The Peregrinus Project

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Resumen

El Proyecto Peregrinus es un proyecto en el que participan seis colaboradores con el fin de crear un viaje cultural virtual por los enclaves del Imperio Romano. Dicho proyecto obtuvo fondos del programa EU Culture 2000 para el año 2002-3. En el marco del proyecto se han creado reconstrucciones en tres dimensiones y vistas *Quicktime* de los emplazamientos arqueológicos de sus colaboradores. Todo ello está disponible para el uso local en los sitios de los colaboradores y para el público en general en un sitio multilingüe www.Peregrinus.org . Este viaje cultural podría ampliarse en el futuro con la incorporación de nuevos colaboradores en el proyecto, de otras zonas del Imperio Romano.

Summary

The Peregrinus Project is a collaborative project of six partners to produce a virtual cultural journey through parts of the Roman Empire. It was supported with funds from the EU Culture 2000 programme in 2002-3. The project has developed 3d animated reconstruct¡ons and *Quicktime* panoramas of the archaeological sites of ¡ts partners. These have been made available both for local use at the partner sites and to a wider audience through a multi-lingual website www.peregrínus.org . The cultural journey has the potential to be developed further in future with the addition of new partners to the project from other parts of the Roman Empire.
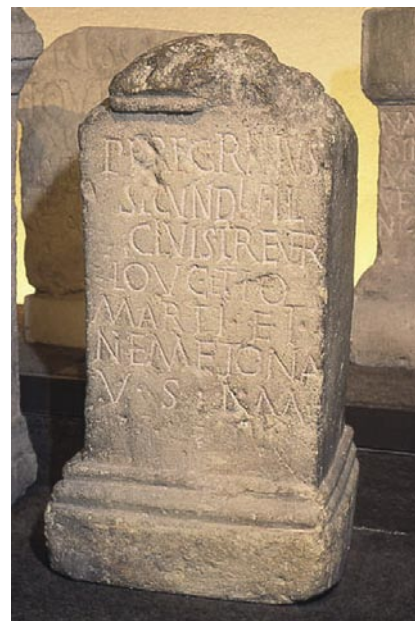
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Peregrinus is the name of a Roman citizen. His name means 'the wanderer'. We know of him because he set up an altar at Bath in England. It tells us that he was born in the Rhineland. We do not know where else he travelled, but in travelling he was typical of many people in the Roman Empire who were able to move peacefully around the known world in a way that had never been known before. Like Peregrinus, the modern citizen of Europe can now also travel without hindrance around the European Union and its adjacent countries. As we do not know exactly where Peregrinus went we can take him anywhere our imagination leads us. So in this project we take the modern citizen in the footsteps of Peregrínus on an imaginative, virtual cultural journey through the Roman Empire.

The Peregrinus Project is a co-operative European project that applies 3d computer animation techniques to the interpretation of the European cultural heritage. The project links the past to the present through the creative use of new technology and provides for wide public access to this heritage through a website and through displays at the locations of the partner sites. To ensure a wide dissemination of the results the website has been built in the four languages of the project partners — Spanish, English, Hungarian and Italian.

Figura 1. Two actors integrated into the virtual reconstruction of a cold plunge pool at the Roman Baths, Bath.

Figura 2. An altar set up at Bath by Peregrinus, son of Secundus. This was the inspiration for the Peregrinus project.
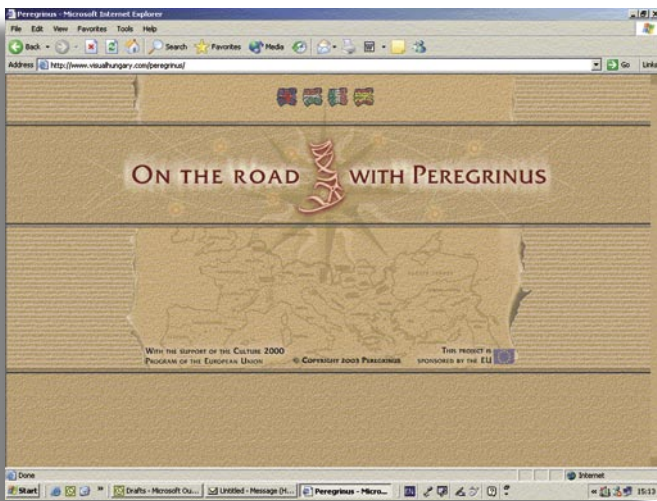
There are six partners in The Peregrinus Project. The project leader is the Roman Baths Museum at Bath in the United Kingdom working with Ascoli Piceno and Piazza Armerina in Italy, Alicante and Puente Genil in Spain and Pecs in Hungary. Three of these partners are at UNESCO World Heritage sites and all have very well preserved Roman archaeological sites.

