

Lindsay Allen, "The letter as object: on the experience of Achaemenid letters", *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 56, 2013 : 21-36

Abstract

This paper arises from research undertaken as part of the AHRC-funded project, 'Communication, Language and Power in the Achaemenid empire: the correspondence of the satrap Arshama'. The project enabled a reengagement with the letters, sealings, and bag purchased in the 1940s by the Bodleian Library from the estate of the archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt. The discussion explores two parallel approaches to reconstructing the three-dimensional function of Achaemenid letters. First, technical variations in letter format and state of preservation reveal a range of physical interactions with letters, both open and closed. Second, Greek prose representations of Persian history imagine letters as objects working with their messengers within Achaemenid (usually royal) communications. This focus on the letter as object prompts us to hypothesize social, performative, and oral elements within the epistolary system.