Interim Project Report
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This report covers the period 1 November 2011 - 30 April 2012

User Engagement and Demographics

During the six-month period covered by this report, Pleiades saw over 28,000 visits from about 19,000 visitors (excluding bots), roughly a 50% increase from the previous six-month period. About 35% of these visitors could be identified as returning visitors. Taking all visitors together, nearly 60% of visits were "bounces": visits that consisted of only a single page hit. Some unknown number of these will have been people who found exactly what they were looking for in response to a search-engine query or by transiting a link on another site. Others will have accidentally found themselves on our site and decided it was not of further interest. Despite this high bounce rate (consistent with previous periods), we recorded an average visit duration of nearly 4½ minutes and an average pages-per-visit metric of 4.82. Although over 60% of visits consumed less than 10 seconds on the site (consistent with our high bounce rate), nearly 20% of visits lasted more than 3 minutes. All key engagement-related metrics show increases from the previous six-month period: page views were up 61%, pages-per-visit went up 8.9%, and average visit duration went up by 11.2%.

Although the majority of Pleiades users appear to be based in the United States, it is clear that our audience continues to be international and multilingual. Users whose browsers reported an English-language localization setting accounted for almost 18,000 of our visits during the reporting period. Despite the fact that the Pleiades web interface is localized only for English, significant representation in certain other languages was seen, including German (~2,000), French (1,500), Italian (1,300), and Spanish (1,000). Location data indicating where users were connecting from tracks the language data, with the top five countries in descending order being: United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Italy. Other countries accounting for at least 500 visits each include: Spain, Turkey, Greece, Canada, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

The vast majority of our visits (over 14,000 during the reporting period) continue to come by way of Google (the only search engine source to drive significant amounts of traffic to our site). 70% of these Google-directed visitors were new, and the associated bounce rate was 64%. Nonetheless, these visits averaged 4.6 pages-per-visit and lasted an average of 4 minutes. The next largest group of visits (4,600) were organic, i.e., resulting from a user typing in the site URL, clicking on a link in their email, or activating a bookmark previously stored in their own browser. Their engagement statistics mirror those exhibited by the Google-directed visits. Other significant referrers of traffic to Pleiades during the reporting period (500+ visits) included the ISAW website, various links posted to Twitter, a single blog post about Pleiades on the Google Maps Mania Blog,[1] and links in photo descriptions on the photo-sharing website Flickr.com (mostly because of ISAW's Ancient World Image Bank project, which publishes photos via Flickr and links them to Pleiades).

Community Building and Collaboration

During the reporting period we undertook a number of initiatives aimed at community-building and promoting collaboration. These include improving our "Credits" page in order to showcase contributions made by community members, and building another page to provide complete

[1] http://googlemapsmania.blogspot.com/2011/12/google-maps-of-ancient-world.html.

information about privacy issues and policies to our user base.[2] As specifications and best practices for Linked Open Data (an initiative started by the World-Wide Web Consortium and Tim Berners-Lee) have matured and serious interest in its use has begun to spread among collaborating projects in ancient studies, we have built on our early experiments in this area by moving linked data for Pleiades Places and Barrington Atlas Grids into production.[3] We have also formalized our collaboration with the Pelagios project, which is linking together a growing number of digital resources for ancient studies on the basis of geography (with Pleiades data at the center).[4] We anticipate reporting substantive advances in the Linked Data / Pelagios context in our next semi-annual report.

To better support our users in learning the Pleiades system and improving content, we have held a series of on-line Pleiades "hack days" and "content workshops," most recently in April 2012.[5] We intend to continue organizing these opportunities over the remaining course of the project. We have also authored and updated a number of "frequently asked questions" and "how-to" documents during the reporting period, touching on such topics as "how to cite Pleiades" and "how to view and download Pleiades coordinates".[6]

Content Improvements

During the reporting period, a number of new Pleiades information resources were created, including: 269 new Pleiades place resources (comprising titles, descriptions, bibliography, etc.), 824 new location resources (comprising coordinate data, dates, and other indicia), and 188 name resources (ancient and modern names, transliterations, dates, and other indicia). Seventeen different Pleiades contributors were responsible for these additions.
A large number of modifications and improvements to existing records were also made; however, we cannot presently quantify these easily because the entire dataset was updated in March 2012 to incorporate full references to the legacy Barrington Atlas bibliography (a major grant deliverable).[7] Consequently, the "last modified" field in our nightly data exports reflects this date (it is on the basis of these exports that the above statistics were calculated). Data mining against the full histories of each object in the Pleiades dataset (the current count stands at over 97,000 information resources) could distinguish between such wholesale editorial upgrades and individual contributions, but we have chosen to invest development resources in other areas at this time.

