

<b>Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, Case 16 (2022-2023) Autograph verses in Greek by Samuel Taylor Coleridge</b>	
<b>Statement from Expert Adviser</b>	Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the manuscript meets Waverley criterion one.  <b>See below</b>
<b>Statement from the Applicant</b>	Statement from the applicant referencing the three Waverley criteria against which the Committee will consider whether an item referred to it is of national importance.  a) <i>Is it so closely connected with our history and national life that its departure would be a misfortune?</i> b) <i>Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance?</i> c) <i>Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?</i>  <b>See below</b>
<b>Note of case hearing</b>	<b>See below</b>
<b>Press release</b>	A press release was issued by the Secretary of State on 17 March 2023  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/news/anti-slavery-manuscript-in-ancient-greek-by-coleridge-at-risk-of-leaving-uk">https://www.gov.uk/government/news/anti-slavery-manuscript-in-ancient-greek-by-coleridge-at-risk-of-leaving-uk</a>
<b>Recommended price</b>	£20,400 (plus VAT of £4.080 which can be reclaimed by an eligible institution)
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Deferral period</b>	16 May 2023
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Deferral period</b>	
<b>Note of outcome</b>	

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1. Brief Description of item(s)

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge autograph manuscript poem**, 'Sors misera servorum in insulis Indiae occidentalis' [Ode on The West-Indian Slave Trade], signed and dated 16 June 1792. 6 pages, 4to, written on rectos only, stab-stitched, with some patches of browning.

The poem, a Greek Sapphic ode in 24 quatrains, laments the fate of slaves on the Middle Passage and won Coleridge the Browne Medal for Classical composition at the University of Cambridge. This copy, containing various differences to the submitted fair copy in the University of Cambridge Archives (the only other known manuscript of the poem), was sent by Coleridge to his brother George. The copy has one or two corrections/revisions and footnote glosses in Latin on 'Hurricanes' and 'Wilberforce', and a pencil note on the metre.

### 2. Context

The manuscript was passed by descent from Rev. George Coleridge; noted as being in the possession of Sir Charles Cave in c.1981; and sold at Sotheby's, London, 24 July 1995 (lot 64).

The manuscript is known to scholars, having been printed in full with collations in Anthea Morrison, 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Greek Prize Ode on the Slave Trade', in J.R. Watson (ed.), *Infinite Complexity: Essays in Romanticism* (1983), p.145-160; and in J.C.C. May's edition of Coleridge's *Poetical Works* (2001).

Coleridge's surviving manuscripts are voluminous and scattered. The largest concentration is held by the British Library, which received in 1951 a gift of some sixty three volumes; the library holds a draft of a short section of 'The Ancient Mariner' but arguably the most famous Coleridge manuscript, regularly displayed in its 'Treasures Gallery', is that of 'Kubla Khan', acquired in 1962.

### 3. Waverley criteria

Waverley 1

The manuscript has a dual connection to our history and national life. Firstly, the manuscript was written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), one of the instrumental leading figures of the Romantic movement in England, whose long-standing literary legacy is of national importance. Secondly, the theme of the manuscript – the abolition of the slave trade – marks a particularly significant time in our national political history, having far reaching legacies which are still relevant today. Intertwined, the manuscript therefore provides important evidence of literary engagement with the abolitionist movement at a pivotal point in our history by one of our foremost Romantic writers. This manuscript is the only known surviving draft of the work. Though the manuscript is not new to scholars, it can be argued that it is of outstanding significance in the fields of literature, biography, and history, as evidence that one of our major national literary figures actively engaged with contemporary debate about the abolition of the slave trade whilst a student at the University of Cambridge. To a degree, the manuscript also demonstrates the institutional attitude of the University of Cambridge towards abolition at that time. The manuscript therefore contributes to our

understanding of Coleridge's life and work, as well as the political and educational climate of the 1790s which still have a powerful resonance today.

## DETAILED CASE

### Detailed description of item(s) if more than in Executive summary, and any comments.

The poet and writer Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) is one of the nation's foremost literary figures. Coleridge played a leading and instrumental role in the highly influential Romantic movement in England. His works, including the poems *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan* (the manuscript of which is regularly displayed as one of the British Library's 'treasures'), had a significant influence on his contemporaries and are still well-known and studied all over the world today. His work as a literary critic was also highly influential and many of his concepts, such as 'suspension of disbelief', are still widely used in critical theory as well as common parlance today.

