



Boethius in Early Medieval Europe

Collaborative writing and sharing resources

Project URL : <http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/boethius>

Oxford's Virtual Learning Environment (WebLearn) is now available in a new, enhanced version, with improved features that enable online communication, collaboration, interaction and assessment.

“Since the documents in our WebLearn site are essentially the raw material for our project, what WebLearn has enabled us to do is to make our work accessible to team members based outside Oxford, whilst keeping it secure until we publish it.”

Dr Rohini Jayatilaka,
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About the Boethius project



Boethius was one of the key figures in the survival of classical learning and its transmission to later times. His writings became crucial texts, on philosophy, music, arithmetic and logic, for later centuries, down to the end of the Middle Ages and beyond. The Consolation of Philosophy, written around 525, is the most famous and influential of these texts. It was translated into English, Old High German, French and other languages. It was intensively studied and acquired a large body of commentary, which reflected contemporary interest and understanding and itself influenced other writers.

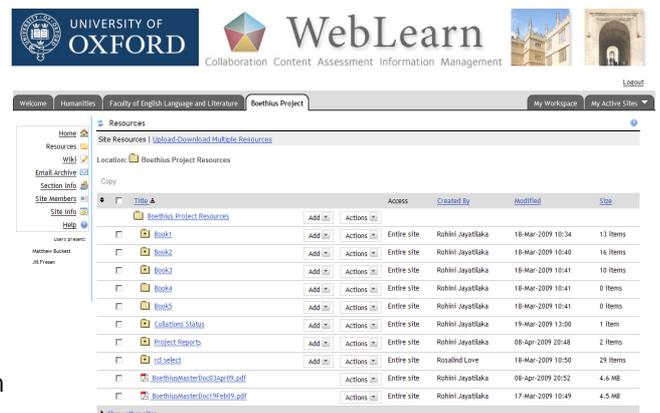
The period from 790, when the work was apparently discovered and popularised by the Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin, to around 1100, when new approaches began to emerge, is a key time in the development of Boethius's influence. The main evidence for the ideas and interpretations of this text is still buried in thousands of annotations and glosses written in the margins and between the lines of scores of manuscripts of the Consolation. These convey contemporary explanations (and misunderstandings) of a vast range of allusions in the text, from Sirens to Socrates and actresses to astronomy.

Aims of the Boethius project

Our aim is to decipher and transcribe all the annotations and glosses, to edit and translate them, and to make the material fully accessible to everyone interested in it. This will form part of a wider re-examination of the study and use of the Consolation of Philosophy in the period up to 1100. Our primary target is a full edited compilation of the whole corpus, which will run to about 2,000 pages, and will, we hope, be eventually available in both print and fully-searchable electronic form.

Using WebLearn

The Boethius Project is a collaborative project whose research team and advisory board members are based at a variety of national and international institutions. The project team members in Oxford have collected (and continue to add to) a large body of material in a variety of formats, including text and pdf files, and this material is drawn upon by other project members. WebLearn is particularly well designed for collaborative projects such as this: it provides an ideal way to store the project resources in a secure environment, whilst also enabling us to update them regularly, and to make them accessible to colleagues based at a variety of institutions outside Oxford.



The following WebLearn tools and features are especially useful to the Boethius Project research team :

Resources tool:

- This provides a secure space in which we can store and access raw data (including text files and pdf files), project reports, and reference materials.
- Uploading, managing and accessing files in this area is particularly easy and efficient; since all three members of the research team are currently working on different, but related, parts of the overall project it is important for each of us to be able to upload the most recent documents to the project site so that we can all access them.
- The ability to create folders for different topics within this tool enables us to organise our documents efficiently.
- The permissions feature makes levels of accessibility to particular resources flexible, in keeping with the roles of the team members.
- The email notification system within Resources is useful for alerting team members to new materials added to the site.

Forums tool:

This communication tool enables members of the project team to post topics for discussion and to read and respond to them. It is particularly useful for discussing ongoing editorial issues and agreeing on editorial policies, to which we can refer back when the need arises.

Wiki tool:

The Wiki tool permits the project team to edit the full corpus of material collaboratively, without the danger of over-writing work completed by another member of the team.

Search tool:

The powerful search tool that enables us to search across all the documents in our project site.

Announcement tool:

This is a useful place to post a notice regarding meeting times and locations, and any important changes to such notices. There are various options within the announcement tool that are also very helpful, such as being able to email the notification to site members; to sort announcements by subject, sender, access and date; and to specify a beginning and ending date for a specific notice.

Permissions feature:

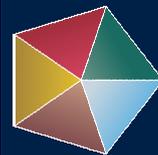
This makes accessibility to particular areas of our project site flexible. Since it is imperative that the material we are using is managed by a single team member (so that documents are not inadvertently over-written, and that the most up-to-date documents are made accessible to all the team members), this feature enables us to set permissions in accordance with the type of task a particular team member might carry out.

Sub-sites:

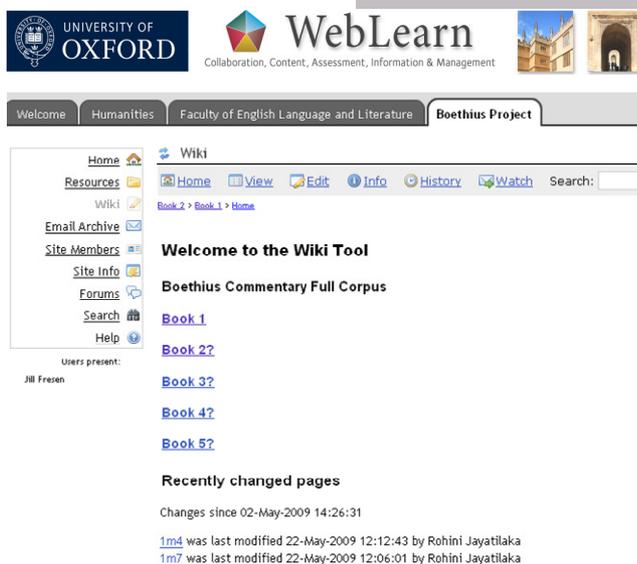
The ability to set up a separate sub-site of the Boethius Project within WebLearn, has provided further flexibility: it enables us to post material relevant to upcoming Project Workshops and other events, which can be made accessible to a slightly wider group of people, such as the Project Advisory Board.

WebLearn provides an easily accessible online area for researchers, lecturers, tutors and students, offering:

- *New ways to collect and share materials*
- *Technology which meets new user expectations of online support.*
- *Rich opportunities for interdisciplinary teaching, learning and collaboration*
- *Improved collection and analysis of feedback from users*



http://weblearn.ox.ac.uk



“One of the reasons we are using the Wiki tool is so that we can put files up in this area that all three team members can edit, without overwriting each other's work. At the moment we've managed to split our tasks in a way that we can keep track of the changes each of us makes, but once we've collected all the material we need and begin the editing process of the full corpus, we will need to work on a 'master' document that all of us can access and edit at different times. The wiki tool is perfect to meet this requirement.”