

## **Slide 1**

Thank you for the invitation to speak to this conference. The British School at Athens purchased and began using EMU as our central data repository for our collections in the autumn of 2009. Since it is our first time at the EMU user meeting, I will begin by introducing the School and its work, and will then discuss the collections that we hold and our migration process to EMU, as well as our future plans for use of the system.

## **Part I**

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The British School at Athens was founded in 1886 following in the footsteps of the French and Germans. The School was founded as a centre for Hellenic studies, and began with a particular focus on architecture and archaeology (and especially Greek prehistory). Established by private subscription the School remains an independent charity, but its majority funding now comes from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills as a grant- in-aid awarded by British Academy. It is one of six schools of broadly similar type (ie. with premises overseas) that are funded by the Academy's Sponsored Institutes and Societies (BASIS) programme. Along with its membership in this British community of Schools, the School joins an international community of 16 other foreign Schools and Institutes located in Athens that provide a base for Hellenic studies to the nationals of countries as diverse as Canada and Georgia. In 2011, the School will celebrate 125 years of continuous research in Greece.

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Though called the British School, the BSA is in actual fact more a research institute. The School holds at least two short training courses per year, one for undergraduates intended as an introduction to the archaeology and topography of ancient Greece and another for postgraduates (delivering skills in subjects as diverse as Greek epigraphy and ceramic petrology). Every other year it runs a refresher course on Greek sites and monuments for school teachers. Our major role, however, has always been to provide British and international academics with a base for their scholarly research. The School has built up a world class library with a particular focus in archaeology, and runs a hostel where scholars may stay.

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It is largely the research of the scholars and intellectuals, artists and travellers that have passed through the British School at Athens over the past 125 years that has created the substantial museum, archive and sample collections that we are now cataloguing in EMU. It is thus of interest to introduce this work briefly in order to show the organic origins of these collections and their interconnections.

We categorize our research into the following four headings: archaeology, text and letters, art and architecture, and history and society.

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The School is best known for its archaeological work; indeed in Greek it is still colloquially known as the Agglikí Archaíologikí Scholí or the English Archaeological School. The School has excavated some of the most important archaeological sites in Greece – it is not possible to give an exhaustive list in this short presentation, so I merely highlight two, Knossos and Lefkandi. Knossos - the great palatial centre of the Minoan civilization - was originally owned and excavated (in collaboration with the School) by Sir Arthur Evans, who subsequently passed it to the British School. Although now the property of the Greek state, the School maintains a research centre here for the ongoing study of previous excavation material and the support of new work. Lefkandi, perhaps less familiar to the general public, is nevertheless a highly important site that has revolutionized thinking about so-called Greek Dark Ages, with a settlement and cemeteries which indicate a flourishing and internationally-connected city life in this heretofore obscure and misunderstood period. It is also important to mention the work of the Marc and Ismene Fitch Laboratory, which was founded in 1974 to conduct scientific analyses of archaeological materials (principally via ceramic petrography and chemical analysis), expanded to include archaeobotany, faunal analysis and geophysical prospection, and whose work now forms an integral part of the archaeological practice of the BSA as a whole.

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The School, however, has often been a space for more than just archaeological work. Research in Texts and Letters was pioneered by one of the first directors, Richard Dawkins, who engaged in linguistic studies of dialect during his field research around greater Greece. Epigraphy is a focus of research under the current assistant director, Robert Pitt, whose work concentrates on ancient Greek law. The School also provides a home for research by literary historians such as Prof. Roderick Beaton of KCL who is working on the texts of Byron, the Greek revolution and the English imagination.

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Many of the School's scholars in residence have been architects, artists or both. The School's first director, Francis Penrose, was in fact the architect of its first premises. Greece and the Mediterranean in general was a place of pilgrimage for British architects trained in the Arts and Crafts tradition in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these architects used the BSA as a base to explore Greece and to document its monuments, especially Byzantine churches. **These architectural drawings, photographs and colour reproductions of mosaics and frescoes of some of these monuments, like the church of Hagios Demetrios in Thessalonike which was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1917, are the only ones which record certain features of the monument before its destruction. This body of work resulted in the collection known as the Byzantine Research Fund Archive which is housed in the BSA Archive.** The BSA has also long supported other types of artists and has an endowed scholarship, the Prince of Wales Bursary for the Arts, that supports an artist to travel and work in Greece each year. This tradition, now expanding with the creation of a new art studio, has led to the establishment of a considerable art collection at the BSA.

