The Karnak Cachette Texts On-Line: the Encoding of Transliterated Hieroglyphic Inscriptions
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The Karnak Cachette project

Between 1903 and 1907, the French archaeologist Georges Legrain discovered thousands of hidden stone statues, stelae and other objects that were buried in a large pit inside the temple of Amum at Karnak (known as the “Cachette” of Karnak). This ensemble constitutes an extraordinary source of information on the Egyptian clergy and the evolution of local cults. The objects as well as the related documentation now being widely dispersed, and in the absence of a comprehensive inventory of each object, a label, date of discovery, its various inventory numbers, and a bibliography. Version 2 went online in 2012. It gives access to the complete photographic documentation (more than 8,000 photographs). The database is regularly updated. See: http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette/

Current goals

The project aims at developing the tools to encode, search and publish electronically the hieroglyphic texts inscribed on the objects from the Cachette, enabling different types of full-text searches and queries (especially those dealing with titles and prosopographical data).

The version 3 of the database will comprise an electronic epigraphic edition of the corpus of texts with detailed prosopographical data. The current efforts are focussed on:

• the development and finalization of a user-friendly tool for the encoding, analysis and online publication of the hieroglyphic texts inscribed on the objects from the Karnak Cachette;
• the implementation of TEI/Episcop standards in ancient Egyptian Epigraphy to serve as a basis for building bridges between text-edition projects within Egyptology.

Xefee Xml Editor For Egyptian Epigraphy

Technical layers

The Karnak Cachette Database, versions 1 and 2, was constructed using FileMaker Pro and published online by using PostSmQ and PHP within a database publication framework developed for the IFAO. The Xefee encoding tool is a desktop Java application developed using the NetBeans IDE. In order to fully re-use the already existing scientific and photographic material, as well as to store the new data created throughout the encoding of the texts, Xefee lends on its own MySQL database in which these different kinds of data are merged. Organized around a main “document” table, the data is spread over eighteen tables, four of which being dedicated to the data coming from the related database, and one to the encoded texts. The electronic textual corpus produced with Xefee will be integrated in an XQuery web application on top of a native XML database.

Conclusion and Future Work

In its actual state, Xefee offers a practical GUI front-end for the TEI/Episcop encoding of ancient Egyptian inscriptions, facilitating the marking up of texts and prosopographical information. The next step is the full encoding of a sub-collection of the corpus (Late Period texts) by a small group of scholars and PhD students with full Egyptological proficiencies. The TEI/Episcop files created using Xefee will then be poured into a web application (built upon a native XML database). Being a pilot project for digital epigraphy, the Karnak Cachette text corpus may offer a discussion basis for a better standardization of practice in the Egyptological field. The ODD customization may also be discussed and enhanced within the community.

As a prototype of what can be done to articulate a relational database to a structured text encoding in the perimeter of a given project, Xefee may be adapted to other epigraphical projects from other fields. It will be distributed as an open-source project in the near future.