



Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Spring 2016

What's
New About
The Old

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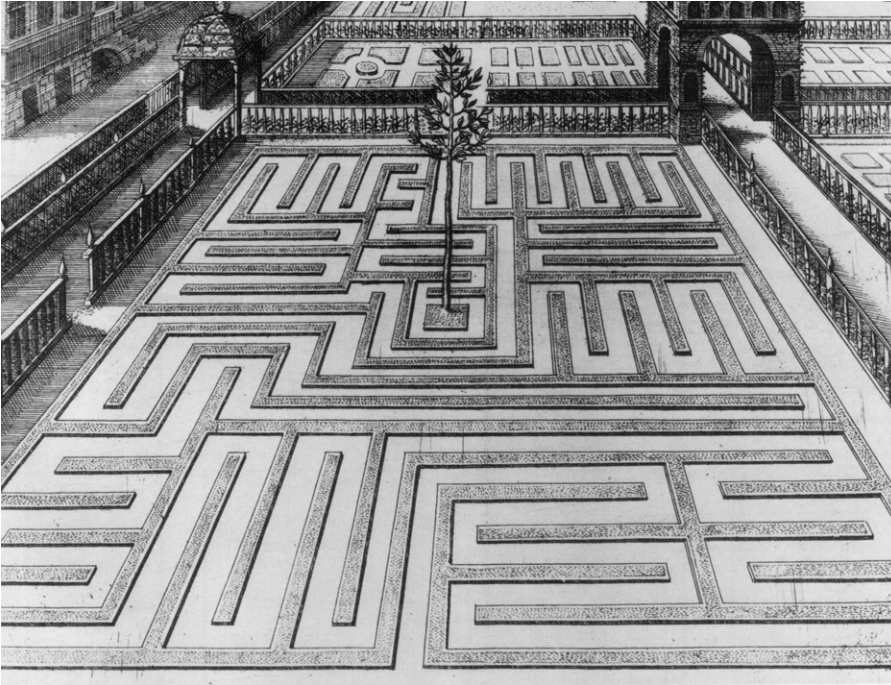
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Introduction: Reassessing Greece & Rome

Matthew S. Santirocco

The past remains integral to us all, individually and collectively. We must concede the ancients their place. . . . But their place is not simply back there, in a separate and foreign country; it is assimilated in ourselves, and resurrected into an ever-changing present.

– David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*¹

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It is difficult to square the rhetoric about the current “crisis” in the humanities with the abundant, if anecdotal, evidence that Greco-Roman antiquity continues to thrive in the popular imagination. As I am writing this, Mary Beard’s new history of Rome is flying off the shelves; general interest magazines publish articles on Greek papyri; the first translation of Homer’s *Iliad* by a woman has appeared to wide acclaim; the challenge of teaching ancient Greek made it to the op-ed pages of *The New York Times*; a remake of the film *Ben-Hur* is scheduled for release this summer; a traveling exhibition of large-scale Hellenistic bronzes has become a “must see” show of the season; productions of Greek tragedies and their adaptations continue to be a staple of professional and amateur theater; and television programs abound on ancient topics ranging from Cleopatra to the Colosseum.² Of course, this preoccupation with the past has a negative side as well, since even the modern attempt to mythologize Zenobia as an Arab queen who resisted Roman power was not enough to save her city Palmyra from those in Syria who were hell-bent on erasing any signs of what they deemed to be unorthodox. But even such wanton acts of destruction, which seek to obliterate

ate history, only provide further proof that the past is still very much alive in the present.³

That said, there are different ways to assess the health of a field than by measuring popular interest in the objects of its study.⁴ These signs of robust interest – of a fascination fueled perhaps by the way in which Greek and Roman culture is simultaneously familiar and foreign to us – do not tell the whole story. If we turn instead to data usefully amassed by the Humanities Indicators of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and by other professional sources, we get a somewhat different picture at the institutional level – small (though relatively steady) numbers of students majoring in classics, respectable enrollments in Greek and Latin (though modest by comparison with many modern languages), and some retrenchment in faculty hiring (though it is not across-the-board and is offset by hiring in other schools and colleges).⁵

Even more striking, and encouraging, is the fact that, as the number of individuals specializing in the field has shrunk, more students than ever before are encountering Greece and Rome through courses on “classics in translation.” A staple of undergraduate general education programs (whether distributional or core requirements) and popular as electives, these courses explore such topics as “Classical Mythology,” “Women in Antiquity,” “Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World,” “Ancient Religion,” “Greek and Roman Drama,” and “Cinema and the Classics” – to name just a few. Rather than “dumbing down” the field, as some critics have claimed, and being harbingers of further decline, these courses have succeeded in educating a whole new generation of citizens, hardly an unworthy goal. They have also helped to recruit new majors who had not encountered this material before college. And they have even supplied a mod-

est pipeline into the profession, as some of those latecomers to the field, upon graduation, make up for gaps in their linguistic training by enrolling in post-baccalaureate programs, yet another creative adaptation by which the field prepares students for entry into doctoral programs and scholarly and teaching careers.

The visibility of antiquity in the curriculum testifies to the resilience of the field in the face of “crisis” – or, rather, “crises.” Greco-Roman studies has long been recognized as the canary in the coal mine of the humanities, having faced early on some of the pressures that the other humanities would encounter only later. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the field lost its curricular hegemony, as American colleges and universities jettisoned Latin as a requirement for admission or graduation. Then, as private schools, particularly Catholic ones, made Latin optional or dropped it altogether, one important pipeline for college majors dried up. Later, as the quintessential home of “dead white males,” the field was at the epicenter of the culture wars.⁶ And, now, in a climate of economic anxiety, vocationalism, and concern with financial return on educational investment, it is again vulnerable. Rather than circling the wagons, the field has confronted these challenges in creative ways. The curricular engagement noted above was one of these strategies. In fact, in a reversal of the usual model whereby research influences what is taught in the classroom, this curriculum also became a powerful driver (though by no means the only one) of exciting new research agendas that focus on contemporary issues where the past has something to teach us.

And so, if ancient Greco-Roman culture is alive and well in the popular imagination and in the general curriculum, the most important evidence of its vitality must nevertheless be sought in the quality of current research. While the past several decades

may have seen no grand paradigm shift,⁷ it is clear that our understanding of the past has been dramatically enhanced – and in some cases radically altered – by new evidence, new methods, and new questions. As befits a scholarly field whose history began to be written even in antiquity, it is not surprising that there are periodic moments of taking stock. The year 2000 occasioned several, including *Classics in Progress*, a volume of essays by British scholars that was published for our sister society, the British Academy.⁸ This special issue of *Daedalus* was inspired by a different sort of milestone, the important work of the American Academy’s Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences. The idea for this issue started to come into view at the same time that the Commission was preparing its report, *The Heart of the Matter*; and the appearance of this issue coincides roughly with the publication of the Commission’s follow-up report, which documents the extensive activities that have taken place over the past two years.⁹ There could be no better time to focus on the oldest of the humanities fields, Greco-Roman studies, and to assess (in the words of this volume’s title) “what is new about the old.”¹⁰

Taken together, the essays in this volume exemplify some of the most important recent developments in Greco-Roman studies. Here I would single out only four. The first is, paradoxically, the persistence of the old amidst the new – the continued focus on the text, whether literary or documentary, and hence the continued importance of philology and the traditional specialisms necessary for recovering and recuperating this category of evidence, such as palaeography, textual criticism, and linguistics. It is sometimes assumed that the vagaries of transmission have left us all that we will ever have of ancient literature – a minute percentage of the total production, to be sure, but more than

any one person could read in many lifetimes. But new material regularly turns up, whether in a manuscript miscatalogued in a monastic library, or in a “quotation fragment” (the work of one author cited by another), or, more commonly, on a scrap of papyrus recovered from the dry and preservative sands of Egypt.¹¹ Indeed, one scholar estimates that “Over the last hundred years, one literary papyrus has been published, on average, every ten days; the agglomeration provides, for Greek literature at least, a small new renaissance.”¹² (For a recent discovery that has attracted much attention, see the elegant translation by Rachel Hadas of the so-called “Brothers Poem” by Sappho in the box on page 40.)¹³

These discoveries not only enlarge our store of ancient literature, but also enable us to restore what we already have, to recognize previously unknown connections among works, and, on occasion, to rewrite history, literary or otherwise. Meanwhile, extant texts regularly require philological attention. To take just one example: new editions of authors are needed not only to incorporate the new discoveries noted above, but also to take into account several phenomena, only recently understood. One is *contaminatio*, the fact that most family trees of manuscripts (*stemma codicum*) are complicated by horizontal transmission (the cross-fertilization of distinct traditions, when a copyist relying mainly on one manuscript nevertheless incorporates readings from another with a different lineage). Another is even more basic: the realization that in an oral culture, where texts were often records of, or scripts for, performance, variance existed from the outset. In other words, there may be no one “right” reading. And just as new editions refresh the texts, new commentaries and critical studies provide exegetical support, elucidating their linguistic, literary, archaeological, historical, and sociological contexts on the basis of the latest research.

In fact, a “new philology” is developing, which considers not just the words upon a page, but also the materiality of the text, including the format of the ancient book (the papyrus scroll and later parchment codex) and its implications not only for textual criticism, but also for ancient reading practices.¹⁴

A second noteworthy development in the field – and perhaps the most consequential so far, since it has been underway for over four decades – is how Greco-Roman studies has opened up dramatically in terms of its methodological approaches and theoretical underpinnings. This is sometimes explained as the influence of other disciplines. But this model, which emphasizes the role of exogenous forces, oversimplifies a more complicated process. Greco-Roman studies had always been multidisciplinary: even to this day, classics departments, unlike their counterparts in the other humanities, commonly include not only scholars of language and literature but also ancient historians, archaeologists, art historians, and philosophers. In fact, most of these humanistic disciplines trace their origins to the study of antiquity, specifically philology. In the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century, however, these disciplines became divorced from their roots and started to develop along different trajectories. The result was that scholars of Greco-Roman antiquity remained together as a discipline unto themselves and, over time, became more isolated from developments in the larger disciplines that they had spawned, but that had moved in different directions.¹⁵

That changed several decades ago as a gradual, if unspoken, realization set in that Greco-Roman studies was not so much a single discipline as a multidisciplinary field, and individual scholars started to take out “dual citizenship” with their larger disciplines. Thus, the work of ancient liter-

ary scholars, historians, and art historians began to be informed by the methodological approaches and theoretical concerns of those larger disciplines. (For an elegant example, see the box on page 68, where Michael Putnam’s explication of a famous passage from Catullus displays traditional philological rigor, while also being informed by contemporary literary approaches such as intertextuality, feminism, and genre studies.) And none of this was a one-way street, since scholars of the ancient world engaged in dialogue with their larger disciplines and made notable contributions to them, particularly in such areas as the history of religion, gender, and sexuality. In an even more consequential move, scholars who were now operating within these larger disciplinary tents began also to acquire *as individuals* disciplinary cross-competencies, the sort of inter- (and trans-) disciplinary expertise that had previously resided in the multidisciplinary collective of their departments or the profession as a whole.¹⁶ Thus, literary scholars “materialized” the texts they were studying, ancient history and art history took a “linguistic turn,” and so forth. At the same time, these scholars also drew upon other disciplines that had their origins outside of the field, such as structural anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis, and (most recently) cognitive science and neuroaesthetics. And through them, they began to participate in larger theoretical discourses, such as Marxist theory and feminist theory (the latter having had a particularly profound and salutary role in the recent development of the field).

In all of this scholarly activity, no one theoretical outlook or methodology has dominated, even for a time, and a comfortable catholicity of approaches prevails. The end result has been that a field seen by some as resistant to – or, more accurately, innocent of – theory has become

much more self-reflective. Scholars have gained an awareness of the historical contingencies at work in the very formation of the field. This has led them to approach the ancient material and older (and sometimes triumphalist) interpretations with a critical eye and a healthy dose of skepticism. It has also led them to question the cultural assumptions that not only past scholars but also they themselves bring to the evidence they study and the questions they ask. Finally, there is increasing appreciation of the constructed nature of antiquity – even in antiquity.

The third development in Greco-Roman studies is the most recent and perhaps the most exciting: the new science of antiquity. A true instance of interdisciplinary collaboration, this offers the potential for exponential growth in our knowledge of the past. Certain scientific techniques, such as radiocarbon dating, dendrochronology, and glaciology have been around for a long time. But these techniques have now been joined by other powerful tools. Multispectral imaging, for example, is making legible papyri from Herculaneum that had been carbonized in the eruption of Vesuvius; 3D laser scanning, or lidar, is enabling us to reconstruct ancient landscapes and structures; and the techniques of bioarchaeology, such as DNA sequencing and isotope analysis, allow us to study human, animal, and plant specimens, and thereby reconstruct ancient ecosystems, diet, climate, disease, migration patterns, and cultural interaction. (See Malcolm Wiener's summary of some of these techniques and their application in the box on page 112.) Scientific techniques are now deployed not just to date objects or events but to tell a larger story. The data recovered in this way constitute an ever-growing physical archive that makes it possible, even necessary, to reopen old subjects, to question settled opinion, and to rewrite historical accounts.¹⁷

Not unrelated to these scientific developments is the important role played by digital technology. Perhaps because Greco-Roman studies has always been preoccupied with technologies of communication,¹⁸ beginning with the shift from orality to literacy, and then from the scroll to the codex, the field was an early (perhaps the earliest) adopter of what has come to be known as digital humanities, and it has been a major contributor to that field ever since. At one level, technology has increased access to evidence, as the digitization of texts and images has made possible research on a scale previously unimagined and has thereby opened up whole new areas of inquiry. But at another level, technology offers not only access to evidence but also powerful heuristic tools for analyzing it, ranging from geospatial mapping of archaeological sites to the treebanking of Greek and Latin texts (the systematic linguistic analysis of every word in a text).¹⁹

The fourth and final development worth noting is the expansiveness of the field. The canon, for example, has been dramatically enlarged, not just by new finds, but also as a result of the new approaches noted above. Thus, Greek and Roman medical writings, once at the periphery of scholarship, are now taking center stage because of their potential to illuminate aspects of ancient thinking and understanding of the self.²⁰ Ancient technical writings (on such topics as science, mathematics, engineering, architecture, agriculture, law, warfare, magic, and divination) are also gradually being mainstreamed. And now that the literature of the Hellenistic period is firmly in the canon, scholars are turning their attention elsewhere, to the classicizing Second Sophistic, the neglected Greek literature of the Roman empire, and the literature of early Christianity.

