

James W. P. Campbell
Photographs by Will Pryce

The Library

A WORLD HISTORY



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A library is not just a collection of books, but also the buildings that house them. As varied and inventive as the volumes they hold, such buildings can be much more than the dusty, dark wooden shelves found in mystery stories or the catacombs of stacks in the basements of academia. From the great dome of the Library of Congress, to the white façade of the Seinäjoki Library in Finland, to the ancient ruins of the library of Pergamum in modern Turkey, the architecture of a library is a symbol of its time as well as of its builders' wealth, culture, and learning.

Architectural historian James W. P. Campbell and photographer Will Pryce traveled the globe together, visiting and documenting over eighty libraries that exemplify the many different approaches to thinking about and designing libraries. The result of their travels, *The Library: A World History* is one of the first books to tell the story of library architecture around the world and through time in a single volume, from ancient Mesopotamia to modern China and from the beginnings of writing to the present day. As

these beautiful and striking photos reveal, each age and culture has reinvented the library, molding it to reflect their priorities and preoccupations—and in turn mirroring the history of civilization itself. Campbell's authoritative yet readable text recounts the history of these libraries, while Pryce's stunning photographs vividly capture each building's structure and atmosphere.

Together, Campbell and Pryce have produced a landmark book—the definitive photographic history of the library and one that will be essential for the home libraries of book lovers and architecture devotees alike.

James W. P. Campbell is fellow and director of studies in architecture and history of art at Queens' College, Cambridge. His most recent books include *Brick: A World History* (also with Will Pryce) and *Building St Paul's*. **Will Pryce** is an award-winning photographer based in London who originally trained as an architect. His previous books include *World Architecture: The Masterworks*, *Big Shed*, and *The Architecture of Wood: A World History*.

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For a review copy or other publicity inquiries, please contact:

Carrie Olivia Adams, Publicity Manager, University of Chicago Press, 1427 East 60th St, Chicago IL 60637.

Email: cadams@press.uchicago.edu;

Telephone: 773-702-4216;

Fax: 773-702-9756.

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LIBRARY OF CELSUS, AD 135. Ephesus, Turkey
This is one of the best-preserved libraries of the ancient world. It is rare in being identified by inscriptions. The impressive façade is a 20th-century reconstruction, only partly made from the remaining stones found on the site, the original having been toppled by earthquakes and subsequently plundered for building materials.

Introduction

Libraries can be much more than simply places to store books. Throughout the ages, the design of the greatest library buildings has celebrated the act of reading and the importance of learning. They have become emblems of culture, whether it be for an individual, an institution, or even a whole nation. This book tells for the first time the complete story of the development of library buildings from the first libraries, in ancient Mesopotamia, through the lost libraries of the classical civilizations, the monastic libraries of the Middle Ages and the lavish libraries of the Rococo, to the monumental libraries of the modern world. It shows how the development of library buildings illustrates the changing relationship of mankind with the written word and that across the world libraries have always been not just dusty repositories for documents but active symbols of culture and civilization.

The word ‘library’ in English and most other European languages is ambiguous: it can refer either to a collection of books or to the space that houses them. This lack of distinction between the two is interesting, but it is far from universal. In Chinese, and many other languages, the words for collections of books and the spaces that contain them are not the same. In Chinese, a library space is called ‘a building for books’. Indeed, the present work might be justifiably called a ‘history of buildings for books’. Despite these linguistic differences, libraries across the world developed in strikingly similar ways.

Any historical survey must necessarily be selective. A recent government census suggested that there are 2,925 public libraries in China alone.¹ A majority do not have buildings of their own. Like most of the public libraries in late-19th-century America, they will be housed in parts of existing buildings that have been adapted for the purpose.² Such rooms are rarely architecturally interesting. A great many owners of libraries and institutions have taken only the slightest interest in the way that their collections were housed. However, in every period others have wished to display their books. They have taken pride in their shelving and been eager to show their books off to the best advantage. They have wanted not only to own books, but also to create a beautiful library to put them in. The history of the library as a piece of architecture – the one that this book seeks to tell – is the history of those libraries: that is, libraries that are designed to be seen.

