

# Back to the Future: Annotating, Collaborating and Linking in a Digital Ecosystem

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**Abstract.** Classical philology has rarely been a self-enclosed discipline: in order to interpret Greek and Latin texts, it is necessary to place them in context—grounding them in the histories of the time and exploring them in and against those cultural horizons. Using the linking potential of the Web, Pelagios Commons (<http://commons.pelagios.org/>) has been pioneering a means of digital ‘mutual contextualization’, whereby any online document—be it a text, map, database or image—can be connected to another simply by virtue of having something in common with it, and then draw on this external content to enrich its own, or in turn be drawn upon by and enrich another. In Pelagios this linking is achieved through the method of annotating places. From having originally been seeded in collaboration with partners who already curated data and had the technical know-how to align datasets, Pelagios Commons now offers any researcher, librarian, museum curator, student or member of the public a simple, intuitive means to encode place information in a document of their choosing.

This presentation will set out and explain this annotation process in the Web-based, Open Source platform, Recogito (<http://recogito.pelagios.org/>) developed by the Pelagios team. It will go through the steps that the researcher would take in order to geoannotate their material—first identifying the place entity in their document, then resolving that information to a central authority file: i.e. a gazetteer of placenames (e.g. <http://pleiades.stoa.org/>). It also considers the potential uses of this kind of semantic annotation, outlining the mapping of places in texts, the repurposing of the data in other systems (such as GIS), and the linking to other related resources. Throughout, however, it will be concerned to identify challenges and persistent issues that are not only related to the technical development and use; using Recogito puts a primary demand on defining and conceptualising place. Thus, contrary to much current thinking, this presentation hopes to show how digital tools can enhance the close reading of texts and facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the status and role of places in our historical sources.

Elton Barker is Reader in Classical Studies, having joined The Open University as a Lecturer in July 2009. Before then, he had been a Tutor and Lecturer at Christ Church, Oxford (2004-09), and also lectured at Bristol, Nottingham and Reading. He has been a Junior Research Fellowship at Wolfson College, Cambridge (2002-04) and a Visiting Fellow at Venice International University (2003-04). From 2012-2013 he had a Research Fellowship for Experienced Researchers awarded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for research at the Freie Universität Berlin and the University of Leipzig. He has been awarded a Graduate Teaching Award from Pembroke College

(Cambridge) and twice won awards from the University of Oxford for an Outstanding Contribution to Teaching.

His research interests cross generic and disciplinary boundaries. Since 2008, he has been leading and co-running a series of collaborative projects, which are using digital resources to rethink spatial understanding of the ancient world. The Hestia project investigates the underlying ways in which Herodotus constructs space in book 5 of his Histories. Meanwhile, the Pelagios project has been establishing the Web infrastructure by which data produced and curated by different content providers – from academic projects like the Perseus Classical Library to cultural heritage institutions like the British Museum – can be linked through their common references to places.