As the canon expands, so too do the temporal and geographical horizons of

the field. Older notions of periodization, for example, are under review, as traditional divisions and categories (such as archaic, classical, and post-classical) are seen to be artificial, privileging rupture over continuity, and implying models of rise and decline that do not comport with the evidence. Similarly, the older focus on Greece and Rome has given way to broader studies of the Mediterranean basin and the ancient Near East that recognize the interconnectedness of their cultures at different periods. And even where there is little evidence of direct connection, comparative history allows for those who work in the Greco-Roman field to explore larger problems that transcend one particular culture or period. The current interest in “big history” or “world history” is an expression of this impulse,²¹ as is the emergence of a new field, ancient studies, which takes as its project precisely this sort of crossing of boundaries of time, space, and discipline.²²

Finally, Greco-Roman studies is being increasingly subsumed under the larger rubric of reception. Just as the “meaning” of a text or material artifact is now understood to be a function not only of the historical and social contexts in which it was produced and used, but also of how other and later communities have interpreted it, so too the study of the Greco-Roman world in all its aspects is no longer just the study of the past. As Mary Beard and John Henderson have put it: “*Classics* is a subject that exists in that gap between us and the world of the Greeks and Romans. The questions raised by *Classics* are the questions raised by our distance from ‘their’ world, and at the same time by our closeness to it, and by its familiarity to us. . . . The aim of *Classics* is not only to *discover* or *uncover* the ancient world. . . . Its aim is also to define and debate *our* relationship to that world.”²³ And to do that entails one additional expansive gesture, moving Greco-Roman stud-

ies into the public square and using technology to democratize the production of knowledge, to disseminate discovery, and to demonstrate how the past is relevant to our own contemporary experience.²⁴

The persistence of philology, the openness to new methods and theoretical perspectives, the new science of antiquity, and the expanding horizons of research – these four developments in Greco-Roman studies over the past several decades are on full display in the essays that follow. At this point, a few editorial observations are in order. Having just argued for the expansiveness of the field, I must now note that many important subjects are missing from this volume. But, given constraints of space and time, topical coverage was never the goal, nor could it be, and the contributors were given the freedom, within broad parameters, to address their subjects as they saw fit. For the same reason, these essays are not general surveys or overviews of the state of research. While most contributors situated their work in the context of recent scholarship, they intended their essays to be exhibits, original case studies that display new approaches in action and, in some cases, point in new directions. Finally, the organizing principle here is straightforward: this volume moves from literature to philosophy, visual and material culture, ancient history, and, finally, the institutional contexts in which Greco-Roman studies are conducted. Of course, this arrangement necessarily oversimplifies the interrelationship among these categories and also among the essays themselves, which display a significant degree of methodological and theoretical overlap. This is all the more remarkable, since the contributors did not share drafts with one another or collaborate in other ways. But this feature only serves to demonstrate the main theses of this volume, as noted above – the interconnectedness of the field, the cross-

ing of boundaries of various sorts (chronological, geographical, disciplinary), and the breadth of intellectual horizon. The short summaries that follow are intended to do something that the abstracts attached to the individual articles could not do, namely to point out some of these connections and also to demonstrate a larger thematic concision, since these essays, when read consecutively, come close to providing a coherent narrative about “what is new about the old.”

Given that the emphasis on texts is constitutive of the field, the first four essays in this volume address literature. Over the past several decades, various approaches have left their mark on literary interpretation, including (but not limited to) the “New Criticism,” reader response, structuralism, deconstruction, and the “new historicism” or cultural poetics. In addition to offering sophisticated readings of individual texts, current scholarship also explores a wide variety of larger topics, including the materiality of the text (as noted above) and, simultaneously, its performative aspects (such as the largely oral/aural dimension of ancient literature); the social and political contexts in which texts were produced and functioned (such as literacy, ideology, and patronage); and more overtly “literary” questions of canonicity, intertextuality, and reception – to name just a few.

Focusing on Greek literature, Brooke Holmes demonstrates how both that category and its scholarly study have been “blown open,” as the traditional canon has itself expanded under the impact of some of these different approaches. To take one example: cultural poetics attempts to locate texts within their immediate social and cultural contexts; on the other hand, reception studies looks to the afterlives of texts and raises questions about their transhistorical value. Taking as her case

study Greek tragedy, the genre in which the tension between these two approaches is perhaps most evident, Holmes proposes a philosophy of the tragic that can accommodate both approaches. She locates Greek tragedy at a historical moment, the fifth century, when questions of agency and responsibility were especially urgent, while also arguing for the resonances of tragedy’s responses to these questions in contemporary contexts. “Tragedy is about suffering . . . but it is also . . . about the mysteries and fallout of agency, understood as the ambiguous power to act in the world as well as ambiguous openness to the world that under extraordinary circumstances impels one to act in ways that are difficult to own.”

The next essay, by Shadi Bartsch, focuses on Latin literature, specifically its complex relationship with its Greek precursor texts, the literature of a people whom Rome had conquered. The nature of this relationship and the Romans’ understanding of it has been a staple of scholarship. But older notions of *imitatio* have given way to an appreciation of the creative processes of *aemulatio* (competitive emulation) that were at work in “carrying over” one literature to another. Bartsch takes this reevaluation further by showing how linguistic usage sheds light on Roman anxieties about their own cultural imperialism. Offering a case study of how the word *translatio* could refer both to linguistic translation (of Greek texts into Latin) and metaphorical transformation (of Romans, whose taste for Greek culture corrupted them, turning them into “Greeks”), she demonstrates that “Translation could be represented as a control exerted over an alien text, but it may ultimately have pointed to the uncontrollability of any ‘import from afar.’”

These two essays demonstrate in different ways how the reception of texts has moved into the center of Greco-Roman studies. The third contribution, by Emily

Greenwood, addresses this topic head-on. Focusing on the “cultural mobility” of the Greek and Roman classics, she describes the recent shift away from a “classical tradition” model that posits a fixed canon whose lineage can be traced through European culture. Rather, by characterizing the ancient texts as “omni-local,” she substitutes for this vertical and hierarchical conception a horizontal two-way relationship, one in which these texts are themselves “cultural composites that result from successive readers and audiences encountering and making sense of these works.” As a case study she focuses on Sophocles’s *Antigone*, and on two different African responses to it, in which the receiving community shapes the meaning of the classic work, in this case making it a vehicle of political resistance.²⁵

Closing this set of essays on literature, Caroline Alexander turns to one specific type of reception, translation. Whereas Bartsch had explored aspects of the idea in Roman antiquity, Alexander’s interest is in the contemporary practice of translation, which has made Greco-Roman texts accessible to countless students and the larger public. While translation studies has emerged recently as its own academic discipline, her focus is not on theory or criticism, but rather on making, as befits one who has just published her own translation of the *Iliad*. Offering not so much a scholarly analysis as a “reflective essay,” Alexander revisits Matthew Arnold’s essay (itself a “classic”), “On Translating Homer,” and demonstrates the continuing relevance of the principles that are set forth there in light of her own experience of translating.

From literature, the volume makes a natural transition to philosophy (still more natural in antiquity than might seem the case today). Taking as his topic the relation of the discipline to its classical past, Philip Mitsis describes the current divorce be-

tween the study of ancient philosophy and the way that philosophy is now practiced, that is, between historical or “continental” philosophers and modern “analytic” philosophy, with its largely presentist focus, its powerful logical tools, its interest in scientific method, and its linguistic paradigm. Mitsis reviews attempts to bridge the divide, noting that ancient arguments often adumbrate modern positions, and that ancient philosophers seem “new” in the way they take on real moral dilemmas that have fallen out of contemporary theorizing. And there are recent signs of potential rapprochement: the “linguistic turn” may be loosening its hold on the field, philosophy of mind may be more hospitable to ancient paradigms, and, at a time of high specialization, some philosophers are discovering that “the texts of the past offer a place where one can again think about some of the traditional central issues of philosophy in a more synthetic way. . . . In ancient texts one can again try to see the forest for the trees.” A case study is the philosophy of death, where there has been a creative engagement between the old and the new. The topic was a central one in antiquity (where most philosophers took the view that death is not an evil), and contemporary philosophers are now perforce rediscovering and grappling with arguments that go back to Epicurus. Mitsis concludes by expressing the hope that the ancient philosophers will continue to help us meet the moral challenges we face, and that they will also teach contemporary philosophers to speak to those issues, and in ways that we can understand.

The next two essays shift our attention from ancient literature and ideas to visual and material culture, though certain concerns persist. In a way that is familiar from Mitsis’s discussion of ancient philosophy, Verity Platt notes how the study of Greco-Roman art has been sidelined within the

larger discipline of art history, which focuses increasingly on the modern and non-Western. Similarly, she notes how classical art history has struggled also to define its relationship to classical philology and the close engagement with texts. Recent responses to these challenges are familiar from the discussions of literature earlier in this volume. One is to focus on reception, on “the dynamic and shifting ways in which Greco-Roman art has been – and continues to be – desired and destroyed, restored and manipulated, collected and displayed.” Another looks to historicizing the objects, locating them in their original cultural contexts; this is an enterprise, Platt notes, in which “the kinds of questions posed by contemporary art history – with their focus on historically constituted forms of visibility and, increasingly, materiality – have an important role to play.” Finally, there is growing attentiveness to the relationship between art and text, which is analogous to the “material turn” in literary studies. Thus, Platt closes by analyzing a provocative passage from Pliny the Elder, which raises questions about the artist’s relationship with his materials, models of perception, and “the slippage between medium and representation.”

The next essay, by Roger Bagnall, also focuses on material objects and texts, but of a different sort, the written artifacts that constitute an increasingly important documentary source for historical research. These include texts on stone and metal (including coins), ostraca (potsherds), wooden tablets, and papyri. Drawing most of his examples from papyrology, he describes two “materializing revolutions.” The first is a new interest in how these artifacts were produced. Digitized texts and high-resolution images of them now make it possible, within limits, to reconstruct the “ecosystem of writing” whereby “the material characteristics of writing materials and

writing itself have come to support inquiry into the entire social dimension of the technology of writing in ancient society.” The second materializing revolution, a collaboration between papyrologists and archaeologists, focuses on the contexts in which the written artifacts were buried and what that reveals about different stages in their use and reuse. Bagnall notes that the two revolutions are connected, complicating the notion that text and archaeology are separate domains. This material focus represents a shift in papyrology itself, from the predominantly literary and philological approaches of a generation ago toward history in a broad sense: “We have moved from being interested only in the text of a new fragment of Sappho to wanting to know who was copying and reading Sappho. . . . Interest has undeniably shifted in the direction of the broader cultural horizons of the ancient world in their embodied form, and away from disembodied canonical texts. This neither is, nor should be, the end of philology. But if it were the end of an isolated philology, that would be no bad thing.”

The next three essays turn our attention to ancient history. In recent years, scholarship has expanded beyond traditional political, administrative, and military history to include also social, intellectual, cultural, and (recently) environmental history. Interest has shifted from elite actors in big narratives to the smaller stories of ordinary, marginalized, and “silent” people, including women, children, slaves, and “the other,” and to such topics as demography, public health, religion, gender and sexuality, identity, and emotion.

Angelos Chaniotis focuses on one of these topics, the formation of identity, both individual and collective. Drawing on the sort of documentary evidence that Bagnall has discussed, he takes as his case study the city of Aphrodisias in Tur-

key, which persisted for a long time and has yielded unusually rich archaeological finds. He explores how different sorts of identity (civic, social, political, and religious) overlapped and competed with one another throughout the centuries; how they were constantly being shaped and reshaped by language, custom, practices, and myths; and how they were expressed in various media, especially inscriptions, which were key to the construction and transmission of collective and cultural memory. Not only the original use of this material, but even its reuse tells a story, as when an honorific inscription is repurposed centuries later as a building block, its original role in preserving memory having by then become obsolete. It is interesting that debates about identity did not undermine the city's cohesion – until late antiquity, when Christians, Jews, and polytheists competed and religious identity trumped all other forms of self-representation. Since names constitute the most basic expression of identity, the ultimate outcome of this competition is reflected in a name, the rechristening of the “City of Aphrodite” as Stauropolis, the “City of the Cross.”

The next essay, by Kyle Harper, uses a very different category of evidence, not just textual and archaeological but also scientific data. Revisiting a “classic” problem of ancient history, the (so-called) fall of Rome, he explores environmental factors that had not figured prominently in past accounts. Harper notes that Rome was an agrarian tributary empire, and its economy was remarkably resilient because of a variety of risk-management strategies, from technological improvements in agriculture to the network of roads and sea lanes that facilitated the movement of foodstuffs and other goods. But if “trade and technology let the Romans outrun the Malthusian reaper for no short season,” we now know, on the basis of scientific ev-

idence, that climate also contributed, specifically that the Mediterranean “patchwork of microclimates” had been hospitable for much of the imperial period. In the AD 160s, however, the Antonine Plague, which science has identified as smallpox, was introduced through the Red Sea trade “along the very networks that held the empire together.” At same time, volcanic eruptions in AD 169 ended the period of stable climate, anticipating the later onset of what science has identified as a “late antique little ice age.” Next, in AD 244 and again in AD 246, the Nile failed to rise, causing a food crisis in Egypt that had repercussions across the empire. And then, a second pandemic, the Plague of Cyprian, started in Alexandria in AD 249 and spread across the Roman world over the next twenty years. The crisis of the third century was underway, not as the result of any one event, but instead due to a cascade of environmental disasters that was related to climate change and disease and that was, in a sense, “the revenge of the giant imperial ecology.” These disasters, finally, “pushed the imperial system beyond the threshold of resilience.”

After two essays that explore specific problems in ancient history, Ian Morris and Walter Scheidel reflect on the nature of the enterprise itself. They review two different versions of ancient history – the classical model that regards Greece and Rome as the beginning that matters, since they were turning points in world history, and the evolutionary model, which is global in its outlook and goes back to the origins of humanity. The approaches have competed and coexisted for two hundred and fifty years, with the evolutionary model taking hold in the social sciences and the classical dominating the humanities. But as evidence and methods are changing faster than ever before, the evolutionary is in the ascendant: “Now, the origin story that seems to matter most

began not in first-millennium-BCE Greece and Rome, but with the invention of agriculture in the Middle East more than ten thousand years ago, or the evolution in Africa of modern humans more than one hundred thousand years ago, or of the genus *Homo* nearly three million years ago.” But if the classical model ignores most of the world’s history, the evolutionary model has its own “flyover zone,” neglecting much of what transpired between the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution, that is, much of recorded history. The authors propose an alternative way of doing ancient history, which is comparative and can combine classical and evolutionary thinking. Their first case study is the Axial Age, the middle of the first millennium BCE, when “an explosion of moral thinking” occurred at roughly the same time in different cultures – Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Israelite, and Greek – without much evidence of diffusion. The second topic is the study of political organization. Both Rome and China, for example, built empires; but they had very different trajectories, and their divergence can be explained only by systematic comparative analysis. The Axial Age and the fate of empires are, then, two areas for research in which both evolutionary and classical historians can work together. But to do this, classical historians “will need to . . . master new evidence, methods, and questions, and recognize that the ancient world was much bigger – and ancient history much longer – than our predecessors made them seem.”

The last two essays in this volume return to a topic that was discussed briefly at the beginning of this introduction: the institutional and professional context of Greco-Roman studies. But the focus, now, is on the future. Turning his attention to curriculum and pedagogy, Peter Struck explains the displacement of classics from

its privileged position in nineteenth-century American education as, in part, the result of the expansion of universities at that time, including the creation of public land-grant institutions whose pragmatic mission differed from earlier colleges’ goal of “acculturation into an aristocracy of the learned.” Struck sees an interesting parallel to contemporary higher education, where more Americans have a B.A. than ever before, and where undergraduates increasingly pursue vocational studies. He makes a case for the classics in this environment by noting that the breadth of the field, the way it encompasses different styles of thinking (literary, historical, philosophical, and so on), is analogous to the liberal arts as a whole. But because these different methods are housed in one curriculum, “we move beyond the paratactic aggregation of skills, and contribute to the development of a different intellectual aptitude.” Now that the liberal arts are facing the same challenges that classics faced decades ago, Struck argues that the liberal arts should make the case for pure research by disseminating knowledge of the past through popular media and online courses, which can reach a broader public and make our teaching a public good.²⁶

Gregory Crane is also committed to having Greco-Roman studies supported as a public good. But his starting point is the transformative power of technology – not how specialist research and teaching can be enhanced by technology (a topic touched upon earlier in this introduction), but rather “the extent to which the shift from print to a digital space changes how our particular fields can contribute to society as a whole.” Data from the Academy’s Humanities Indicators demonstrate that making the humanities accessible to the general public is not considered essential by scholars in this and other major humanities fields. But this leaves the humanities exposed (as figures for the National

Endowment for the Humanities' support of research show). Crane suggests ways to counter this "intellectual scholasticism." One is to expand open access, which is "a necessary, though by no means sufficient, condition for reaching beyond this closed academic network." Even more important is to come up with "a new theoretical foundation for Greco-Roman studies in a digital age," one which does not prioritize the "idealized expert" with full control of the scholarship, but extends to non-specialists, including specialists in other disciplines. Technology makes it possible for such "citizen scholars" to develop requisite skills and make real contributions to knowledge. His final point is that Greco-Roman studies in a digital age needs to open up not only to different audiences and practitioners but also to "a global network of historical languages and cultures." One traditional name for the field, "classics," ignores the fact that there are many other "classical" languages and cultures than those of Greece and Rome. He suggests institutional reorganization, forming partnerships with scholars of non-European cultures and making use of communications technology to work with colleagues around the globe. His vision of "students in Tehran and Texas reading classical Greek and classical Persian to-

gether" is akin to the sort of comparative ancient history that Morris and Scheidel envision and is consistent with the larger opening out of the field noted earlier. While not all readers may agree about the advisability or feasibility of some of these recommendations, Crane's final exhortation can serve not only as a conclusion to this introduction²⁷ but also as a prelude to the essays that follow:

Those of us who have the privilege to earn a living as students of the Greco-Roman world have a decision before us about the field we want to build. . . . We can continue writing and teaching in much the same way we always have, exploiting new digital methods as ancillary tools by which we compose more traditional articles and books, rather than asking ourselves what the purpose of our research and teaching should be and then exploring new forms of intellectual activity and production. . . . Deviating from any of these paths will be difficult: it entails redefining our field and thus inevitably challenges established structures of authority and institutional power. But the potential benefits are immense and there will be opportunities for anyone in the field, at whatever level of seniority, to contribute to and flourish within the world we collectively fashion.