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Finally, the School has an important focus in History and Society. One of the founder collections of the School's library, that of the British politician and philhellene George Finlay, includes important

documents and personal papers concerning Greek politics of the time, and Finlay's relationship with other philhellenes including Byron. The study of Anglo-Hellenic relations in the broader context of Mediterranean politics has become a tradition at the BSA. In addition, the School has built up a tradition of anthropology over the 125 years of its operation: the work of Profs. Renee Hirschon and Margaret Kenna on refugee communities are outstanding recent examples of this work.

## **Part II**

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125 years of Anglo-Hellenic research in Greece has led to an impressive number and range of collections held by an otherwise small institution. The collections that have been created are as follows:

**Knossos:** here the School maintains the Stratigraphic Museum as the repository for materials from excavations in the Knossos area, from systematic research in the palace itself to local rescue excavations and materials collected in the on-going field survey of the Knossos valley. All materials are stored, catalogued and are made available to researchers for study and publication following the granting of permits.

**Athens Museum:** on our main premises we host a small private museum of artefacts collected from early excavations, and donated by travellers and individuals to the School over the years. This serves as a reference collection for students and scholars who pass through the School. It is a responsibility to the Greek state to maintain a complete digital catalogue of the antiquities.

**Fitch Laboratory:** the Laboratory holds two basic types of collections, reference and analytical data. Its reference collections include seed materials for archaeobotanical studies, animal and fish bone for archaeozoological studies, and mineral and soil samples for geoarchaeological studies. In addition, the lab has specialized in ceramic petrology and chemical analysis of archaeomaterials (primarily ceramics and metals) recovered both by BSA and non-BSA projects in Greece and beyond. These analytical data form an important body of research and reference material for scholars in this field.

Finally, the Archive holds a diversity of collections of note. It holds School excavation records, the personal papers of many of the scholars, intellectuals and artists who have passed through the School throughout its history, and in particular the archive of the Byzantine Research Fund as noted above, a unique architectural and historical resource both for Byzantine art history and for the study of the Arts and Crafts Movement. It is also the repository for the works of artists associated with the School, including recipients of the Prince of Wales Bursary. Finally, it holds the School's corporate records, important both for the history of the School as an institution, but also for the projects and works in which it has been engaged, and as part of the historical record of modern Greece.

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These collections, which have grown organically out of numerous strands of research and under the auspices of different personalities, intellectual agendas, financial constraints and historical conditions, now represent both a considerable intellectual boon and an intellectual as well as an administrative and curatorial challenge. The collections have been catalogued and stored in

numerous fashions: paper records, digital records, photographic materials and digital materials as well as purely notional records (information stored only in people's minds). The collections are also diverse in nature, crossing the disciplines and scope of museum, archival and analytic data. It is for this reason that in 2009 we launched *Museums and Archives Online*, a five year programme to consolidate the various data in our numerous collections into one relational database system from which to manage and disseminate these important works. In the summer of 2009 we decided on the procurement of the EMU software as the best available to meet the diverse needs of these collections.

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In the Autumn of 2009 we carried out an initial migration of four collections into the EMU system which include: the Stratigraphical Museum Catalogue, the Athens Museum Catalogue, the Fitch Seeds Reference Collection, and the Byzantine Research Fund Catalogue. In addition to migrating the data, together with the EMU team we implemented the standard web portal of EMU to display our collections to the public at large and researchers in particular.

With the migration now both successful and complete, it is useful to look back on the process to highlight some of the challenges faced in moving these collections into one unified system.

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The first challenge came in choosing the appropriate fields into which to migrate the former data. Although continuously supported by the EMU team, this process was not straightforward. Interestingly the challenge was almost never finding that a necessary field was missing, but rather to find in the ubiquity of available fields the one that best matched the previous field without having a good knowledge of the system with which to make this judgment. Subsequent migrations, informed by use of the system, should reduce this difficulty.

Another difficulty faced was making the conceptual jump to a RDBMS. While some collections already existed in databases including Access, most collections had a very simple construction. While the many modules of EMU offer a long term return in intellectual and curatorial investment by allowing the full documentation of a range of objects outside the catalogued items (parties, sites etc.), the concept of cataloguing not only items but related items is not culturally ingrained in our curatorial practices. This created difficulty in understanding how these objects would behave in the new system. The migration process generated many related records such as site and party records, a definite net benefit, but one that requires evaluation of the process of managing these new types of object.

