

# CULTURES of KNOWLEDGE



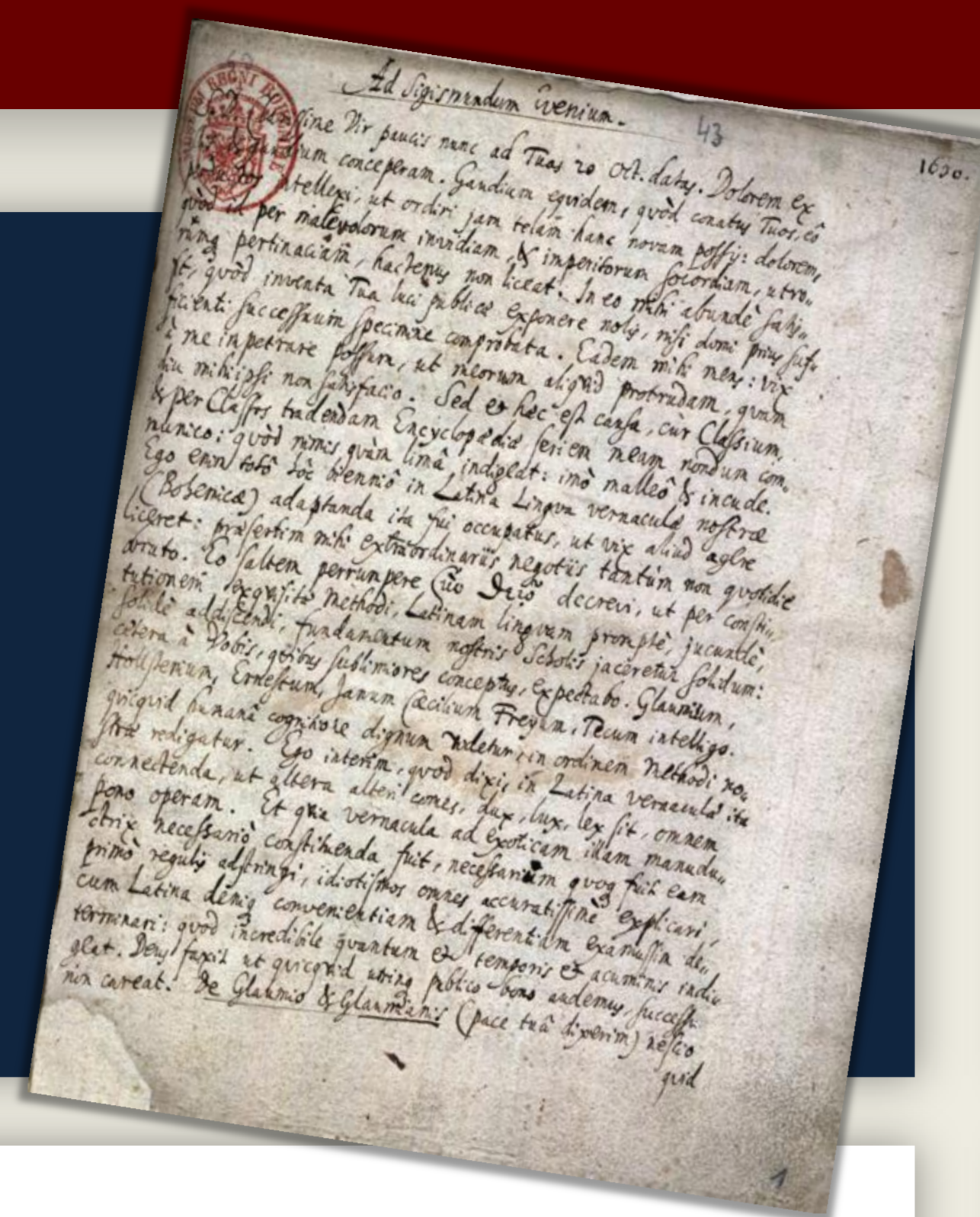
## An Intellectual Geography of the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters

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### Project Background: Networking Correspondence