ENDNOTES

¹ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 412.

² Mary Beard, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome* (New York and London: Liveright, 2015); John Seabrook, "The Invisible Library: Can Digital Technology Make the Herculeum Scrolls Legible After Two Thousand Years?" *The New Yorker*, November 16, 2015; Caroline Alexander, trans., *The Iliad: A New Translation by Caroline Alexander* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015); James Romm, "Beginning Greek, Again and Again," *The New York Times*, January 3, 2016, SR 10; "Jack Huston: The 'Ben-Hur' Remake Was an Epic Undertaking," *The New York Times*, February 10, 2016; Jens M. Daehner and Kenneth Lapatin, eds., *Power and Pathos: Bronze Sculpture of the Hellenistic World* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2015).

- ³ This sort of destructive preoccupation with the past can be countered by technology, since we are able to digitize detailed images of archaeological remains that are in harm's way, and to visit and study them, even after they are gone, through virtual reality – a new type of “salvage archaeology.”
- ⁴ Throughout this introduction and the essays that follow, various names are used interchangeably for the field. Each is fraught. “Classics,” for example, has a Eurocentric bias in that it ignores the existence of other “classic” cultures; “Greco-Roman studies” avoids that hegemonic trap but falls into another, blurring distinctions between Greece and Rome and implying a tighter cultural unity than existed (in the same way that references to a unified “Judaean-Christian” culture also mislead). Discussion of nomenclature figures in several of the essays in this volume, such as those by Emily Greenwood and Gregory Crane.
- ⁵ More worrisome for all humanities fields is the move from a full-time faculty (whether on tenure track or on contract) to an adjunct academic workforce.
- ⁶ See Phyllis Culham and Lowell Edmunds, eds., *Classics: A Discipline and Profession in Crisis* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1989). For an example of the conservative critique of the field in the climate of the culture wars, see Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath, *Who Killed Homer? The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom* (New York: The Free Press, 1998); for a rejoinder to the conservative critique, see Page DuBois, *Trojan Horses: Saving the Classics from Conservatives* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).
- ⁷ “There are no ‘paradigm-shifts’ in the Classics. That is the simple truth with which this survey of the field at the end of the twentieth century must begin.” See Louis A. Ruprecht, Jr., “Classics at the Millennium: An Outsider’s Survey of a Discipline,” *Soundings* 82 (1–2) (1999): 242.
- ⁸ T. P. Wiseman, ed., *Classics in Progress: Essays on Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). This volume explores changes in the field in Britain over the past half-century, since the publication of an earlier overview on the occasion of the Classical Association’s Jubilee, namely, Maurice Platnauer, ed., *Fifty Years of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954). For another millennial assessment of the field, see Carolina Ponce-Hernández and Lourdes Rojas Álvarez, eds., *Estudios Clásicos en América en el Tercer Milenio* (Mexico City: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, UNAM, 2006), which contains essays on Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, the United States, and Venezuela. The excellent overview of classics in the United States by David Konstan, on pages 159–175 of that volume, can be read profitably alongside my introduction to this issue of *Daedalus*.
- ⁹ American Academy of Arts & Sciences, *The Heart of the Matter: The Humanities and Social Sciences, for a Vibrant, Competitive, and Secure Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2013); and American Academy of Arts & Sciences, *The Heart of the Matter: Around the Country* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2015). These reports are also available online at <http://www.amacad.org> and <http://www.humanitiescommission.org>.
- ¹⁰ The original plan for this issue had been to survey a wide spectrum of ancient cultures, not just Greece and Rome. But the impossibility of the task in the time and space allowed soon became evident; indeed, even the current, more narrow focus of this volume entailed a great deal of selection. Finally, although the field is international, the essays here are by scholars at work in American institutions. It is worth noting, though, that while distinct national “styles” of scholarship persist in certain subfields, these distinctions have increasingly fallen away in the English-speaking world and beyond.
- ¹¹ Not all texts are recovered from papyri. One of the most famous of recent finds, documents from Vindolanda, a Roman frontier settlement near Hadrian’s Wall, were preserved on wooden tablets, and many other fragments, including some of Sappho, survive on ostraca (potsherds).
- ¹² See Peter Parsons, “New Texts and Old Theories,” in *Classics in Progress: Essays on Greece and Rome*, ed. Wiseman, 42.

- ¹³ The poem refers to two individuals, Charaxos and Larichos, who are mentioned by later authors as Sappho's brothers, but whose names did not until now appear in her surviving works. The context may be a sister's prayer for the safe return of the former, a merchant sailor, and the growth to maturity of the latter, who will bring joy to his family. This was one of two fragments of Sappho recently found on a papyrus. For a popular discussion by the scholar who discovered them, see Dirk Obbink, "New Poems of Sappho," *Times Literary Supplement*, February 5, 2014; for the scholarly publication that followed, see Simon Burris, Jeffrey Fish, and Dirk Obbink, "New Fragments of Book 1 of Sappho," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 189 (2014): 32–49.
- ¹⁴ On the "new philology," which originated in medieval studies, see the seminal essays in *Speculum* 65 (1) (1990), a special issue edited by Stephen G. Nichols. See also the conclusion of Roger Bagnall's essay later in this volume on the need for a new, "less isolated" philology.
- ¹⁵ See James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), especially pages 231–235, for a succinct overview of how, in the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, philology fragmented and spawned most of the humanities disciplines (except philosophy, whose roots were not in philology). For different approaches to the disciplinization of the field, see the essays in Glenn W. Most, ed., *Disciplining Classics – Altertumswissenschaft als Beruf*, *Aporemata* 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2002). Finally, on the return to philology in the humanistic disciplines generally, see Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Humanities and the Dream of America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 43–79.
- ¹⁶ Of course, there had always been scholars who were able to bring the insights of several disciplines to bear on the subject in the service of a holistic *Altertumswissenschaft*. But this crossing of disciplinary boundaries is now increasingly common, at least as a goal. Working in multidisciplinary teams is another way of achieving this goal; but it isn't particularly common in the field, except among archaeologists.
- ¹⁷ See Kyle Harper's essay later in this volume, which uses scientific evidence to offer a radical reassessment of the fall of Rome.
- ¹⁸ For a thoughtful overview of the impact of technologies of communication from antiquity to the present, see James J. O'Donnell, *Avatars of the Word: From Papyrus to Cyberspace* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).
- ¹⁹ For early uses of digital technology in the field, see John Solomon, ed., *Accessing Antiquity: The Computerization of Classical Studies* (Tucson and London: University of Arizona Press, 1993); see, also, the essays on "Computing in the Classics," in *Classical World* 91 (6) (1998): 457–568. For an overview of how quickly and how far the field has progressed, see Alison Babeu, "Rome Wasn't Digitized in a Day": *Building a Cyberinfrastructure for Digital Classics* (Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2011), available online at <http://www.clir.org/pubs/abstract/pub150abst.html>.
- ²⁰ See the essay by Brooke Holmes later in this volume for discussion of the relevance of medical and legal materials to an understanding of Greek tragedy.
- ²¹ For comparative ancient history, see the essay by Ian Morris and Walter Scheidel later in this volume. There may be a parallel here to the way that "world literature" is emerging as a scholarly field, either distinct from or as part of comparative literature.
- ²² A good example of this approach is New York University's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW), which offers doctoral training, post-doctoral research opportunities, and scholarly outreach. According to its website, ISAW "aims to encourage particularly the study of the economic, religious, political, and cultural connections between ancient civilizations. . . . [B]oth historical connections and patterns, as well as socially illuminating comparisons, will always be central to its mission."
- ²³ See Mary Beard and John Henderson, *Classics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6–7; see, also, page 116: "Classics must also include the study of *Classics*."

²⁴ This is a theme in several essays in this volume, including those by Peter Struck and Gregory Crane. Matthew S. Santirocco

²⁵ The illustrations on the two inside covers of this issue of *Dædalus* exemplify, from the visual arts, precisely this sort of reception. The image on the inside front cover, *The Siren's Song* (1977), is from Romare Bearden's "Odyssey Series," collages and watercolors that use Homer's epic about a hero's torturous homecoming to reflect on the African-American experience of displacement and journey, from the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the Great Migration. On the inside back cover, Picasso's late work, *Rape of the Sabine Women* (1963), was inspired by the Cuban missile crisis and uses the violent Roman foundation myth to express, in the tradition of *Guernica*, the brutality of war in terms of the horrors it visits upon women and children.

²⁶ See Matthew S. Santirocco, Nicholas Lemann, Kevin Guthrie, and Daphne Koller, "The Evolving Role of Technology in Higher Education," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* LXIX (2) (Winter 2016): 31 – 41.

²⁷ I am grateful to the American Academy's Committee on Studies and Publications, and to Leslie Berlowitz, for very helpful suggestions on the shape and content of this issue; to Phyllis Bendell and her colleagues at the Academy, Nora Khan and Peter Walton, for the professionalism and care with which they shepherded this issue, and its guest editor, through the publication process; to the Corporation of Yaddo for the residency that enabled me to reflect and write; to the contributors to this issue for numerous stimulating conversations; to Kevin Davis, for advice and assistance on editorial and technical matters; and to David Konstan, who read and improved my introduction and whose own wide-ranging and forward-looking scholarship has been an inspiration to me, and many others working in this field.

Tragedy in the Crosshairs of the Present

Brooke Holmes

Abstract: A number of developments in the study of Greek literature over the past few decades have broken down boundaries of canon and genre, opening up a wide range of texts once deemed degenerate or unavailable to literary analysis, expanding the networks within which literary texts are interpreted, and bringing renewed attention to the reception of ancient texts in later periods up to the present. The rise of reception studies, in particular, raises new questions about how our own position within specific present moments not only imposes constraints on the interpretation of ancient texts but also enables it. In this essay, I survey these developments using Greek tragedy, the most canonical of genres, as a case study. I argue that we need to develop strategies of interpretation more attuned to resonances between contemporary quandaries and our extant tragedies while remaining committed to forms of social and historical difference. I pay particular attention to the problems of agency that tragedy raises at the juncture of the human and the nonhuman worlds.

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The category of “Greek literature” has been nothing if not contestable for some decades now. The challenges have come largely from a cluster of approaches usually referred to as “cultural poetics” or “cultural history,” whose driving assumption is that determining the meaning of any ancient text requires that we embed it within a larger network of power and a broader field of signs (Athenian democracy, for example, or archaic song culture, or pan-Hellenic politics). The impact of cultural poetics has been enormous. As canonical “literary” texts have been released into a wider cultural stream, once-marginal texts have become newly privileged objects of attention. The study of texts produced after the fall of classical Athens in Ptolemaic Alexandria and under the Roman Empire, texts long dismissed as imitative and degenerate, has been booming since the mid-1990s. Decades of groundbreaking work on gender and sexuality have also helped to broaden the corpus of texts, encouraging a shift of attention toward medical and other tech-

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nical texts, in particular. Alongside these developments we have witnessed the rapid ascent of a subfield usually called “reception studies,” roughly the study of classical antiquity in post-antique societies and the history of classical scholarship. The field of Greek literature, in short, has been blown open. Its boundaries – generic, geographical, chronological – are no longer easily locatable.

Yet if these trends have worked together to transform what gets studied under the heading of Greek literature, they also pull in different directions. The potential for tension is most evident in the relationship between approaches that locate texts in their social and cultural contexts and those that look to their many and varied afterlives. One strategy tries to figure out what the texts meant in their immediate contexts; the other looks to a series of encounters in a range of places and times, including some close to home. Reception studies is often practiced with a primarily historicist outlook. But reception studies by nature, tracking as it does antiquity’s long tail, raises questions about the trans-historical value of ancient texts and the meaning of these texts today. These kinds of questions can be tough for classicists.

Indeed, anxieties about presentism are virtually constitutive of modern classical scholarship, founded as the model science in the nineteenth century on techniques for accessing the historical truth of the past and reconstituting its texts.¹ In the twentieth century, fascist appropriations of an idealized antiquity came to haunt uses of the classical past for present-day ends. Triumphalist classicism has been turned on its head by a political tide that has been in ascendancy since the late 1960s, and out of which the best strands of cultural poetics have emerged. Yet while the conservative attempt to turn back that tide is undoubtedly misguided, forms of anticlassicism always risk being constrained by what they

oppose. Historicism has its limits. For better or for worse, “the Greeks” still haunt the Western imagination, as they have for millennia. Though we did not need reception studies to tell us that, a flood of recent work has driven the point home. And like the humanities more generally, classics is always facing challenges to its relevance.

It is easy enough to let the sheer impact of “the Greeks” or “the ancients” on Western civilization legitimate by default the study of whatever fits under the big tent of Greek literature. The strategy is at some level unavoidable under current conditions. But I do worry that it feeds off a certain defensiveness about the field in an age of budget cuts and STEM-envy, and I worry even more that it falls back uncritically on standard classicizing presumptions of value. The harder task is a serious reckoning with the legacies of classicism and anticlassicism as the conditions under which anyone comes to the Greeks as if they do and should matter. This reckoning would start by taking up the inherited category of “Greek literature” and its canon not only as a historical construct but also as the dynamic terrain for the staging of arguments about the value of ancient Greek texts and demands that we attend to them. In the rest of this essay, I flesh out these more general arguments by looking at the specific case of that most canonical of genres, Greek tragedy.

There may be no other genre in which the tensions I have just sketched are so evident, precisely because of tragedy’s tenacious prestige value. Tragedy already exuded power and status during its efflorescence in fifth-century BCE Athens. But from our vantage point, the genre’s power is unthinkable without its reimagination as the philosophy of the tragic most closely associated with the German idealists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Reborn in a philosophical mode and

buoyed by highly influential readings of a handful of plays (*Antigone*, *The Bacchae*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*) by Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud, tragedy has remained central to twentieth- and twenty-first-century continental philosophy, political theory, psychoanalysis, feminism, and literary theory, while also enjoying a robust performance tradition. There is arguably no tragedy in modernity without a philosophy of the tragic.

Unsurprisingly, in light of my remarks above about historicist trends in the field, the modern legacy of the tragic has been a problem for scholars of Greek tragedy over the past four decades. Much effort has gone into making sense of what tragedy meant not as an idea but as a genre in the context of fifth-century Athenian politics, culture, and performance traditions. Most scholars would in fact deny that anything like a “tragic” outlook on life or worldview is embodied by tragedy in its prime, cordoning off Aristotle as well as Hegel from the phenomenon of lived performance. The commitment to a historicist program can be explained not only by the discipline’s own formation as a “science of antiquity” (*Altertumswissenschaft*), which I mentioned above, but also by the wide-ranging influence of the French Hellenist Jean-Pierre Vernant, who critiqued the universalizing claims of psychoanalysis and structuralism in order to situate Greek tragedy more firmly within the coordinates of democratic Athens. In this critical climate, the pressures of modernity’s impassioned appropriation of tragedy have been seen as amplifying the pressures of the present more broadly construed. If we are going to rescue Greek tragedy from the tragic, the thinking goes, we need to cut through the interference.

