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"The House of Books": Libraries and Archives in Ancient Egypt

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Published Online: 2013-03-05 | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/libri-2013-0002

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Abstract
In 1957, John Sperry Jr. published an article in *Libri* entitled “Egyptian libraries: a survey of the evidence.” Some 55 years on, this article revisits the subject, taking into account research undertaken in the field of Egyptology over the last half a century. Based on an extended essay written for the online Certificate in Egyptology course at the University of Manchester, this article considers the evidence for the existence of “institutional” (that is, created for the use and functioning of the state) libraries and archives in Ancient Egypt throughout the dynastic period (c.3500−30 B.C.); their history, purpose and, to some extent, their administration. It also considers an aspect not explored in Sperry’s article, that of “private” libraries in Ancient Egypt (texts collected by an individual for their own personal use). Whilst estimated literacy levels within the general population precluded the widespread collection of texts for personal edification, there is evidence to suggest that private libraries were present in Ancient Egypt. The article concludes with a brief assessment of the legacy of these ancient libraries and their influence on the creation of the Library of Alexandria, in both its ancient and modern manifestations.
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