Survival and alteration

The problems of interpreting ruins are obvious, but even where libraries have survived, they rarely

remain completely unchanged. Many have been subject to quite radical alterations over time. Few libraries demonstrate this better than the Long Room at Trinity College, Dublin. The major defining feature of this impressive early-18th-century building is the barrel vault, which appears to be the first of its kind in a library. However, it is not what it seems. The library, which was designed by Thomas Burgh (1670–1730), the Surveyor General of Ireland, and completed in 1732, was undoubtedly an important library when it was first built, but it looked very different from the room we admire today.³ Its tripartite design consisted of two three-storey pavilions flanking a colonnade on the ground-floor level and the two-storey-high Long Room above. One of the pavilions contained the staircase leading to the library and offices for the librarian, and the other provided room for a philosophy school on the ground floor and a manuscripts room above. The ceiling of the Long Room was originally lower and flat and the upper galleries did not support bookcases. The distinctive barrel vault was only introduced by the architects Deane and Woodward in 1856, when the original library underwent a radical remodelling, which included raising the roof and filling in the ground floor.⁴ Thus the library we see today is essentially a 19th-century creation. Here, as elsewhere, distinguishing later additions from the original is a considerable challenge. This brings us to another important issue in the history of libraries: who designs them?

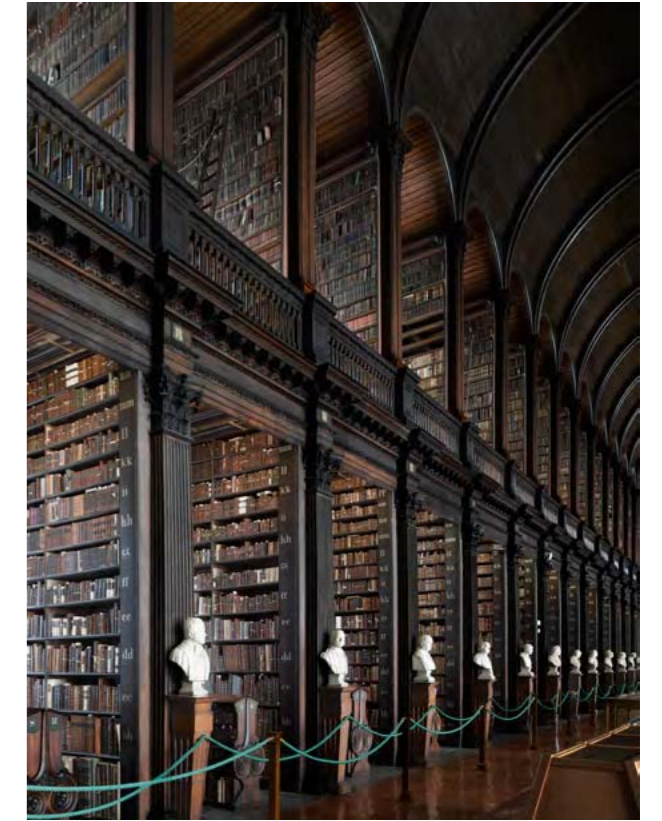
Who designs libraries?

The intentions of the designers of libraries are often very difficult to determine. Libraries are never entirely



TRINITY COLLEGE LIBRARY, 1856
Dublin, Ireland

Designed by Thomas Burgh and completed in 1772, this is rightly one of the most famous libraries in the world, but all is not as it seems. An engraving (right) shows the library as originally built, with a flat ceiling and no books on the galleries. The library as it appears today (left and far right) is not a reflection of 18th-century thinking but the result of a major reconstruction by the architects Deane and Woodward, completed in 1856.



have the perfect conditions for book storage rather than to suit the needs of human beings.

Books have not always been placed on the shelves vertically. This is a comparatively recent innovation. It was developed because it enabled a large number of books to be stored in a relatively small space, but it is far from universal and really only suitable for books that are designed to be shelved in that way. In many cultures, books are simply stacked horizontally on top of each other on the shelf. This arrangement has its drawbacks: taking a book from the bottom of a pile involves moving those on top. The vertical spacing of shelves in a bookcase in which books are stacked in this way is relatively unimportant as long as the shelves are far enough apart to accommodate a few volumes. Shelves in such libraries are thus invariably fixed, and the regular spacing of the shelves is pleasing to the eye.

