manuscript culture

history of information

february 4, 2009
by 5th century bc, Greece is an "alphabetic society"
overview

book talk

the turning point of print

pre-print: what came before

understanding change

technologies

institutions

practices

manuscript culture
book talk

eyewitness reports

Plato,
Phaedrus, ?370bc/1973

Johannes Trithemius,
In Praise of Scribes, 1492/1974
There have been three revolutions in the history of human thought. The first ... when language first emerged. ... The second cognitive revolution was the advent of writing ... The third ... the invention of a type and the printing press. ... the fourth cognitive revolution, which is just about to take place with the advent of "electronic skywriting".

"Not since the landmark institution of the printing press, beginning half a millennium ago, has there been so much excitement over the publishing of words"

www.rimric.com on the wiki

"Not since Gutenberg invented the modern printing press more than 500 years ago, making books and scientific tomes affordable and widely available to the masses, has any new invention empowered individuals or transformed access to information as profoundly as Google."

Not since the invention of the printing press have the people of the world been privy to so much information. With the invention of the printing press, the Dark Ages was brought to an end. It was the progressive ideas contained in affordable books that also made the Renaissance and the Age of Reason possible.

Amin Sharif, 'Third world cyberactivists' http://www.nathanieltturner.com/

Now, I want to say a few things about the net. ... This is the most extraordinary invention for empowering ordinary people since the invention of the printing press in the 1400s. It really is. It has re-democratized America. There is an enormous shift in power. I thought the YouTube/CNN debate was sensational.

Howard Dean, Yearly Kos. Chicago, Aug 4, 2007; http://howardempowered.blogspot.com
"Not since Gutenberg unveiled his miraculous invention of a printing press with moveable type has the book world been privy to another event as thrilling as NuvoMedia's Rocket eBook."
"what should they know . . ."

technological determinism

non-determinism

presentism
He who saw the deep ...
...set all his labours on a tablet of stone

See the tablet-box of cedar,
Release its clasp of bronze
Lift the lid of its secret,
Pick up the tablet of lapis lazuli and read out
The travails of Gilgamesh ...
relevant social groups

business
bureaucracy
law
religion
education
"Printed books evolved into better-designed packages of information"
-- Grendel, *Cambridge Hist. of Renaissance Philosophy*

"The need for readily available information, which had been steadily rising, was accelerated by the advent of Christianity ..."

"The need to find information more rapidly than is possible in a papyrus-roll-form book initiated the development of the Greco-Roman codex in the second century ..."

-- Kilgour, *The Evolution of the Book*
what are they talking about?

keywords -- Socrates

"The discoverer is not the best judge"
what are they talking about?

keywords -- Socrates

manuscript

"The discoverer is not the best judge"
what are they talking about?

keywords -- Socrates
manuscript
speech

"The discoverer is not the best judge"
"The discoverer is not the best judge"

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manuscript

speech

writing
what are they talking about?

keywords -- Socrates

manuscript

speech

writing

information

"The discoverer is not the best judge"
"your pupils will have the reputation for [wisdom] without the reality; they will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction." --Penguin

alternatives

"You are supplying the opinion of wisdom to students, not the truth. For you'll see that, having become hearers without much teaching, they will seem to be sensible judges, while being for the most part senseless." --Cornell

"[Writing] is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you will give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth ... they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality." --Jowett
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... all going direct the other way

Sumer & the origin of writing

"His speech was substantial, and its contents extensive. The messenger, whose mouth was heavy, was not able to repeat it. Because the messenger, whose mouth was tired, was not able to repeat it, the lord of Kulaba patted some clay and wrote the message as if on a tablet. Formerly, the writing of messages on clay was not established. Now, under that sun and on that day, it was indeed so. The lord of Kulaba inscribed the message like a tablet. It was just like that. The messenger was like a bird, flapping its wings; he raged forth like a wolf following a kid. He traversed five mountains, six mountains, seven mountains. He lifted his eyes as he approached Aratta. He stepped joyfully into the courtyard of Aratta, he made known the authority of his king. Openly he spoke out the words in his heart. The messenger transmitted the message to the Lord of Aratta."

--Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta
Trithemius

1462-1516
Abbot of St Martin's, Sponheim, 1483-1505

bibliophile
1483, 48 books in the library
1505, 2,000 books
intensive to extensive

troubled reign
Exhortationes ad Monachos, 1486
De Laude Scriptorum, 1492

"I readily admit my boundless and unceasing love of studies and books. Neither could ever satisfy my desire to know everything which can be known in this world. It is my greatest pleasure to own and to know all books I ever saw or which I knew to have appeared in print. ... To my regret ... money was always lacking ... for the satisfaction of my passion for book".
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"The collector of books should beware that his inclination and liking do not become ends in themselves."

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Trithemius & the press

**De Laude Scriptorum**
"For all his dislike of mechanical reproduction, 'Trithemius] proved particularly deft at exploiting the printing press. ... He had his book... published in Mainz by Peter von Friedberg, his favourite printer, and ... set the work not in Gothic type normally used in Germany, but in an innovative and attractive Roman font".

**Catologus Scriptorum Ecclesiastorum**, 1494
under threat

Monks "are so detested that it is considered bad luck if one crosses your path"

Erasmus, *In Praise of Folly*, 1511

"brothers, concentrate now all your fervor on the sacred books, for the salvation of your souls and the order"

**the university**

"In the 700 years between the Fall of Rome and the 12th century, it was the monasteries .... which enjoyed an almost complete monopoly of book production and so of book culture.... from the end of the 12th century a profound transformation took place ... reflecting in the founding of the universities and the development of learning".

Febvre & Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, 1984

**humanism**

**printing**
survival
survival
what are they talking about?

keywords -- Trithemius
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book (liber, libello, impressura, codex, voluminis)
what are they talking about?

keywords -- Trithemius

book (*liber, libello, impressura, codex, voluminis*)

scribe, script, scripture
what are they talking about?

keywords -- Trithemius

book (*liber*, *libello*, *impressura*, *codex*, *voluminis*)

scribe, script, scripture

writing, copying
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scribe, script, scripture

writing, copying

information
on scripture

"scripture, my dear brothers will serve many purposes"

monks should not stop copying because of the invention of printing

"Every word we write is imprinted more forcefully on our minds"

"Knowledge of Scripture will enhance you in the sight of God and man. You will be admired by all and esteemed by your superiors. Nobody will doubt your words, kings and princes will call you friend ..."
"The written word on parchment will last a thousand years. The printed word is on paper. How long will it last? The most you can expect of a book of paper to survive is two hundred years. Only time will tell."

"He who gives up copying because of the invention of printing is no genuine friend of the holy Scripture ... Printed books will never be the equivalent of handwritten codices, especially since printed books are often deficient in spelling and appearances."
Quadruplex est modus faciendi librum. Aliquis enim scribit aliena, nihil addendo vel mutanda; et iste mere dicitur scriptor. Aliquis cribit aliena addendo, sed no de suo; et iste compliator dicitur. Aliquis scribit et aliena et sua, sed aliena tamquam principalia, et sua tamquam annexa ad evidentiam; et iste dicitur commentator non auctor. Aliquis scribit et sua et aliena, se sua tamquam principia, aliena tamquam annexa ad confirmationed et debit dici auctor.

There are four ways men make books. One writes another's words, but adds or changes nothing. He is called a writer. Another writes others' words and adds work from yet others. He is called a compiler. A third adds his own words to the writing of another, but the other remains the central text, what is added merely evidence. He is called a commentator. And one writes both his own and another's words, but his are the main text and the other is added as confirmation. He truly can be called an author.

St Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1217-1274),
"Whoever may want more information on this subject should read the book by Johannes Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris, *De Laude Scriptorum*. There can be found in abundant detail the above-mentioned benefits and a multitude of collected arguments in praise of the good scribe."
The revolution between the second and fourth centuries that changed the very structure of the book by substituting the codex for the roll

Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meaning* 1995
technological triumph?

**western europe**

200 AD, codex gaining, scroll losing

500 AD, codex dominating

"The roll continued to serve for ... writing of the sort that goes into files or archives, but the codex took over in literature, scientific studies, technical manuals ... the sort that go onto library shelves". Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World*, 2000

why?

codex: trunk of a tree
liber: bark of a tree
technological superiority?
technological superiority?

random access
technological superiority?

random access

one handed
technological superiority?

- random access
- one handed
- two-sided
technological superiority?

- random access
- one handed
- two-sided
- pagination
technological superiority?

random access
one handed
two-sided
pagination
marginalia
technological superiority?

random access

one handed

two-sided

pagination

marginalia

footnotes
technological superiority?

- random access
- one handed
- two-sided
- pagination
- marginalia
- footnotes
- indexes
technological superiority?

- random access
- one handed
- two-sided
- pagination
- marginalia
- footnotes
- indexes
Is there technological superiority?

- Random access
- One handed
- Two-sided
- Pagination
- Marginalia
- Footnotes
- Indexes
technological superiority?

random access
one handed
two-sided
pagination
marginalia
footnotes
indexes
not quite so dumb?

handy
collection
divisions
(incipits, explicits, colophons)
random access
(sillyboi)
doesn't crack
know when to fold 'em

"the move from scroll to codex was accompanied by a move from papyrus to parchment"

papyrus
processed plant

parchment
animal skin

"the parchment alone in a fine Bible, even allowing for the shorthand script of the day, represented a flock of perhaps three hundred sheep"

--North, *God's Clockmaker*
kinds of determinism

geographical determinism?
- parchment at Pergamum
- papyrus at Alexandria

religious determinism?
- palm in India
- silk in China
breakthrough innovation?

paper

200 bc? - 105 ad, China
Ts'ai Lun, Emperor Ho-ti, Hunan
bark, rags, bamboo

diffusion:

300 ad, Korea (Koguryo dynasty)
5th century, 'domestic' uses, India
610, Japan
750, Samarkand ...

795, Baghdad
9th century, Byzantium
slow on the uptake

11th century Spain

12th century Genoa, Nuremberg

hesitation

1145, Roger of Sicily ordered all charters on paper to be copied to parchment then destroyed

1248, paper accepted for us by the notaries of Languedoc (France)

"The written word on parchment will last a thousand years. The printed word is on paper. How long will it last? The most you can expect of a book of paper to survive is two hundred years. Only time will tell."
paper codex—a technological triumph?

Christian codex, 2d century

Islamic codex, 8th century

Hebrew codex, 9th century

Chinese sutra fold, 10th century
"In late antiquity, all authority was founded on Scripture ...: and the highest authority, the authority of the church, was represented by the codex."

Cavallo

"Men began to think of facts not as recorded in texts but as embodied in texts, a transition of major importance ... help[ing] to isolate what man thought about from his process of thinking."

Brian Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 1893
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... technological superiority?
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Brian Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 1893
"The expectation of readers was changed, and this was reflected in changes in the physical appearance of books. A writer organized his work for publication, and if he did not ... then a scribe would ... The production of books became more sophisticated ... The most spectacular example ... the Ellesmere manuscript of the Canterbury Tales."

Parkes, "Influence"

"The late medieval book differs more from its early medieval predecessors than it does from the printed book."

--Parkes, "Influence" 1976

gloss
running titles
subdivisions: books, chapters
analytical tables of contents
chapter headings
cross references
alphabetical order
page numbers, indexes
the phylogeny of *The Canterbury Tales*

meanwhile ...

