

REVIEW–DISCUSSION

The Oxford Classical Dictionary: Third Edition on CD-ROM. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000. £40.00. ISBN 0-19-268767-0.

Although, broadly, information technology is a force with which the traditional humanities are still coming to terms, in many areas it is rapidly becoming a routine source of reference. As the pool of online resources grows bigger and bigger, so the resources become more diverse. We can, at the touch of a button, access the catalogue of any university library in the country (<http://www.niss.ac.uk/lis/opacs.html>), search the British Library (<http://opac97.bl.uk>), or even look for a job (www.jobs.ac.uk). Also available are some of the biggest names in the reference literature. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (www.oed.com), for example, has now been joined on CD-ROM, although not (yet) the internet, by the new third edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. The *OCD* has been a cornerstone of classical studies in the English speaking world since the first edition of 1949. The newly released third edition, edited by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, promises to continue this tradition into the 21st century. However, the general philosophy of the third edition, and its release on CD, raise specific academic issues, as well as general questions about the role—and possibilities—of new media and ‘weightless technology’ in the traditional humanities.

The first question: why? Apart from the obvious reasons of bulk volume and convenience (although these in themselves hold some merit), why take a standard reference work like the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* and put it on CD at all? With its ‘Research Desk’, its ‘Gallery’, its ‘Binders’, with its icons with labels like ‘Context’ and ‘Highlight’, and its ‘Search Filters’ and ‘Full Text Searching’, is this not vastly overcomplicating what should be a straightforward case of going to a shelf and looking up an entry from an alphabetical list? Or do the advantages of quick reference and slim-line packaging outweigh the relative complexities of using a computer rather than a book?

The answer depends on who you are and what you are looking for. For somebody new to classical studies, or for a classical researcher seeking information outside their own field, enhanced search facilities and a compact format may have much to recommend them. In theory, the provision of such facilities with a work as established and reputable as the *OCD* could produce great benefits. On the other hand, the process of starting up the computer, inserting the CD, waiting for it to initialise, selecting the appropriate menu and scroll bar, and only *then* being able to look up an article, is likely to prove very cumbersome and unnecessary for a scholar in the field

who knows exactly where to go and what to look for anyway. The general reader is therefore the yardstick by which the digital *OCD* should be judged.

Accordingly, the package is clearly designed with user-friendliness at the forefront. Like most CD-based software packages, installation is very straightforward, as is the initial main menu, offering you 'Books', 'Search', 'Gallery', 'Binders', 'Library', and access to an online Bookstore. You select the *OCD* from the 'Books' menu, and there it is—a scroll-down menu with the headwords of all 6,250 entries in alphabetical listing. Scroll down, and select or type in your subject, and it appears in a view pane on the right, in just the form it would in the paper book. Cross references are given in the form of hyperlinks to other headwords. Clicking on one (as on the internet) takes you directly to the relevant article: this a fast and convenient device. The 'Binders' facility is also very useful, being similar to folders on a normal computer desktop environment. It is possible to save individual articles into different binders: for example, one could save 'Mycenaean Language', 'Mycenaean Civilization' and 'Minoan Civilization' into a single binder and entitle it 'Aegean Prehistory'. This allows researchers immediate access to all entries that are relevant to different areas of their work. They would then be able to make written annotations 'in the margin' while avoiding the wrath of their librarian, by making on-screen notes which are stored with the article under its heading.

One clear advantage—indeed, the main advantage—the CD-ROM version has over its paper counterpart is the search facility. This has basic and advanced provision for search by title, keyword or author. A simple 'full text' search will look through the entire text of the dictionary for a particular word, and display the results in descending order of the frequency of the word in an article. The results can also be displayed in alphabetical order. This is particularly useful for one researching a topic with a large number of articles in which the keyword appears. A full text search of the word 'Homer', for example, yields 477 headwords. An alphabetical search allows the user to find any article containing the word immediately and cross-refer to it. For example, it enables one interested in 'ball games' in Homer to go instantly to the relevant references (in this case, *Odyssey* 6.100 and 8.370) by selecting the headword 'ball games' from the list generated by a search using 'Homer'. On the other hand, a more general researcher may want only the most relevant articles, as defined by the number of occurrences of the word in the article (although, for large subject areas, an alphabetical list of secondary references is generated after the initial list). Thus, a 'by score' search using the word 'goths' generates a list with 'goths' at the top and 'St Saba' at the bottom (of the initial list). These two search facilities offer a flexible and powerful research tool. The more advanced search options, however, are not as useful. There is, for example, a tool to search a pre-selected passage of

