



ANCIENT WORLD MAPPING CENTER

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Prof. Bernie Frischer, Director
The Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities
Alderman Library, University of Virginia
P.O. Box 400115
Charlottesville, VA 22904-4115

30 September 2006

Dear Professor Frischer,

I am writing to register the strongest possible support for the *Bibliotheca Alexandrina Latina* project now in development under your direction. There can be no question that Latinists, historians and students desperately need a true, networked, digital library of primary sources, not just a collection of web pages, CD-ROMs or standalone programs. The work done to date by your team demonstrates that *BAL* is poised to meet this need. It is of utmost importance that *BAL* be funded in full.

As a geographic historian of antiquity, I am dependent on the broadest possible range of primary sources for my research. As Director of the Ancient World Mapping Center's Pleiades Project (icon.stoa.org/trac/pleiades), which builds on the achievements of the Mellon-supported Classical Atlas Project (1988-2000), I must find ways to provide similarly-minded users of our "online workspace for ancient geography" with the best possible access to permanent, citable, interoperable digital resources for geospatial data, secondary literature and primary sources. There is not at present (nor indeed in planning to my knowledge) any system or collection of Latin materials that meets our needs. Existing digital texts suffer from one or more of the following failings: unreliable editions, poor digitization, "lock-down" behind proprietary interfaces, inadequate articulation for citation and manipulation via web services, permanence.

Pleiades is collaborating with a number of other institutions and projects, including the Alexandria Digital Library Gazetteer Project, the Center for Hellenic Studies Technical Working Group, the Blegen Library at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, the Burnam Classical Library at the University of Cincinnati, the Stoa Consortium for Electronic Publication in the Humanities, and the Perseus Project, to address these needs for geography, secondary literature and Greek sources. We are also working closely with Greek and Latin epigraphists in a number of contexts, including the EAGLE federation of epigraphic databases sponsored by the International Association for Greek and Latin Epigraphy.

BAL is the answer to our needs for Latin literature. Without it, we will be slowed in our quest to facilitate rapid, reliable and high-quality publication and maintenance of historical geographic data for ancient historians.

I am also the principal inventor of the “EpiDoc” customization of the Text Encoding Initiative's XML tagset, tailored for digital epigraphical publication (epidoc.sf.net). The international community of practice that has grown up around EpiDoc in the last 8 years is producing a body of tools, techniques and documentation that can serve as both a model and a springboard for BAL in developing an appropriate schema for the elaboration of its digital texts. All of the software and guidelines developed by the EpiDoc Community are regularly released to the public under the provisions of the GNU Public License. They are therefore readily reusable, at no cost, for your project.

The National Endowment for the Humanities recently highlighted — for reasons of efficiency, interoperability and permanence — the importance of using TEI customizations for text encoding (as opposed to one-off, unique schemas) when it announced that TEI-using proposals submitted to its “Scholarly Editions” programs would receive preferential funding consideration. In choosing TEI, you align yourself with this federal initiative, which may well be the source of support for future editors of editions that will appear in BAL itself.

For all of these reasons, I am pleased to reiterate here the commitments I made to the BAL project at the BAL Scholars’ Summit meeting in Washington last month, subject to the availability of resources:

- To assist — following the model of the EpiDoc Community — in developing a customization (i.e., a DTD or XML Schema) of the Text Encoding Initiative XML tagset, suitable for BAL needs
- To coordinate interoperability requirements, capabilities and services across the family of projects with which I am engaged
- To craft mechanisms for the direct-to-BAL contribution of geographical and epigraphical information, both from the Pleiades workspace and from EpiDoc projects

My best wishes to you and your team for the continuation of this most promising project!

Sincerely,



Tom Elliott, Pleiades Project Director

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Pleiades: <http://icon.stoa.org/trac/pleiades>

EpiDoc: <http://epidoc.sf.net>