When the project was formed some partners had more experience than others of creating animations so an important part of the project was information sharing between the participants. It was not possible for all the creative work to be done by a single company employed by the project. Instead the constraints of language, geographical distance and the nature of the work that involved each site in close collaboration with an animation development company meant that four companies were used to develop content. The two Spanish partners shared the services of one company, the two Italian partners shared the services of another and the English and Hungarian partners worked with companies in Wales and Hungary respectively. Those partners with less previous experience of animation work had less to build on and so produced a more modest output.

In designing material for display on the website one difficulty encountered was that most personal computers cannot download animation files very quickly. This can lead to frustration on the part of the user and may well lead to web visitors abandoning the site because of slow download times. To address this it was decided to present animations as Quicktime files. This is a widely used and easily downloadable software. It offers the web visitor the ability to interact with the animation by choosing their own route through the re-created environment or clicking on 'hotspots' to pop up additional information. Although other gaming softwares are now available that can offer greater control and interactivity to the web user the use of Quicktime was something that could be easily achieved at modest cost.

The use of Quicktime also gave some simple flexibility and diversity to the website. It was possible to work from real environments to virtual pop up environments as in the early Christian burial chambers at Pecs, or to work from completely virtual animated environments to real image pop ups as at Bath.

With six partners working on content creation in four local teams the three meetings of the project partners held over nine months helped to ensure consistency in style and presentation. The result was not entirely uniform however, and indeed it would have been disappointing if it had been. The main objective was to ensure consistency in the presentation of the opening layers of the website with individual partner sites taking responsibility for the development of lower order site specific content. Diversity is demonstrated at Puente Genil where the partner has introduced into the website some stories describing the travels of Peregrinus. The website was constructed in Pecs and begins with a language choice. This is followed by an interactive map at which you can choose your place to visit. There is also an explanation of who Peregrinus was. It can be viewed at www.peregrinus.org and for that reason is not described in detail here.

Figura 3. The home page of The Peregrinus Project on the web, where users can select one of four languages to view the site.

Use of the newly created content at the partner sites is an important outcome of the project. At Alicante the project provided an opportunity to further develop some existing animated content. At Puente Genil plans are afoot to develop the Fuente Alamo Roman villa as a place for the public to visit. The Peregrinus Project has made possible the creation of an animated reconstruction of the villa. It will not only be invaluable as an interpretation aid when the visitor centre is developed, but in the interim will also play an important part in helping local people to visualise what the ruined walls they see in a local olive grove once looked like. This will make it much easier to argue for the resources to carry out the conservation and development of the site. At Ascoli Piceno and at Piazza Armerina the new work is to be distributed to local schools in the form of a compact disc. At Pecs the project has funded the creation of new panoramas and animations that may be integrated into displays at the world heritage site. At Bath the project has funded the development of new animations that will be incorporated into the displays at the Roman Baths.

The future sustainability of The Peregrinus Project is an issue that has been addressed by the partners. A contract with the Hungarian development company has been entered into which will sustain the website until March 2005. It also provides for further modest improvements to the website content.

Having worked together on the project for nearly a year the partners are very conscious of the future potential of the project for developing and promoting the creative use of new technology to improve the interpretation of archaeological sites throughout the European Union. It addition to creating new virtual content for use at partner sites, the project has the potential to develop the website not just as an exciting cultural journey within the European Union, but also as an appealing showcase site demonstrating a wide range of new interactive web based heritage interpretation technologies. Some simple examples have already been included in the website. The format of a cultural journey makes it very easy to introduce new partners to the project and several archaeological sites in many different parts of the Union have already expressed interest in joining the project as part of an expanded phase two development.

We therefore anticipate developing the project further and will join with new partners to make an application to the European Union for development support in the next Culture 2000 programme call.