Dumbarton Oaks Research Library recently embarked on a multi-year project to digitize selected rare materials for free access through the web. In the spring of 2013 the Library digitized 14 titles in 35 volumes. An online exhibit documents the titles that have already been made available.

The following Q&A with Library staff offers a behind-the-scenes view of the layers of planning and communication, and the hands-on work of many experts, that precede a book ever being placed on a copy stand and becoming available to users around the world.

Linda Lott (Librarian, Rare Book Collection)
Q: The Rare Book Collection contains more than 10,000 volumes, prints, drawings, photographs, and blueprints. How do you decide on which items to select for digitization?

The manuscripts are the first candidates to be placed on the list as they are unique to the rare book collection. This includes Humphry Repton’s Red Books, Giovanna Garzoni’s sketch book of botanical illustrations, and Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues book of miniature paintings of flowers, butterflies and insects on vellum with gold leaf. Titles that are not just rare but fragile, and heavily used, are also included, such as George-Louis Le Rouge’s Détail des nouveaux jardins à la mode, a publication begun in 1776 with close to 500 loose prints. We try to make sure that any edition of a title that is included has not been digitized elsewhere. We listen to suggestions from scholars using our collections and we welcome recommendations of specific titles for future prioritization.
Q: Can you tell us about the work that goes into metadata creation for digitized items?

The goal in creating metadata for digitized books is to provide an experience of reading and paging through a digitized book as though it were a physical object. This involves describing in detail every nuance of the organization of a book and its components from front cover to back cover and includes the spine and edges.

Q: How do you protect the materials during their transportation for off-site scanning?

Shipping these books is not quite at the level of a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma, but it is pretty close - there are multiple layers of packing to make up a single shipment, each custom-made to conform to library preservation standards and to be reused over multiple shipments, while still being custom-fit to the books inside.

Read more here>>

From the Archives

“An Old, Old Problem Solved in an Up-To-Date Way”
Recently, at the Georgetown Flea Market, a new artifact turned up that is of relevance to the Archives. However, it is allied neither to the Byzantine, nor the garden and landscape, nor the pre-Columbian components of the institution. This new acquisition, in fact, at first glance seems outrageously distant from the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection: it is a 1940 *Life Magazine* advertisement (shown at right) for Fletcher’s Castoria, a children’s vegetable-based laxative designed to accommodate their “delicate” systems.

Read more about this interesting facet of Dumbarton Oaks’ history on our website.

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**Peter Der Manuelian and The Giza Archives**

Peter Der Manuelian, Philip J. King Professor of Egyptology at Harvard University, visited on June 24-25 to find out more about the digital humanities at Dumbarton Oaks.

Professor Der Manuelian also gave a lecture to the Dumbarton Oaks academic community on *The Giza Archives*. He has been working for more than a decade on digitizing and making available online the extensive archival records of George Andrew Reisner (1867 - 1942), first Professor of Egyptology at Harvard and director of the joint Harvard University-Boston Museum of Fine Arts archeological excavations at Giza and other archeological sites in Egypt (1905-1947).

*Read more about Professor Der Manuelian’s visit and his work here>*

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**Leaden Gospels**

**Seals Online Exhibition**

This exhibition is divided into two sections; Engraving Lives considers the seals depicting narrative scenes from the Gospels, while Architects of Faith explores seals that show the authors of the works that make up the New Testament. As the smallest Byzantine sculptures and expressions of faith and status, these seals add
another dimension to our understanding of how the Byzantines related to the New Testament.

Read more here>>

Early Numismatic Books in the Research Library

Timed to coincide with the Byzantine Coins and Seals Summer School of Dumbarton Oaks, the Library presents Ces pièces immortelles: Early Numismatic Books in the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, on display on level 4 until the end of July. This rare-book exhibit explores the study and illustration of Roman and Byzantine coins and seals in printed books from the Renaissance through the mid-nineteenth century.

Image caption: Louis Jobert (1637-1719)’s La science des medailles, Dumbarton Oaks Rare Books Collection

Gallery Talk in the Museum
Staff, Fellows and Readers were recently invited to a gallery talk in the Dumbarton Oaks Museum. Gudrun Bühl, the Director of the Museum, and current Fellows, Warren Woodfin (Queens College) and Nektarios Zarras (University of the Aegean), led a discussion about the twelfth-century Roundel with John II Comnenus (ca. 1110 - 1118; BYZ.1937.23). The discussion focused on the possibility that the roundel has been misdated.

Staff Accolades

Anatole Tchikine, Post-Doctoral Associate in Garden and Landscape Studies, traveled to Portugal in May, having been invited by the University of Évora to talk about Carlo Fontana’s hydraulics treatise Utilissimo trattato dell’acque correnti ... (Rome, 1696) as part of a lecture series on early published books: Livros sobre Arte dos Jardins: Diálogos sobre Ideias de Jardins.

Then, on June 5th, Anatole gave another talk in Florence at The British Institute, entitled “Lorenzo de’ Medici’s Ambra, Poggio a Caiano, and the landscape of wilderness.” Its subject was a poem by Lorenzo the Magnificent, which has an early description of nature, and its connection with his villa at Poggio a Caiano near Florence.

Scott Johnson, Post-Doctoral Teaching Fellow in Byzantine Studies (Dumbarton Oaks/Georgetown University), recently published a book entitled Jacob of Sarug’s Homily on the Sinful Woman (Gorgias Press, 2013). The book includes a translation (with facing Syriac text) of an important metrical homily by the sixth-century poet Jacob of Serug, who produced 760 such homilies in his career and was recognized as one of the two greatest Syriac poets (with Ephrem the Syrian) in his own lifetime. He is today revered as a saint by both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches. In addition to the text and translation, this book contains a long introduction to Jacob’s interpretative context in Syriac literature, as well as an appendix comparing this poem to a famous Greek poem on the same subject by Jacob’s younger contemporary, Romanos the Melode.
Good Ink

Visit the Washington Gardener to see a video of the Cao|Perrot Studio installation, Cloud Terrace, currently installed in the Arbor Terrace of the Dumbarton Oaks Gardens.

Now on View

inspiring art

The Dumbarton Oaks Birthing Figure

June 27, 2013 — March 2, 2014

Four Byzantine Manuscripts

through September 2013