



The Evolution of the Book

Frederick G. Kilgour

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Distinguished scholar and library systems innovator Frederick Kilgour tells a five-thousand-year story in this exciting work, a tale beginning with the invention of writing and concluding with the emerging electronic book. Calling on a lifetime of interest in the growth of information technology, Kilgour brings a fresh approach to the history of the book, emphasizing in rich, authoritative detail the successive technological advances that allowed the book to keep pace with ever-increasing needs for information. Borrowing a concept from evolutionary theory--the notion of punctuated equilibria--to structure his account, Kilgour investigates the book's three discrete historical forms--the clay tablet, papyrus roll, and codex--before turning to a fourth, still evolving form, the cyber book, a version promising swift electronic delivery of information in text, sound, and motion to anyone at any time.

The clay tablet, initially employed as a content descriptor for sacks of grain, proved inadequate to the growing need for commercial and administrative records. Its successor the papyrus roll was itself succeeded by the codex, a format whose superior utility and information capacity led to sweeping changes in the management of accumulated knowledge, the pursuit of learning, and the promulgation of religion. Kilgour throughout considers closely both technological change and the role this change played in cultural transformation. His fascinating account of the modern book, from Gutenberg's invention of cast-type printing five hundred years ago to the arrival of books displayed on a computer screen, spotlights the inventors, engineers, and entrepreneurs who in creating the machinery of production and dissemination enabled the book to maintain its unique cultural power over time.

Deft, provocative, and accessibly written, *The Evolution of the Book* will captivate book lovers as well as those interested in bibliographic history, the history of writing, and the history of technology.

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