But pendulums swing. Approaches that were once dynamic ossify. The turn away from the democratic context of our extant tragedies understood as the key to their

meaning has produced a renewed interest in the plays’ formal elements, without jettisoning the hope of observing tragedy as a thoroughly political genre in its original habitat.² Even more energy has been channeled into approaching tragedy via reception studies. Greek tragedy has given rise to a substantial and thriving subfield devoted to the study of reperformance and adaptation not only in all corners of the modern world but in antiquity as well. Although less attention has been paid, at least under the auspices of reception studies, to philosophical constructions of the tragic, the past couple years have welcomed a trio of smart new books published by classicists on the history of tragedy and the tragic in continental philosophy, psychoanalysis, and political theory.³ The idealist tradition is fast becoming less of a threat and more an object of study in its own right within the disciplinary parameters of classics, parameters already expanded by reception’s generous outlook on the temporal and geographical scope of Greek tragedy itself.

It will not escape readers that reception studies thus described looks like historicism by other means. They will not be mistaken. Rather than being trained on the fifth century, the historian’s gaze is now focused on key moments in the nineteenth or the twentieth. The twist is that, taken to its logical outcome, the work of historicizing interpretation – indeed, of historicizing the very dominance of historicism in recent waves of scholarship on tragedy – poses with renewed urgency the question of what it means to read, stage, or watch Greek tragedy now. The methodological implications of reception studies can be spun out in at least two ways.

On the one hand, we can frame historical self-consciousness as a necessary attempt to know thyself. As such, it entails becoming aware of the spectral presence of past readings, judgments, and critical tools that inform your own interpretations. The

process is necessarily aporetic or, to put it more constructively, recursive. You have to stop historicizing at some point and trust whatever tools you have (philology, say, or critical theory) to interpret what a text means. Nevertheless, by trying to understand why we ask the questions we do of a text and perhaps why we find the answers we do, we free ourselves up to ask different questions and arrive at unexpected answers. Such an outcome, anyways, is the hope of any method that aspires to what Michel Foucault called “genealogy.”

On the other hand, the work of engaging the rich tradition of modern and contemporary readings of tragedy can be seen as license and inspiration for strategies of interpretation that invest tragedy with the power to shed light on the human condition, or some historically inflected version of it (modern, postmodern, post-postmodern). An approach of this kind hardly precludes critical self-awareness of one’s place in an interpretive tradition. It may actually be a precondition of enabling Greek tragedy to tell us something we do not already know. But this second approach frames the payoff of historical self-consciousness differently. The reader’s larger commitments and interests within the present function not so much as a distorting lens to be somehow corrected; rather, they are now seen as the very condition of saying something meaningful about ancient tragedy, precisely because they shape a conviction that antiquity matters to us at all.

The shift marked by the second perspective may seem minor. But it has significant implications for how classicists negotiate their relationship to the present more generally. For it asks them to reflect more openly on – and thereby take responsibility for – the values that motivate their readings and the worlds that they hope these readings will sustain or help to create. Taking responsibility in this sense means refusing the default mode that the

value of “the classical” is at once obvious and guaranteed by centuries of prior validation.

But this reflective mode also means not rejecting out of hand the logic of classicization in order to insist on the *otherness* of the Greeks and the particularity of their world. Although the latter approach may seem to sidestep questions of value or to locate value in cultural difference alone, the situation is more complex. For an attachment to the strangeness and the distance of the Greeks shapes the contours of classical antiquity in the modern period as much as figures of intimacy and continuity do. The case of tragedy is exemplary here insofar as one of the fundamental questions posed by philosophies of the tragic is whether ancient tragedy is even still possible in the modern world. We can speculate, then, that classicists are attached to historicizing antiquity not just because they objectively recognize a rupture between past and present. The recognition of rupture, rather, is a precondition of the operation to heal rupture by making the ancients available to the present *in their difference*, a desire often motivated by the implicit belief that antiquity is no ordinary anthropological other, but occupies a privileged position as a distant parent or lost model. In its reparative mode, historicism comes full circle to meet forms of universalism that see ancient tragedy as valuable because it taps into timeless truths – in other words, the ancients are available to the present *in their sameness* – without always being explicit about its own logic of value.

I am suggesting, then, that classical value is still too often assumed as an inheritance easily mistaken for an elite birthright. In challenges to conventional classicism, value is either suppressed or defined via an ethics of alterity broadly understood. Neither option feels adequate to the complexity of contemporary encounters with tragedy. What if instead Greek

tragedy were actively imagined as an object of what we might call, after the Stoics, *elective sympathy*? The aim of changing our terms would be to force a greater recognition of the ways in which tragedy provokes a sense, at once historically conditioned and deeply embodied, of the tensions involved in being human (being mortal, being assigned a gender, being in a family, being in a city, being embedded in a field of nonhuman powers) while, in its impossible strangeness, resisting appropriation. The language of elective sympathy invites us to think harder about how sameness and difference work together in specific ratios to make Greek tragedy matter to us now, where both “us” and “now” refer to diverse communities living out temporalities irreducible to the present alone. It offers a way of seeing modernity’s philosophies of the tragic as constitutive of the vocabularies we use to locate ourselves in relationship to Greek tragedy without determining the sense that we make of the texts.

With the term *elective sympathy*, then, I am trying to foreground our agency in establishing the terms of our investment in tragedy alongside the power that these texts still exercise over us. Agency, on this account, is not radical freedom, whatever that means. It is, rather, the thoughtful and creative negotiation of legacies ancient and modern, in the interest of living more fully in this world by not being fully of this world. Under these conditions, what might be the claims of Greek tragedy on our attention now?

In Greek tragedy, not being fully of the world in which one finds oneself most commonly leads to living it more fully through pain. The majority of surviving plays are about the suffering of outsized human beings: trauma, violence, carnage, grief. Fragments from others suggest that the texts we have are not unusual in this

respect. The extant plays’ speeds and rhythms are structured by the eruption and modulation of pain. This highly formal and complex scripting of tragic suffering is largely unfamiliar to contemporary American and Western European culture, making it one of the least assimilable aspects of the genre for audiences and readers (and a perennial challenge for performers). This is not to say that performances of Greek tragedy cannot be raw and intense. But its very unrelenting intensity, together with the absence of contemporary reference points for its form, can obscure the fine-grained workings of the law that Aeschylus calls “the learning through suffering.”

Pain in Greek tragedy *always* demands the work of making sense. This is true despite the fact that sense-making always falls short, leaving a remainder of senseless harm that, depending on your theories or your experience of the genre’s therapeutic effects, may or may not be metabolized through spectatorship itself. Like other remainders, the kernel of senseless harm testifies to the failure of a peculiarly human capacity to understand and, through understanding, to master the unknown. It testifies, too, to the very doggedness of the drive toward epistemic mastery. The famous “Ode to Man” in Sophocles’s *Antigone* names this kernel “death.” Many of the surviving tragedies suggest there are even worse things that can happen to you.

There are a range of different ways that characters in a given play come to knowledge or the limits of knowledge in the face of pain, their own and that of others. These manifold ways of knowing explain a good deal of the formal complexity of tragedy (variations of meter and syntax; changes from solo speech to choral song to variants of dialogue, including the rapid-fire back-and-forth called “*stichomythia*”; matched odes; and the combative quasi-legal speeches of the contest or “*agon*”). We sometimes see characters in the grip

of intense pain: consider Heracles writhing under a cloak doused with flesh-eating poison at the end of the *Trachiniae* or Philoctetes being seized by spasms of agony when his festering snakebite flares up in Sophocles's *Philoctetes*. Sometimes we see them coming to know the terrible things they have done in a state of madness (Heracles and Ajax in the eponymous plays by Euripides and Sophocles, respectively, or Agave at the end of *The Bacchae*). We see other characters trying to figure out why someone is suffering or else situating a fresh trauma within an intergenerational narrative of misfortune (Euripides's Hippolytus and Orestes in *Orestes*; Prometheus in the *Prometheus Bound*, probably written by Aeschylus). The role of explaining suffering is often taken up by the chorus, who spend a lot of time cycling through myths like a lawyer "searching for a precedent," as Anne Carson's chorus puts it in *Antigonick*.⁴ Sometimes gods show up *ex machina* to give an explanation whose very neatness magnifies the gulf between the arid logic of immortals and the lived experience of mortals (that gulf is one of the great challenges of staging the *Medea* for modern audiences).

The intimate relationship between tragic suffering and the work of making sense can be clarified by thinking about the sort of violence tragedy shows. It is a generic convention that direct, human-on-human violence happens offstage and gets reported in speech, typically by messengers. What we see onstage is god-on-human violence: characters struck by diseases, especially madness, that manifest themselves via symptoms, or running into disaster (*atē*) with a recklessness that provokes more sober observers to diagnose the interference of daemonic agents. But who can be sure? What distinguishes god-on-human violence is the open-ended status of a symptom when compared, say, to a corpse whose murderer accompanies it onstage.

A symptom requires an interpretation of what is happening, what will happen, and who or what is causing it. Those who witness or experience it usually want to know, in particular, which god is responsible.

The recourse to the gods as explanatory principles, however, is never clear-cut. Even if you know which god is behind the suffering, you need to know why he or she is angry. At times in Euripides, characters wonder in desperation what kind of creatures would dream up such horrors. Moreover, the very fact that gods wreak havoc in and through human beings always implicates the vehicles of divine and daemonic power in the harm that they and others suffer. Even the case of the red-handed killer turns out to be murky. When Clytemnestra stands at last over the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra, after many scenes of subterfuge, she boldly claims the murders as her own acts. But she also claims to be an avenging daemon. A corpse, too, can thus be a tragic symptom. It, too, marks incontrovertible evidence of damage to human life together with an impetus to make sense that always overshoots the mark (too many agents: god, human, ancestral) and always falls short (no account can translate pain completely into meaning).

Tragedy is about suffering, then, but it is also, over and over again, about the mysteries and the fallout of agency, understood as the ambiguous power to act in the world as well as the ambiguous openness to the world that under extraordinary circumstances impels one to act in ways that are difficult to own. The standard definition of *hamartia* as "fatal flaw" fails to get at the force and the complexity of what is going on here. It is too complacent about the boundaries of the individual to whom the flaw is thought to belong. It is too caught up in Christian notions of original sin, with its attendant certainty about guilt. It is just too blunt an instrument. It can be downright maddening to watch scholars

argue about whether Oedipus in Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus* is guilty or innocent of killing his father and sleeping with his mother. But there is also a risk of discounting the problem of agency as a belated philosophical imposition, at the hands of either Aristotle or the German idealists. The problem of agency matters a lot in the tragedies themselves.

It is of course the case that the convergence of philosophy and politics makes the question of agency newly urgent in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century. But it is precisely by recognizing the creative force of the idealists' urgency that we can be more strategic about drawing out the resonances of tragic agency in the early twenty-first century. For once again philosophy and politics are converging on the conundrum of agency, and in many spaces at once. The examples can be multiplied: thinking about and through the scope, limits, and uneven distribution of human agency on scales both cosmic and local in the era of the Anthropocene; the implications of research in cognitive science and medicine for taxonomies of mind, intention, and responsibility; concerns about the capacity of courts to do the political and emotional work of defining harm and blame and assigning damages; the rapid growth of technological expansions of agency that magnify the power to harm and the power to help, thereby shifting our thinking about mortality and our control over life; the tenacity of forces of oppression that continue to work through individuals and communities and institutions with devastating consequences; the ever-fuzzier boundary between human and nonhuman actants in the various new materialisms and the causal traffic between human and nonhuman communities and networks; wars that inflict violence by drone but still send home soldiers damaged by the awful intimacy of combat. The list goes on. Suffice to say that we

are not done with tragic agency. Not even close.

What tragedy does not do is provide easy answers to the darkest puzzles of agency. But its refusal to do so does not mean it necessarily yields what Bonnie Honig has recently diagnosed as "mortalist humanism," that is, a quiescent politics bred out of the indulgence of lament and the positing of a universal community stitched together by finitude.⁵ Rather, Greek tragedy carves out spaces for dwelling with vulnerability and damage via a rich spectrum of epistemic and emotional modalities. We need aesthetic and communal spaces to work through the suffering we undergo and witness that cannot be made sense of by the poles of guilt and innocence alone – the moral, ethical, political, and emotional complexity that surrounds damage to human life. Rather than inducing paralysis, the experience of tragedy may condition more discerning, nimble, and compassionate forms of thought and action in the world beyond its boundaries. The possibility that it might do so does not exhaust its value. But nor can such potential be written off as instrumentalization.

In contemporary American culture, we have a deep and desperate need not to see suffering: to fix it with technology or laws, to ignore it or blame it on someone else. Tragedy does not replace medicine or law or politics. But it does have the capacity to flesh out the human sciences by transposing them into worlds where their mechanisms get jammed. Its provocation is to ask whether and how suffering itself can be creative. If tragedy seen in these terms bears the residues of the idealist tradition, idealism's traces bear witness to the urgency and power of its readings of the texts themselves. We court narcissism in believing that sophisticated problems of subjects and objects, of necessity and what is "up to us," of the human and nonhuman are uniquely modern. I want to close by look-

ing very briefly at three versions of these problems, loosely allied with law, medicine, and politics, as endemic to the historical moment of tragedy. My aim in doing so, in an essay ostensibly about the “now,” is to enlarge the autonomy of tragedy as the condition of its viability in this present.

Sophocles’s Oedipus is a cipher from the start. In the *Oedipus at Colonus* (performed approximately two decades after the *Oedipus Tyrannus*), Sophocles scripts two modes of making sense of what has happened to Oedipus that meet but do not merge. When Oedipus, blind and nearing the end of his life, first has his infamous name pried out of him by the chorus of elderly Colonians, he slips into a rhetorically polished speech of self-defense. I am a man, he says, whose deeds were suffered more than acted, who went unknowingly along the path he traveled.⁶ Midway through the play, he revisits this language of ignorance and blamelessness in a blistering rebuke to Creon, who has stirred up old slurs to goad Oedipus’s newfound protectors into expelling him from their city.⁷

Oedipus here is very much the master of the legal vocabularies that had been refined over the course of the fifth century. The appropriation of legal vocabulary by the tragedians is the main reason why Vernant put so much emphasis on the evolution of legal thought as a condition for the historical development of Athenian tragedy, which he located at the juncture of older religious paradigms of blame and punishment and fifth-century legal institutions.⁸ But the mode of the law-court interacts with others. Once the chorus has agreed to let Oedipus wait for their king Theseus, they return to the story of his life, now told through song and punctuated by lament. Oedipus does not give up the language of blindness and innocence here. But as another kind of sense-making surges up around it, suffering becomes the con-

dition of Oedipus’s life, what defines it as his own even as he disclaims ownership of the actions that create it. His hands are not stained and yet without the stain (*miasma*) – and the ongoing work of making sense of the stain – he does not exist. The law is little help here.

