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February 27, 2011

The Fortification Social Network and *Ancient Animations*
Digitizing Interpersonal Connections for Exhibit Development and Presentation

The Persepolis Fortification archive consists of thousands of small clay tablets inscribed with records of supply transactions and “signed” with impressions of stamp and cylinder seals. All date to a narrow period during the late 6th and early 5th centuries BCE (Garrison and Root 2001, 1; Root 2011). Such seals have often been studied as a genre of Achaemenid Persian art and as a category of material culture in the ancient Near East in general (e.g. Collon 2005). But seal impressions on the Fortification tablets represent more than mere signatures. They materialize moments of human interaction, however small, connecting people in a vast multicultural empire, a “global society” for its time (Root 2011, 1; 1997, 238-40).

All the known uses of a single seal in the Fortification archive contribute to a profile of an individual, his activities in Persepolis and its environs, and the contacts he made along his way (Root 2011, 2). An examination of one seal-owner’s interactions leads the observer to other seal-owners and the contacts they made; a web of social connections soon becomes apparent. Despite the obvious differences of scope, technology, and purpose, the social network discoverable in the Fortification archive can easily be compared to modern social networking practiced in globalizing, digital culture.

A digital presentation of the seal-owners’ social network will allow viewers to consider ancient interactions in terms of Facebook, the twenty-first-century social networking medium *par excellence*. The Fortification Social Network will consist of two components: a series of interconnected “profile pages” for seal owners, and an actual Facebook profile page for one of the seal owners.

The Facebook profile for Išbaramištima, owner of Persepolis Fortification Seal 49, will provide a public point of access to the thematic content of *Ancient Animations* both before and during the run of the exhibit. The profile will be accessible through a link on the exhibit’s official website and as a publicly viewable Facebook page, like that of Mummy Djehutymose, who already interacts through social media

with the public on behalf of the Kelsey Museum. Išbaramištima's Facebook profile will introduce and promote the exhibit with increasing intensity in the final months before its opening. Maintenance and outreach activity (as opposed to passive viewability) of the profile will be minimal until early 2013, or whenever the curator is ready to enlist a volunteer for these purposes.

The other component of the Fortification Social Network will be accessible at first only to those involved with the exhibit's preparations, with the option to provide public access later. Modeled on Root's "branches of encounter" of seal iconography (1997, 238-40), a series of "profile pages" of individual seal owners (constructed on the University's Sitemaker interface) will contain links to those of other seal owners, with explanations of the connections they share. These pages will synthesize the diverse types of information contained in the major editions of material from the Fortification archive (Garrison and Root 2001, Hallock 1969) in a form that reflects the exhibit's themes of interactivity and the active, intentional deployment of seals and their iconography in social settings (Root 2011; 2008, 108-11; 1997, 238-40).

Annotated Bibliography

Collon, Dominique. 2005. *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East*. London: British Museum Press.

In a wide-ranging but thorough treatment, Collon presents the history of cylinder seals and their various social functions and meanings.

Garrison, Mark B., and Margaret C. Root. 2001. *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets. Volume I. Images of Heroic Encounter*. Oriental Institute Publications 117. Chicago: Oriental Institute Publications.

In this volume Garrison and Root present stylistic and contextual analysis for those seals from the Persepolis Fortification Archive exhibiting the “heroic encounter” motif. The volume’s introduction surveys major issues in seal history, function, and production.

Hallock, Richard T. 1969. *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*. Oriental Institute Publications 92. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hallock’s corpus of transcriptions and translations of tablets from the Fortification archive remains the foundational work consulted for studies of the tablets and their contents.

Root, Margaret C. 2011. “Preliminary Description: *Ancient Animations: Experiencing Social Expression in the Persian Empire*.” Class document, History of Art 822. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.

Here Root presents working theory and planning notes for *Ancient Animations*. This document serves as both a starting and a reference point for student work in History of Art 822.

----- 2008. “The Legible Image: How Did Seals and Sealing Matter in Persepolis?” In *Archives des fortification de Persepolis: Etat des questions et perspectives de recherches*, 85-148. Collection Persika 12. Paris: Boccard.

Besides technical discussions of some aspects of the Fortification archive and its associated seals, Root theorizes the social-interactive components of seal deployment. Along with Root 1997, this article provides the theoretical basis for this project.

----- 1997. “Cultural Pluralisms on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets.” *Topoi* Suppl. 1, 229-252. Berlin: Topoi.

Although only a small part of this article, Root’s case study of Persepolis Fortification Seal 143s provides the inspiration and model for this project. The case study views seal deployments as opportunities for the transmission of iconographic and stylistic information.