

Semantics and Semantic
Constructs in Cultural
Comparison:
The Case of Late Antiquity

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Sample data model: Roman soldiers attested on inscriptions

	Name	Rank	Age at death	Unit	Inscription location	Inscription date
1	Aulus Paulinus	Cornicularius	48	Legio II Adiutrix	Londinium	64 AD
2	Badvok Maximus	Miles	21	Cuneus Frisiorum	Eboracum	143 AD
3	...					
3	...					

Example: Mediation using the Simple Knowledge Organisation System (SKOS)

@prefix skos: <<http://www.w3.org/2004/02/skos/core#>> .

@prefix rdf: <<http://www.w3.org/1999/02/22/rdf-syntax-ns#>> .

@prefix earlyEmpire: <<http://www.exemplum.com/ranks#>> .

@prefix highEmpire: <<http://www.alterexemplum.org/ranks#>> .

earlyEmpire:peditatus rdf:type skos:Concept ;
skos:prefLabel "Foot-soldier"@en.

highEmpire:ballistarius rdf:type skos:Concept ;
skos:prefLabel "Artillery-man"@en ;
skos:broader earlyEmpire:peditatus .

highEmpire:scorpionarius rdf:type skos:Concept ;
skos:prefLabel "Artillery-man"@en ;
skos:sameAs highEmpire:ballistarius .

Ontology: Definition

“An ontology is an explicit specification of a conceptualisation ... Formally, an ontology is the statement of a logical theory.”

- Gruber, Thomas R. (1995) “Toward Principles for the Design of Ontologies Used for Knowledge Sharing”, *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 43, 907 - 28, 907 -8.

Electronic Resources for Late Antique Urban Culture

- Pleiades - <http://pleiades.stoa.org/>
- Google Ancient Places - <http://googleancientplaces.wordpress.com/>
- Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire - <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/ddh/research/projects/pbe.aspx> (CD-ROM)
- Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England - <http://www.pase.ac.uk/index.html>
- Regnum Francorum Online - <http://www.francia.ahlfeldt.se/>
- Medieval and Renaissance Italy Prosopographical Database Project - <http://www.slu.edu/x19463.xml>

Kriterienbündel for late antique urbanism

- defences
- street-planning
- markets
- a mint
- legal autonomy
- role as a central place
- a (relatively) large population
- economic diversification
- 'urban' house types
- social differentiation
- complex religious organisation
- judicial functions

- Biddle (1976) as cited in Wickham, Chris (2006)
Framing the Early Middle Ages (Oxford), p. 592

The ... comparativists, alerted by one or several dissonances [between cultures in the term of comparison], then ... proceed to coin a new category or set of concepts [as their ideas and questions become more precise]. They move constantly from one culture or society to another if these seem of a kind to make the *conceptual* elements that have been discovered productive. They try to see how known cultural systems *react* not only to the initial category that was selected as a touchstone, but also to the series of questions that now arise and the conceptual elements that gradually come to light.

Detienne, Marcel (2007) *The Greeks and Us*
(Cambridge), 13 - 4

“... I do believe that comparativism is more vibrant and more stimulating if ethnologists and historians are able and willing to lend an ear to dissonances that at first seem ‘incomparable’, and to put them in perspective. By dissonance I mean, for example, a case where a society appears to make no room for an institution or configuration that our kind of common sense regards as normal and natural, or where a system of thought encountered elsewhere does not appear to offer any obvious category.”

Detienne, Marcel (2007), *The Greeks and Us* (Cambridge),
12

Productive ancient/modern dissonances in cultural scholarship

- Colour terms
- The “self”
- Cartography
- Foundation / Authochthony
- Suicide
- Sexuality / Homosexuality
- etc ...

Semantic Web mediation grab-bag I: SKOS and OWL

- skos:broader
- skos:narrower
- skos:related
- skos:broadMatch
- skos:closeMatch
- skos:exactMatch
- skos:member
- skos:memberList
- owl:sameAs
- owl:differentFrom

Semantic Web mediation grab-bag II: WordNet

- pwd:antonym
- pwd:hypernym
- pwd:hyponym
- pwd:causes
- pwd:entailment (i.e., verb entails some other action)
- pwd:nearest (i.e., nearest synset)
- pwd:pertains-to