What about medicine? A number of scholars have noticed a spike in “medical” vocabulary and depictions of disease in tragedy toward the end of the fifth century. These developments are usually chalked up to a vague “realism” and sometimes secularization, particularly in Euripides. I have elsewhere argued that they can be more productively understood as part of the larger story about tragic agency. More specifically, they stand at the heart of new ways of thinking about human nature, vulnerability, and agency stimulated by the emergence of a concept of the physical body under the aegis of naturalizing medicine and the larger “inquiry into nature.”⁹

What makes these developments so powerful for tragedy is the fact that the open-ended structure of the symptom allows the eruption of pain and violence to sustain different kinds of narratives of cause, some attached to gods, others to generic or named diseases. In the last decades of the fifth century, Greek tragedy is working out the implications of different kinds of stories that can be attached to the symptom. By emphasizing gods, tragedy figures the human being as a vehicle of daemonic power, as we saw above. This figuration is always problematic. But the spike in the language of disease, together with an increased use of medical language and imagery, radically expands the space accorded to the human as an incubator of harm to self and others in accordance with the contemporary conceptualization of the corporeal interior as the space of disease and the origin of the symptom. The body on this model comes to figure the strangeness of what is both not self – for what is

new about the physical body and its nature is its status as an object – and constitutive of self. It thereby enlarges and sharpens tragedy’s conceptual resources for problematizing agency. Euripides’s *Orestes* maps a very different world by turning the Furies, who appear onstage in the final play of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, into the unseen hallucinations of an Orestes now described with the language of disease as a man capable of murder without divine sanction. The disease motifs of the same playwright’s *Hippolytus* magnify the ethical conundrum of Phaedra’s desire. The stakes of disease-language often go unrecognized by scholars of tragedy. But as we wade deeper and deeper into the complexities of subjectivities formed through biopolitics and biotechnology, perhaps we are ourselves at a historical moment to appreciate more fully the shock of the physical body as a concept, one that upends what it means to be a subject and an agent in ways as powerful as the democratic institutionalization of the law. From this vantage point, the drama of the symptom and the medicalization of tragic agency acquire new depths.

The trust we place in medicine and law to deal with questions of harm and blame can make tragic agency especially powerful and disturbing. Our own attachment to the idea of the individual, however, is sometimes said to distort the way we interpret ancient tragedy. The chorus, on this line, is the perennial problem of modernity. There is a risk here of overcorrecting a fixation on the isolated hero and losing sight of the shifting coordinates – legal and medical but also political – for imagining the tragic subject in the fifth century. But if we remember that part of the problem of tragic agency has to do with boundaries, then it becomes clear that tragedy is also a site for thinking about the distribution of agency within networks that extend widely over space and time and

encompass a broad range of relations between people: kin, armies, slaves, and other subject populations (who are favored members of the chorus).

The web of kin relations, in particular, is notoriously sticky in Greek tragedy. The legacy of the family can be seen to enable forms of agency. Antigone, in Sophocles’s eponymous play, demands that Ismene prove that she is the offspring of noble parents by assisting in the illicit burial of their renegade brother Polyneices. More often, though, what is transmitted from one generation is the curse (as Antigone herself suggests at other moments in the play), which ensnares later generations in ancestral crimes and misfortunes. In Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, the city and its law-courts appear to arrest the potentially interminable chain of harm. But by the time we get to the *Orestes*, Euripides’s wildly perverse sequel staged in the last decade of the fifth century, the city no longer appears as a ready savior.

The curse binds one generation to another, but it also entangles humans in a world of nonhuman judges and avengers. Nonhuman agents sometimes resolve into clear forms, such as the Erinyes of the *Orestes* myth or Olympian gods. But deified force also spreads more diffusely in our extant tragedies to animate and disrupt what we would call the natural world, perhaps most memorably in the *Bacchae*, with its flows of milk, its uncannily tame animals, the eerie quiet of the forest before Pentheus is destroyed. In so doing, intensities of power seem to become unmoored from the gods’ intentions and the narratives they support. The circulation of power through the natural world can also give rise to heterodox forms of human and nonhuman community (as in the *Philoctetes*). The fluid movement of power thus works against the arrest of cause required for responsibility and explanation at the level of not only humans but also

nonhumans. The inscrutability of a cosmos unpredictably implicated in what we do and suffer and marked by ancestral damage signals another facet of Greek tragedy newly visible in light of our present ecological predicament. Tragedy does

not offer to fix a broken world. Instead it demands that we attend to the complexity of embodied and earthbound life through attempts to make sense of suffering and its causes. In an age of quick fixes, this is a lot.

Brooke
Holmes

ENDNOTES

- ¹ On philology as a model science, see Lorraine Daston and Glenn W. Most, "History of Science and History of Philologies," *Isis* 106 (2) (2015): 378 – 390.
- ² See, for example, Simon Goldhill, *Sophocles and the Language of Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Victoria Wohl, *Euripides and the Politics of Form* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015).
- ³ Joshua Billings, *The Genealogy of the Tragic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014); Miriam Leonard, *Tragic Modernities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015); and Joshua Billings and Miriam Leonard, *Tragedy and the Idea of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). This is not entirely new ground for classicists; for example, see M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); M. S. Silk, ed., *Tragedy and the Tragic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); and James I. Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on The Birth of Tragedy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- ⁴ Anne Carson, *Antigonick (Sophokles)* (New York: New Directions, 2012).
- ⁵ Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- ⁶ Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 258 – 291.
- ⁷ *Ibid.* 960 – 1013.
- ⁸ See Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 25 – 28.
- ⁹ Brooke Holmes, "Euripides' Heracles in the Flesh," *Classical Antiquity* 28 (2) (2008): 231 – 281; and Brooke Holmes, *The Symptom and the Subject: The Emergence of the Physical Body in Ancient Greece* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 228 – 274.

Roman Literature: Translation, Metaphor & Empire

Shadi Bartsch

Abstract: The Romans understood that translation entails transformation. The Roman term “translatio” stood not only literally for a carrying-across (as by boat) of material from one country to another, but also (metaphorically) for both linguistic translation and metaphorical transformation. These shared usages provide a lens on Roman anxieties about their relationship to Greece, from which they both transferred and translated a literature to call their own. Despite the problematic association of the Greeks with pleasure, rhetoric, and poetic language, the Roman elite argued for the possibility of translation and transformation of Greek texts into a distinctly Roman and authoritative mode of expression. Cicero’s hope was that eventually translated Latin texts would replace the Greek originals altogether. In the end, however, the Romans seem to have felt that effeminacy had the last laugh.

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Recent work on Roman literature has turned to the act of translation as a fundamental and defining feature of the Roman literary corpus. The focus on translation is not new, *per se*; both the Romans and the scholars who have written about them acknowledge that Roman literature originated in the appropriation and translation of Greek texts. Roman literature was thus already “secondary,” “belated,” “imitative,” even as the Romans mused on the paradox of taking to their collective bosom the literature of a conquered empire. What is novel about the current approach is the understanding that Roman discourse on the origins of their literature entailed a complicated ideological battle fraught with implications for their social, cultural, and political thought. Recent scholarship has focused, *inter alia*, on literary production as a tool for elite self-definition; on the creative nature of what the Romans loosely called “translation”; on Roman epigraphy and how Greek source-texts are treated in Roman inscriptions.¹ What is already clear is that the notions of “imitation,” “transla-

tion,” and “transmittal” that were so basic to the old denigration of Roman literature actually involved creative processes that laid down a challenge to their source-texts, provided grounds for competitive claims within Roman culture, and ultimately fed into a broad nexus of concerns about foreign influence, native character, and the dangers of empire.

In this essay, I offer a specific case study of one feature of Roman translation that has remained unexplored in the flourishing of translation studies. This is the curious overlap of the Roman terminology for *translation* with the Roman terminology for *metaphor*.² While we moderns understand that to translate is always to transform, our lexicon does not trace the two processes back to identical literal meanings with different figural extensions. In Latin, however, to translate is to “turn” one text into another or to “transfer” a text from one language to another (*vertere, transferre*; the past participle *translatum*). At the same time, to “turn” a phrase or “transfer” a term also means to create a metaphor.³ In other words, both translation and metaphor developed from the basic language of turning, changing, or transferring. Of course, the Romans understood that signifiers from one language cannot be mapped onto exactly the same meaning in another, and that translation thus involved a transformation of sorts.⁴ But unlike contemporary theorists who posit that a translation is itself a metaphorical rendition of an original,⁵ the literary and rhetorical writers of the ancient world never compared translation and metaphor – never even put them side by side – as if there was a deep gulf between the ways they could be understood. This was the case even though (as I demonstrate below) the very *metaphors* they used to talk about metaphor and translation were largely the same. In the end, this shared Roman vocabulary of *translatio* as

metaphor and *translatio* as translation sheds light on the connections between metaphor, translation, and Roman anxieties about the influence of a subject empire: the Greeks.⁶

The Romans lacked an indigenous literary and philosophical tradition, and self-consciously inherited the Greek tradition to fill the void. Their direct contact with Greek learning through the conquest and annexation of the Greek mainland in the second century BCE provided the conditions in which *translatio*, the noun meaning “carrying across,” came to hold another extended meaning: that of translating. From the conquered territories, the Romans acquired not only booty, but also Greek texts; the latter were “carried across” from abroad and also “translated” from Greek into Latin, hence solving the poverty of native Roman literature, which the Romans themselves figured as a lack (*inopia*) in their culture.⁷ Translation and the acquisition of Greek volumes were thus mutually linked; Terence, for example, describes himself as “transferring” materials from Menander’s plays, and we know that he physically traveled to Greece to fetch them.⁸ All this is unsurprising, but the fact that ancient discussions of metaphor likewise relied on the vocabulary of lack, substitution, and transferal from a foreign venue provides a striking parallel that demands more explanation.⁹ The ancients generally took a substitution view of metaphor (the replacement of one word by another),¹⁰ defining the trope as an “ornament” that provides immediacy, clarity, and a foreign quality.¹¹ Cicero instructs speakers to use metaphor “via similitude” when a proper word is lacking (*inopia*, again) or when they can introduce sweetness (*suavitas*), the latter being a fundamental feature of the trope and one reason why its effect on the reader is pleasurable.¹² As we know, the literal meaning of the verb *transferre* is “to carry across,” and

in Greek and Latin, metaphor is viewed as dependent on the foreign quality of the “new” term. But the Roman treatises emphasize geographical and spatial characteristics in their definitions, as if metaphors were foreign texts. Where Aristotle speaks in terms of a transfer between genus and species (Aristotle *Poetics* 1457b), for Cicero, metaphor’s vehicle is seen as specifically fetched or imported from a distant place to carry out a local act of signification.¹³ Thus, he notes, “Everyone takes more delight in carried-over [*translatis*] and foreign [*alienis*] words than in the proper ones that belong to them” (Cicero *De Oratore* 3.39.159), and offers as one explanation that “it’s a mark of talent to skip over what is at your feet and to seize foreign words sought at a great distance” (3.40.169).¹⁴ With the same idea in mind, he cautions elsewhere that one’s source shouldn’t be *too* far away (46.163) – and that the metaphorical vehicle should seem to have immigrated to, but not invaded, its new home (Cicero *Brutus* 274).¹⁵ The first-century philosopher and rhetorician Seneca sees the reader as doing the traveling instead: metaphor, on which we lean like a pair of crutches, “brings us to the literal spot” where we can see what we need to (Seneca *Epistles* 59.6). In either case, there is some ground that has to be crossed.

Translation and metaphor shared other basic features. Both, for example, were discussed in terms of the improvements they could bring to a given sentence or passage. Aulus Gellius, the second-century Latin grammarian, notes that Vergil won praise for translating a risqué passage in Homer into tamer Latin; as Gellius puts it, using “a modest *translatio* of words, even as [Vergil] showed and made clear [the original text], he covered it. He used pure and honorable words.” Gellius is referring to Vergil’s lines in the *Aeneid* that describe Jupiter seeking the “desired embrace” of Juno’s arms; the Homeric passage from

which Vergil took his model spoke more boldly of “deeds of love,” and a bed (Vergil *Aeneid* 8.404 – 406). Vergil, then, is being praised for describing a sex-act in very oblique (read: “pure and honorable”) language. But does Gellius mean that Vergil’s polite “embrace” is a *metaphor* for sex, or a *translation* of Homer’s passage? All we can discern is that it is a *translatio*, a transferal, from the too-frank original.¹⁶ This and similar passages from Gellius are already revelatory in their combination of a number of considerations: the notion of transformation, the use of metaphor to suggest modesty, and the competition between Roman and Greek versions (Vergil improving on Homer, or not). As Vergil’s mastery in translation is praised, so is his correct use of metaphor.¹⁷

In fact, modesty played a role in the evaluation of both successful translations and successful metaphors. Cicero, we saw above, calls for metaphor to be modest, to seem invited into the text rather than to have forced its way in. The author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* also wants metaphor to be modest, lest it seem to have “rashly and libidiously” (!) run across to a dissimilar term (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.34).¹⁸ Such “libidinous” (uncontrolled or far-fetched) metaphors were tied to literally libidinous practices in their creators and were roundly criticized. Seneca condemns eras in which metaphors were used “immodestly” (Seneca *Epistles* 114.1) and then goes on to characterize the frequent or unusual use of metaphor in terms of excessive luxury and deviant sexuality: it springs from the pen of writers that are “effeminate,” marked by *mollitia* (softness), full of license (114.3 – 4). Such were Maecenas and others like him, who wore colorful cloaks or transparent togas and who were not considered by Seneca “manly men” in the other realms of life as well.¹⁹

What is a libidinous metaphor, or a luxurious one? The parallels in Roman treat-

ments of translation help us understand Greek literature – like the culture in which it was embedded – posed the same perceived threats of excess sweetness and effeminacy. Translators into Latin were well aware of the need to make it appropriate for the sturdily no-nonsense Romans, as they thought of themselves. Indeed, Valerius Maximus, the great Roman collector of edifying moral stories, characterizes the Greek language itself as “sweet” (Maximus *Nine Books of Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 2.2.2).²⁰ As a correlate, we find that translators are praised for modifying or eliminating what is either too sexual or pleasurable in the original; so, for example, Gellius praises Vergil, again, for “prudently omitting what was very sweet in the Greek” when translating Theocritus.²¹ An extreme expression of this xenophobia comes courtesy of Cato the Elder, who warned his son not to learn Greek literature too deeply: it would corrupt everything Roman (Greek doctors were banned from his home, too) (Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 29.7.14). And if too much metaphor ran the risk of effeminizing the author, all of Greek culture represented the dangers of unmanly softness for the Roman elite, who repeatedly figured Greece as the source of all things luxurious and unmanly, including statuary, clothing, philosophy, even pederasty.²²

What are we to make of these alliances between Roman translation and metaphor: the terminology, the idea of transformation, the distance traveled by the text or the metaphorical vehicle, the care taken with sweet or sexual qualities, the potential taint of effeminacy?²³ They tell us much about the Roman view of both Greek literature and rhetorical figure as potential sources of an active and almost contagious anti-Romanness that had to be carefully regulated – or better still,

overcome and made Roman.²⁴ When Vergil famously contrasted Greek statuary and oratory to the Roman “art” of warfare, the divide between these national qualities was as much prescriptive as descriptive: the Romans wanted to contrast themselves to the conquered Greeks in this particular way. But lest we think metaphor and translation can be lumped together in Roman thought as simple cases of the incorporation of “pleasant but risky things from afar,” we should look to their perceived differences to see why the Romans declined to lump them together – to see, that is, how one process was perceived as safe for the Roman character, while the other remained fraught.

