



# IDP NEWS

No. 1

*Newsletter of The International Dunhuang Project  
The British Library, Oriental & India Office Collections,  
197 Blackfriars Road, LONDON SE1 8NG, UK*

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*A conference held at Sussex University, UK, in October 1993 brought together curators and conservators of collections from Central Asian sites to discuss the preservation and documentation of the manuscripts in their care. Following the conference the International Dunhuang Project was established with the aim of promoting the study and preservation of the Dunhuang legacy through international co-operation.*

## 'CAVE 17' CONFERENCE SUSSEX UNIVERSITY, UK OCTOBER 13-15, 1993

Substantial collections of pre-eleventh century documents from Dunhuang in Chinese Central Asia are held in libraries in London, Paris, St. Petersburg and Beijing, with important holdings in Japan and smaller collections elsewhere throughout the world. The aim of this conference organized by The British Library and principally funded by a Ko Ho Ning Memorial Bursary with support from Dr Abraham Sek-Tong Lue and additional assistance from The British Council and The British Academy, was to promote good practice in the preservation of these materials by encouraging exchange of information and promoting collaborative links.

Participants came from all the four main collections as well as from other institutes in Europe, India and the USA. Although the emphasis of the conference was on material from Cave 17 at Dunhuang—primarily Chinese Buddhist documents on paper—the conference was also more generally interested in any collection from the Central Asian region.

Technical and scientific input was ensured by the attendance of Professor Ken Seddon, now at Queen's University, Belfast with two of his students, and Dr Derek Priest, a paper chemist, and one of his students.

Much of the conference was taken up with discussion of the collections and their preservation history. The similarity of the experiences of curators and conservators from collections throughout Europe was striking, despite lack of previous contact. All reported previous conservation misjudgements, poor records and incomplete cataloguing.

Despite this, the conference ended on a spirit of optimism. Everyone seemed relieved to discover that their institute's collection was not in a worse state than those of other countries, and that co-operation would make the mistakes of the past less likely in the future. These feelings were summed up by Brian Lang, Chief Executive of The British Library, in his closing address and the resulting initiatives are described overleaf.

Special thanks must go to Peter Lawson of the Conservation department of The British Library for the original conception and all his hard work in making this conference—the first of its kind—so successful. We offer him every best wish in his forthcoming retirement but hope that he will continue his involvement in the IDP.

Papers were presented by the following participants:-

### **The British Library, London**

Peter Lawson, Conservator  
Dr Frances Wood, Head of Chinese Section  
Mark Barnard, Senior Conservator

Kumiko Matsuoka, Conservator  
Susan Whitfield, The Dunhuang Project

### **Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris**

Monique Cohen, Director, Oriental Department  
Astrid-Christiane Brandt & Pascale Henry

### **Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, Russia**

Professor Yuri A Petrosyan, Director  
Professor Lev N Menshikov

Nadezhda M Brovenko, Conservator

### **The National Library of China**

Du Weisheng, Manager, Conservation Studio

### **National Museum, New Delhi, India**

Mr S P Singh, Chief Chemist

### **Staatsbibliothek, Berlin**

Dr Simone-Christiane Raschmann

Thomas Schmieder-Jappe

### **Freer Sackler Gallery, Washington DC**

Dr John Winter, Conservation Chemist

### **The British Museum, London**

Mr Andrew Thompson, Conservator

### **UMIST, Manchester**

Dr Derek Priest, Principal Lecturer

M C Southgate, Student

### **School of Molecular Science, University of Sussex**

Dr Kenneth Seddon (since appointed to a chair at Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland)

Peter Gibbs, Postgraduate Student

Anne Marie Bremmer, Student

**Others attending** included Dr Abraham S-T Lue, Dr Adaline Ko, Ms Anne Thomas (The British Council), and Dr Brian Lang, Dr Mirjam Foot, Mr Graham Shaw, Beth McKillop and Mr Mike Western (BL).

## CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The British Library, Directorate of Collections and Preservation, has agreed to underwrite the cost of publication subject to a sponsor being sought. The estimated cost after sales will be £4000, of which we have £420 at present.

If you have not submitted your paper from the conference can you do so as soon as possible. Please send it to Frances Wood at The British Library.

