

LIMC

The *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* was conceived nearly 20 years ago. Its intention was to publish an encyclopaedia of representations in Greek and Roman art of gods and mythological scenes. They are put in order alphabetically, each article having as full a catalogue as possible, with discussion of literary sources, general summaries and rich illustration. The first double volume appeared in 1981, and further double volumes have appeared regularly every two years. The sixth is due at the end of 1992 and with only two more, by 1996, the Lexicon should be complete. It was and is an ambitious project, the most ambitious since the big German classical encyclopaedia, Pauly-Wissowa, which took the best part of 85 years to complete. Its size can be judged by the fact that each double volume comprises on average about 1000 pages of double columns and 700 to 800 plates. It can of course serve Renaissance scholars no less than scholars of Classical antiquity, and among the latter not only iconographers, but students of literature and religion.

In many respects it is likely to prove to be the last of the major classical publications in the old style. When it was conceived, the value of the computer for publication was hardly recognised, and although computers have been increasingly used in the editing and back-up work for the Lexicon, they have not determined the methods of editing and production as they certainly would if the project had begun today. For the Lexicon the style of production is perhaps no bad thing. The work depends very heavily on illustration which is why each double volume carries so many plates carrying over 3000 pictures. The computing world is by now, of course, busily engaged in recording pictures as well as in the problems of transmitting them as freely as text, but there is a difference between the needs of scholars who require information on specific objects or subjects, and the value of rapid comparison of a wide range of images under many different heads, and even the uncontrolled and therefore unprogrammable search for possibly relevant material. It is perhaps unlikely that the computer will ever easily replace the book for such work, unless we envisage individual working spaces supplied with a battery of screens for each scholar, and even then open-minded browsing probably remains impossible.

There are nevertheless several features about the Lexicon which are relevant to our subject — not so much technological, but ones that concern the broader principles on which classical archaeologists work.

1. With regard to the technology I have already remarked the problems of research workers who require multiplicity of images and who depend, as indeed

we all do, on ready and uncontrolled access to sight of material whose potential importance is totally unpredictable. There is, however, the simple fact that traditional publication cannot deal with the enormous number of potentially important images. The Lexicon has by now built up, and continues to build up, a library of photographs of iconographic importance which is unrivalled in the world. That this, and the relevant text data, should one day be made accessible to scholars on-line is certainly a desirable objective, and not unattainable given the technology expected to be available in a few years time. But it involves a major new research enterprise since the present project is totally devoted to the production of the books and cannot deviate from that. Here, however, there is great potential for the future, adding a dimension to the on-line databases which are the subject of some of the papers of this conference.

2. Of greater importance perhaps is the way in which the Lexicon offers a model for international scholarly collaboration. This operates on two levels - the obvious and practical one of control and financing; and the less easily definable one of the freedom of international scholarship and accessibility of material.

On the practical side, the Lexicon is one of the most ambitious international undertakings in either arts or sciences, and has been recognised as such by the European Science Foundation. It operates from an editorial centre in Basel which is financed by contributions from 23 different national Academies or comparable bodies from countries in all the continents, as well as the J. Paul Getty Trust; and is actively supported by a scientific committee on which there are representatives of 36 different countries. This has produced a readiness to share information often even about unpublished objects. Some countries have been freer about this than others, but a pattern has been set for the future for that free exchange of information on which scholarship thrives, but which has long been constrained by local loyalties and misguided distrust. If we can through our technology share information freely we may also perhaps succeed in breaking down national, regional and personal barriers that have long hampered scholarship.

JOHN BOARDMAN
Ashmolean Museum
Oxford University