



Oxford University

Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents

Newsletter no. 1

Winter, 1995

Introducing CSAD

With this inaugural Newsletter we are pleased to introduce the Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents. The Centre was established at the beginning of the academic year 1995/6 with the aim of bringing together individuals and projects not only in the Faculty of Literae Humaniores at Oxford but also in other faculties and institutions concerned with the study of ancient documents in the widest sense of the term. We are interested in literary as well as strictly 'documentary' texts; and although our main focus is on the Classical world, we hope and intend to create and maintain links with those working on documents in other languages from the ancient Mediterranean and the Near East.

The Newsletter provides an introduction to the structure and resources of the Centre, notices of its activities, and a review of one of its major research projects. We hope that the work of the Centre will be of interest to you and invite your cooperation in its development.

CSAD: Structure and Resources

The Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents forms a unit within the Faculty of Literae Humaniores at Oxford. The Director of the Centre is Dr. A.K. Bowman of Christ Church. Day-to-day running is the responsibility of the Administrator (currently Dr. C.V. Crowther). A Management Committee, made up of six scholars working in the fields of epigraphy and papyrology, has been appointed by the Faculty of Literae Humaniores.

The Centre is located in a newly-converted room at 67 St. Giles close to the Ashmolean Museum, which offers seminar facilities as well as housing the Centre's research and computing resources.

The Centre provides a home to the University's collection of squeezes (paper impressions) of Greek inscriptions, which is one of the largest in the world, with more than 20,000 items. The strengths of the collection lie in its broad coverage of early Greek inscriptions, Attic epigraphy and the Hellenistic world. Individual sites well represented include Chios, Samos, Priene, Rhodes, and Samothrace. The material in the archive is currently being reorganised and catalogued. Questions about the availability of particular items may be addressed to Dr. C.V. Crowther at the Centre.

The Centre, in addition, maintains a growing photographic collection, and houses the Haverfield Archive of facsimiles, drawings, photographs and squeezes of the Roman Inscriptions of Britain. The Centre also has valuable collections of academic (mainly epigraphical) papers left by Th. Wade-Gery, L.H. Jeffery and D.M. Lewis. The material left by Professor Lewis includes a valuable collection of 2500 transcripts of Elamite cuneiform texts from the Persepolis Fortification

archive made available by Dr. M.W. Stolper of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. Access to this material is for the moment restricted.



Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents

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The Centre has a small library, made up of epigraphical and papyrological books donated by Brasenose College library, and also houses two substantial collections of offprints, inherited from Prof. A.A. Andrewes (general Ancient History) and Prof. A.A. Schiller of Columbia University (Papyrology and Greek and Coptic legal scholarship).

A primary focus for the Centre's activities is the exploitation of new technology resources in the study of documentary sources. The Centre now has available a range of IT equipment and aids for the study of ancient documents, including a scanner and digital camera, running on Power Macintosh computers. The Centre is creating a database catalogue of its research collections and maintains a WWW site for on-line publication of its research activities.

Affiliation to the Centre is open to scholars working in relevant fields and involves being placed on a mailing list for distribution of the Newsletter and other news about the Centre's activities. Enquiries about affiliation should be addressed to the Administrator at the Centre.

HRB Award

The Centre has recently been awarded a four-year Humanities Research Board Institutional Fellowship by the British Academy, to be held by Dr. C.V. Crowther. The award funds Dr. Crowther's post and provides an additional annual research allowance for a period of four years. With matching funding guaranteed by the University, this means that the post is established for a period of at least 7 years, until 2002. Not the least significant aspect of the award is that it helps to fill a gap in teaching and research left by the abolition of the Faculty Lectureship in Greek Epigraphy formerly held by the late Professor D.M. Lewis.

