

Inscriptions of Aphrodisias: Paradigm of an Electronic Publication

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PAPER

Inscriptions, as studied by epigraphers, ancient texts inscribed on stone or other durable materials, are an important source of access to various ancient societies, and particularly the worlds of Ancient Greece and Rome. The conventional publication of inscriptions has however tended to keep them in an academic limbo – not quite literary text and not quite archaeological object. By publishing the *Inscriptions of Aphrodisias*¹ – a corpus of over two thousand texts, mostly in Greek, and from a single, marble-rich city in Asia Minor spanning nearly a thousand years – in electronic format, we are taking the opportunities offered by the medium for a radical reappraisal of this body of material, setting it both in a literary and in an archaeological context.²

I have identified six primary advantages of electronic over traditional publication: accessibility; absence of size and space restrictions; use of new media; hyperlinking and interactive materials; ability to update and correct publication; accuracy and verifiability of reference materials.³ Of these areas, the greatest advantages to the project of epigraphic reappraisal are to be gained from increased size and space, new media, and hypertext (although the improved accessibility also makes the inscriptions available to a wider audience than usual).

The availability of near-unlimited space has significant impact on the possibilities for the nature of the publication of this corpus. At the simplest level, as compared to a book which will include relatively few, black-and-white images of inscriptions, focusing by necessity on the face of the stone and the letters themselves, the web publication is unlimited as to the number of useful photographs that can be presented. The site includes images in colour and in high resolution, of all sides of the inscribed object and its physical context, as well as scans of squeezes, sketches, and notebooks reporting the original condition of the text. Addition significance of the increased space available can be found in our ability in this publication to provide multiple presentations of the content text. Not only can we display a choice of diplomatic and interpretive editions of the Greek (with the underlying XML also accessible for view or download), but the materials can be presented in a range of outputs focussing on different aspects of the analysis. Two outputs might place different emphases on the philological and archaeological contexts, for example. Rather than a single table of contents and linear presentation of the inscriptions, the corpus is accessible via several tables of contents and a couple of dozen indices and bibliographical concordances, allowing readers to choose their route through the material.

The good, colour images mentioned above are one example of new media that the electronic medium allows us to publish. Another is the use of scalable and linked maps and plans, including archaeological plans encoded in SVG, with a range of information about findspots and locations of inscribed objects embedded within them.

The advantages of hypertext in an electronic publication are many, and include the ability to link internally within the text, making cross-references easier to follow up (and return from), and the navigation within a user-defined route through the publication. In addition, and in particular in this case, the ability to hyperlink to external objects is of great value to the project of this publication. We have been able to refer readers directly to other textual sources, encyclopedias, and prosopographies for comparison or further information, and to the archaeological reports both in printed articles (available through JStor) and the detailed materials on the NYU excavators website⁴ and elsewhere.

In this paper, I shall use the example of the *Inscriptions of Aphrodisias* project and the particular needs and

opportunities of its publication to argue for what I believe are some of the most promising possibilities of electronic publication. There will also be some discussion of the hazards and shortfalls of this approach, and ways in which we can address them. Although not yet a complete replacement for traditional printed books, digital publications are an unavoidable part of modern scholarship, and we owe it to ourselves to be as familiar as possible with the issues surrounding research and publication in this medium.

References

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1. Available online: *Inscriptions of Aphrodisias* (<http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/>); and especially at this point the pilot publication Roueché, Charlotte, 2004. *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity* (<http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/ala2004/>), revised electronic edition.
2. cf. Roueché, Charlotte, 1989. *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity*. London: Roman Society Monographs for some of the same material in transitional paper format.
3. The implications of electronic publication have been widely discussed (especially in the hard sciences), see e.g. Marnett, L. 2005. 'The impact of electronic publication' *Chemical Research in Toxicology* 18: 1-2; Kasdorf, W. 2003. *The Columbia guide to digital publishing*. Columbia University Press; ALPSP (ed.), 2002. *Authors and electronic publishing*; Clarke, J. 2001. 'Questions raised by electronic publication in archaeology', *BAR International Series* 931: 351-6. My six categories are referenced in conference papers, teaching materials, and site documentation, but currently unpublished.
4. *Aphrodisias Excavations* (<http://www.nyu.edu/projects/aphrodisias/>), (April 2006).