The manuscript is evidence that, as a young man, Coleridge actively engaged with the debate against the slave trade (at the time, a hugely contentious and debated national topic), siding with the abolitionists. It gives contextual evidence of Coleridge's development as a writer and as a thinker. The poem, a Sapphic ode in Greek on the evils of the slave trade, is Coleridge's response to a subject set by the University of Cambridge's Vice-Chancellor for the Browne Medal for classical composition: the fact that he won (overcoming the technical faults of the work) and recited the poem at the university on Commencement Day, suggests a high degree of institutional sympathy for abolitionism at a politically charged time (coming as it did between the French Revolution and the consequent Reign of Terror). Though some of the leading abolitionists – Wilberforce (who is directly referenced in Coleridge's ode), Clarkson and Peckard – were Cambridge educated and the university sent petitions to the House of Commons against the trade in both 1788 and 1792, the wider implications of the trade on the university have only recently been the topic of a major Legacies of Enslavement inquiry, demonstrating its continued relevance in today's society.

The manuscript is the earlier of only two autograph manuscript copies of the poem (the other being in the archives of the University of Cambridge) and the numerous differences between the draft and fair copy provides unique evidence of the development of the work. As Coleridge sent the manuscript to his brother George, along with a letter saying that it was his most significant poem to date, it also has high biographical value. Though the full poem was never published in Coleridge's lifetime, the first sixteen lines (Translated by Coleridge himself) were published as part of his contribution to Robert Southey's poem *Joan of Arc* (1795) and in *The Destiny of Nations* (1817), his own revised version of those contributions, suggesting a significance to Coleridge beyond simply being a submission for a prize.

The manuscript also gives evidential value of the state of classical education and scholarship in England in the 1790s, which was, at the time, a point of contention among classicists: Coleridge's ode was praised for its sentiments rather than its adherence to the rules of classical Greek (Coleridge himself later admitted its technical deficiency). Nonetheless, the Greek odic form was to provide the basis of some of his best poems, such as 'Dejection: An Ode', and as such his prize winning poem can be seen as a precursor to his later, more accomplished, work as a mature writer.

This manuscript is of outstanding importance both in relation to Coleridge's personal poetic and political development and in relation to a particularly fraught moment in the nation's political history.

## **Applicant's statement**

### ***Application to export the following manuscript:***

S.T. Coleridge, Autograph verses in Greek, on the slave trade, dated 1792.

The first of the Waverley Criteria asks whether an object is 'closely connected with our history and national life', and I think that although Coleridge is beyond doubt an important British poet, verses in Greek – even by him – are unlikely to be considered a work of great significance. Unlike earlier poets, such as Milton, Pope or Cowper, Coleridge's ability in the classical languages is very far down on the list of his qualities: he is barely known for neo-Latin poetry, let alone neo-Greek. A series of verses on any subject, in Greek, by an undergraduate, would have had a minimal effect on any but a very small group of people in the 1790s. The horrors of the slave trade, amongst the thinking public, were by this stage very commonly understood and appreciated, and it was a mere 15 years later that the trade was abolished by Parliament. It would be very hard to argue that Coleridge's contribution could have had any effect on this campaign whatsoever.

The second Waverley Criterion asks whether the object is 'of outstanding aesthetic importance'. Any autograph manuscript of a poet like Coleridge is bound to be of interest, but its aesthetic qualities would surely be agreed by all to be a very small proportion of its importance.

The third Waverley Criterion is perhaps the most relevant here: is the object 'of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history'? There is, as I have said above, no dispute about Coleridge's importance as an English-language poet; and in the very narrow fields of his Greek verse, or his youthful engagement with anti-slavery sentiment, this could be considered worthy of study. Taking his career in the round, however, I think this poem must be considered minor and thus of little significance in the study of his poetry. I would point out that, as an instance, William Keach's edition of *The Complete Poems* (Penguin, 1997) does not include *any* of Coleridge's poetry in Greek or Latin whatsoever.

I would also point out that there is another autograph manuscript of this poem in a highly appropriate national collection, namely Cambridge University Library, among the university archives: this is the official manuscript of the poem, and is four lines longer than the present version.

Furthermore, the poem has been published from that manuscript, by Anthea Morrison, in 1983\*: that publication provides not only a full transcript of the Cambridge MS, but also prints the variants from this MS, to which the scholar had access. It is perhaps of importance that Morrison treats the university's official copy as the primary version, and this one as a secondary one.

\*In J.R. Watson, ed., *Infinite Complexity: essays in Romanticism* (Edinburgh UP, 1983), pp. 145-160.