highlighted text, but it is not always possible to highlight certain passages, and no explanation is given for this. The 'search by title' option, which allows the user to search the headwords and titles of the dictionary, seems superfluous, given that it is far easier to browse the alphabetical list of entries.

A further feature, provided by the Versabook format which powers the digital *OCD*, has a 'Talking Book' function in its 'Library Page'. This facility 'reads out' any article in a kind of flat, digitised drawl of indeterminate accent. The pronunciation needs some adaptation for work in the classical field—for example, it pronounces 'Mycenaean' 'Missananian', and 'Philip II' 'Philip eeh-eeh'—and it is rather difficult to comprehend at first. But, once you get used to the inflection and pronunciation, it is quite easily understandable, and will be welcomed by users with visual impairments.

Finally, another advantage of the digital version which will be appreciated especially by the general reader and the specialist looking for references outside his or her area, is the facility to identify immediately the full name of the author of the article. Whereas, in the paper version, identifying a person represented by an unfamiliar set of initials would involve looking in a separate list arranged in order of surname initial, in the digital version one simply holds the mouse pointer over the initials of the author, and their name and institution pops out in an on-screen box.

It is an inconvenience that the CD has to be physically in the drive in order for the program to function. If the program is being used in conjunction with another CD-ROM (for example, the digital *Oxford English Dictionary* which, likewise, has to be physically in the computer to function), you are constantly swapping between CDs. The program has to be shut down when the CD is removed and restarted when it is replaced. Cumbersome this may be, but it is understandable, given that it prevents, or at least strongly discourages, the software piracy to which enterprises such as this are so vulnerable.

Overall, all well and good. The digital format of the *OCD* CD-ROM is user-friendly, easily accessible to the non-, or at least semi-computer-literate user, easy in cross-referencing, possible to annotate, simple to search for any angle, keyword or headword, and nicely laid out. At least for a general reader, these will be incentives to invest. But what of the content? Hornblower and Spawforth have made a number of significant changes to the 1970 second edition of N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard which need discussion.

In their preface, Hornblower and Spawforth 'reject the sharp distinction made in the Preface to the second edition between "classical" and "archaeological".' They have sought to recognise the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of classical studies since 1970, while retaining the emphasis on the factual record, which has always formed the heart of the *OCD*'s usefulness.

In practice, this has taken the form of more ‘thematic’ entries, focusing on more general and theoretical aspects of classical antiquity. For example, in the new edition are P. Cartledge and D. Konstan’s entry on ‘Marxism and classical antiquity’, A. Richlin’s entry on ‘sexuality’, and J. T. Vallance’s article on ‘anthropology.’ Such new entries seek to reflect the growing diversity of the classical field, while retaining the ‘core’ entries, which will remain the main point of factual reference for workers in more traditional areas. On this latter point, the editors indicate, in particular, H. T. Wade-Gery’s article on Thucydides, the only article to remain unchanged since the first edition of 1949, but which has been supplemented in the third edition with articles by S. Hornblower, A. W. Gomme and P. J. Rhodes updating the reader on research since 1970.

