



The Social Life of Ink: Culture Wonder And Our Relationship With The Written Word

Ted Bishop

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A rich and imaginative discovery of how ink has shaped culture and why it is here to stay

Ink is so much a part of daily life that we take it for granted, yet its invention was as significant as the wheel. Ink not only recorded culture, it bought political power, divided peoples, and led to murderous rivalries. Ancient letters on a page were revered as divine light, and precious ink recipes were held secret for centuries. And, when it first hit markets not so long ago, the excitement over the disposable ballpoint pen equalled that for a new smartphone—with similar complaints to the manufacturers.

Curious about its impact on culture, literature, and the course of history, Ted Bishop sets out to explore the story of ink. From Budapest to Buenos Aires, he traces the lives of the innovators who created the ballpoint pen—revolutionary technology that still requires exact engineering today. Bishop visits a ranch in Utah to meet a master ink-maker who relishes igniting linseed oil to make traditional printers' ink. In China, he learns that ink can be an exquisite object, the subject of poetry, and a means of strengthening (or straining) family bonds. And in the Middle East, he sees the world's oldest Qur'an, stained with the blood of the caliph who was assassinated while reading it.

An inquisitive and personal tour around the world, *The Social Life of Ink* asks us to look more closely at something we see so often that we don't see it at all.

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