A dictionary records a language and a cultural world. This global history of lexicography is the first survey of all the dictionaries which humans have made, from the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, India, and the Greco-Roman world, to the contemporary speech communities of every inhabited continent. Their makers included poets and soldiers, saints and courtiers, a scribe in an ancient Egyptian ‘house of life’ and a Vietnamese queen. Their physical forms include Tamil palm-leaf manuscripts and the dictionary apps which are supporting endangered Australian languages. Through engaging and accessible studies, a diverse team of leading scholars provide fascinating insight into the dictionaries of hundreds of languages, into the imaginative worlds of those who used or observed them, and into a dazzling variety of the literate cultures of humankind.

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