<b>Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, note of case hearing</b>	
<b>Meeting date</b>	Wednesday 18 January 2023
<b>Object</b>	Autograph manuscript poem on the miseries of the slave trade, 1792 in Greek by Samuel Taylor Coleridge
<b>Expert Adviser's objection</b>	The Keeper of Special Collections, Bodleian Library, had objected to the export of the manuscript under the first Waverley criterion on the grounds that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune because it was so closely connected with our history and national life.
<b>Committee Members &amp; Independent Assessors</b>	Six of the regular eight Committee members were present and able to inspect the manuscripts. They were joined in person by three independent assessors, acting as temporary members of the Committee.
<b>Value on the licence</b>	The value shown on the export licence application was £20,400 which represented the hammer price at auction of £15,000, plus buyer's premium of £3,900 and the agent's commission of £1,500.
	<p>The applicant was informed that there was currently an interim process in place for Committee hearings. The Committee was still holding hybrid meetings but any Committee members, including the independent assessors, were required to attend in person and inspect the object/s under consideration prior to discussing the case and voting. Any permanent Committee members or independent assessors who were not able to attend in person and view the object were not able to vote.</p> <p>The applicant confirmed that the owner understood the circumstances under which an export licence might be refused.</p>
<b>VAT</b>	The applicant confirmed that the value did not include VAT and that VAT of £4,080 would be payable in the event of a UK sale.
<b>Expert Adviser's comments</b>	The expert adviser stated that they had nothing further to add to their submission but reiterated the poem's biographical importance to Coleridge.

	<p>When questioned about the significance of the pencil annotations on the manuscript, the expert adviser indicated that they could be attributed to either Coleridge or his brother, George. He noted that the input of George to this poem would be an interesting point for further scholarship to consider.</p>
<p><b>Applicant's comments</b></p>	<p>The applicant stated that they had nothing further to add to their statement that disputed that the manuscript met the Waverley criteria.</p> <p>When questioned about the rarity of the manuscript, they confirmed that not many Coleridge manuscripts had appeared on the market recently and certainly not any in Greek. They added that Coleridge has been collected for 150 years so one would expect that most of the surviving manuscripts were now in institutions.</p> <p>In response to this, one independent assessor added that there were a large number of Coleridge material in Canada and some at the British Library.</p>
<p><b>Committee's discussion</b></p>	<p>The expert adviser and applicant retired and the Committee discussed the case. They agreed this was a rare early manuscript of great biographical significance to one of Britain's most important Romantic poets. They noted that at the Sotheby's auction at which this manuscript had last sold there had been other Coleridge material consigned by Sir Chares Edward Coleridge Cave. A lot had failed to sell and the rest had sold piecemeal. As a consequence, there was a large collection of letters from Coleridge to his brother George still to be discovered which could increase our knowledge of this important relationship.</p> <p>They noted the importance Coleridge himself placed on this early work, written while he was a student at Jesus College, Cambridge to compete for the 1792 Browne Medal in classical composition (which he won), as a lifelong supporter of the abolitionist movement, as he referred to this poem many times throughout his life. The Committee concluded that this manuscript was of particular importance as an early fair copy, and that it was an important steppingstone in Coleridge's career and demonstrated a connection with other political poetry in his</p>

	oeuvre. The poem's subject, which focused on the incredibly crucial movement in our history around the abolition of slavery, added to its outstanding significance to British history.
<b>Waverley Criteria</b>	The Committee voted on whether the manuscript met the Waverley criteria. Of the nine members, all members voted that it met the first Waverley criterion. Three members voted that it met the third Waverley criterion. The manuscript was therefore found to meet the first Waverley criterion.
<b>Matching Offer</b>	The Committee recommended the sum of £20,400 (plus VAT of £4,080 which can be reclaimed by an eligible institution) as a fair matching price.
<b>Deferral periods</b>	The Committee agreed to recommend to the Secretary of State that the decision on the export licence should be deferred for an initial period of two months. At the end of the first deferral period, if the Arts Council received notification of a serious intention to raise funds with a view to making an offer to purchase the manuscript, the owner will have a consideration period of 15 Business Days to consider such offer(s). The Committee recommended that there should be a further deferral period of three months that would commence following the signing of an Option Agreement.
<b>Communication of findings</b>	The expert adviser and the applicant returned. The Chairman notified them of the Committee's decision on its recommendations to the Secretary of State.  The expert adviser agreed to act as champion if a decision on the licence was deferred by the Secretary of State.