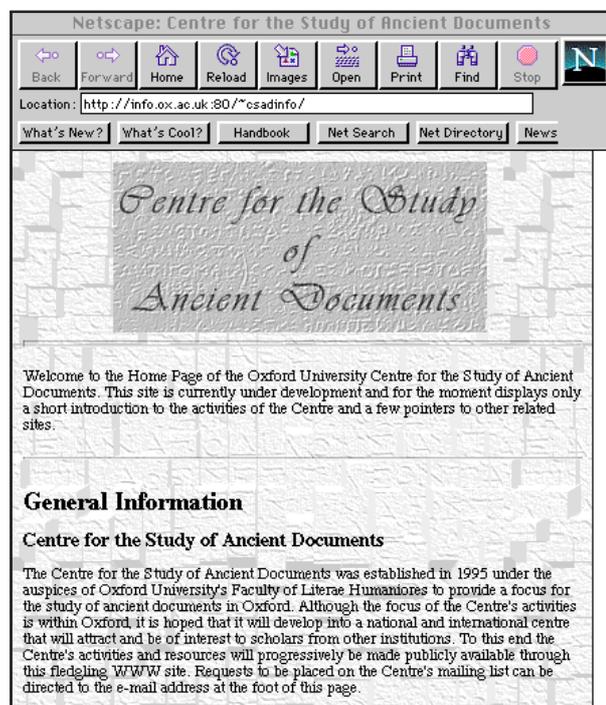
Lewis Memorial Fund and Lecture

A memorial fund to commemorate the work of the late Professor D.M. Lewis has been established by a donation of £10,000 from a charitable trust associated with a member of Prof. Lewis's family. The fund has been almost doubled by generous donations from the colleges at which Prof. Lewis studied and taught (Corpus Christi and Christ Church) and from colleagues, friends and former pupils. The fund will support an annual lecture by a distinguished scholar on a subject relating to "the study of ancient history through inscriptional or other documentary sources". The first Lewis Memorial Lecture is to be given by Professor M. Jameson of Stanford University on May

29, 1996, with the title "The Rituals of Athena Polias in Athens". Further details of the time and venue for the lecture will be circulated in early Spring.

WWW Site

The Centre, in accordance with its aim to exploit developments in information technology, has from the date of its establishment maintained a World Wide Web (WWW) site on the Internet at URL <http://info.ox.ac.uk/~csadinfo>. The site provides general information about the Centre's activities and an introduction to the Imaging project, together with a small sample of digitised photographs of inscriptions. Information on the Centre's pages is periodically updated and the selection of images available will gradually be widened.



CSAD WWW Home Page

Research Projects

The Centre supports and is associated with a number of research projects, including an initiative to develop image enhancement tools to assist in the decipherment of intractable written materials such as wooden and lead tablets, a complementary image bank project, the Philodemus project, the compilation of a database of the Ashmolean Museum's Greek coin collection, and continuing work on the Oxyrhynchus papyri. The Newsletter will provide a series of progress reports on these various projects, beginning, in this issue, with the Image Bank project.

Building an Image Bank of Inscriptions

The Centre is currently undertaking an experimental project to create a library of digitised images of Greek inscriptions, based in the first instance on material in the squeeze collection. Equipment for the project has been purchased with a grant of over £15,000 from the University's Research and Equipment Committee.

The project developed out of an initiative to reorganise and catalogue Oxford University's squeeze collection and make it accessible as a research resource to the widest possible audience. The availability of the collection, together with developments in digitising and networking—above all, the growth of the WWW—created an opportunity to build an image database of inscriptions that could be made widely accessible through existing and future electronic networks. A model and inspiration for the creation of such a database was offered by work being undertaken at Michigan and Duke Universities, under the auspices of APIS (Advanced Papyrological Information System)—in particular, the Duke University Papyrus Digitization project, which has made available hundreds of high quality photographs of papyri from its WWW site.

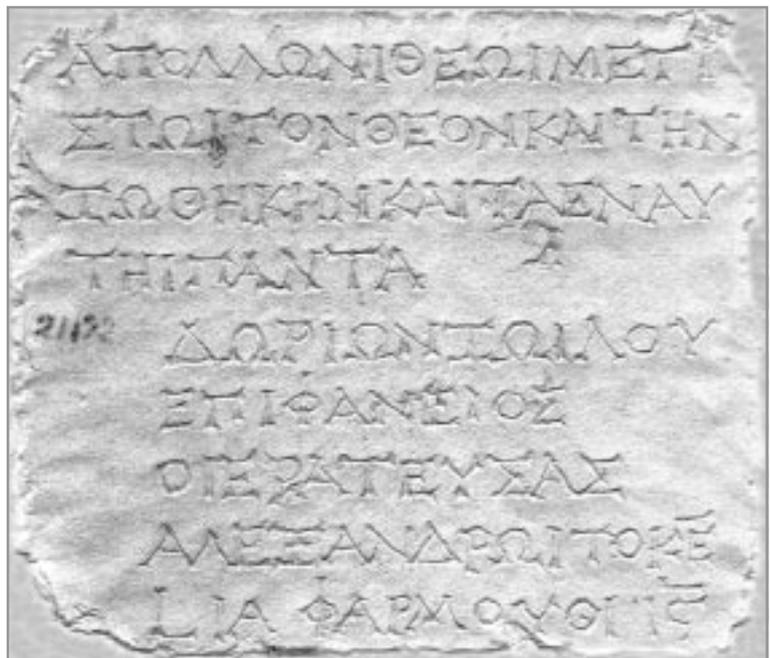
The potential advantages of an image bank of this kind are compelling. Photographs of inscriptions can be called up directly on a computer screen, enlarged, adjusted and compared using programmes such as Adobe Photoshop. To take full advantage of these possibilities, the project is making a fresh start. The aim is not so much to digitise existing photographic resources—although these will not be neglected—but to create a database of new photographs created under controlled conditions and to a uniform scale so as to make them directly comparable one with another. For this purpose, images will be created directly from squeezes, using either, as at present, a flatbed scanner or, eventually, a digital camera. The opportunity to carry out an undertaking of this kind is, of course, offered by the existence of the Centre's own extensive squeeze archive.

