

About IDP

- [Background](#)
- [History](#)
- [Achievements](#)
- [Collaborating Members](#)
- [IDP Centres](#)
- [The Future](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

'The International Dunhuang Project is an amazing example of the importance, power and potential inherent in digital collaboration. This project provides resources to all levels of users from schoolchildren to post-doctoral researchers. It offers a springboard for collaboration and is an inspiration for other cross-cultural, multidimensional library-related websites.'

([The Journal of Web Librarianship](#) , 1.1 (November 2007): 121-22.)

Background



Little was known of the remarkable heritage of the Silk Road until explorers and archaeologists of the early twentieth century uncovered the ruins of ancient cities in the desert sands, revealing astonishing sculptures, murals and manuscripts. One of the most notable discoveries was the Buddhist cave library near the oasis town of Dunhuang on the edge of the Gobi desert in western China. The cave had been sealed and hidden at the end of the first millennium AD and only re-discovered in 1900. Forty thousand manuscripts, paintings and printed documents on paper and silk were found in the cave itself. Tens of thousands more items were excavated from other Silk Road archaeological sites. These unique items have fascinating stories to tell of life on this great trade route from 100 BC to AD 1400. Yet most were dispersed to institutions worldwide in the early 1900s, making access difficult.

- [TOP](#)

History



The turmoil of the twentieth century meant that conservation and cataloguing were delayed, further hindering access. Following a conference in 1993 to discuss the problem of preservation and access, The International Dunhuang Project (IDP) was formed in 1994 with external funds out of a desire by the holding institutions to work together to rectify this by reuniting all these artefacts through the highest quality digital photography, by coordinating international teams of conservators, cataloguers and researchers to ensure the objects' preservation and cataloguing, and by pushing the limits of new web technologies to make this material accessible to all.

IDP's directorate was established at the British Library and it has centres in [China](#) , [Russia](#) , [Japan](#)

,
[Germany](#)

,
[France](#)

and

[Korea](#)

(see below). A

[newsletter](#)

started to be published in 2004. IDP continues to be largely externally funded.

Much of IDP's early work focused on conservation and cataloguing, both of which remain core [activities](#)

. These have been supplemented in the past few years with digitisation,

[education](#)

and

[research](#).

IDP started digitising the manuscripts in 1997 with the aim of bringing together the collections in virtual space. Its web site went online in October 1998 and allows free access to the

[IDP DATABASE](#)

with high-quality images of the manuscripts and other material, with cataloguing and contextual information. In this way, Silk Road material is becoming increasingly available to academic and general users alike.

A history of the first ten years of IDP is given in [IDP News 24](#) . You can also view major activities on the

[IDP timeline](#) .

- [TOP](#)

Achievements

- IDP is the largest and most successful project of its kind, providing information on tens of thousands of paintings, artefacts, textiles, manuscripts, historical photographs and maps as well as cataloguing and contextual information. More data is added to the site every day (see

[statistics](#)

). All the data and images are freely accessible to all.

[Search the IDP database here](#)

.

- IDP has [local centres](#) in [London](#) , [Beijing](#) , [Dunhuang](#) , [St Petersburg](#) , [Kyoto](#) , and [Be](#)

[rlin](#)

training local staff to use the latest digitisation and computer equipment and sharing conservation and scientific advances among all.

- IDP resources were an essential part of the British Library's 2004 exhibition: ['The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith'](#), which explored cultural diversity and interaction on the Silk Road. Exhibits were also borrowed from China, Japan, and Europe, the exhibition attracted over 150,000 visitors.
- IDP has held regular international conservation conferences, hosted by its members, to discuss the best methods of conservation of the materials, and has published the proceedings of several of these. [See Conservation Projects here](#).
- [TOP](#)

Collaborating Members

The following institutions are involved in IDP's work, as founder members or collaborating institutions.

