The Oaks News, December 2012

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Online Exhibits

The Byzantine Emperors on Coins

*The Byzantine Emperors on Coins* exhibit provides high-resolution images of one hundred and twenty seven coins drawn from the Dumbarton Oaks coin collection, which numbers twelve thousand coins and includes all Byzantine rules and denominations. The selection featured here, with one coin from each reign, provides a portrait gallery of all the emperors and usurpers that governed Byzantium over the eleven centuries of its existence. At the same time, the selection suggests major changes that affected the Byzantine coinage, both in numismatic and iconographic terms (for example, the growing presence of Christian themes and symbols). Read more>>

Maria Sibylla Merian

In 2012 the Dumbarton Oaks Rare Book Collection participated in a project, organized by the National Museum of Women in the Arts, to celebrate works by great women artists in Washington, DC museums. The artist we selected is the naturalist Maria Sibylla
Merian (1647-1717), and specifically her 1719 publication *Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium* (first published in 1705).

To accompany Dumbarton Oaks’ participation in the NMWA exhibition, the Rare Book Collection presents an online exhibit featuring information about the artist and images from, among other sources, Merian’s *Metamorphosis*. Read more>>

**Recent Scholarly Events**

**Garden and Landscape Studies**

**Public Lecture: "History and Memory in the Manchu Imperial Park of Bishu Shanzhuang"**

Stephen Whiteman, Fellow at CASVA: National Gallery of Art  
Wednesday, December 5, 2012  
The Dumbarton Oaks Music Room

Constructed, neglected, rebuilt and expanded over the course of nearly a century, the Qing imperial park of Bishu Shanzhuang played a central, but constantly changing, role in the history of the Manchu dynasty for nearly two centuries. In this talk, Stephen Whiteman explores the park’s early history under the Kanxi emperor, from its original conception as an imperial retreat to its representation through text and image—especially in the famed 36 Views, poems and illustrations of the park that were the first depictions of Chinese gardens to reach Europe—and considers the legacy of this history not only in the later iterations of the landscape, but also in collective memories of the rise and fall of the dynasty itself. Read more>>

**Byzantine Studies**

**Dream Workshop**

From 8-10 November Byzantine Studies held a workshop on the (mis)interpretation of Byzantine dream narratives. The study of dreaming in Byzantium is in its infancy. There exists a corpus of dream-books, and studies on dream treatises, but the study of dream narratives has hardly begun, despite the ground-breaking database initiative of the Institute of Byzantine Studies in Athens.

In different societies, dreams can be many things: a view into the future, a manifestation of the past, a means of approaching the divine, a mechanism for healing, a plot device, a medieval cinema, a complex means of communication, or an alternative plane of existence. Read more>>

**A Ninth-Century Greek-Arabic Palimpsest from the Sinai New Finds**

*An Informal Talk with Father Justin Sinaiotes and Jack Tannous*
On November 16 Father Justin Sinaïtes and Professor Jack Tannous gave an informal talk at Dumbarton Oaks. Their paper concerned a manuscript from the New Finds (discovered in 1975) at Sinai, a ninth-century bilingual Greek-Arabic Lectionary, written in uncial over an erased lower layer, which has only recently been made legible. This includes an as yet unidentified text concerning John Chrysostom, the Pandects of Antiochos, and text from prophetic books including Jeremiah. Father Justin began by discussing the Greek text of the epistles, which contains non-standard Byzantine readings. Jack Tannous then spoke about the Arabic New Testament and the social context for bilingual copying in the early centuries of Islam, establishing that the Arabic version of the epistles was translated from Syriac rather than from Greek. Finally, Father Justin showed what can now be seen of the under-layer, and identified the texts concerned. Some members of the audience working on Chrysostom were directly affected by the discovery; Syriac and Arabic scholars found another piece in the story of the languages of the eastern Mediterranean; everyone, including undergraduates from Georgetown, realized how privileged we were to share in this spectacular scholarly advance. Read more>>

Meeting of the Harvard Bilingual Libraries

The first meeting of the newly minted Harvard Bilingual Libraries took place at Dumbarton Oaks on November 2. Director Jan Ziolkowski represented the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library and welcomed editors of the four other bilingual series published by Harvard University Press: Jeffrey Henderson and Richard Thomas of the Loeb Classical Library; James Hankins of the I Tatti Renaissance Library; Aviad Kleinberg of the Hackmey Hebrew Classical Library; and Sheldon Pollock of the Murty Classical Library of India. During the morning discussion, the editors shared strategies for tackling the unique editorial challenges posed by bilingual publications. Read more>>

Tyler Fellows in Residence

Processing of Two Important Pre-Columbian Archives at Dumbarton Oaks

This year, two of the four Tyler Fellows in residence are working on the preliminary stages of making two outstanding Pre-Columbian archives accessible to researchers at Dumbarton Oaks. Dylan Clark (Anthropology, Harvard) will be inventorying the Maya Vase Archive assembled by Justin and Barbara Kerr, in preparation for this promised gift’s eventual acquisition by Dumbarton Oaks. Lisa Trever (History of Art and Architecture, Harvard) will focus on an assessment of Christopher Donnan’s Moche Archive, which will facilitate the future archival processing of this recently acquired collection and its eventual availability for scholarly study. Both fellows will be supervised by the Pre-Columbian Studies Department and the Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives during their residential fellowship year,
Lisa Trever