Established in January 2009 with generous funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Cultures of Knowledge: An Intellectual Geography of the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters is a collaboration between the Humanities Division and Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford. Building on recent interpretative trends within the history of science, we are using a variety of methods to reconstruct the local, national, and international networks of learned correspondence which are now understood to have been central to the revolutionary intellectual developments of the seventeenth century. We are funded until September 2012, and are pursuing our objectives in collaboration with a number of partner institutions in the UK and mainland Europe, including the University of Sheffield, the University of Wales, and the Czech Academy of Sciences. Our activities can be grouped into three main strands:



### Strand 1: Editorial Projects

A first task is to make the letters of several early modern intellectuals more accessible to scholarship via a series of editorial projects. Correspondences to be calendared and edited (\*) include those of:

- Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670) c.800 letters
- Samuel Hartlib (1600-62) c.4,700 letters
- John Wallis (1616-1703)\* c.1,700 letters
- John Aubrey (1626-97)\* c.850 letters
- Edward Lhwyd (1660-1709)\* c.2,500 letters
- Martin Lister (1639-1712)\* c.900 letters

We have also digitised and are editing the card catalogue of early modern epistolary holdings in the Bodleian Library, of which c.26,000 records detail scholarly letters from the seventeenth century.



### Strand 2: Events

Alongside and informing these editorial initiatives, a rich programme of academic meetings – held in Oxford and elsewhere – is refining analytical frameworks for interpreting seventeenth-century correspondence networks and consolidating an international community around their investigation:

- Three workshops in Prague, Cracow, and Budapest (pictured) have identified a younger generation of scholars and explored the east central European dimensions of epistolary networks.
- An annual seminar at Oxford is showcasing a series of correspondence-related projects and case studies from mainland Europe and further afield.
- Three conferences at Oxford will combine themes and participants from previous meetings to develop new models for the data collected. Now booking: **Universal Reformation: Intellectual Networks in Central and Western Europe, 1560-1670** (St Anne's College, 21-23 September 2010).



### Strand 3: Online Union Catalogue

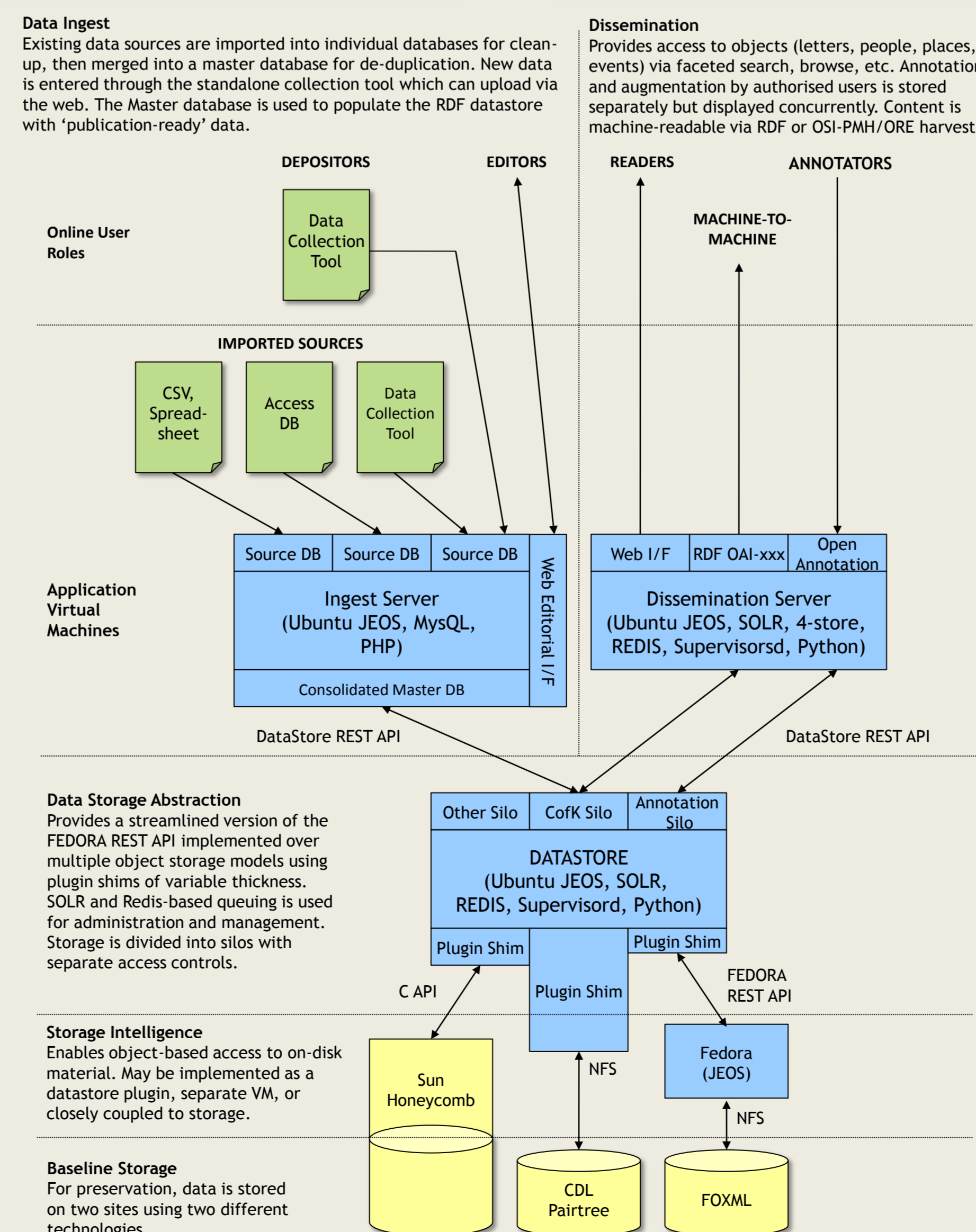
The metadata generated by our editorial initiatives will also be gathered within a single, standardised framework to form the nucleus of a scalable and sustainable online union catalogue of intellectual correspondences. Designed and mounted by colleagues in Systems and e-Research Service of Bodleian Libraries, this will represent a growing centralised inventory of letters to which scholars can contribute (and search across) extensive catalogues, small calendars, as well as transcriptions and scans where these have been generated. From its beta launch in September 2010 this will combine:

- Metadata on the letters in the six project calendars c.11,000 letters
- Metadata on seventeenth-century Bodleian letters c.26,000 letters

The catalogue, which will be refined and augmented throughout the lifetime of the Project, is underpinned by the following core dimensions:

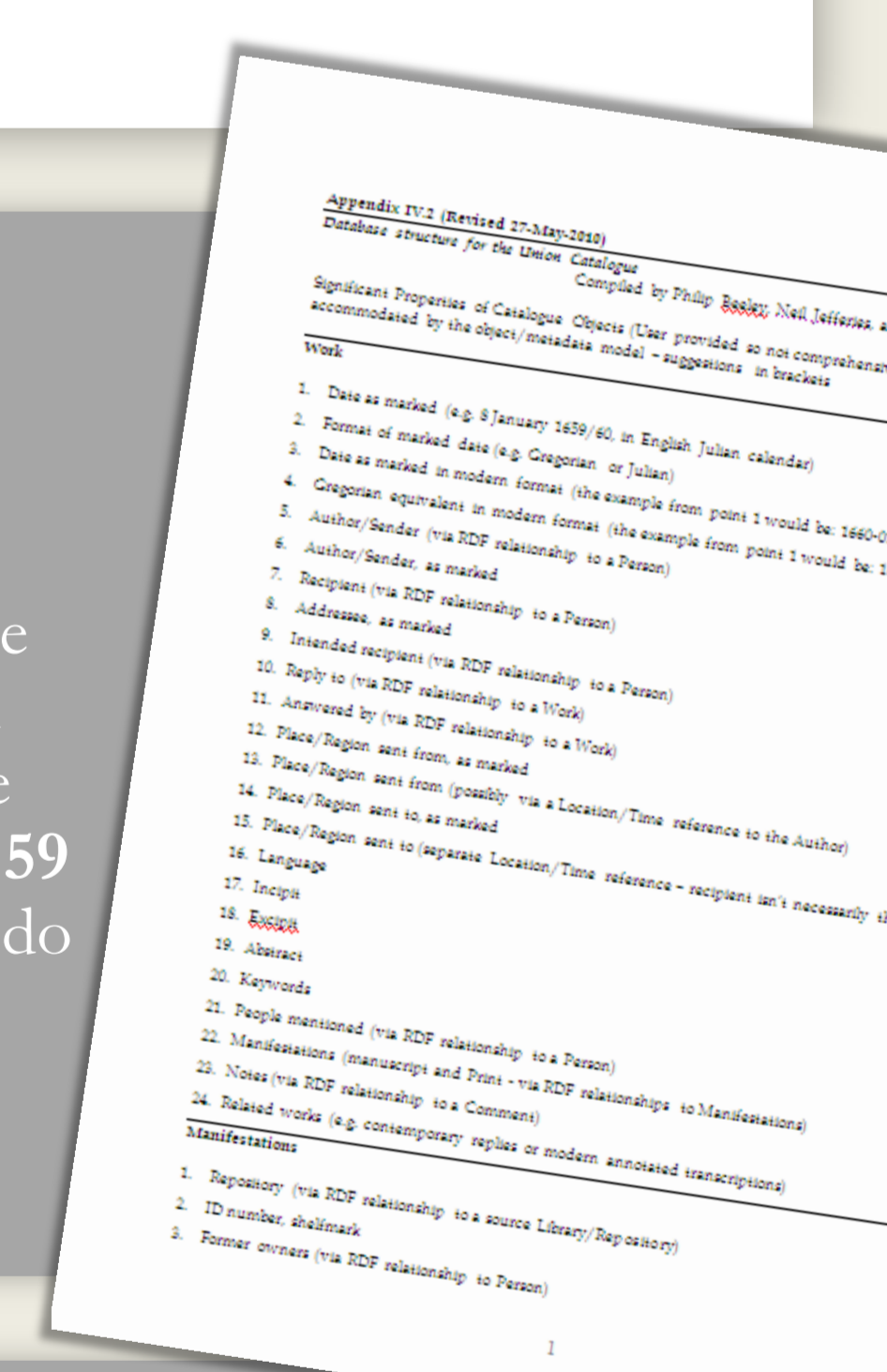
### 3 a) System Architecture

All metadata will be incorporated into a single object store within the Digital Asset Management System (DAMS), developed as a platform to support digital library projects within Oxford. Predicated on FEDORA and RDF, the DAMS represents a robust and flexible framework which can be adapted to changing demands and technologies and anticipates the modification and reuse of content by a dispersed scholarly network. All material and metadata in the open-access portion of the DAMS are accessible via OAI-PMH and OAI-ORE standards, while each layer of the system is abstracted from the others using well-defined APIs to allow components to be updated with minimal impact to the overall system, enhancing longevity. Support for many-to-many relationships between components permits the effective scaling of the system as the volume of content grows. Support for scholarly tools such as RSS/Atom feeds, Zotero eCitation, and integration with iGoogle are provided as part of the basic feature set. It is illustrated schematically on the right.