**business and the bureaucratic state**

"The oldest writings to survive to our time were inscribed five thousand years ago by temple bureaucrats recording economic transactions ... crops, animals, manufactured goods"


"In the twelfth century... magnates used documents occasionally ... In the thirteenth .. laymen began to convey property to each other by charter; in the latter half ... this practice extended below the gentry class to some peasants."

Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 1993
"[B]y the mark of a single impress the mouths of the pontiffs may be opened."
-- Theobald of Canterbury
an information age?

preparing the ground
Domesday cadastras
dates
names
spelling
written evidence
authenticity
centralization
an information age?

From objects and the spoken word to written evidence: "We don't accept the evidence of monks against bishops, why should we accept that of a sheepskin?"

--Clanchy, Memory to Written Record

preparing the ground

Domesday cadastras
dates
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Preparing the ground

Domesday cadastras
dates
names
spelling
written evidence
authenticity
centralization
a linear model?

**reversible trends**

"Seals were indeed 'two-faced' images': they looked back to charms and memorized symbolic objects and forward to the automation of writing".

-- Clanchy

"Up to the eleventh century, western Europe could have returned to an essentially oral civilization. But by 1100 the die was cast".

-- Stock

**the return of the roll**

"the reason why medieval England ... kept its records predominantly in rolls remains a mystery".

-- Clanchy

fall of literacy
"No document coming from such centres of proved fabrication as Westminster, Evesham, Winchester cathedral, Chertsey and Malmesbury should be accepted at its face value without close examination.

"Ancient monasteries like Chertsey had traditionally forged charters. Now that the king was keeping copies ... abbots ensured that their forged documents were reinforced by inspection in the Chancery and enrollment among the royal records. The Chancery rolls, which were intended to prevent fraud, thus became a means of making forgeries official."

--Clancy, From Memory to Written Record
"some of the advantages which manuscript publication gave over print in other periods--immediate appearance, relative freedom from censorship"

Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sydney, 1966
"some of the advantages which manuscript publication gave over print in other periods—immediate appearance, relative freedom from censorship"

Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sydney, 1966

manuscript beyond print

records and single documents

accounting

scribal publishing

note taking

personal communication

music

"subversive forms" (Love)
"some of the advantages which manuscript publication gave over print in other periods--immediate appearance, relative freedom from censorship"

Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sydney, 1966

For (a) use in the business of Electrical Shows.

To E. L. DUNBAR, Secretary of State.

(*) JOSEPHINE JONES

(*) a single individual, desiring to secure within the State of Oregon the sole and exclusive use of a (*) name, for use upon (*) Electrical Shows, in accordance with the provisions of Chapter V, Title XXXVIII, Bellenger and Cotton's Annotated Codes and Statutes of Oregon, hereby presents this application for the registration of the (*) name, described as follows:

"DREAMLAND"

Name to be used in connection with Electrical Show, at present located at 133 Fourth St., Portland, Oregon.
a fac simile of which is marked "Exhibit A," hereto attached. This (*) name as shown in the exhibit is to be used upon (*) Electrical Show at 133 Fourth St., Portland, Oregon. said above named

(*) JOSEPHINE JONES

And by reason of being the originator and original user of the (*) name herein described and shown in the exhibit hereto attached, the said (*) JOSEPHINE JONES hereby claims the right to the sole and exclusive use of the same within the State of Oregon for the uses and purposes herein stated.

JOSEPHINE JONES

This is certify that Josephine and

Hofl 09 -- MS Culture

subversive forms" (Love)
print beyond manuscript

and so to Gutenberg

Eisenstein


[in the reader]
Questions

Either

Does Eisenstein strike you as a determinist? Suggest what kind of evidence or argument would support or challenge her thesis that print culture has particular features.

Or

Some scholars have accused Eisenstein of "trashing" scribal culture to make her case about print culture. Based on what you know of scribal culture, does that strike you as fair?