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DocuMentality: New Approaches to Written Documents in Imperial Life and Literature

In the Roman Empire, documents – letters, contracts, laws, testaments, and inscriptions – were an important part of everyday life, and extended their influence even into the world of Greek and Roman literature. The DocuMentality conference, to be held in September 2016, will convene classicists working on documents ‘real’ and literary to explore the height of the documentary habit in the imperial period. Some questions we look forward to investigating include: (i) what aesthetic and material features made ancient documents ‘documentary’, (ii) how fictitious documents engaged with the characteristics of real documents in classical literature, and (iii) why documents were used (and abused) in antiquity. With a series of presentations by leading experts and rising scholars, this conference offers a unique opportunity to explore ancient attitudes towards information and authority at the crossroads of reality and imagination.

The principal aim of the DocuMentality conference is to establish lines of communication and intellectual exchange between Stanford University and centers of documentary study at French institutions, such as the Laboratoire HiSoMA in Lyon. The research presented at this event and the conversations it sparks will lay the foundations for future study between Francophone and American classicists.