

The Oaks News, January 2015

# The Oaks News

A monthly bulletin from Dumbarton Oaks

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## Upcoming Dumbarton Oaks Public Lecture

Sacred Chanting from Aleppo: An Evening of Syrian Music, Photographs, Stories, and Discussion with Jason Hamacher

February 12 at 5:30 p.m.



From 2005 to 2010, musician Jason Hamacher was granted unprecedented access to the Syrian city of Aleppo to document the ancient prayers, hallowed rituals, and sacred spaces of Syria's religious

minorities. He went to document ancient Christian and Jewish culture and captured the apex of Syria's modernization before the revolution. He created the *Lost Sound Series* to introduce his musical archives of rare field recordings to the world. His latest series, *Sacred Voices of Syria*, showcases the beauty of Syria's endangered ancient Sufi, Armenian, Syriac, and Assyrian-Chaldean chant traditions.

Hamacher's forthcoming book, *Aleppo, Syria: Witness to an Ancient Legacy*, is a collection of photographs documenting his journey into Syrian culture. Many of the people that appear in the book have been killed or have fled the country; many of the places have been destroyed.

Seating is limited and by reservation only. Find out more [here](#).

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## Culture and Power

### Inaugural Wintersession Course for Harvard Students

From January 11 through 18, Dumbarton Oaks welcomed thirteen Harvard undergraduates for an immersive exploration of the humanities.

"Culture and Power: Art, Philanthropy, and Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century" featured lectures and discussions on Robert and Mildred Bliss and other cultural philanthropists; the intersection of art and diplomacy; the history of collecting; and the philosophy of the gift. The week also included visits to the [National Gallery of Art](#), the [Folger Shakespeare Library](#), the

[Kreeger Museum](#), and the [George Washington University and Textile Museums](#). Students had the opportunity to hear from the directors and staff of these institutions about their mission and activities, to discuss the challenges and rewards of working in cultural nonprofits, and to witness behind-the-scenes planning for upcoming exhibitions.



Read the students' blog posts about their experiences [here](#).

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## The Life and Death of Metadata

Lecture by Dr. Yanni Loukissas | December 11, 2014



"In some ways, when people hear big data, that causes a lot of anxiety. How do we handle it all? How do we navigate it? How do we make sense of it? There's a sense that it's just enough data to be overwhelming." Researcher and designer Yanni Loukissas posed these questions to assembled Dumbarton Oaks staff and fellows as he delivered a lecture, "The Life and Death of Metadata," on December 11. Currently an assistant professor of Digital Media in the School

of Literature, Media, and Communication at Georgia Tech, Loukissas formerly served as a principal in the metaLAB at Harvard’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society. There, he spent two years working on “The Life and Death of Metadata,” for which he analyzed the records of 70,000 trees, shrubs, and plants accessed by the Arnold Arboretum—Harvard’s “living museum,” located in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston—over a 140-year period.

The project, Loukissas explained, has two main features: a vast infographic displaying accessions by the Arboretum, each month in each year from 1872 to 2012; and an essay that integrates the displayed data with interviews Loukissas conducted with Arboretum staff and scholars. By uniting data with more traditional historical methods, Loukissas built a case study for understanding the role that metadata can play in illuminating history, both discrete events that become evident when comparing data as well as larger trends revealed by changing patterns of data collection and dissemination.

“We’re only beginning to uncover how we see data from this digital perspective, how we might think of them as entities that are rooted in a place, in a culture, in a community,” he concluded.

Read more about the lecture [here](#), and find more information about Dr. Loukissas’s project [here](#).

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## Tyler Fellow Update: Coleman Connelly

The [William R. Tyler Fellowships](#) support two years of travel and dissertation completion for advanced Harvard graduate students in areas related to the fields of study at Dumbarton Oaks. Coleman Connelly (Classics) is working on “Appropriating the Greek Past in the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement.”

“I arrived at Dumbarton Oaks early this summer to settle in for the first year of my Tyler Fellowship. Since then I have made great headway on my dissertation, which focuses on the translation of Greek into Arabic in ninth- and tenth-century Baghdad. I investigate the ways in which the translators—the majority of whom were Syriac-speaking Christians—handle the elements of Classical Greek culture, religion, and literature embedded in Greek scientific works. How do these Christian translators process and transmit to their Muslim readers references to the Greek gods, to Homeric poetry, to Graeco-Roman political structures, or to historical figures from the Greek past?”



Read more about Coleman’s research and work at Dumbarton Oaks [here](#).

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## From the Archives

The Edgar Wind Lectures at Dumbarton Oaks, January 1940



Seventy-five years ago, on January 10-12, 1940, the iconologist Edgar Wind (1900-1971) delivered three lectures at Dumbarton Oaks on the topic of mysticism: “The Tradition of Christian Mysticism,” “The Survival of Pagan Mysticism,” and “Mysticism in El Greco.” Although Dumbarton Oaks would not officially open as a research library and collection until November 1940, the Blisses had begun to sponsor scholarly lectures already in 1939 and 1940 to establish an intellectual underpinning for the nascent institute in advance of its transfer to Harvard University. These lectures also included Henri Grégoire’s “Constantine and His Period as Seen in His Monuments” in January 1939 and Sirarpie der Nersessian’s “Some Aspects of Byzantine Sculpture” in March of that year. Notes were taken at each of these lectures, and typed copies of the notes, along with relevant correspondence and other documents, are preserved in the Dumbarton Oaks Archives.

Read more about the Edgar Wind Lectures [here](#).

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## Friends of Music

Kitka | December 7 and 8, 2014

The sounds of traditional Eastern European songs graced the Music Room on December 7 and 8 when the Friends of Music hosted its final concerts of 2014. The San Francisco-based women’s vocal ensemble Kitka set the tone for an attractive and diverse celebration of winter, rooted in some of the coldest countries of the Old World. The exotic program, *Wintersongs*, displayed a distinctive palette of sonorities and rhythms, sung with spirit and precision in languages such as Bulgarian, Romanian, Georgian, Russian, Hungarian, and Yiddish.



Read more about the concerts [here](#).

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## Good Ink

The *Washington Post* [reviewed](#) the concert by Kitka, noting that “Kitka moved easily from tradition to tradition, as comfortable with the shrieks and howls of joyful celebration as with the quietest meditation, offering a convincing shout-out for a repertoire many know too little about.”

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## Behind the Scenes



Juan Antonio Murro, assistant curator of the Pre-Columbian Collection, looks on during the installation of the new special exhibition. In the foreground is an **owl-shaped zun**, a bronze ceremonial vessel.

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Dumbarton Oaks  
1703 32nd Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20007

[www.doaks.org](http://www.doaks.org)

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