Once books were placed upright, the spacing of the shelves became important if the number of volumes that could be accommodated was to be maximized. The books had to be sorted by size and the shelves were arranged accordingly. Large books were typically placed on the lower shelves while smaller ones – which were easier to steal – were placed at the top, out of reach. Designers of libraries were reluctant to abandon fixed shelves and examples such as the palace library at Mafra and the Duchess Anna Amalia Library in Weimar show that libraries were still using them in the late 18th century. But gradually it became clear that it

was more efficient if the shelves could be adjusted, so various systems were invented in the 18th century for allowing this to be done. Initially these relied on timber notches or slots cut into the vertical supports, but in the late 19th century they were gradually replaced by proprietary systems using metal fixings. The shelves on which the books were placed were at first always timber. Metal shelving did not appear until the 19th century. Its strength and resistance to fire were obvious advantages. But there were always concerns about placing expensive leather bindings on hard metal surfaces. Owners of particularly valuable collections preferred timber shelves and often spend large sums lining them with leather or cloth coverings.

Stairs, ladders and stools

The design of the shelving also presents another problem: access to the shelves. Ideally, no library shelving system would place the books out of reach of those trying to retrieve them. If this dictum had been followed religiously then no library would have had shelves more than two metres or six feet six inches above the floor. However, throughout the ages library designers have broken this rule continuously. The history of library design is partly an exploration of why they have chosen to do so, and partly a history of the ways that designers have then dealt with the problems that they have created.

In simple libraries, reaching high shelves might require nothing more than standing on a bench





Cloisters, Codices and Chests Libraries in the Middle Ages

This chapter looks at the period normally termed the ‘Middle Ages’, between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance, that is between 600 and approximately 1500. The story of the survival of classical manuscripts in medieval collections in the West is well known, but the architectural form of early medieval libraries is not widely understood, a situation not helped by their exaggerated and frequently erroneous depiction in films and in fiction. This chapter explains the current scholarly understanding of the development of libraries in the Middle Ages in Europe, a period from which, despite general assumptions, remarkably little survives.

The largest libraries in this period were not in Christian Europe. They lay in the Arab world and in Southeast Asia. Islam spread across north Africa from the Middle East and reached as far as Spain. Paper allowed Islamic scholars to produce books in greater numbers and distribute them widely. The technology for paper production however was not invented in the Middle East but in China, where the use of paper was combined with printing to produce books very different from their European counterparts, centuries before these technologies were available in Europe. It is thus not in Europe that this chapter begins, but in the very oldest library to survive in Asia.

SUTRA HALL, MIJ-DEIRA TEMPLE, 15th century Ôtsu, Japan

The books, which contain Buddhist sutra, are paper wrapped in linen. Each is placed in its own niche in a lead box, to protect it from the elements.

The *Tripitaka Koreana* and the invention of printing

The remote monastery of Haeinsa sits high in the mountains of South Korea, five-and-a-half hours drive from Seoul and 45 km (28 miles) from Daegu, the nearest city. Its location has enabled it to remain largely unaffected by the changing world outside, and to preserve intact the *Tripitaka Koreana*, one of the world’s most extraordinary literary artefacts. The *Tripitaka Koreana*, also called the *Goryeo Daejanggyeong* (meaning ‘The *Tripitaka* made by the Goryeo ruling dynasty’), was compiled in 1251 and is, in the words of UNESCO, ‘the most important and most complete corpus of Buddhist doctrinal texts in the world!’ In fact, this is the second version. The first *Tripitaka Koreana*, which was commissioned in 1011 and took eighty-six years to complete, was destroyed by fire after the Mongol invasions of 1232. A second copy was commissioned soon after and it is this ‘new’ 1251 edition, written 780 years ago, that is stored in the monastery today.²

As an artefact the *Tripitaka* is hugely important, but it is the buildings that it sits in that concern us here: they are some of the oldest intact library buildings in the world and are strikingly different from the library buildings discussed so far. The Buddhist Haeinsa Temple is arranged on a series of terraces cut out of the steep mountainside and is entered at the lowest level. The library courtyard is at the top of

THE TRIPITAKA KOREANA, 1251 Haeinsa, South Korea

*The timber printing blocks of the *Tripitaka Koreana*, a complete set of the Buddhist scriptures, fill the shelves of one of the oldest intact libraries in the world.*





TRIPITAKA

**THE TRIPITAKA KOREANA, 1251
Haeinsa, South Korea**

The inside of the longer of the two halls that house the Tripitaka Koreana. The blocks are stored in open racks to allow the air to freely ventilate around them. The timber structure is lifted off the floor on pad stones and the building is raised on a stone plinth surrounded by drainage channels.

the site, on the highest terrace. It consists of two long, plain wooden pavilions, the Janggyeong Panjeon, that face each other across a small courtyard, with two smaller pavilions closing the ends of the courtyard. The first of the longer buildings is divided in two by a corridor that forms a gateway from the staircase into the courtyard, leaving two chambers, one on each side of the entrance. The second building has a prayer hall set within it, but behind this hall is a corridor, so that it is possible to walk internally between the chambers in this building from one end to the other. Both buildings are firmly locked and generally inaccessible.

