
CDH seed grant proposal: a web-based reading and reference software for commentaries on Hermogenes' works

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This proposal is in two parts, the first of which is an explanation of her academic challenge to be addressed, by Ruth Webb, while the second attempts to think through the practical aspects of the project, by Kai Laidlaw.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the rhetorical works of Hermogenes of Tarsus (2nd century CE) in later Antiquity due to the predominance of rhetoric in education and society in the Greek world from the Imperial period until the end of Byzantine Empire in 1453. Hermogenes' treatises on argumentation (*On Issues*) and on style (*On Types of Style*) are, however, not easy sources to read due to their condensed and highly technical nature. Even in Antiquity, readers felt the need for explanation and supplementation, giving rise to commentaries.

The commentaries that are at the root of this project are attributed to the fifth-century scholar Syrianus, better known as a Neoplatonic philosopher and commentator on both Plato and Aristotle. That on Hermogenes' treatises on argumentation (*On Issues*) has an unusual format for a commentary in that, rather than treat the text line by line or short section by short section as is usually the case with commentaries to literary texts, Syrianus writes a continuous discussion of up to 40 printed pages that runs parallel to Hermogenes' text. *On Issues* is divided into a series of sections discussing each type of question an orator might encounter (if the accused denies having committed the act, the case falls into one category and demands one set of argumentative strategies; if he admits that he committed the act but pleads mitigating circumstances, the arguments will be different). Syrianus therefore takes each type of question in turn and writes a lengthy discussion, sometimes clarifying Hermogenes' reasoning, sometimes disagreeing with him, often citing other commentators or even classical authors. In his discussion, Syrianus also refers to details of Hermogenes' treatise that come earlier or later than the chapter currently under discussion.

Syrianus' text is of great interest in itself both as a testimony to 5th century rhetoric and as a little known work by this philosopher. It is, however, very difficult to access (the most recent edition dates to 1892) and not easy to understand at first reading. The difficulty arises partly from the inherent complexity of the subject matter and partly from the need to understand Hermogenes' text in order to clarify Syrianus' commentary. Currently, using printed editions, this is a cumbersome task, particularly if one wants to follow up Syrianus' quotations of other authors to illustrate Hermogenes. The project would involve linking the texts so that it is immediately clear which particular part of Hermogenes' text is the subject of each part of Syrianus' discussion and providing access to the other texts quoted in the

form of footnotes. Ideally, Syrianus' text would also be accompanied by a translation (no translation into any European exists to my knowledge) and notes.

If this technology could be developed there are other similar commentaries to both Greek and Latin texts to which it could be applied.

There is existing software which solves the simple problem of dual pane reading of nearly symmetric bodies of text, such as for a text and its translation, but little I could find that addresses asymmetric reading, and more than two texts linked together (commentary referencing other commentary as well the original text, with translations), as Ruth is looking for.

The one area I might have found a parallel in, and investigated briefly, is bible study software. For example, the Talmud is rabbinical commentary of ~6,000 pages on the Hebrew Bible, roughly 1/6 the size. This can be accompanied by additional commentary, translations, and references. I believe this could be a good area to start discovery—in looking at this software and identifying ways in which the interfaces do and don't apply to our project.

I believe the seed grant will only cover creating a wireframe of the interface, designing a semantic markup syntax such that the various relationships of the texts can be adequately described, and perhaps begin the time-consuming task of doing the markup. Nevertheless, I would like to describe all of the phases of the project as I see them.

1. Discovery / consultation
2. Planning
3. Semantic markup syntax design
4. Wireframing
5. Prototyping & markup in parallel
6. Development
7. UI testing and refinement

The proposed software should be web-based and open-sourced, so that others may install and use it. As Ruth wrote, there are commentaries besides Hermogenes', at least in the field of classics, for which this software could be used. A major additional piece of work, once all else is completed, would be to create an interface easy enough for non-technical scholars to use that allows them to perform the markup with a GUI interface. With this capability, the work for other pieces could be crowdsourced, in a sense.

Following the seed grant Additional funds can be sought from the Department of Classics, The Council of the Humanities, and the Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies. The main non-staff expenditure would be in the post seed grant period, when a grad student should be hired to perform the markup.

Sample Budget
(all funds sought are for CDH's time)

Description	Number of Hours	Total
Discovery meetings: Ruth, CDH, Kai, possibly David Jenkins	4	\$200
Project planning: CDH, Kai	4	\$200
Design of semantic markup syntax / wireframing: Ben Hicks, Kai	12	\$600