## IDP SECOND CONFERENCE

Monique Cohen and her colleagues at the Bibliothèque Nationale have agreed to organize and host the next conference in autumn 1995. Details will be given in future issues of *IDP News*.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF STEERING GROUP

On return from the conference at Sussex, Mr Graham Shaw (Deputy Director, OIOC, The British Library), Dr Frances Wood (Head, Chinese Section, The British Library) and Mr Peter Lawson (Conservator, The British Library) decided to establish a steering group to carry forward the ideas discussed. Dr Abraham Lue accepted the invitation to chair the group and Susan Whitfield will act as Secretariat from the British Library Chinese Section. She will edit and design the newsletter and deal with correspondence and queries. Contact numbers for email, fax and telephone are given below.

The first meeting of the group took place on 11 April 1994 and the name 'International Dunhuang Project' (IDP) was selected. Choice of this name is not meant to disqualify documents from other Central Asian sites from the project but is rather intended to be a convenient shorthand: any comprehensive description would have been too unwieldy for a title. The Project's logo is as shown on the front of this newsletter.

The objectives of IDP were formulated as follows:-

1. To establish the full extent of the documentary legacy from Dunhuang and other Central Asian Sites and to share that information through the development of an international database.
2. To develop new techniques for the preservation of the original documents through close collaboration with research chemists and paper technologists.
3. To promote common standards of preservation methods and documentation.
4. To catalogue the material according to common or compatible standards.
5. To store the documents in the best possible environment and reduce handling to a minimum.
6. To stimulate research on the material and increase access through the production of surrogate forms, facsimile publication, microfiche, and computer stored images.

The meeting also discussed possible sources of funding and patrons for the project.

The next meeting will be held on 1 June, 1994 in London.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### LONDON-ST PETERSBURG CO-OPERATION

Prior to the October 1993 conference, Dr Nadezhda Brovenko had been working in the Oriental Conservation Studio at The British Library for six weeks. Mark Barnard from the Studio is now in Russia to assist with technical problems.

### BELFAST-ST PETERSBURG LINK

Professor Kenneth Seddon and Peter Gibbs visited St Petersburg in December 1993 with the objective of a collaborative venture in the analysis of materials in the Russian collections relating mainly to dyes, pigments and inks. Application to the European Community has been made for funding. Ken returned to Belfast with some ninety samples from Chinese Central Asia for analytical investigation.

## CURRENT AND PROJECTED WORK AT BELFAST

Mark Barnard visited Ken Seddon's laboratory in Belfast in February and spent some time showing Peter Gibbs how to flatten the very crumpled samples from Russia. He also checked information on some of Ken's future analytical projects and the methodology to be used. A more detailed report of this will be given in a future newsletter.

Peter Gibbs plans to complete his doctoral thesis on the chemical constituents of the *Huang bo* (yellow) dye by October 1995.

## PEOPLE

Professor Sha Zhi of the History Department, People's University, Beijing and Dunhuang Research Society was awarded a British Academy K C Wong Fellowship to continue his research on The British Library documents from Stein's Third Expedition. He is also assisting Susan Whitfield on The Dunhuang Project. He will be at The British Library until November 1994.

Peter Lawson is retiring on 26 May 1994. He is having a farewell party on Friday, 20 May at 12.30 pm and would be pleased to welcome any colleague who is in London on this date to join him at Orbit House (Blackfriars Road).

## PHILODENDRON TREE

As I am sure many of you will know, we have spent considerable time in the past identifying the botanical source of the yellow dye used on many of the Dunhuang and other Chinese documents. You can therefore imagine our surprise and delight when Christine Laver of the Griffen Paper Mill offered The British Library as a gift the botanical source—Philodendron Amurence, commonly known as the Amur cork tree. The tree is a native of northern China (Amur River) and quite a rarity in the UK. It is at present 2 metres tall but may grow to 14–18 m: somewhat difficult to pressmark and put on a library shelf!

## COMPUTERIZATION OF ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPTS GROUP

A group of people concerned with the computerization of oriental manuscripts has been established to exchange and disseminate information. The mailing list address is:-

asiandoc@magnus.acs.ohio-state.edu

It is also possible to contact the group on the following email numbers:-

asiandoc-request@magnus.acs.ohio-state.edu

owner-asiandoc@magnus.acs.ohio-state.edu

or fax no.:-

(614) 292 7852 attn Maureen Donovan (US no.)

or by contacting Susan Whitfield at the IDP address.

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