

# Ontologies for Prosopography: What's in and what's out?

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Standards for Networking Ancient  
Prosopographies: Data and Relations  
in Greco-Roman Names  
(SNAP:DRGN)  
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## Linked Data and History

- If linked data is to connect historical data, it is likely to work best when centered on three kinds of entities:
  - Sources
  - Places
  - People

## What data is properly prosopographical?

- Vast amount of data is related to people to various degrees: what is most properly prosopographical?
- Good Ontology design practice: a kind of “Occam's Razor”.
- So what information related to persons is IN prosopography and what is OUT?

## Traditional Prosopography

- “A particular prosopography aims to amass and present clearly a quantity of information on all individuals in a given category” (PASE website)
- Prosopography has traditionally been a linked closely to biography

**People** → Eucherius 4  
 v.inl. 470  
 Of noble birth; Sid. Ap. Ep. III 8 2  
 Addressee of a letter from Sidonius Apollinaris praising him as one to whom the Roman state owed much for his military activities without having rewarded him; Sid. Ap. Ep. III 8 (facile clarescit republican morari beneficia vos mereri) (the date is unknown, but the circumstances to which Sidonius alludes in this letter may have been the attacks by the Visigoths in 471/474).  
 VIR INLSTRIS: he and Pannychius were 'inlustres'; Sid. Ap. Ep. VII 9, 18 (written in 470).  
 He was apparently a candidate for the bishopric of Bourges in 470, but was ineligible since he was twice married and so excluded by the canons; Sid. Ap. Ep. VII 9, 18.  
 He was an enemy of Victorius 4 who had him imprisoned and then murdered; Greg. Tur. HF II 20 (super Eucherium vero senatorem calumnias devolvit, sc. Victorius).  
**Sources** → Sid. Ap. Ep. III 8 2, Sid. Ap. Ep. III 8, Sid. Ap. Ep. VII 9, 18, Greg. Tur. HF II 20  
**Places** → Bourges

From J.R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 3: A.D. 527-641. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1992.



## FOAF: Friend of a Friend

FOAF is widely used for modern rudimentary prosopographical purposes

- "FOAF is a project devoted to linking people and information using the Web. Regardless of whether information is in people's heads, in physical or digital documents, or in the form of factual data, it can be linked."
- "FOAF is about your place in the Web, and the Web's place in our world."

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Classes: | Agent | Document | Group | Image | LabelProperty | OnlineAccount | OnlineChatAccount
| OnlineEcommerceAccount | OnlineGamingAccount | Organization | Person |
PersonalProfileDocument | Project |

Properties: | account | accountName | accountServiceHomepage | age | aimChatID | based_near |
birthday | currentProject | depiction | depicts | dnaChecksum | familyName | family_name |
firstName | focus | fundedBy | geekcode | gender | givenName | givenname | holdsAccount |
homepage | icqChatID | img | interest | isPrimaryTopicOf | jabberID | knows | lastName | logo
made | maker | mbox | mbox_sha1sum | member | membershipClass | msnChatID | myersBriggs
name | nick | openid | page | pastProject | phone | plan | primaryTopic | publications |
schoolHomepage | sha1 | skypeID | status | surname | theme | thumbnail | tipjar | title | topic |
topic_interest | weblog | workInfoHomepage | workplaceHomepage | yahooChatID |
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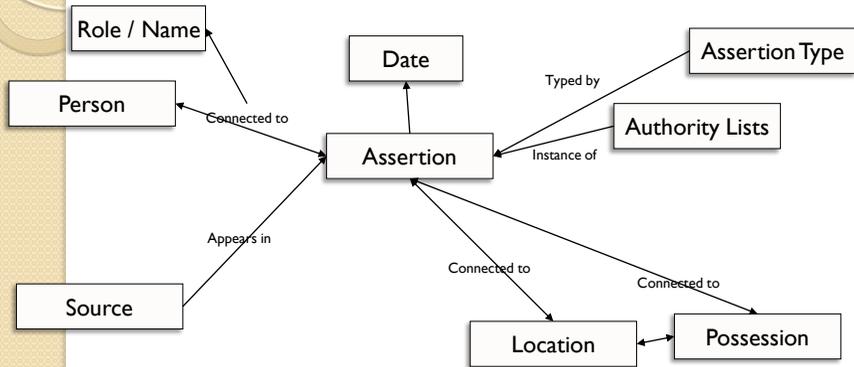
<http://xmlns.com/foaf/spec/>

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## Information about persons is a part of prosopography.

- Assertions about a person have traditionally formed the basis of prosopography.
- One could argue that historical people from before the immediate past only "survive" in our memory through their presence in sources: what sources assert about them.
- Arguments about their identity flow from what these sources say to us.

