

THE BEAZLEY ARCHIVE DATABASE

The database is now in its thirteenth year and available on line for direct interrogation by remote users in continental Europe, North America and Australia. Data are held on 40,000 clay figure-decorated vases, made in Athens in the 6th, 5th, and 4th centuries B.C. Documentation comes from more than 1200 publications in which the vases have been illustrated. Subsequent stages of documentation will be directed towards unpublished material. More than 100,000 vases of the type computerized are estimated to be housed in museums, private collections and excavation stores worldwide. The database at present occupies about 52MB storage.

The database runs on the University of Oxford's mainframe DEC VAX cluster to which the Archive offices in the Ashmolean Museum are linked on an internal network. Fibre optic cables will be added in the autumn of 1992. The university network is linked to national and international academic research networks which provide telecommunication services to foreign countries at low cost. From the outset the Beazley Archive database was intended to serve the needs of international scholarship. It was, therefore, swift to take advantage of international research networks such as the EEC's X.25 service and the North American NSFnet.

Athenian figure-decorated pottery is ideal for computerization because it is abundant and remarkably homogeneous over centuries. It has also been well studied. Sir John Beazley developed a system of classifying it in Oxford more than 70 years ago. His system was so regular and so consistent that his categories could become the fields and tables of a database with minimal alterations. Beazley also developed a controlled vocabulary even for the most varied field, the one which describes the pictures painted on the clay vases, and that vocabulary has become known to scholars worldwide through his numerous publications.

Unlike most painted pottery from antiquity Athenian vases were dominated by pictures of men, not animals or patterns, and these pictures illustrate stories from Greek mythology and from Greek life. They are the single richest archaeological source of information about classical antiquity and for that reason the range of potential users of the database is quite large. More than 200 remote users have consulted it by letter, E-mail, fax or through direct interrogation during the past few years.

The Beazley Archive also has about 250,000 photographs of these vases. Although none of them have as yet been added to the database the intention had always been to incorporate images as soon as the data were in an advanced

state and technology made image transmission a practical reality. That time has come. ISDN is widely available and national research networks (such as the UK's JANET) are promising imaging capabilities in the near future. With the aim of promoting the sharing of academic resources internationally the Beazley Archive joined an EEC telecommunications project early in 1992. RAMA (Remote Access to Museum Archives) will explore possibilities of networking data and image between European museums and academic institutions. A pilot image transmission project between the UK and Paris is planned for 1992.

The Beazley Archive is committed to sharing information and to helping other educational institutions to build data and image bases for international scholarship. It also welcomes productive working relations with the commercial sector when there is genuine interest in developing technologies to promote the arts.

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