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Adventures in Librarianship -- Noorg the Absurd

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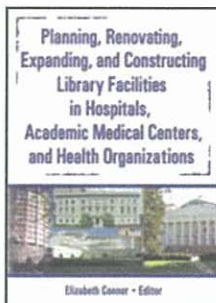
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require myself and other librarians to take a stand — to be patriotic or not. Most librarians I know want to be both. We don't want to have to choose to be one or the other. Yes, we recognize that there are books and Websites about how to construct bombs and death dealing micro organisms, and we wouldn't want to circulate them to bad people who would use this information to destroy others. But we don't want to be part of an enterprise that wants to restrict what people can or cannot read, nor do we want to share with the government a list of what some of our patrons have been reading. I think groups that want to force us to join one or the other camp are misguided. I think we need to hang out someplace in the middle (an aphorism) and stick to the basics: treat others as you would like to be treated and pick leaders who will follow that dictum. If we do that, we'll allow others basic freedoms and we'll avoid the political messes we read about daily. While this is a naive way of thinking, we must not give into those who think everyone else is evil and require our help in controlling them at all costs. Of course if everyone did this people would probably not need to write so many books and we'd be out of a job. 🌱



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This work's thirteen insightful case studies reveal the planning processes involved in renovating or constructing a new library in a hospital, academic medical center, or health organization. Each study plainly highlights objectives, methods, results, and conclusions, and reviews the design of the completed library.

"ANY LIBRARIAN CONTEMPLATING THE RENOVATION, EXPANSION, OR BUILDING OF A NEW LIBRARY WILL BENEFIT GREATLY FROM READING THIS BOOK — Examples include moving the library to a basement, merging two libraries into one tight space, and taking the library to various parts of the campus to be where students prefer to work and study."

Kathleen Murray, MLS, AHIP, Professor, Consortium Library, Health Sciences Information Service, University of Alaska Anchorage



Adventures in Librarianship — Noorg the Absurd

by **Ned Kraft** (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State) <kraftno@state.gov>

After the Nippur Codex, the second earliest example of a library catalog is the set of hammered bronze plates compiled for the Finnish King Noorg the Absurd in 725 AD by his scribe Nebbish and his blacksmith, Saam the Repulsive. The plates were later transcribed on vellum by Pere Xavier Plumpe (that transcription is now popularly referred to as the "Codex of Dung," after the archaeological dig where the boxed codex was unearthed, outside the Estonian fishing village of Skwerlee Dung).

The Plumpe transcription, circa 1055, was thought to be an original work until 1967 when the bronze plates were uncovered by Dr. Horbert Horton and his team of Yale co-eds while digging a pit for a clam bake on the isle of Sylt. With his trained eye, Horton knew these were no pie plates, but important relics from a little known era of Finnish history.

The plates, 27 in all, were authenticated by the Archeology Department of the University of Helsinki. "Theese eese momentous party-like celebration day for Finns over the world, and for the chubby librarians," said Professor Jyri Tökin. Though no one knows what he meant by "chubby librarians," the University's enthusiasm for the discovery was clear. Here was an item-by-item description of the library of Noorg the Absurd — the inventor of the court game now known as "tic-tac-toe," the first Finnish king to eat with utensils, and, apparently, the first to catalog his holdings.

The bronze plates, each measuring 28cm square and weighing just short of five pounds, are bibliographic curiosities for several reasons. First, they describe both written works and books of illustrations for which no known examples exist. No library, Finnish or otherwise,

holds a copy of Collecting Taxes and Spending the Bounty on Frivolous Whatnots, or The Gentleman's Sport of Chasing Peasants on Foot with Very Few Bush Beaters in Tow. No art book dealer has ever heard mention of Happy Puppies, or Courtizans I have Known, or come across sets of illustrations that may have been pulled from such books. Scholars speculate that Noorg's library may have fallen victim to the Helsinki fire of 762 AD, known as the Great Inflammation. The bronze "shelf list," of course, would have survived.

Another oddity for bibliophiles is that the plates are the first catalog describing the location of each book. Many wondered why Noorg would have bothered having locations listed when he owned only 27 books. But the reason became clear when those locations were correctly translated from the Old Finnish in 1971. Noorg had no central location for his collection. The books were to be found in such places as "in the pine box where also is kept numerous sharp sticks and fish bones," or "beneath the floor boards five shoe-lengths from where Pääarvi fell dead," or "wrapped in bull rope behind the festive silks that don't itch or irritate the skin." Was the King hiding his books, or was he simply careless? Was he hoarding against some medieval paranoia, or had he never heard of co-location? The mystery has yet to be solved to any scholar's satisfaction.

The King Noorg Plates are now on display at the Turun Yliopiston Kirjasto (Turku University Library) where thousands of Finns and hundreds of librarians from around the world visit every year. With as much as scholars have uncovered, the hammered bronze still holds its secrets. No one has expressed it as well as Professor Tökin himself: "Theese peoples come here, they see his own reflection in the old bronze things, then they go exit and buy little chocolate snack pieces in the café." 🌱