To start with, the connotations of effeminacy and excess with which the Romans tarred the Greeks generally did not attach to Greek literature in *translation*. If questions of modesty, self-control, and excess were sources of concern for those writing prescriptions for the use of metaphor, translation, on the other hand, was almost always figured as a successfully accomplished exercise of control and mastery over a foreign text, an operation that “Romanized” it enough to make it all right for consumption. This was possible because the Romans had little interest in producing translations that were identical to their source texts. Instead, from the early days of combining different Greek comedies to produce a single Roman one, to the more sophisticated translations produced by the Roman elite in the late Republic and beyond, the Roman translator not only made available an originally Greek text, but also demonstrated his control over the source material and recontextualized its content, all to show that he was no self-effacing imitator, but a manipulator of Greek originals in his own right.²⁵ And since most elites tended to know both languages, they did not need a literal crib; no one complained

that Roman texts were too different from the works that inspired their creation.²⁶

There are numerous attestations to this way of thinking. The poet Horace's famous lines showering scorn on the servile herd of literary imitators probably refer to his disdain for poets trying to imitate his own accomplishments, not Greek originals, but he himself points out that he treads untrodden turf as he takes on Greek lyric (Horace *Epistles* 1.19). In his programmatic poem, the *Ars Poetica*, he mocks the idea of the faithful translator, and the narrow space in which he works (Horace *Ars Poetica* 133ff). The epistolary writer Pliny the Younger urges us to translate for fun, but also to be ashamed if our versions do not sometimes outdo the original (Pliny the Younger *Epistulae* 7.9). And as Aulus Gellius reminds us, "Whenever we have to translate and imitate famous passages from the Greek poets, people always say we should not try to translate every single word in the original. Many things lose their charm if transferred too violently, as if unwilling and reluctant" (Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 9.9.1–2). Roman authors produced not one but five versions of Aratus's difficult didactic poem on astronomy, the *Phaenomena*; as Glenn Most writes, the fact that it was translated into Latin so often "is a testimony not only to the importance of astronomy in the ancient world, but above all to the necessity Latin poets felt to sharpen their instruments on the most intractable of materials (and, along the way, to display their virtuosity)."²⁷

In justifying his decision to translate Greek philosophical works, Cicero claims that the Romans are wiser than the Greeks and had improved upon what they inherited from them; the Greeks surpassed the Romans in literature, to be sure, but "victory was easy where there was no contest" (Cicero *Tusculanae Disputationes* 1.2 and 4.1–2).²⁸ The term "victory" is no accident. Modifying the source text was a chance to

display not only one's virtuosity, but also the general superiority of the Roman version over the Greek original, and indeed, of Romans over Greeks.²⁹ The relationship between source text and destination text could even descend to metaphors of violence: as Siobhán McElduff put it, "Roman literary translation, as a general rule, dismembered a Greek text and scattered it within a larger work."³⁰ *Translatio* was the outcome of conquering, of enacting a translation of empire (*translatio imperii*) as well as a translation of literary culture (*translatio studiorum*). Indeed, Cicero's hope was that, eventually, translated Latin texts would replace the Greek originals altogether (2.6) much like a metaphor in which the literal term trumped the imported vehicle, thus turning the whole process of transfer on its head!³¹

If literary translation could and should be free, and represented Roman mastery over Greek originals, it in this respect differed greatly from metaphor.³² Metaphor had to be closely controlled: in the treatises, the need to avoid overstepping certain bounds when creating tropes very much comes to the fore. We have seen the frequent invocation of the language of modesty and restraint.³³ There were injunctions about modest choices, control of the level of dissimilarity, avoidance of base vehicles, avoidance of excess, avoidance of effeminacy. These attempts at control stand in sharp contrast to the confident stance of the translators and their freedom to change the original, to "illuminate" (*inlustrare*, or "light up") the obscurities of the Greeks in the Latin tongue.³⁴ When these rules were ignored, the results were all but disastrous. Well might Seneca lament Maecenas's cloying metaphors, or Cicero limit their usage, or Quintilian decry metaphors that involved lowly and improper vehicles such as sewers (Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 8.6.15). In the end, of course, the production of metaphors was up to individu-

al authors; neither their production, nor their interpretation, could be controlled.

This must be part of the reason why these two forms of “translation” had little in common in the Roman imagination. Since metaphor by definition “produced pleasure” and risked causing effeminacy, it ran conceptually in parallel to the *other* imports from the empire that the Romans acquired: not the literary texts brought back, but the booty, slaves, wealth, and statuary transferred from the conquered peoples to Rome.³⁵ A swarm of late Republican and early imperial laments linked the conquest of Greece to the destruction of Roman character. Pliny the Elder felt such extravagances justified calling a man Venus (Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 36.3.7–8); Horace’s other famous dictum, “Greece, once captured, captured her fierce conqueror and brought the arts into rustic Latium” (Horace *Epistles* 2.1.155–156), reminded the Romans that their military

success was double-edged; the satirist Juvenal took Horace one further in remarking that “Luxury has settled down on us, avenging the world we’ve conquered” (Juvenal *Satires* 6.294); Pliny the Younger speaks of Roman zeal for work transformed (*translatum*) to zeal for pleasure (Pliny the Younger *Panegyricus* 13.5).³⁶

Translation could be represented as a control exerted over an alien text, but it may ultimately have pointed to the uncontrollability of any “import from afar.” In the Roman imagination, at least, the final *translatio* was that of sturdy Romans into luxury-loving slaves to pleasure and foreign importations – and this was no act of mastery in translation, but, metaphorically, of surrender to the joint threats of *translatio* from Greece and *translatio* as metaphor. What metaphor pointed to, in the end, is the instability of the conqueror’s position *and* the instability of any text, “conquered” by translation or not.

ENDNOTES

¹ For examples of these approaches, see Bernard Bertolussi, Madeleine Keller, Sophie Minon, and Lyliane Sznajder, eds., *Traduire, Transposer, Transmettre dans l’Antiquité gréco-romaine* (Paris: Éditions Picard, 2009); Maurizio Bettini, *Vertere: un’antropologia della traduzione nella cultura antica* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012); Alessandro Garcea, “Aulu-Gelle, Probus et le problème de la traduction des textes poétiques,” in *Traduire, Transposer, Transmettre dans l’Antiquité gréco-romaine*, ed. Bertolussi et al., 17–26; John Glucker and Charles Burnett, eds., *Greek into Latin from Antiquity Until the Nineteenth Century* (London: The Warburg Institute, 2012); Bernard Kytzler, “Fidus interpres: The Theory and Practice of Translation in Classical Antiquity,” *Antichthon* 23 (1989): 42–50; Siobhán McElduff and Enrica Sciarrino, eds., *Complicating the History of Western Translation: The Ancient Mediterranean in Perspective* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2011); Siobhán McElduff, *Roman Theories of Translation: Surpassing the Source* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Christian Nicolas, “La note de traducteur antique et le niveau méta de la traduction, ou Quand la patte du traducteur se prend dans le fil du texte,” in *Traduire, Transposer, Transmettre dans l’Antiquité gréco-romaine*, ed. Bertolussi et al., 61–89; Frederick M. Renner, *Interpretatio: Language and Translation from Cicero to Tytler* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989); Diana Spencer, “Horace and the Con/straints of Translation,” in *Complicating the History of Western Translation*, ed. McElduff and Sciarrino, 101–116; Astrid Seele, *Römische Übersetzer, Nöte, Freiheiten, Absichten: Verfahren des literarischen Übersetzens in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995); Anna Svenbro, “Théoriser la traduction à la fin de l’Antiquité et au début du Moyen Âge: Quelques glissements sémantiques,” in *Traduire, Transposer, Transmettre dans l’Antiquité gréco-romaine*, ed. Bertolussi et al., 9–16; Alfonso Traina, “Le traduzioni,” in *Lo spazio letter-*

ario di Roma antica, Volume II, *La circolazione del testo*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo, Paolo Fedeli, Andrea Giardina (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1989), 93–123; Thomas N. Habinek, *The Politics of Latin Literature: Writing, Identity, and Empire in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); and Sophia G. Papaioannou, “The Translation Politics of a Political Translation: The Case of Augustus’ Res Gestae,” in *Complicating the History of Western Translation*, ed. McElduff and Sciarrino, 62–74.

- ² The Roman vocabulary for *metaphor* is derived from that of the Greek, but the parallels between *translation* and *metaphor* are only Roman. (Indeed, the Greeks translated little from other languages into Greek.)
- ³ *Translatio* or *trlatio* – though verbal forms – are, in both cases, more common than nominal ones. A rare example of *metapherein*, meaning “change into another language,” occurs in Plato’s *Critias* 113a; more common would be *metaphrazein*.
- ⁴ See Clifford Ando, “Interpretatio Romana,” *Classical Philology* 100 (1) (2005): 41–51. On page 43, Ando discusses several examples of such Roman awareness and relates the famous story of the idiom *dari spondes*, which was said to be untranslatable by Gaius (*Gai Institutiones: or, Institutes of Roman Law* 3.93). On the understanding that translation is always an interpretation, “as shown by the connection of terms with the synonymic values *interpretari*, *vertere*, and *transferre*,” see Glenn W. Most, “Violets in Crucibles: Translating, Traducing, Transmuting,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 133 (2) (2003): 381–390. See also Douglas Robinson, *The Translator’s Turn* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); and Nicholas Round, “Translation and its Metaphors: the (n+1) Wise Men and the Elephant,” *Skase Journal of Translation and Interpretation* 1 (2005): 47–69.
- ⁵ For discussion, see Alfred J. MacAdam, “Translation as Metaphor: Three Versions of Borges,” *Modern Language Notes* 90 (6) (1975): 747–754; Robinson, *The Translator’s Turn*, 127–193; and Round, “Translation and its Metaphors,” which also discusses metaphors of translation. The bibliography in Round’s article serves as an introduction to the field of translation theory in general, which is not, however, within the scope of these pages.
- ⁶ On the value of the metaphors with which a culture thinks *about* such matters as metaphor and translation, see Bettini, *Vertere: un’antropologia della traduzione nella cultura antica*, xiii. Bettini includes an interesting discussion of the metaphorical implications of *vertere* as transforming the source text.
- ⁷ On the lack of literary or philosophical texts, or even a Latin vocabulary for philosophical terms, see Cicero *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* 1.3.80; Cicero *De Oratore* 3.24.95; Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* 1.832; and Seneca *Epistles* 58.1. Cicero disputes the stereotype in *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* 1.10. For a full treatment of the theme in Lucretius, Cicero, Quintilian, and Aulus Gellius, see Thorsten Fögen, *Patrii sermonis egestas. Einstellungen lateinischer Autoren zu ihrer Muttersprache (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde Band 150)* (München-Leipzig: K.G. Saur Verlag, 2000).
- ⁸ As Terence writes in *Andria*, lines 13–14, “The playwright admits that he transferred what was suitable from the *Perinthia* into the *Andria*.” See McElduff, *Roman Translation*, 87ff, for discussion of Terence’s practices. Poor Terence died, in fact, while returning to Rome from Greece with 108 new plays – or so his biographer Suetonius tells us, in *Vita Terenti* sec. 5.1.
- ⁹ For more on *translatio* as translation (a less common version than its verbal form, *transferre*), see Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 1.4.18; Jerome *Letters* 99; and Servius 1.223.7. For material on *translatio* as metaphor, see Cicero *De Oratore* 3.38.156, 3.41.165; *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.34.45; and Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 1.5.2, 8.6.4. For material on the verb *transferre*, meaning “to translate,” see Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 6.2.3; Cicero *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* 1.3.7; Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 1.6.3, 2.1.4, 2.15.21, 7.4.4, 7.4.7; Seneca *Dialogue* 11.11.5; Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 6.111; Pliny the Younger *Epistulae* 7.9.2; and Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 9.9.2. For notes on meaning to create a metaphor, see Cicero *De Oratore* 3.37.149; Cicero *Orator* 19.65; Cicero *De Optimo Genere Oratorum* 4; Cicero *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* 2.10; and Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 12.10.34. There is also an appendix containing a list of the verbs for translation in McElduff, *Roman Theories of Translation*.

- ¹⁰ On ancient metaphor, see Andrew Barker, “Shifting Frontiers in Ancient Theories of Metaphor,” *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 45 (2000): 1–16; G. R. Boys-Stones, ed., *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Doreen Innes, “Cicero on Tropes,” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 6 (3) (1988): 307–325; Doreen Innes, “Metaphor, Simile, and Allegory as Ornaments of Style,” in *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition*, ed. Boys-Stones, 7–27; John Thomas Kirby, “Aristotle on Metaphor,” *American Journal of Philology* 118 (4) (1997): 517–554; G. E. R. Lloyd, “The Metaphors of *metaphora*,” in *Aristotelian Explorations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 205–222; Stephen Nimis, “Aristotle’s Analogical Metaphor,” *Arethusa* 21 (2) (1988): 215–226; Michael Silk, “Metaphor and Metonymy: Aristotle, Jakobson, Ricouer, and Others,” in *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition*, ed. Boys-Stones, 115–147; Bruce M. Psaty, “Cicero’s Literal Metaphor and Propriety,” *Central States Speech Journal* 29 (2) (1978): 107–117; and Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).
- ¹¹ Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1405a, 1411b; *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.34; Cicero *Orator* 25, 39; Cicero *De Oratore* 39.157–59; and Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 8.6.4.
- ¹² “Translata dico, ut saepe iam, quae per similitudinem ab alia re aut suavitatis aut inopiae causa transferuntur,” from Cicero *Orator* 27.92. See also Cicero *De Oratore* 3.38.155–156, 3.43.211; and Cicero *Partitiones Oratoriae* 17. For material on metaphor in general, see Cicero *Orator* 27.92; Cicero *De Oratore* 3.29.134, 3.38.155; and Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 8.6.4.
- ¹³ For other definitions that emphasize the distance that a metaphoric term must cross, see Cicero *De Oratore* 3.37.149. For definitions that emphasize the vividness a metaphoric term must have, see Cicero *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.34; and Cicero *De Oratore* 3.40.161.
- ¹⁴ On why we find metaphor sweet, Cicero offers four reasons in total in *De Oratore* 3.159–161: metaphor is a mark of natural talent; it stimulates intellectually; it can embed a comparison in a single word; and it offers both sensual and visual stimulation.
- ¹⁵ One might contrast this form with metonymy, which draws on words that are “nearby” or “bordering” the noun to be replaced. See Cicero *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.43.
- ¹⁶ Another critic, or so Gellius tells us in *Noctes Atticae* 9.10, found this very same *translatio* not, in fact, so pure and honorable. Here we speak of metaphor, since Cornutus criticized the presence of the word “limbs” in the Vergilian *translatio* as “indiscreet” in a work entitled “On Figural Language.”
- ¹⁷ Gellius, however, cites other pundits of the age who criticized him as an *immodest* user of metaphor in Vergil’s translation of Pindar’s passage on Aetna. See Vergil *Aeneid* 3.570ff.
- ¹⁸ The Roman terms are *pudens* or *verecunda*.
- ¹⁹ Similarly, Persius complains about poetry chock-full of luxuriant imagery and Bacchic content and claims these transgressions would not take place if the Romans kept a shred of their ancestral spine. See Persius *Satires* 1.103–104. Cicero reminds us that orators have to watch their use of ornament, lest they cross over into Asiatic-style floweriness. See Cicero *De Oratore* 3.52.201; and Cicero *Brutus* 325–326.
- ²⁰ On risks to the translator in navigating all this sweet and sexual material, see Elizabeth M. Young, “Sappho Under My Skin: Catullus and the Translation of Erotic Lyric at Rome,” in *Complicating the History of Western Translation*, ed. McElduff and Sciarrino, 25–36.
- ²¹ Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 9.9.4.
- ²² Other figures are shared between metaphor and translation. Once rendered into being, both could be characterized as a garb or protective “covering” for the literal or original text. Thus, to use Latin for a Greek original might be called exchanging the *pallium* for the toga. See Seneca the Elder *Controversiae* 9.3.13; and Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus *Divus Augustus* 98–99. Over-use of figures, in Quintilian’s view, was like wearing over-luxurious clothing. See Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 8 proem 20. Cicero compares the use of metaphor to the human adoption of clothing: just as the former was originally used to repel the cold, but later became decorative,