In addition to rolling out comprehensive access to full Barrington Atlas bibliography references, major content advances during the period of performance include the documentation of all milecastles and forts along Hadrian's Wall (contributed by Pleiades user Scott Vanderbilt)[8]

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[2] See http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/thomase/news-items/giving-credit-where-credit-is-due and http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/sgillies/news-items/a-letter-to-pleiades-users-about-privacy.

[3] See http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/sgillies/news-items/linked-data-for-barrington-atlas-grids and http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/sgillies/news-items/linked-data-for-pleiades-places.

[4] http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/thomase/news-items/pleiades-pelagios-and-linked-open-data.

[5] http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/thomase/news-items/content-workshop-online-friday-20-april-2012.

[6] See, in general, the announcements at the Pleiades News Blog (http://pleiades.stoa.org/news/blog) and the lists of documents in our FAQ and Documents sections (http://pleiades.stoa.org/faq) and (http://pleiades.stoa.org/docs).

[7] http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/sgillies/news-items/barrington-atlas-bibliography.

[8] http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/sgillies/news-items/milecastles-project-completed.

and the addition of links to several hundred geographic data records held by the Trismegistos Project at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.[9]

Feature and Performance Enhancements

We highlight here three major feature enhancements undertaken during the reporting period.

We mentioned above that, of late, significant traffic to Pleiades has come from the Flickr.com photosharing web site. We attribute this traffic to the creation of a bi-directional linking mechanism that allows Flickr users (including our partner project called the Ancient World Image Bank) to tag their photos with Pleiades place identifiers. Flickr's web interface exploits these "machine tags" to automatically create an appropriate link to Pleiades. Flickr uses the alternate data formats we expose on our website to look up the place title and other useful information to include in the link. Conversely, whenever a Pleiades user visits one of our place pages, our software checks Flickr for the existence of photos with corresponding tags and generates a link to these in the Pleiades sidebar. We have also created a "Pleiades Places" group on Flickr, which allows us to curate photos submitted by Flickr users, selecting a subset for each Pleiades place that are appropriately legible, representative of the place, and openly licensed; these are automatically used as featured images directly in the Pleiades sidebar for the matching place resources.[10]
During the period of performance, we have also rolled out map enhancements on Pleiades to visualize the locations of "connected" places. Previously, Pleiades maps illustrated the locations associated with each place resource visualized, as well as a number of nearby places. This enhancement takes advantage of data users have begun adding to indicate connections between places. For example, a spring feeds an aqueduct, which supplies a settlement -- each of which is a discrete Pleiades place resource, yet they are all functionally connected. Such connected places are now represented in our maps as well.[11]

In December 2011, we took a number of steps to improve visibility of, and access to, the Pleiades News Blog and content drawn from our documentation and FAQ sections. The Blog acquired a new start page, as well as an obvious link path from the top menu bar. Key posts, comments, and articles are now featured in a context-sensitive way, in the sidebar. This has the effect, for example, of putting links to articles related to content editing in the sidebar when a user is actively editing content.[12]

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[9] http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/sgillies/news-items/trismegistos-and-pleiades-places.

[10] These features are explained more fully, from a Pleiades user's perspective, at http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/sgillies/news-items/eye-on-the-sidebar-related-photos-from-flickr. The Flickr user's perspective, as well as the associated technical details, are addressed in a guest post by Pleiades' Sean Gillies on the Flickr Developers' blog: http://code.flickr.com/blog/2011/12/16/pleiades-a-guest-post/.

[11] http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/sgillies/news-items/adding-geographic-connections-to-maps.

[12] http://pleiades.stoa.org/Members/thomase/news-items/eye-on-the-sidebar-cool-new-pleiades-portlets.