The building in which the *Tripitaka Koreana* is housed is an unconventional library because of the form of the books within it. The objects stacked in neat rows are printing blocks: 81,258 of them. Each block is exactly 700 x 240 x 30 mm (approximately 28 x 9½ x 1¼ in) and weighs 5.25 kg (just over 7 lb). They are made of wood, originally assumed to be birch from the island of Koje.⁵ However, tests have shown that ten different species were used, each block being made from a timber board, which was cut and then boiled in salt water before being left to dry slowly for three years. Having been thoroughly seasoned, only the hardest blocks were used, each fitted with end panels and reinforced with metal. They were then painstakingly carved by hand. Every block is engraved on both sides, so each block can be used to print two sheets of paper. When the engraving was completed the blocks were coated in thick, grey poisonous lacquer to protect them from insects.⁴

The survival of the wooden blocks for nearly 800 years can be largely attributed to the exceptionally clever design of the buildings that house them. The first point to note is that the blocks were not always in Haeinsa. They were carved in Namhae (in South Gyeongsang province) and were originally stored in the Taejanggyong P'andang, outside the western gate of the Kang-wha Fortress, before being moved in 1518 to the Sonwonsa Temple on Kanghwha Island and then finally to the present depositories in Haeinsa in 1598, to protect them from the frequent invasions of Korea during this period. Records show that the King personally oversaw the transportation of the blocks.⁵

The current buildings date from the move to Haeinsa in 1598 and although it is assumed that much



SUTRA HALL, MII-DERA TEMPLE, 15th century. Ōtsu, Japan

The pavilion sits in idyllic situation, close to, but set apart from the main hall. It is approached from the main part of the monastery by crossing a bridge over a pond and ascending a staircase. The roof of the sutra case (right) mimics a building, complete with miniature roof brackets.

shelves built for his collection of 2,000 volumes, while the celebrated scholar Ōe no Masafusa (1041–1111) is said to have owned 10,000 volumes, housed in a specially built storehouse, the Goke Bunko, which burnt down in 1153. The 12th-century poet Fujiwara no Sanesada is also said to have collected over 10,000 volumes, which were burnt in the great fire of Kyoto of 1177.²⁶

Chinese collections were usually measured in *juan*, which in the Song period, when bound codices were used, meant ‘chapters’, but in earlier periods probably refers to scrolls.²⁷ At the start of the Song dynasty the imperial library held 13,000 *juan*. Fires and invasions destroyed successive collections, which were then rebuilt.²⁸ At its peak, in 1177, the imperial collection reached 72,567 *juan*. In the Ming dynasty, collections grew further, so that in 1420 the imperial collection contained an estimated 20,000 titles and some 100,000 volumes. Sizeable private collections often had 10,000 *juan*, with the largest having as many as 40,000.²⁹ It is obviously difficult to convert these figures to their modern book equivalents, but it is clear that the collections were big, and needed a building or large room in which to store them. The other cultures that had very large collections in this period are those of the Islamic world.

Islamic libraries

Although there were books in Arabic before Muhammad (570–632), it is the birth of Islam that was responsible for spreading the Arabic script all over the world. Muhammad was proud of his illiteracy, which proved that the Qur’an had been dictated by God, but the copying out of the Qur’an and its circulation was a key part of Islamic teaching and very soon Islamic scholars were gathering together and translating the scholarship of the peoples they conquered. Twenty years after the death of the Prophet, Syria, Iraq and Persia had been conquered. By 670 the Islamic world extended over north Africa and Egypt and in the first half of the 8th century it included Spain and ranged from China in the east to the Atlantic in the west.³⁰

The Qur’an has always been learnt by heart. Oral transmission was more important than the written, so that if every physical copy of the Qur’an should be destroyed the book would still be preserved. Reading in the Arab world was always reading aloud and even today mosques and madrassas hum with the murmurings of reading and recitation.³¹