- metaphor also came about originally due to lack, but now is used to create pleasure. See Cicero *De Oratore* 3.38.155.
- ²³ Few modern authors have commented on this alliance, either. Bettini in *Veretere* devotes one sentence to the correlation; McElduff does not have an index entry for metaphor in her interesting book on translation; and MacAdam, who is not writing about antiquity, finds it a “happy coincidence” in “Translation as Metaphor: Three Versions of Borges,” 747.
- ²⁴ Rhetoric itself was characterized as a Greek art. In 161 BCE and again in 92 BCE, edicts were issued expelling the *rhetores*. See Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus* 25.2.
- ²⁵ See discussion in McElduff, *Roman Theories of Translation*, 10ff and passim. See also Hans Baltussen, “Cicero’s Translation of Greek Philosophy: Personal Mission or Public Service?” in *Complicating the History of Western Translation*, ed. McElduff and Sciarrino, 37–47; on page 46, Baltussen quotes David Sedley on Cicero avoiding transliteration of Greek terms in translations of Greek philosophy as a “rare resort” that “savours of defeat.” On the translation of particular Greek terms, see Seele, *Römische Übersetzer, Nöte, Freiheiten, Absichten*, 23–50.
- ²⁶ See Cicero *Academica* 1.4–5; and Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 11.16, with further discussion in chapters 5 and 6 in McElduff, *Roman Theories of Translation*.
- ²⁷ See Most, “Violets in Crucibles,” 288. Christian Nicolas, in “La note de traducteur antique et le niveau méta de la traduction,” is excellent in his discussion of the way Roman translators inserted themselves into the texts they translated.
- ²⁸ Baltussen, “Cicero’s Translation of Greek Philosophy,” 37–47.
- ²⁹ Quintilian, too, in *Institutio Oratoria* 10.98, thinks in terms of challenge. Cicero is more laudatory of Greek culture in *Tusculanae Disputationes* 2.26; he suggests that Greek texts even figure as “ornaments” to the Latin language.
- ³⁰ See McElduff, *Roman Theories of Translation*, 10. Conquest literally brought translation in its wake. Even Pompey’s defeat of Mithridates resulted in the collection and translation of medical texts Mithridates had compiled (their language is not clear). See Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 25.7. Jennifer Larson points out that the politically dominant language (Latin) precedes the Greek in a majority of private inscriptions, even when it is not the language of the majority or of the inscriber. See Jennifer Larson, “Bilingual Inscriptions and Translation in the Ancient Mediterranean World,” in *Complicating the History of Western Translation*, ed. McElduff and Sciarrino, 52. Other political considerations emerge from Papaioannou, “The Translation Politics of a Political Translation.”
- ³¹ Even in the early translators’ work, “corrections” to the Greek are visible. Plautus changes names to make Latin puns in which *nomen* works as *omen*; this sort of greater fidelity to reality offers another venue for claims to superiority. Likewise, Gellius uses etymology to defend propriety of a Latin translation in *Noctes Atticae* 2.6.5–6. This is a return to closer meaning, not a movement away from it, or a metaphorical change. Failure to make the Latin text “more real” or “better” than the Greek offered an opportunity for criticism; see Nicolas, “La note de traducteur antique et le niveau méta de la traduction,” 71–76.
- ³² By contrast, from the start of the literary tradition, close translation was largely the province of a few non-Romans and ex-slaves. On their socioeconomic status, see Enrica Sciarrino, “The Introduction of Epic in Rome: Cultural Thefts and Social Contests,” *Arethusa* 39 (3) (2006): 451–452. Unfortunately, the fragments of the early Roman writers of Greek-based tragedy and dactylic epic do not offer a lot of further information. We do know that later poet Attius Labeo was lambasted for his crude literal translation of the *Iliad* (compare with the scholia to Persius *Satires* 1.4). Outside the world of letters, the close translator was the *interpres*, the military translator summoned to help at meetings of foreign generals. Cicero claimed precisely to have worked “not as an *interpres* but as an *orator*” – that is, he neither translated literally, nor like one of lower station. See his *De optimo genere oratorum* 4.14. He would only do

so if “he did not want to be himself.” See Cicero *De legibus* 2.17. On the *interpres*, see McElduff, *Shadi Roman Theories of Translation*, 24–30, 144–145, and 201–202.

- ³³ Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1405a; *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 34; Cicero *De Oratore* 3.41.165; Cicero *Epistulae ad Familiares* 16.17; Longinus *De Sublimitate* 32.2; Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 8.3.37; and Seneca *Epistles* 114.10.
- ³⁴ See Lucretius’s claim in *De Rerum Natura* 1.136–140; and Cicero’s claims in both *Academica* 1.3 and *Tusculanae Disputationes* 1.5. Both are talking about translating Greek philosophy into Latin.
- ³⁵ The corrupting effect of such goods was linked by Roman authors to the conquest of Asia and Greece, in particular, and most often dated to 146 BCE, the year in which both Corinth and Carthage were destroyed; 187 BCE is another candidate. On Hellenism as an agent of moral corruption, see Sallust *Bellum Catilinae* 10.6; and Pliny the Younger *Epistulae* 4.22. On luxury and pleasure as imports from Greece, see Cicero *In Verrum* 2.2.7; Cicero *Pro Flacco* 71.10; Cicero *In Pisonem* 42.6; Valerius Maximus *Factorum ac Dictorum Memorabilium Libri IX* 9.1.5; Velleius Paterculus *Historiae* 2.1.1; Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 33.150, Livy *Ab Urbe Condita* 7.38.5; and Lucan *Bellum Civile* 1.16–70. Horace suggests that the Romans only valued things that came from faraway lands or had been made extinct by the passage of time, but also corrupted them, like both metaphorical vehicles and luxury items. See Horace *Epistles* 2.1.21–22.
- ³⁶ For discussion, see Rhiannon Evans, “Learning to be Decadent: Roman Identity and the Luxuries of Others,” in *ASCS XXXII Selected Proceedings*, ed. Anne Mackay (Auckland: Australasian Society for Classical Studies, 2011), 1–7.

The New "Brothers Poem" by Sappho

Translated by Rachel Hadas

Chatter, rumors: *Ooh, Charaxos has come safe, ship laden—he is back at home!*
If you ask me, that is the gods' concern.
Don't think about it.

Better send me to pour out a stream
of supplications; tell me to pray to Queen
Hera: *May Charaxos steer safely home.*
And may he find us

safe and well. And let us please leave all
the rest to heaven. Out of a stormy squall
a divine calm suddenly can prevail,
if that is how

the king of heaven wills it. Some power may
from rough waters steer us skillfully
toward blessings and prosperity.
As for our family,

if Larichos would only lift his head,
leave his childhood, grow to a man instead,
then we from this weight of depression would
finally be free.

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For a brief discussion of the "Brothers Poem" by Sappho, see the introduction to this issue, page 17, endnote 13.

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Reception Studies: The Cultural Mobility of Classics

Emily Greenwood

Abstract: In spite of connotations of classics and the classical as an established tradition based around a stable canon, Greek and Roman classical antiquity has never been a fixed object of study. It has changed as our knowledge of ancient Greece and Rome has grown and shifted, and as a function of history, intellectual movements, and taste. Classicists have turned to classical reception studies in an attempt to chart some of the different encounters that various historical audiences have had with Greek and Roman classics, and this wave of research poses interdisciplinary questions about the relation of Greek and Roman classics to world literatures and cultures. The emphasis on classical reception studies offers fresh ways of thinking about the cultural mobility of the classics without appealing to discredited, old-fashioned notions of “timeless importance” or “universal value.” This debate is explored here via a Malawian reception of Sophocles’s Antigone.

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By its very name, the term *classics* proclaims that a select body of works from antiquity is perpetually new. Here I am thinking less of Ezra Pound’s dictum in *ABC of Reading* that “literature is news that STAYS new,” and instead of a remark made by Plutarch, a polymath from Boeotia in central Greece and a subject of the Roman empire.¹ In his *Life of Pericles*, written early in the second century CE, Plutarch writes admiringly of the architecture of the buildings on the Athenian Acropolis, built in the third quarter of the fifth century BCE. For Plutarch, the striking quality of these buildings was that, at the time of construction, they were instantly antique, and yet in Plutarch’s day (over five hundred years later) they remained fresh and new.

Each one of them, in its beauty, was even then and at once antique [*archaios*]; but in the freshness of its vigour it is, even to the present day, recent [*prosphtatos*] and newly wrought [*neourgos*]. Such is the bloom of per-

petual newness [*kainotēs*], as it were, upon these works of his, which makes them ever to look untouched by time, as though the unfaltering breath of an ageless spirit had been infused into them.²

(Plutarch *Life of Pericles* 13.3,
trans. Bernadotte Perrin)

All of us in the academy would like to claim the bloom of perpetual newness for our disciplines. In the case of classics, this old-newness is written into our self-naming, with *classics* and *the classical* shorthand for a complex process of classicization that has gone into defining the transcultural and transhistorical value of works from Greek and Roman antiquity.

As a heavily freighted value system, classics is not always an ideal vehicle for ensuring the continued study of the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome. Instead, because of the antiquity of the works that it signifies, its perceived entwinement with formations such as “Western Civilization,” “Europe,” or “Eurochronology,” and because of the elitism written into its very nomenclature, from the outside, classics strikes many across the globe as at best moribund and at worst a bastion of European cultural chauvinism. What is classical is what is judged first-rate, and this judgment presupposes a single scale of value, since works can only be ranked in terms of excellence and lasting value if they are all measured on the same scale. And if the classics of ancient Greece and Rome have a prior monopoly on what is classical, then classics appears to impose its canon on all other areas of study and artistic endeavour. The fact that *canon* is a Greek noun in origin (*kanōn*: a rod, rule, standard), attested in ancient Greek literary criticism to refer to authors who are exemplary and judged worthy of study and preservation, does not help the case for classics in the academy, where the implicit universalism of classics falls foul of a

distrust in universals in contemporary liberal thought.

For much of the research and teaching transacted within departments of classics, the ideological overtones of classics and the classical are an extraneous concern; classicists know what they study (the languages, history, literature, art, archaeology, and thought – including philosophy and science – of ancient Greece, Rome, and contiguous civilizations in the ancient Mediterranean) and are not interested in claiming universal relevance or reach for their subject. On the contrary, the palaeographical, linguistic, philological, historical, and archaeological skills that are at the core of research and pedagogy in classics are deeply historicizing and pull against a universalizing impulse. But academic disciplines do not always get to define themselves and are subject to something of a time-lag as far as external perceptions go. In recent years, classicists have responded by tackling any image problems head-on: the 2009 creation in the United Kingdom of a flourishing charity entitled “Classics for All” counters the assumption that classics is the preserve of a narrow elite; meanwhile, the erstwhile American Philological Association, founded in 1869, changed its name in 2014 to the more accessible “Society for Classical Studies.”³

These outreach efforts have been accompanied by the growth of classical reception studies. Classicists have long studied the afterlives of Greek and Roman authors, as have scholars in other disciplines, but the emergence of a concerted program studying the contextualized reception of classics and the history of classical scholarship marks a shift away from a fixed and hierarchical classical tradition, which emphasized a single lineage traced through European culture to the present day, to an unruly, uncanonical, and unpredictable series of encounters and responses to Greek

and Roman classics in diverse cultures and contexts. This development has in turn sparked new debates, revolving around the question of how to study the far-reaching cultural mobility of Greek and Roman classics, which increasingly circulate in the works of writers who do not identify themselves with “the classical tradition,” “the West,” “European civilization,” or “classical humanism” without appealing to discredited universals.⁴

Latterly I have begun to use the compound adjective *omni-local*, modeled on Albert Murray’s term *omni-American*, to discuss the translatability, adaptability, and relationality of classics in different contemporary cultures. As coined by Murray, the term *omni-American* referred to the “irrevocably composite” nature of modern American culture.⁵ In proposing the category of *omni-local* for Greek and Roman classical texts that circulate widely in different historical and cultural contexts, I want to evoke the idea that these “classics” are cultural composites that result from successive readers and audiences encountering and making sense of these works.

But the concept of *omni-local* classics has other useful resonances. The *omni-local* substitutes a horizontal, two-way relationship in place of a vertical, hierarchical tradition. In the context of classical reception studies, the focus on the local dimensions of classical adaptation applies equally to the classical “source” text, and reminds us that in their original contexts the classics were themselves “local,” insofar as they worked with, read, and received existing myths and other works. This is particularly clear in the case of “classical” ancient Greek epics such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which grew out of the oral circulation of epic poems, and for extant Greek tragedies, which rework and supplement existing versions of myths and sometimes prior dramatic works that are based on these myths. So Sophocles’s interpretation and

version of *Antigone* is local in the sense that it adapted a body of myth, which had both local and trans-local dimensions, for an Athenian audience, at an Athenian dramatic festival in a specific historical, cultural, political, and religious context.⁶ This local drama then went on to have a very rich supra-local life in re-performance.

Critics of cosmopolitanism have objected that championing cosmopolitanism in literature and art downgrades the regional and the local, instead elevating works with a Western-oriented and “cosmopolitan” literary reach that secures them transnational mobility. Along similar lines, canonical literature and local literature are frequently treated as mutually exclusive. Commenting on the experience of teaching Sophocles’s *Antigone* alongside the Argentinean playwright Griselda Gambaro’s *Antígona furiosa* (1985 – 1986) in a world literature class, Jane Newman has remarked that her students were struck by the gulf between critical responses to the two works: “canonical works are often read, well, canonically, as articulating universals, as opposed to how their successors are often read and perhaps also taught – that is, as only local works.”⁷ Approaching a work like Sophocles’s *Antigone* as an *omni-local* classic obviates the traditional hierarchy between the canonical and the local by emphasizing the local embedded in the classical.

One possible objection to this concept is that a version of cosmopolitanism or universalism is being reintroduced through the prefix *omni*, from the Latin adjective *omnis* (all, every). After all, isn’t labeling something “local to all” (one way of construing *omni-local*) the same as labeling it universal, or timeless (to shift from a spatial to a temporal metaphor)? Or, responding to a recent challenge to an overly fluid and fluent model of world literature, doesn’t the *omni-local* rest on naive assumptions about cultural equivalence and

translatability and ignore the stubborn untranslatability of many classic works?⁸ Here the focus on reception is crucial, since the receiving community makes or shapes the meaning of the classic being received. The omni-local model recognizes the fact that while a classic might circulate virtually among very different interpretative communities, as soon as it gets taken up and adapted it becomes specific and local, opening an inevitable translation gap between the adapted text and the adaptation. The idea that a text is inert without readers to give it meaning is a given in reception studies, specifically the reader-response theory exemplified by the work of Wolfgang Iser, who argued that “the convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence.”⁹ To label a classic omni-local is to acknowledge its local, historical origins, some of which are untranslatable, while simultaneously crediting it with a strong degree of cross-cultural adaptability that is virtual and indeterminate – to be determined by the receiving reader and audiences.

One of the explanations for the cultural mobility and versatility of Greek and Roman classics is the fact that, although they have been grafted into multiple national literatures in the modern world to serve arguments surrounding national sovereignty, empire, and anti-colonial resistance, neither ancient Greek nor Roman literature was or is a national literature.¹⁰ This is true both in the weak sense that the various political communities encompassed by ancient Greece and Rome predated the emergence of the modern nation-state, and in the stronger sense that the literature that survives from Greek and Roman antiquity has its own local affinities, both under the heterogeneous Greek city-states and contiguous centers of Greek culture dotted around the ancient Mediterranean, and also under the Roman empire with educated Roman citizens writing in Latin, Greek,

and other languages from different geographical locations (including Rome, Gaul, Spain, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia), and often traveling between these locations and switching between cultures.¹¹

Sophocles’s *Antigone* is one of the most mobile classics to have survived from ancient Greece, and it has garnered an immensely rich reception history that spans the disciplines of classics, theater and performance studies, comparative literature, modern languages, and political thought.¹² According to Erin Mee and Helene Foley, editors of a recent collection of essays analyzing the presence of *Antigone* in contemporary global theater, *Antigone* is the most widely performed play in the world *tout court*.¹³ The essays in their collection discuss performances and adaptations from Argentina, Burkina Faso, Canada, Egypt, Finland, France, the Republic of Georgia, Greece, Haiti, Ireland, India (specifically Manipur), Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Poland, Turkey, and the United States.

