



<http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk>

Oxford University / Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents Overview:

Oxford University, located in Oxford, United Kingdom lays claim to eight centuries of continuous existence as the oldest English-speaking university in the world. In 2001-2002 the total student population numbered over 16,500. The Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents was established in 1995 as a research unit within Oxford University's Faculty of Literae Humaniores to provide a focus for the study of ancient documents within Oxford; in the years since its creation it has built an international reputation for its scholarship and innovation. The Centre provides a home for Oxford University's epigraphical archive, which includes one of the largest collections of squeezes (paper impressions) of Greek inscriptions in the world, together with the Haverfield archive of Roman inscriptions from Britain, and a substantial photographic collection.

The Vindolanda Tablets:

The Vindolanda writing tablets, written in ink on post-card sized sheets of wood, have been excavated at the fort of Vindolanda, immediately south of Hadrian's Wall in northern England. Dating to the late first and early second centuries AD, the formative period of Roman Britain's northern frontier, they were written by and for soldiers, merchants, women and slaves. Through their contents, life in one community on the edge of the Roman world can be reconstructed in detail.

The Challenge:

The Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents and the Academic Computing Development Team (ACDT) at Oxford University (with the financial support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation) were looking to create a website directly relevant to university courses in ancient history, archaeology and classics as well as palaeography and papyrology. The specific goals were to:

- Establish an online edition of the Vindolanda tablets
- Provide a full, searchable set of digital materials related to the tablets
- Enable and encourage wider access to and use of the tablets
- Deliver interactive zoom and pan functionality of the tablets over low bandwidth
- Offer different viewing options of both Java and HTML only viewers

Solution:

In designing the site tasks and technologies were divided between the ACDT and CSAD staff. The ACDT team was generally responsible for the design and layout of the site, as well processing images, and setting up the Zoom Image Server Enterprise software. The tablets database, tablets XML scheme mark-up, and the interface scripts were developed at CSAD. The site is hosted on a Power Macintosh server, running 4D 6.8 and WebSTAR V 5 on Mac OS X. The XML was processed using Apache's XALAN freeware. The high-resolution images are delivered using iseemedia Zoom Image Server for Red Hat Linux and two Viewer choices are offered to the online user. These are the Java Zoom 2D Viewer and the Universal Viewer, which works with any web browser and requires no client-side installation. The tablet images were originally archived as TIFF images and converted to the Flashpix (FPX) file format using the iseemedia Photoshop Plug-in. The graphical interface was developed using Macromedia Dreamweaver and Adobe ImageReady.



Results:

- An Enterprise research resource available online to students and researchers 24/7
- Added zoom and pan interactive experience for online users
- Two different viewer choices offered to online users
- The interpretation of the tablets, which draws on many types of expertise, benefits from the increased dialogue within the scholarly community facilitated by online delivery of detailed images

Key Technologies:

- iseemedia Zoom Image Server Enterprise Edition
- Red Hat Linux 7.3 Operating System
- iseemedia Universal Viewer
- iseemedia Java Viewer
- iseemedia Photoshop Plug-in
- Macromedia Dreamweaver
- MacOS X
- 4D WebSTAR 5.1
- 4th Dimension 6.8 database

The Bottom Line:

“iseemedia’s Zoom Image Server solution has allowed us to provide a highly engaging interactive experience for students and researchers visiting the Vindolanda Tablets website. We are delighted with the feedback from our online users. The ability to present the high resolution detail of the tablet images over the Web so responsively would not have been possible without the Zoom Image Server technology.”

Dr. Charles Crowther – Assistant Director, Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents, Oxford University