The blurring of the line between the purely ‘classical’ and ‘archaeological’ is not just a disciplinary issue, it is also chronological. In his *OCD* definition of ‘archaeology, classical’, A. Snodgrass defines ‘the archaeology of early Greece—at any rate down to the late bronze age—as lying outside the scope of classical archaeology.’ For Italy, ‘classical archaeology’ does not begin before the iron age. This leads inevitably to a rather confusing debate, centring on terminology. Should a topic not defined as ‘classically archaeological’ have any place at all in a ‘classical dictionary’? Can this definition extend to the prehistory of the Aegean and Italy? In the third edition, there are good treatments (to name the main entries) of ‘Mycenaean Civilisation’, ‘Mycenae’ and ‘Tiryns’ (O. T. Dickinson), ‘Pylos’ (O. T. Dickinson and S. Hornblower), ‘Mycenaean Language’ (J. Chadwick) and, on the Cretan side, ‘Minoan Civilisation’ (J. Bennet); ‘Minoan scripts’ refers the reader to J. Chadwick’s ‘Pre-alphabetic scripts (Greece)’. This inclusion of the archaeology of early Greece, particularly the mainland, shows a trend which is to be welcomed. Minoan studies, however, remain underrepresented. The entry for ‘Cnossus’ describes a ‘town on Crete [which] flourished from the 9th to the 6th cent’, apparently disregarding the middle and late bronze age flourish of eight to five centuries before that. It is true that, given that there is *no* entry for Cnossus in the second edition,¹ this is a clear improvement. In the third edition, however, there are still no entries for the major Minoan palatial centres of Malia, Phaistos and Zakro.

The editors of the third edition have dispensed with the cross-referencing tool used in the second, by which ‘names, etc. which are not titles of entries in the dictionary’ are listed in the back. This twenty page list of names, directing the reader to relevant topics that are listed as headwords, is regarded by Hornblower and Spawforth as ‘useful in theory [but] not much

¹ Although there is in the first, presumably inspired in part by the publication fourteen years earlier of the final volume of A. J. Evans’s *Palace of Minos at Knossos*.

used in practice.’ For example, a researcher wishing to look up ‘Polyphontes’ would be directed, via this list, to ‘Messenia’. It seems fair to say that this tool does have limited use in practice, and a good case can be made for its redundancy, especially given the new powers of search and cross-reference provided by the CD-ROM version. Instead, ‘signpost’ references are given in the list of headwords. For example, the word ‘generals’ appears in the list of headwords, but it directs the user to the articles on ‘dux’, ‘imperator’, ‘strategoi’ etc. This is a useful innovation for the *OCD*, incorporating two lengthy alphabetical lists into one.

Finally, a simple yet obvious improvement is in the arrangement of Roman proper names in the general alphabetical listing. Instead of being listed by cognomen, the nomen is used as the keyword. The example used by the editors in their preface amply illustrates the sense of this. In the second edition the brothers of the *gens* Aemilia—Paullus and Lepidus—appear under P and L, rather than A. In the third edition, all the Aemilii are listed under A, their names descending in alphabetical order of cognomen. In the transliteration of names, especially Greek, tradition has been adhered to: the standard Latinised version is used throughout, avoiding confusion.

In conclusion, the aim of this third *OCD* on CD-ROM is plain: to increase accessibility to the general reader through the twin means of the CD-ROM format and the philosophy governing its content. In this, the third edition may be judged a success. The standardised system of menus and scroll bars, the help and tutorial facilities, and the large, simple to use toolbar, as well as the general user-friendliness of the package ensures that it can be easily used by those not well-versed in computing. On the content side, the new, more ‘thematic’ and generalised entries will appeal to the wider readership, as well as to scholars from outside the discipline and to interdisciplinary classicists working outside their specialised field. The powerful and flexible search facilities add to this appeal, as will features such as the ready identification of names and institutions of authors and the ‘signpost’ entries. This is to be welcomed, particularly for the possibilities it offers outside higher education, such as in schools. On the other hand, it is difficult to envisage many classicists whose work is all or nearly all contained within a single ‘traditional’ area investing in the CD-ROM. For people who know what they are looking for from the start, using the paper version will be far less effort. However, because it has the potential to carry the information to a wider audience, while retaining its traditional factual aspects, the CD-ROM version is a very positive step in the *OCD*’s development. At the same time,

sub-disciplines not previously classified as ‘classical’, but which are nonetheless relevant to classical studies, are being included. May this combination be maintained and developed in the fourth edition.

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