- [The British Library](#), London
- [The British Museum](#), London
- [The Victoria and Albert Museum](#), London
- [The Chester Beatty Library](#), Dublin
- [The National Library of China](#), Beijing
- [The Dunhuang Academy](#), Dunhuang
- [Academia Sinica](#), Taipei
- [The Institute of Oriental Studies](#), St. Petersburg
- [The National Museum of India](#), New Delhi
- [Ryukoku University](#), Kyoto
- [State Library](#), Berlin
- [Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities](#), Berlin
- [Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris](#)
- [Musée Guimet](#), Paris
- [The National Museum of Ethnography](#), Stockholm
- The Sven Hedin Foundation, Stockholm
- [The Freer Gallery of Art](#), Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC
- [University of California at Los Angeles](#)
- [Princeton University](#), (Gest Library and Art Museum), Princeton
- [The Morgan Library](#), New York
- [Research Institute of Korean Studies](#), Seoul
- [Old Tibetan Documents Online \(OTDO\)](#), Japan

- [TOP](#)

IDP Centres

IDP London



IDP London, located at the British Library and established in 1994, acts as the directorate of IDP. It maintains the IDP database and web site and carries out fundraising. It coordinates the conservation, cataloguing, digitisation and research of the Central Asian manuscripts in the British Library [collections](#) in liaison with British Library conservators and curators as well as scholars worldwide. It has its own digitisation studio using the latest [digital backs on high-format cameras](#), as well as staff specialising in conservation, cataloguing, research and education. It is largely externally funded.

IDP London also hosts the images and metadata of other collaborating institutions which do not have their own IDP website, such as the [British Museum](#) and [Princeton University](#).



IDP Beijing

IDP Beijing was established in 2001 at the [National Library of China \(NLC\)](#) to coordinate the conservation, cataloguing and digitisation of the Central Asian [collections in China](#) in liaison with NLC conservators and curators and Chinese scholars. It is part of the [Rare Books and Manuscript Section](#). It has research and inputting staff and a digitisation studio. It maintains a [Chinese version of the website](#).

IDP Dunhuang



[IDP St Petersburg](#) was established in 2004 at the [Institute of Oriental Studies \(IOS\)](#), St Petersburg Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences to coordinate the conservation, cataloguing and digitisation of the Central Asian [collections](#) in St Petersburg in liaison with IOS conservators and curators and Russian scholars. It has research and inputting staff and a digitisation studio. It maintains the [Russian version of the website](#).

IDP St Petersburg

IDP St Petersburg was established in 2004 at the [Institute of Oriental Studies \(IOS\)](#), St Petersburg Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences to coordinate the conservation, cataloguing and digitisation of the Central Asian [collections](#) in St Petersburg in liaison with IOS conservators and curators and Russian scholars. It has research and inputting staff and a digitisation studio. It maintains the [Russian version of the website](#).

IDP Kyoto

IDP Kyoto was established in 2004 at [Ryukoku University](#), Kyoto to coordinate the conservation, cataloguing and digitisation of the Central Asian [collections](#) in Japan in liaison with University conservators and curators and Japanese scholars. It has research and inputting staff and a digitisation studio. It maintains the [Japanese version of the website](#).



IDP Berlin

IDP Berlin was established in 2005 at the [Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities](#) and [Staatsbibliothek](#) to coordinate the conservation, cataloguing and digitisation of the Central Asian [collections](#) in Berlin in liaison with local conservators and curators and German scholars. It has research and inputting staff. It maintains the [German version of the website](#)

.

IDP Paris

IDP Paris was established in 2008 at the [National Library of France](#) and [Guimet Museum](#) to coordinate the conservation, cataloguing and digitisation of the Central Asian [collections](#) in Paris in liaison with local conservators and curators and French scholars. It has research and inputting staff. It maintains the [French version of the website](#)

.

- [TOP](#)

The Future

The emphasis for the medium term is to continue IDP's core [activities](#) of conserving, cataloguing, digitising and researching the manuscripts and artefacts and to utilise these resources to build up greater awareness of Central Asian history and culture worldwide. By 2015, we aim to have catalogued, digitised, and made 90% of the collections freely available online for anyone to use. We hope to have established further collaborations with other centres in China, India, Korea and the US. We also aim to develop a greatly enhanced [education and outreach programme](#) to bring this unique resource to schoolchildren and scholars worldwide.

IDP is largely externally funded and relies on your support to enable this work. If you would like to help IDP achieve these aims [please give us your support](#) . To be kept informed of our progress [sign up](#) to receive our [newsletter](#)

- [TOP](#)

Contact Us

[Click here to contact IDP](#)

- [TOP](#)