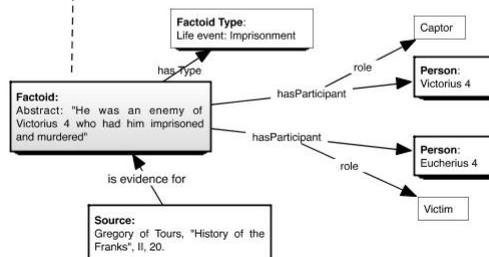
## Core structure for DDH's Prosopographical databases: "factoid model"



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## Structuring Prosopography: the factoid

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Personal Information: "E. was described this way"</li> <li>■ Status: "E. held this status"</li> <li>■ Event: "E. took part in event of this type"</li> </ul>	<p><b>Euclerius 4</b> <span style="float: right;">v.inl. 470</span></p> <p>Of noble birth; Sid. Ap. Ep. III 8.2. Addressee of a letter from Sidonius Apollinaris praising him as one to whom the Roman state owed much for his military activities without having rewarded him; Sid. Ap. Ep. III 8 (facile clarescit rempublicam morari beneficia vos mereri) (the date is unknown, but the circumstances to which Sidonius alludes in this letter may have been the attacks by the Visigoths in 471/474).</p> <p>VIR ILLUSTRIS: he and Pannychius were "illustres"; Sid. Ap. Ep. VII 9.18 (written in 470).</p> <p>He was apparently a candidate for the bishopric of Bourges in 470, but was ineligible since he was twice married and so excluded by the canons; Sid. Ap. Ep. VII 9.18.</p> <p>He was an enemy of Victorius 4 who had him imprisoned and then murdered; Greg. Tur. HF II 20 (super Euclerium vero senatorem calumnias devolvit, sc. Victorius).</p>
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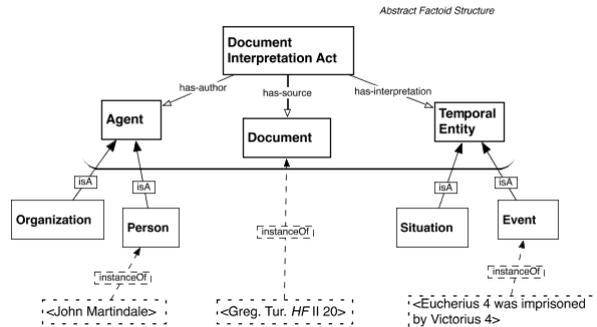


Pasin, Bradley (2011). Factoid-based Prosopography and Computer Ontologies: towards an integrated approach

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# Source Assertion: An Act of Document Interpretation

☞ Pasi, Bradley (2011). Factoid-based Prosopography and Computer Ontologies: towards an integrated approach



Martindale asserts that... → "Greg. Tur HF" asserts that... → Victorius 4 imprisoned Eucherius 4

"Two levels" of assertion

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## Assertions are ...

- Source Driven:
  - The factoid model aims to present what the sources are saying, and downplays what the modern day prosopographers, as historians, believe.
- Time dependant
  - PoMS's *Abraham 749*'s identity seems to be wrapped up in his having been Bishop of Dunblane.
  - Even so, an assertion such as "Abraham (ID 749) was Bishop of Dunblane" is actually time dependant
  - Material about him might well exist from times before or after he was Bishop of Dunblane.

## Problems: Agent and Event driven approaches

- Historical persons are not (always) agents
  - Oxford English Dictionary:
    - 2: A person or thing that takes an active role or produces a specified effect.
    - 2.1: (Grammar) The doer of an action, typically expressed as the subject of an active verb or in a *by* phrase with a passive verb.
  - Merriam-Webster:
    - 1. one that acts or exerts power
- Assertions are not always about events

## Contestability

- Historical Prosopography must be contestable, since it deals in information which is often uncertain.
  - About Person (I think your A is my (slightly different) B)
  - About assertion (I think this assertion belongs to a different person, or mis-interprets the sources)
  - After date/timing (I think this event happened at a different time)
- A data model needs to accommodate statements of uncertainty. Where and how?
- The factoid model, by being "source driven" deals with one aspect of this. An factoid assertion is a claim about what a source says, not what the project believes (thus, a little less like biography).

## ... so, what's in

- Identifiers for persons
- names and forms of names for people as they appear in sources
- assertions about them, as derived from the sources
- models to deal with recording uncertainty, and complex dating?

## ... what's near by?

- Names for onomastic studies?
  - I'm interested in seeing how name data fits in in the SNAP-DRGN project!
- Places (perhaps linked to, but the task of formally organising places is a project in its own right)
- Sources (linked to, but not captured or represented)



**What's still missing?**