Although early Islamic manuscripts are in the form of papyrus scrolls, in Islam the book generally meant the codex rather than the scroll.³² It was written on parchment at first. At the beginning of





**BIBLIOTECA MARCIANA,
1564. Venice, Italy**

The first-floor entrance vestibule (left), which is reached by a dramatic and richly decorated staircase from an ornate doorway in the centre of the ground floor. Since 1591–6 the vestibule has housed the Grimani collection of classical sculpture. It leads to the reading room (right, looking back towards the entrance). The ceiling roundels are painted by the leading Venetian artists of the day. The room was a lectern library furnished with thirty-eight banchi like those in the Biblioteca Malatestiana, nineteen down each side of the room. The books were chained to the lecterns.

are double height (without a mezzanine), creating a reading room for the emperor. The first floor was entirely book storage.

The *Siku Quanshu* is a comparatively late example of the way that the Chinese emperors throughout the ages sought to control knowledge. They collected books and censored them in equal measure, and although it was a badge of honour for a writer to have a work accepted by the imperial library, the risks, if a work was disapproved of, were severe. Written examinations, rather than connections, led to promotion at court and this also encouraged private collectors, who often opened their collections for the use of local people studying for those examinations. The ownership of books conferred status on an individual, an idea that would have been recognized not just in China, but also in Europe at the same time.

Libraries of the Italian Renaissance

Italian buildings of the 15th and 16th centuries – the period commonly referred to as the ‘Italian Renaissance’ – have played an unparalleled role in the history of European architecture. Their importance stems from the fact that they were drawn, discussed, published and scrutinized by architects across Europe in the following centuries. The types and forms established in Italian buildings in this period became the accepted standards of classical architectural design throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

By the 1500s, libraries in Italy already had a reasonably long history. As discussed in the last chapter, the first libraries were constructed in the late 1200s. These were first-floor rooms with open timber roofs. A new type was established in the mid-1400s by the architect Michelozzo for the Medici family with

the building of the Biblioteca S. Marco in Florence.²⁴ This room survives, but its furniture has long since disappeared. As usual, the library is on the first floor, but it is vaulted in stone. The central aisle has a continuous barrel vault, and the side bays are cross-vaulted. This was closely copied by Matteo Nuti for the Malatesta library at Cesena, discussed at length in the previous chapter. This form of room, with rows of pew-like seats (*banchi*) ranged down both sides, and a central aisle flanked by supporting columns, was typical of Italian libraries in the late 1400s. The columns rarely lined up with the walls in the floors below and as a result the vaults were difficult to construct. Not all libraries conformed to this plan: the libraries of S. Croce (1427) and SS. Annunziata (1455), both in Florence, seem to have had single spans, with no columns. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that by the end of the *quattrocento* (the 1400s) the three-aisle form was still the most popular.²⁵ This was to change in the 1500s, when there were a number of significant developments that had the most profound effects on all later library designs. The first of these was the project for the Biblioteca Marciana.

Biblioteca Marciana

Today the Biblioteca Marciana, the library of St Mark, Venice, is one of the most important research libraries in Italy. It currently occupies a number of buildings that have been joined together for the purpose, including the building that was constructed in the late 17th century to house the mint. The original library is still part of the complex, but it is now used only as a museum and for receptions. It sits on the corner of St Mark’s Square and the Piazzetta, the smaller square that links St Mark’s Square with the Grand Canal,





MERTON COLLEGE LIBRARY, 1589
Oxford, United Kingdom

This is almost certainly the earliest stall-system library. It is L-shaped. One wing (left) has a window facing east, thus catching the morning light. The other (right) is orientated roughly north-south. The library was built in the late 14th century. Originally both wings were fitted out on the lectern system and were lit by low windows along each side. The wagon roof was installed in 1502-3. In 1589 the original lecterns were rebuilt as stalls, and the shelving was raised to provide three or four shelves above a projecting desk. The spacing of the stalls was determined by the existing windows, and as a result the benches are narrow. The books remained chained. The installation of stalls in a room designed for lecterns greatly reduced the light, which prompted the addition of the dormer windows.



tended to repeat earlier mistakes.⁵⁶ The stall library is not, however, medieval. The first was not built until the end of the 16th century; at the beginning, in other words, of the early modern era.