There are no magic techniques (yet!) for making illegible texts reveal their secrets. Reading difficult inscriptions directly or from squeezes will remain a painstaking task sometimes requiring an imaginative contribution. Scholars will always need to go back to the original stone or a squeeze to verify readings of intractable texts. But

our images will, we hope, help them to control their interpretations.

The study of lettering styles can also benefit from the resources potentially offered by the database. Again, we do not pretend to offer a short-cut to the skills and techniques of analysis developed by Professor Stephen Tracy of Ohio State University in identifying the work of individual letter cutters. But if a large corpus of samples of lettering can be built up, some of the unsystematic and subjective character of datings offered for inscriptions on the basis of their letter forms can perhaps be ameliorated.

During the initial experimental stage of the project images have been captured at resolutions of 150 and 300 dpi (dots per inch). Since the standard image resolution of a computer monitor is 72 dpi, images of this or higher resolution can be viewed very satisfactorily on a computer screen. An image of 150 dpi can be magnified approximately twice on a computer screen without loss of definition, an image of 300 dpi four times, and so on. Each time the resolution of the image is doubled, however, the size of the resultant file is quadrupled. High resolution images of large objects, such as squeezes, will therefore be very large—a 300 dpi greyscale scan of A4 size, for example, could easily take up 8 Mb of storage. The size of files can be reduced using compression techniques by up to six times without perceptible loss of quality, but even so, compromises will be necessary in presenting and distributing the images. It is impractical to download for immediate viewing many



Sample image from the Image Database: squeeze of SEG, II, 849

—or, indeed, any—files of more than 500 Kb over existing networks. For most epigraphical purposes, however, images of inscriptions of 150 or even 75 dpi (equivalent to a full-sized image on the computer screen) are adequate and with compression can be reduced towards a size that can be transmitted rapidly over the currently available bandwidth on the network. Ten sample images of this size (100-350 Kb) have already been posted on the Centre's WWW site and are available immediately for viewing or downloading. When downloaded, the images can be stored and printed out satisfactorily using conventional inkjet or laser printers.

The techniques used in creating the image database are relatively simple and can readily be applied elsewhere. The computing and imaging resources required are no longer out of the ordinary—a Power Macintosh computer running Adobe Photoshop 3.0 and a UMAX Powerlook scanner. The process of scanning and photographing squeezes and inscriptions to obtain satisfactory images, however, is time-consuming. Part of the experimental character of our project is the uncertainty of just how long it will take to build up a database of this kind. The project is still at an early stage, and the existing database consists of no more than 100 images, ten of which are at present available from the Centre's WWW site. By the end of the first year of the project, our aim is to have increased both figures at least 10 times. By then, we shall know how far the project can be taken—expect a further progress report in the third issue of the Newsletter in a year's time!

Seminar Programme

The Centre is sponsoring a regular seminar series on documentary subjects, beginning in Hilary Term 1996 with four seminars on "Documents Old and New", for which the programme is as follows:

- 25 January: Dr. A.K. Bowman, "New Texts from Vindolanda"
 8 February: Dr. C.V. Crowther, "Epigraphy and the Second Athenian Confederacy"
 15 February: Dr. D. Obbink, "A New fragment of Eumelos recovered from carbonised papyri"
 29 February: Dr. R.S.O. Tomlin, "Some Romano-British Curse Tablets"

Visiting Scholars

The Centre welcomes Prof. R.S. Bagnall of Columbia University as its first Honorary Visiting Fellow. Professor Bagnall, who holds the Fowler Hamilton Visiting Fellowship at Christ Church during academic year 1995/96, is a distinguished historian and papyrologist. His most recent book is *Egypt in Late Antiquity*. During his year in England, he is studying and editing a collection of Greek ostraka belonging to the British Library.

The Centre is able to provide a base for a limited number of visiting scholars working in fields related to its activities. Enquiries should be addressed to the Director.

Other News

CSAD also welcomes Dr. N. Gonis, who has recently been appointed Research Assistant on the Oxyrhynchus Papyri. Dr. Gonis, who will be based at the Centre from December 1995, recently completed a DPhil thesis consisting of editions of literary texts from the Oxyrhynchus collection.

Circulation and Contributions

This is the first newsletter of the Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents. A second issue will be circulated in Spring 1996, and subsequent issues biannually in Autumn and Spring. The Newsletter invites contributions of news, reports and discussion items from and of interest to scholars working in the fields of the Centre's activities—epigraphy and papyrology understood in the widest sense. The Newsletter is circulated to individual scholars on the Centre's mailing list and is also available from the Centre's WWW site (URL <http://info.ox.ac.uk/~csadinfo>) in HTML format or for downloading, either as a text file or as an Adobe Acrobat™ PDF file. Contributions, together with other enquiries and requests to be placed on the Centre's mailing list, should be addressed to the Administrator at the Centre.

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