As a Tyler fellow in Pre-Columbian Studies in residence at Dumbarton Oaks for the academic year, I am looking forward to the final stages of writing my dissertation on the late Moche (c. 600–850 CE) mural paintings of Pañamarca, Peru. This year I am also collaborating with Dumbarton Oaks staff to process the Moche Archive, which has recently been given to the institute by Christopher B. Donnan, professor emeritus at UCLA. My project involves researching the photographic archive’s history, assessing its physical needs, and working toward the creation of a finding aid to assist researchers interested in this incomparable resource on ancient Andean art. The combination of this particular institutional project with my own research is particularly harmonious. Familiarity with the Moche Archive will inform my analyses of the iconography, style, and composition of the Pañamarca mural paintings and—vice versa—my background in Moche art and archaeology will facilitate this important first phase of work with the Moche Archive at Dumbarton Oaks.

Dylan Clark

I am a doctoral candidate in Mesoamerican Archaeology in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University. My dissertation project, entitled Living on the Edge, explores the daily life, social organization and community dynamics of an ancient Maya coastal port through the archaeological excavation of domestic spaces.

This year I also have the opportunity to assist with a fascinating project involving a new addition to the Dumbarton Oaks archival collection. In 1972, photographer Justin Kerr revolutionized the study of Maya pottery by modifying existing camera technology to more easily take rollout photographs of cylindrical objects. This allowed scholars to study Maya polychrome painting and incising styles, images, colors, and hieroglyphic texts on the surface of ceramic vessels in more detail because their scenes and designs could be viewed as one would a horizontal panoramic photograph. For many years, Justin and Barbara Kerr traveled widely, visually documenting pre-Columbian art, artifacts, and sites through photography, making these images and, whenever possible, scholarly analysis of them available to all researchers through Mayavase.com. Last year, the Kerrs donated their archive to Dumbarton Oaks, and I am very excited to be assisting with the transition of this important collection to its new home here in Washington, D.C. over the course of the next several months.

Read more about the Tyler Fellows.

Friends of Music

The Friends of Music presented pianist Alessio Bax in a pair of stunning recitals on November 4 and 5,
which received standing ovations. Mr. Bax performed Johannes Brahms' Four Ballades, opus 10; Sergei Rachmaninov's transcriptions of Fritz Kreisler's beloved violin pieces *Liebesleid* and *Liebesfreud*; a selection of five Preludes by Rachmaninov; and Variations on a Theme by Paganini, by Brahms. The concert on November 5 was recorded by Classical WETA for future broadcast on *Front Row Washington*, a program of classical music performances in local venues.

In December, the all-male *a cappella* ensemble, Cantus, made its Dumbarton Oaks debut with an international program in the Music Room, including selections of seasonal works.

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**From the Archives**

**The Bliss Christmas Card of 1938**

1938 was a momentous year for Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss. On April 14, they celebrated their thirtieth wedding anniversary. Nearly a month later, on May 8, Nadia Boulanger conducted in their Music Room the world premiere of Igor Stravinsky's *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto*, which the Blisses had commissioned in celebration of their anniversary. In June, their close friend Royall Tyler visited them at Dumbarton Oaks for the first time and saw the Byzantine, Pre-Columbian, and other artworks that he had helped them collect. 1938 was also the year that the Blisses decided to give their home, gardens, and collections to Harvard University within their lifetimes rather than at the time of their deaths. To this end, they engaged the architect Thomas T. Waterman to design the Byzantine Collection pavilions, which were constructed the following year. For their 1938 Christmas card (seen at the right), they chose an informal image of themselves wistfully gazing at the flowering herbaceous border in the gardens. This image is all the more poignant as it records one of the very few times that the Blisses were photographed at Dumbarton Oaks. This Christmas card is retained in the Dumbarton Oaks Archives (AR.OB.Misc.021).

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**DO at Digital Cultural Heritage DC Meetups**

On November 15, 2012, Dumbarton Oaks staff attended the Digital Cultural Heritage DC meetup organized by staff from the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP) in the
Office of Strategic Initiatives at the Library of Congress. Shalimar Fojas White, Manager of ICFA, gave a short presentation entitled “Connecting the Home of the Humanities to the Internet: Digital Initiatives at Dumbarton Oaks.” Read more>>

Staff Accolades

Last month saw the publication of the Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity, edited by Scott Johnson, Dumbarton Oaks Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in Byzantine Greek at Georgetown University. Five years in the making, the Handbook contains thirty-seven chapters on all aspects of Late Antiquity, a period that has become increasingly central to the study of Byzantium and the medieval West. However, the geographical scope of this book is unparalleled among comparable surveys of the period: it includes, among others, chapters on the Balkans, Armenia, Ethiopia and Arabia, and Central Asia.

Good Ink

Cecelia Porter recently reviewed the concert by Alessio Bax at Dumbarton Oaks, part of the Friends of Music concert series.

Ancient Maya Art at Dumbarton Oaks, ed. by Joanne Pillsbury, Miriam Doutriaux, Reiko Ishihara-Brito, and Alexandre Tokovinine, is one of two 2013 finalists for the College Art Association Alfred H. Barr Jr. Award.
Now on View

All Sides Considered
New Research on the Maya Collection
Open through June 2, 2013

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