Merton College, Oxford

The story of the development of the stall library is still uncertain, but it probably starts with Henry Savile at Merton College, Oxford, in the 1580s. Savile was an immensely well-connected individual who would eventually be made Warden of Merton by direct intervention of the Queen herself. He was also a close friend of the founder of the Bodleian Library, Thomas Bodley, and had travelled widely in Europe. Between 1575 and 1589 Savile introduced changes to the college library at Merton, where he was a Fellow. He secured an endowment, established the post of librarian and converted the east end of the existing library from a lectern library to a stall library.⁵⁷ The bookcases are still in position today, so Savile's innovations are clearly visible. The benches of the old arrangement were retained, but the desks were replaced by freestanding bookshelves, extending above head height and dividing the space into a series of bays or stalls, from which the arrangement derives its name. The books were originally chained and shelved with the spines inwards, attached to

rods that ran along the front edge of each shelf. They were read on a desk which stuck out at the correct height on each side and had a slot at the back through which the chains fell, so that they were not in the way when reading. The weight of the four shelves above was too great to be supported from each end so an intermediate vertical member was required, partitioning the shelving.

It is not clear whether Savile invented this new arrangement or if he had seen it elsewhere. Similarities to the arrangements in Leiden are obvious. It is also possible that the influence was closer to home. The accounts of New College, Oxford, suggest that extensive alterations had been made to the timberwork of its lectern library a few years earlier, but no details are known. Whatever its source, Savile's system was quick to catch on. Savile and Bodley were both involved in alterations to the library that was later to be called the Bodleian. Some of these belong to the next chapter, but among them was the reworking of Duke Humfrey's Library.⁵⁸

Duke Humfrey's Library, Oxford

Humfrey (or Humphrey, both spellings are used) of Lancaster, first Duke of Gloucester, was a younger brother of Henry V. He was born in 1390 and died in 1447. Although he seems not to have read either







THE RADCLIFFE CAMERA, 1749
Oxford, United Kingdom

The view up into the dome. The Radcliffe Camera was a very early domed library but it was not the first.

HERZOG AUGUST BIBLIOTHEK, 1710
Wolfenbüttel, Germany

The first domed library in the world, the Herzog August Bibliothek was completed to the designs of the architect Hermann Korb between 1705 and 1710. Although a dramatic design, it was poorly constructed and was demolished in 1886.



The Herzog August Bibliothek

The Herzog August Bibliothek was funded by successive dukes of Brunswick. The most important of them was Duke August the Younger (1579–1666), who at his death left over 55,000 volumes to found the library. The mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz held the post of librarian, among his many other offices for the duchy.⁴⁴ The building to house the library was designed by Hermann Korb (1656–1735). He was a carpenter by training and seems to have been largely self-taught as an architect, but was evidently talented, and rose through the ranks of the office of works of the duchy of Brunswick to become its head in 1704. Most of Korb's works were built in timber to imitate stone and have disappeared. The library was probably timber too. Its layout was particularly innovative. Plans show that the reader entered the building through an entrance tower, which also housed the staircase giving access to the upper floor. Inside, the central reading room was not circular in plan, but oval. Tall, arched clerestory windows high above provided much of the light. The books were arranged around all the walls in bookshelves with fixed shelves painted white. Large blank walls below the windows concealed the sloping roofs behind and were decorated with painted patterns. The new library was built between 1705 and 1710. Architecturally it was not entirely satisfactory and was demolished in 1886 to be replaced with a much larger, if less interesting, stone structure.⁴⁵



The Codrington Library

Hawksmoor may not have designed the Radcliffe Camera, but he was responsible for another library in Oxford, the Codrington Library for All Souls College. The library was begun in 1716, shortly after his designs for Radcliffe's library, and was finished in 1720, although the fitting out was not completed until 1751.⁴⁶ The Codrington Library is unusual for being on the ground floor. To attempt to alleviate damp – the traditional problem with ground-floor libraries – it was built over a basement.

The Codrington Library, like the Radcliffe Camera, takes its name from its benefactor. Christopher Codrington was a Fellow of the college who bequeathed to it 12,000 books, together with money for the construction of a new building to house them.⁴⁷ The Fellows insisted that Hawksmoor's library had to blend seamlessly with the existing college buildings by being Gothic on the exterior. Inside, it reflected the very latest taste in classical design. Hawksmoor dealt with this challenge with great cleverness, especially in the windows at each end, which are classical serlianas (Venetian windows) on the inside and Gothic on the outside.

