, and, more recently, Pierre Levy in his theories of cyberspace and “the virtual.” Through examination of key texts by Otlet and Briet, including work by Briet yet to be translated into English, Day presents a framework for reading information as a “trope” for science. Accordingly, information becomes a rhetorical strategy for defining the role and locating the work of librarians and documentalists in scientific discourse and culture. In Weaver and Wiener, one finds a link between communication and scientific information in their articulation of a scientific theory of com-
communication, a link that is essential to the
development of a post-World War Two
global exchange of ideas through commu-
nication networks.

Day analyzes Levy’s use of the word
virtual both through an examination of the
influence of French philosophers Gilles
Deleuze and Felix Guattari on Levy’s work
and by an explication of Levy’s arguments
concerning the relationship between capital-
ism and the construction of information.
Finally, Day explores the ways in which
Heidegger critiqued information culture’s
model of language and truth and
Benjamin’s “engagement with the congru-
ence of aesthetics, history, knowledge and
technical reproduction in the modern phe-
nomena of public information.” Day’s cri-
tique of Benjamin’s observations from the
late nineteenth and early twentieth centu-
ries is especially pertinent to today as one
considers the shattering effects of the in-
dustrial age, and in particular, the devel-
opment of mass communication’s technical
reproduction, on local knowledge. A
return to Benjamin’s project has surpris-
ing resonance in our present era of “cre-
ative destruction,” a term used by Joseph
Schumpeter and made current by Alan
Greenspan to describe the continuous
“scrapping” of old technologies for new
ones.

This is a pretty demanding book, yet
Day is engaged in more than an academic
exercise in the hermeneutics of informa-
tion. He also challenges our profession to
think carefully about the word informa-
tion and its use when he writes, “Informa-
tion professionals and theorists ques-
tion very little what information is, why
it should be valued, or why it is an eco-
nomic and social ‘good.’” The word in-
formation is applied to literacy, equity of
access, and freedom, as well as to policy
statements and initiatives, yet rarely chal-
lenged “with any social, political, and
historical depth”; both meaning and con-
notation are taken at face value. The Mod-
er Invention of Information is worth read-
ing for those who wish to explore its
deeper meaning.—William Welburn, The
University of Iowa.

Jackson, H. J. *Marginalia: Readers Writing
in Books.* New Haven, Conn., and Lon-
don: Yale Univ. Pr., 2001. 324p. $27.95,
alk. paper (ISBN 0300088167). LC
00-043721.

Historically, librarians have had little tol-
eration for notes scribbled in book mar-
gins, seeing no pardonable difference be-
tween them and other forms of book
defacement. Transgressors have not had
an easy time of it at the hands of our pro-
fessional ancestors. For example, 2,700
years ago, Ashurbanipal’s librarians
called down the wrath of Adad and Ishtar
on the heads of tablet defacers, and dur-
ing the Middle Ages, monastic librarians
placed “anathemas” (curses) and other
drastic injunctions in books to dissuade
potential abusers. Throughout history, it
is clear, members of our profession have
had nothing but evil thoughts and threats
(and replacement fees) for self-styled
book improvers, witty emendators,
underliners, and moustacheurs.

Whether we like it or not, however,
marginalia and the many other forms of
spontaneous, often subversive reader re-
actions found in “author-ized” texts are
in and have become the darling of histo-
rians and literary scholars. Consider, for
example, Alexander J. Peden’s *Graffiti of
Pharaonic Egypt* (Brill 2001), in which
demotic scribblings found in Egyptian
tombs are described as a “more accurate
reflection of the character of the Egyptian
era of the pharaohs than the far more
polished artistic or literary works” they
appear next to. Another recent work, The
Medieval Professional Reader at Work, by
Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo
(Univ. of Victoria 2001), subjects the
marginalia of medieval clerics and scribes
(one known only as the “Red Ink Anno-
tator,” as if he were some daring and
mysterious bandit) to careful and reveal-
ning study, yielding a veritable “taxonomy
of marginalia in late medieval English
manuscripts” and contributing to a “re-
cover of medieval reader response.”

So is it okay now to scribble in books?
Well, if you ask a frontline librarian, no,
itis still isn’t. Exceptions will be granted