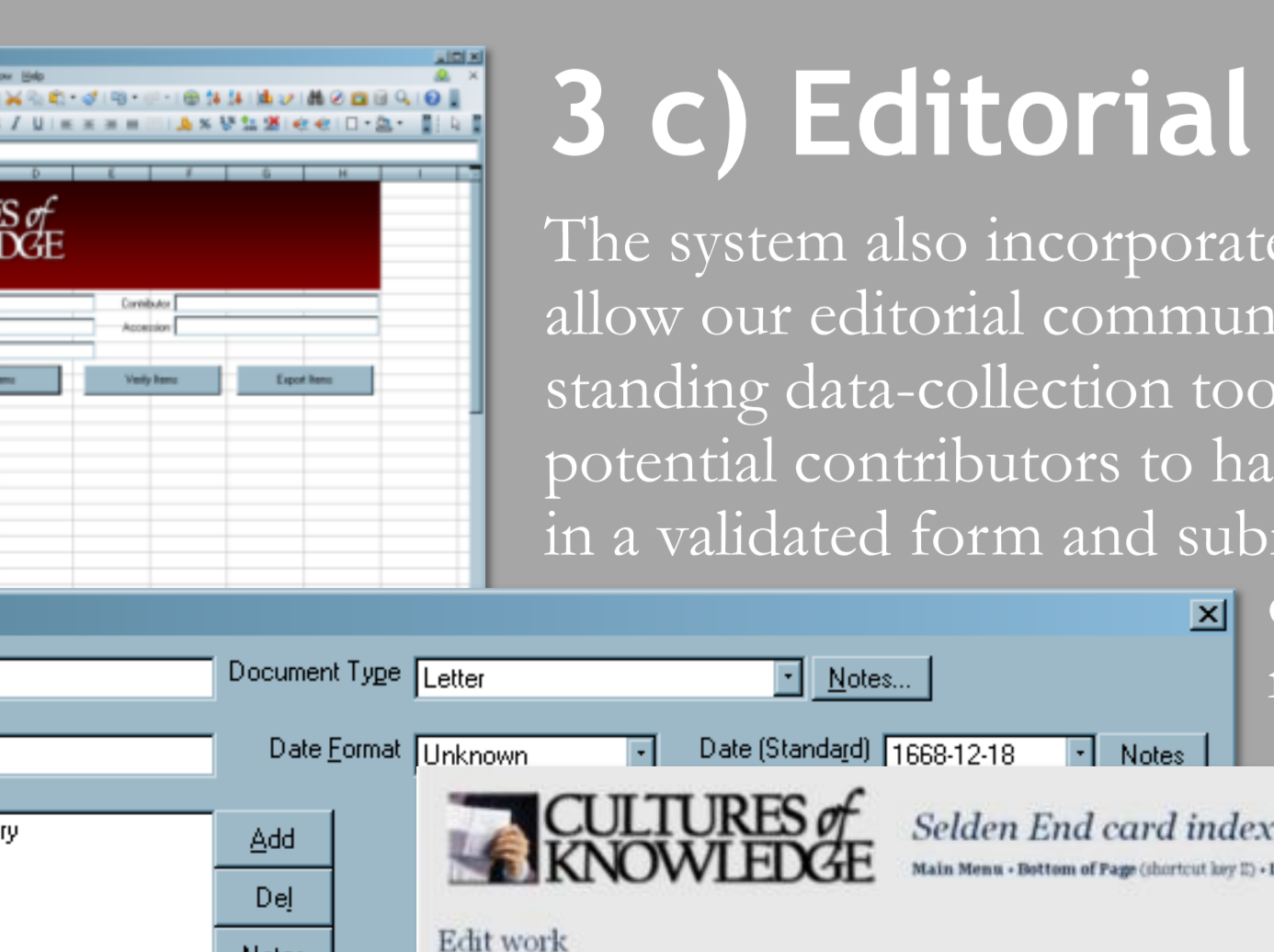
### 3 b) Metadata Standards

Each catalogue component (or letter) will be stored within the DAMS as a single FEDORA object, which will be rendered discoverable and filtered by a variety of overlaying indexes. The Project has devoted considerable resources to specifying the significant properties of early modern letters in consultation with our scholarly and technical teams based locally, our existing collaborators, as well as new partners (see below). The latest iteration of the object model – or database structure – contains 59 fields (organised into Work, Manifestations, and Agents), although contributors do not have to complete all of these and only a minimal data set of 8 fields are compulsory: Date as Marked; Author/Sender; Recipient; Place/Region Sent From; Place/Region Sent To; Language; Source; and Record Creator.



### 3 c) Editorial Tools & Enhancements

The system also incorporates a diverse suite of editorial tools. A web-based interface will allow our editorial community to correct, modify, and enhance uploaded records. A free-standing data-collection tool (based on Open Office) will allow a wider network of potential contributors to harvest basic data on additional early modern letter collections in a validated form and submit it via the web for editorial review. In this way, the union catalogue will enable both the ongoing refinement of existing records, and the addition of metadata on wholly new correspondences, in an organic, distributed, and sustainable fashion.



### 3 d) Workshops & Partnerships

A wide range of projects and institutions have an active interest in the digitisation of early modern correspondences. As such, international cooperation is crucial to developing unified standards for describing and preserving epistolary data (see above), and for ensuring that the systems we are engaged in developing will be interoperable in the longer term. From the outset the Project has facilitated dialogue between different initiatives at a series of day-long technical workshops. These meetings have led to the formation of a global consortium, which includes Mapping the Republic of Letters (Stanford) and The Circulation of Knowledge (Huygens Institute) among its participants.