The library's internal layout is entirely original. The constraints of the site meant that it was possible to have windows only on one side and at both ends. At the lower level, the room is entirely lined with books around all four sides on the wall system. The cases are lifted above the floor by solid timber benches running around all the walls. Readers sit with their



**MAFRA PALACE
LIBRARY, 1771**
Mafra, Portugal

This view shows the doors to the galleries (foreground left), which are not hidden as they are in many libraries of the time, but are decorated with Rococo surrounds. The cartouches above the cases were presumably intended to contain allegorical paintings. The original oil lamps still hang from the ceiling. Since its opening the library has been home to a colony of tiny bats. Recent studies have revealed that they roost in winter behind the cases, and in the orchards outside in summer, coming into the library at night to feed on insects that might otherwise damage the books.





THE BEINECKE LIBRARY, 1965
New Haven, United States of America

The sun shines through the marble walls, bathing Yale University's rare-book collection in an amber light. This is one of the 20th century's most powerful and influential library interiors.

Electricity, Concrete and Steel Libraries in the Twentieth Century

When the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner wrote his seminal essay on the history of library design, published in 1976, he could find little to say about 20th-century libraries.¹ He illustrated just five buildings, only one of which would still be considered a great library today. He completely failed to mention any buildings by Gunnar Asplund, Jože Plečnik, Hans Scharoun or Louis Kahn. Writing in the 21st century, the problem is more what to leave out than what to put in. The 1970s saw an explosion in library design, especially in the United States. Part of Pevsner's problem may have been that libraries did not seem to obey the rules of 20th-century architectural history written from a Modernist point of view, as promoted by him. It is easy to assume that the 20th century was dominated by Modernism of the sort exemplified by the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier. In fact, the first half of the century was dominated by other preoccupations, no less interesting, but all too often ignored in the haste to explain later events. The tendency to see early-20th-century architects as 'proto-Modernists' should be resisted. The designers in architectural styles such as the Arts and Crafts and Art Deco had their own preoccupations.

Arts and Crafts

The period leading up to World War I was one of great architectural debate, but this does not seem to have been reflected in library design. Two themes predominated, both of which were rather conservative. The first was the Arts and Crafts. As discussed in the previous chapter, in Britain and America, small-town libraries increased, thanks to finance from Carnegie grants that were not available to other European countries.² In America (and to a lesser extent in Britain) these libraries were often homely in feel. Richardson had established an architectural style for libraries, based on Romanesque churches and Oxbridge libraries, which was widely copied.³ In Britain, Arts and Crafts libraries could be found, but monumental classicism predominated, with Dutch-inspired brick Modernism appearing between the wars.⁴ Charles Rennie Mackintosh's library for the Glasgow School of Art is a particularly notable and original interpretation of Arts and Crafts, mixed with ideas from Art Nouveau.

The Glasgow School of Art

Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928) began his association with the Glasgow School of Art in 1885, when he took evening classes in architecture in the rooms occupied by the school in the city art gallery.⁵ These premises were entirely inadequate, and in 1895 funds were finally raised to construct a new building. A limited competition was held, with eight local firms asked to submit designs. The winning

firm was Honeyman and Keppie, where Mackintosh had been working since 1888.⁶ Mackintosh had been a prize-winning student in the architecture school and throughout his working life he sketched, drawing inspiration from plants, Gothic buildings and Scottish tower houses. He was more interested in nature and vernacular building than classical architecture and his idiosyncratic drawing style is instantly recognizable. The drawings for the competition designs are undoubtedly in his hand and the building was constructed under his direction.⁷

Because of limitations in the funding that was initially available, the new Glasgow School of Art had to be designed in two phases. Work began in 1897 but the second phase, containing the library, was not completed until 1909. The library is two storeys high and square on plan, with a gallery running around all four sides. The whole interior is panelled and fitted out in dark-stained wood. The columns that appear to support the gallery are pulled forward into the room. In fact, they conceal steel hangers, which descend from beams in the roof through three floors to support the library floor. That is not appreciable from within, where the lamps, balustrades, bookcases, chairs and tables provide a remarkably unified interior, bathed in light from large windows down one side. At the opening, Sir John Stirling Maxwell praised Mackintosh for demonstrating that 'it was possible to have a good building without plastering it all over with the traditional, expensive and, often, ugly ornament'.⁸ Claims that the building inspired early Modernist