This relates to a knock-on difficulty of the migration process. As intended, the process has brought all of our collections into relation. This will bring substantial benefit in terms of relating previously unrelated data in new and fruitful ways, as will be discussed. As an immediate effect, however, it entails an organizational change in making collections management a practice of working together. While collections were managed and curated by excel sheet, log book or word document, particular methodologies and idiosyncrasies were possible that are no longer so in a unified system. Migration exposes inconsistencies in data sets which require first formal intellectual resolution and then actual data cleanup.

This leads to the final challenges we can highlight as arising from migration. First is the need for staff training. While this is part of the general EMU package and the training sessions are both complete and well taught, training must extend beyond a few practice days. For curators and collection managers, whose roles entail many other activities, this commitment can be difficult to maintain. Nevertheless, it is vital to maintain internal knowledge of the logic and structure of the EMU database not only for regular staff to be able to use and manage the system, but also to be able to train temporary workers and interns in data entry and editing. In particular, this knowledge must be well learned before post-migration cleaning can be effectively undertaken using the system tools of EMU. This may leave something to be said for pre-migration cleanup as better practice when possible.

Having highlighted these difficulties, it is important to stress that the BSA is very pleased with the EMU system and staff, and while working on the somewhat onerous task of post-migration cleanup, we are also looking forward to, and planning, using the capabilities of EMU to better manage and disseminate our collections.

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Our first priority is the standardization of information across our collections. This involves the adoption of both internal and external standards, including thesauri. This will be the basis for the cross linking and efficient management of collections. I will take the time to briefly highlight two projects that we hope to undertake with the collections once this has been done, plus a third speculative application of EMU.

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The first project involves the cross linking of our collections. There are many potential links between the data held in the School that have not been made explicit owing to the lack of a proper tool to store this information. EMU releases us from this disadvantage. A good example of the type of cross connections we want to be able to make available to researchers can be given in reference to Knossos. The archive holds the excavation records of a majority of the Knossos excavations (with the exception of those of Evans **kept at the Ashmolean Museum**). The Stratigraphic Museum holds the materials from these excavations. At this point these two collections are separately managed and curated and not interrelated. By agreeing site nomenclature in the database system and by extra research activity on the notebooks we should be able to deliver to a researcher both the notebook for a certain site in Knossos as well as the items held in the Strat. Collection while even being able to link individual digital pages of the notebook to the items referenced in them. There are many other such linking exercises that would prove highly valuable resources to researchers – for example the analytical data of the Fitch laboratory that could be related back to the materials and sites that they come from.

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A second project we wish to undertake is more management focussed. While all of the capabilities do not currently exist in the rights module, we envision expanding it slightly to cover this scenario. In order for material in the collections of the British School to be studied, reprinted, published etc. a permit must be obtained either from the School, the Greek State or both. This process involves

multiple employees at the **School** depending on whose collection the material belongs to, who has rights over the object, and so on. Using the rights and tasks module we envision streamlining and documenting this process from moment of permit application to permit granting. This will not only enable savings in work time, but more importantly will allow us to take a global view of the permits and rights of researchers over different materials, and thus to ensure that materials are made available for study as soon as possible and that the sale of reproduction permissions can be maximised.

Finally, and speculatively, I will mention another possible application of EMU under consideration. The British School is allowed by the Greek state to apply for up to six permits per year for major fieldwork projects including excavation and field survey, as well as for additional study season permits. BSA archaeological projects, when completed, deliver their work for archival preservation to the BSA. Having recently set up our location in Knossos with a VPN connection and remote desktops that are allowing three interns to simultaneously enter data from that remote location, the thought of using EMU to bypass the migration process from project to archive arises. Given the availability of 3G networks throughout Greece, the possibility of setting up the EMU GUI for field archaeological use is not all that outlandish a question. The benefits to archaeological projects would include both a reduction in investment in database design and increased security of their data. The benefits to the School would include mitigating the costs of data migration at a later date. The benefits to researchers would be standardized data sets being collated in one central location and being immediately accessible for research upon publication.

This concludes my thoughts on future uses of EMU, some of the challenges of data migration to the EMU system and a general introduction to the BSA. Thank you for your time and consideration.