As a case study, I am going to focus on a single, short response to Sophocles’s *Antigone* by the Malawian academic, poet, and writer Jack Mapanje, comparing it to the best-known response to *Antigone* from the continent of Africa: the play *The Island* (1973) by Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona.¹⁴ I have chosen Mapanje’s poem because it illustrates the vital, recalcitrant energy of Sophocles’s play and its traction within a particular, local context where it was mobilized as a counter-text to a brutal hegemonic regime that had claimed Greek and Roman classics for rather different ends.

Some brief context first: Jack Mapanje was head of the English department at Chancellor College (the University of Malawi) when he was arrested and imprisoned without charge in September 1987, apparently because he had been critical in his poetry of the country’s autocratic “Life

President,” Ngwazi Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda (1898 – 1997).¹⁵ He was kept in Mikuyu prison for a total of three years, seven months, and sixteen days. One of the many poems that Mapanje composed in prison addresses Banda in the guise of Creon, tyrant of Thebes, as depicted in Sophocles’s play. Specifically, Mapanje has chosen the point at which Creon discovers the suicide of his son Haemon, a suicide precipitated by Creon’s effective murder of Antigone, who had been betrothed to marry Haemon. In order to avoid the pollution that might result from killing Antigone, Creon had her walled up in a cave, with food provided, in a form of live burial (Sophocles *Antigone* 773 – 780). As it is, Antigone commits suicide by hanging.

“No, Creon, There’s No Virtue in Howling”
‘It is no glory to kill and kill again.’

Tiresias, *Antigone*

No, Creon, you overstate your image to your
 People. No, there’s no virtue in howling so.
 How can you hope to repair Haemon, your
 Own blood, our only hope for the throne,
 By reproaching his body mangled by your
 Decree and put to rest without the requiem
 Of our master drums? What tangential
 sentries

Advise you to bemoan the dead by scoffing
 Them publicly thus? Those accidents your
 Flunkies master-stroked, those tortures &
 Exiles fashioned, and the blood you loved
 To hear, did we need more lies? Look now,
 Even the village lads toss their coins for old
 Creon’s days. What cowardice, what
 perversity

Grates life-laden minds on our
 death-beds?¹⁶

In Mapanje’s version of this episode from Sophocles’s play, Haemon represents the “son” of Malawi killed on Banda’s orders, or upon the orders of those in his inner circle. Among the many victims of Banda’s rule, the poem alludes to the mur-

der of the dissident Malawian MP Aaron Gadama, who in May 1983 was assassinated by Banda’s regime along with three other MPs. The four men were clubbed to death and then bundled into a car that was subsequently crashed, to make it look like a road accident.¹⁷ In his memoir, Mapanje writes with dark humor of his own fear that he too might be “accidentalised.”¹⁸ Aaron Gadama was apparently Banda’s cousin, hence the poem’s stress on the hypocrisy of Creon lamenting the death of his own kin, for which he is responsible. The quotation that supplies the epigraph for Mapanje’s poem is a paraphrase of *Antigone*. At lines 1029 – 1030, the prophet Tiresias urges Creon to “Give way to one who is dead and don’t keep goading him now he has perished. What strength is there in re-killing one who is dead?” (ἀλλ’ εἶκε τῷ θανόντι, μηδ’ ὀλωλότα | κέντει. τίς ἀλκὴ τὸν θανόντ’ ἐπικτανεῖν;). These lines refer to Creon’s dishonouring of the corpse of Polynices, Antigone’s brother and Creon’s own nephew, whose burial he has forbidden on the grounds that Polynices died as a traitor fighting against Thebes. In Mapanje’s epigraph, the motif of double-killing may allude to the fact that the MPs were given a staged, second death, to dissemble their prior assassination. In focusing on the relationship between Creon and Haemon, the poem hints at Banda’s kinship relation to Aaron Gadama, as well as Banda’s autocratic, paternalistic style of government destroying the household of the nation, killing off the “sons” of Malawi.

In the circumstances, there is grim irony in Mapanje’s recourse to Sophocles. In 1981, Banda founded an eponymous secondary school modeled on the British public school system, Kamuzu Academy, at which all students were required to study ancient Greek and Latin, and where he lectured his students that they could not be truly educated or civilized without knowledge of the classics. He was duly ridiculed

by many African intellectuals, most notably Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, for whom such statements were a sign of a thoroughly colonized mind.¹⁹ Detained by the regime of a leader who had aligned himself with the classics, Mapanje offers a counter-reading of the classics in the form of a lesson drawn from Athenian tragedy. Echoing Creon's clash with Antigone over whether the laws of the state should prevail over the unwritten customs that applied to honoring the dead, Banda-as-Creon is depicted overturning the customs of his own people by denying proper burial rites to his victims, as with the four MPs assassinated in 1983.²⁰ And as is the case in Sophocles's Thebes, where civil war spills into fratricide and, ultimately, domicile, Banda's making enemies of his own people is represented as the murder of his own family and preparation for his downfall.

Mapanje's decision to remonstrate with Banda's tyrannical rule via Sophocles's play was presumably influenced by the adoption of *Antigone* in the political theater of African playwrights. The obvious parallel is *The Island*, a South African adaptation of *Antigone* by Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona. First staged in Cape Town by the Serpent Players in July 1973 with the title *Die Hodoshe Span* (*Hodoshe's Work Team*), the play revolves around a two-man production of Sophocles's *Antigone* that was performed by two ANC (African National Congress) prisoners, Norman Ntshinga and Siphon Mguqulwa, on Robben Island, as part of a prison concert that capped sketches at fifteen minutes. Both men were members of the Serpent Players when they were arrested and they related details of this production to the troupe in their letters from prison; these descriptions inspired *Die Hodoshe Span*, subsequently retitled *The Island* (after Robben Island).

While *The Island* is a play about putting on a production of *Antigone*, rather than a

conventional version or adaptation of *Antigone*, it has its origins in a conventional production of Sophocles's *Antigone* produced by the Serpent Players in 1965, which was based on E. V. Rieu's translation of the play.²¹ Siphon Mguqulwa had been due to play the part of Haemon and Norman Ntshinga had been cast in a supporting role, but both men were arrested while the play was in rehearsal. John Kani, the actor who would subsequently play the part of Creon in *Die Hodoshe Span / The Island*, stepped in to the role of Haemon. In *The Island*, the prison production within the play uses classical drama as an alibi for on-going resistance to the nationalist Afrikaner government. The protagonists John and Winston use their prison play about Creon's brutal punishment of Antigone to deliver a message of protest to the regime and to those whom it oppresses from within its most notorious prison. While Antigone's classical credentials get their subversive messages past the prison guards, it is the unruliness and complexity of Sophocles's classic that commended it to the Serpent Players in 1965, and it was this unruliness that commended it to Norman Ntshinga when he was casting around for a play to produce for the prison concert on Robben Island.

The boundary between Sophocles's play and contemporary South Africa, particularly as viewed from the black South African perspective, collapses in the fourth scene of *The Island*, in which John and Winston present and enact "The Trial and Punishment of Antigone." When Creon sentences Antigone, her place of incarceration is the actual prison in Robben Island in which the play is set:

Take her from where she stands, straight to the Island! Then wall her up in a cell for life, with enough food to acquit ourselves of the taint of her blood.²²

Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona mobilized *Antigone* as an anti-colonial protest play,

while Mapanje's poem – technically a post-colonial poem written by a Malawian poet in an independent African nation – used the figure of Creon in Sophocles's play as an argument against the president's merciless abuses of power. In both cases, Sophocles's *Antigone* offers a supra-local web of reference; it functions both as a source text and a hypertext that links works in different local contexts.

What does any of this have to do with the ways that scholars, students, and the general reader might approach Sophocles's *Antigone* in the twenty-first century? The model of classical reception that I have sketched here, based around the idea of the omni-local, is emphatically a two-way process in which later adaptations also become "local" and available for the interpretation of Sophocles's play. While these readings may be available, it is up to classicists to choose whether and how they avail themselves

of these responses when trying to make sense of Sophocles's play.

In his scholarly edition and commentary of the Greek text of Sophocles's *Antigone*, Mark Griffith distinguishes between the many different approaches to interpreting the play and those that are convincing to "a majority of the 'competent readers' who have weighed the critical alternatives in the light of their own examination of the text."²³ In this scenario, traditional classical scholarship nestles within and is a version of reception studies, where it is carried out by an interpretative community with scholarly expertise in ancient Greek literature, alongside other communities who have read and responded to the text. But there is no barrier between reading and studying Sophocles's *Antigone* as an Athenian, ancient Greek text and an omni-local text; in fact, the latter is vital if we want to be part of the broader conversation about Sophocles's play in the twenty-first century.

ENDNOTES

¹ Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 29.

² For an astute discussion of this passage, see James Porter, "Feeling Classical: Classicism and Ancient Literary Criticism," in *The Classical Traditions of Greece and Rome*, ed. James I. Porter (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 301–352 (for discussion of the Plutarch passage, see 329–333).

³ See <http://www.classicsforall.org.uk>; and <https://classicalstudies.org>.

⁴ Lorna Hardwick offers a perceptive commentary on this return to a version of the universal in classical reception studies: "One of the effects of the recent association of classical texts with social critique and liberation movements has been to release them from inevitable association with the classes and monuments that appropriated them in the past. . . . [O]ne less expected consequence of this liberation has been the revival of interest in what used to be dismissed as "universalism," that is explanations of transhistorical (and now also transcultural) force." See Lorna Hardwick, "Against the Democratic Turn: Counter-Texts; Counter-Contexts; Counter-Arguments," *Classics in the Modern World: A Democratic Turn?* ed. Lorna Hardwick and Stephen Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23.

⁵ Albert Murray, *The Omni-Americans: Some Alternatives to the Folklore of White Supremacy* (New York: Outerbridge & Diensfrey, 1970), 22.

⁶ Alexander Beecroft proposes a helpful explanatory model for understanding the local and supra-local aspects of ancient Greek epic, lyric, and tragedy. Beecroft proposes the terms *epichoric* (referring to "literature produced within the confines of a local community") and *panchoric* (referring to "literary texts and systems of circulation operating across a range of epichoric communities"), and argues that these two orientations – epichoric and panchoric – often

- interact productively in these archaic and classical Greek genres. See Alexander Beecroft, "World Literature Without a Hyphen: Towards a Typology of Literary Systems," *New Left Review* 54 (November – December 2008): 92 – 93. The term *epichoric* is borrowed from Gregory Nagy, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 66 – 67.
- ⁷ Jane O. Newman, "The Afterlives of the Greeks; or, What Is the Canon of World Literature?" in *Teaching World Literature*, ed. David Damrosch (New York: Modern Language Association, 2009), 131.
- ⁸ On untranslatability, see the arguments in Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013).
- ⁹ Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 275.
- ¹⁰ For an analysis of some of the ways in which modern, national cultures have appropriated ancient Greece and Rome and in turn been shaped by Greek and Roman ideas, see Susan A. Stephens and Phiroze Vasunia, eds., *Classics in National Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- ¹¹ See Tim Whitmarsh, "Thinking Local," and Greg Woolf, "Afterword: The Local and the Global in the Graeco-Roman East," in *Local Knowledge and Microidentities in the Imperial Greek World*, ed. Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1 – 16 and 180 – 200, respectively.
- ¹² Major studies include George Steiner, *Antigones: The Antigone Myth in Western Literature, Art and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); S. E. Wilmer and Audrone Zukauskaitė, eds., *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- ¹³ Erin Mee and Helene Foley, "Mobilizing Antigone," in *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage*, ed. Erin Mee and Helene Foley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.
- ¹⁴ For a discussion of prominent African adaptations of and responses to Sophocles's *Antigone*, see Barbara Goff and Michael Simpson, *Crossroads in the Black Aegean: Oedipus, Antigone, and Dramas of the African Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- ¹⁵ On May 2, 1988, "Banda" wrote a reply to academics at the University of Edinburgh (his alma mater) who had written asking him to release Jack Mapanje. The letter (probably written by a member of Banda's inner circle) states that Jack Mapanje had been detained because he had been "using the classroom as a forum for subversive politics"; a copy of this letter is reprinted on page 4 of Peter H. Marsden and Geoffrey V. Davis, eds., *Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Human Rights in a 'Post'-Colonial World* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2004). In the same collection, James Gibbs offers a careful analysis and chronology of the events leading up to Mapanje's arrest; see James Gibbs, "The Back-Seat Critic and the Front-Line Poet: The Case of Jack Mapanje, Scholar, Teacher, Poet, Detainee, Exile," 29 – 50.
- ¹⁶ See Jack Mapanje, *From the Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* (London: Heinemann, 1993), 12.
- ¹⁷ The three other MPs were Dick Matenje, Twaibu Sangala, and David Chiwanga.
- ¹⁸ Jack Mapanje, *And Crocodiles are Hungry at Night, a memoir by Jack Mapanje* (Banbury: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2011), 19 and 29.
- ¹⁹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1986), 19.
- ²⁰ See Mapanje, *From the Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*, 205: "When the MPs' mangled bodies were dumped at their homes, the security officers who brought them ordered the families to bury them at gunpoint. The expected traditional or church burial rites for them were not allowed." As Francis Moto explains in his discussion of this poem, the reference to "our master drums" in line 7 is to the drumming customarily performed for the dead in the Che-

wa ceremony of the gule wamkulu (“big dance”); see Francis Moto, *The Context and Language of Jack Mapanje’s Poetry* (Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society, 2008), 102.

²¹ For the background to all three productions, see Athol Fugard, “Antigone in Africa,” in *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy*, ed. Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton (London: Methuen, 2002), 128–147.

²² Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona, *The Island* (1972) in Athol Fugard, *The Township Plays*, ed. Dennis Walder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 227.

²³ Sophocles, *Antigone*, ed. Mark Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 25–26.

On Translating Homer's *Iliad*

Caroline Alexander

Abstract: This reflective essay explores the considerations facing a translator of Homer's work; in particular, the considerations famously detailed by the Victorian poet and critic Matthew Arnold, which remain the gold standard by which any Homeric translation is measured today. I attempt to walk the reader through the process of rendering a modern translation in accordance with Arnold's principles.

“It has more than once been suggested to me that I should translate Homer. That is a task for which I have neither the time nor the courage.”¹ So begins Matthew Arnold's classic essay “On Translating Homer,” the North Star by which all subsequent translators of Homer have steered, and the gold standard by which all translations of Homer are judged. A reader will find Arnold's principles referenced, directly or indirectly, in the introduction to most modern translations – Richmond Lattimore's, Robert Fagles's, Robert Fitzgerald's, and more recently Peter Green's. Additionally, Arnold's discussion of these principles serves as a primer of sorts for poets and writers of any stripe, not only those audacious enough to translate Homer.

While the title of his essay implies that it is about translating the works of Homer, Arnold has little to say about the *Odyssey*, and he dedicates his attention to the *Iliad*. The greater and more profound of Homer's two epics, the *Iliad* relates the events of a few weeks in the tenth and final year of the long, stalemated Trojan War, and by doing so evokes the tenuousness of human life and the blighting tragedy of all war. At the time of Arnold's writing in 1861, eighteen complete translations of the *Iliad* had been published in the English language – a remarkably small number given that the *Iliad*, the oldest of Homer's two epics, is believed to have been composed

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around 730 – 700 BC. Since then, and despite Arnold’s observation that at the time of his essay the “study of classical literature is probably on the decline,”² sixty-five new translations have appeared, a figure that does not take into account many partial translations and adaptations.

The most recent of those translations is my own. And while I concur with Arnold that this effort required much time, I make no claim to courage. A better attribute might be, to use a very Iliadic word, *alkês*, which has connotations of “courage,” but is more about “strength as displayed in action,” to quote Liddell and Scott’s indispensable *Greek-English Lexicon* – in other words, “fighting-spirit.”³ Undertaking a translation of either of the Homeric poems, but especially the *Iliad*, which at 15,693 lines of verse is some 3,000 lines longer than the *Odyssey*, is a lot like swimming a monster workout: lap by lap one toils away, back and forth, and suddenly the end of the workout arrives and thousands of meters – or verses – lie behind.

Matthew Arnold was not only a critic and accomplished classicist, but also a major poet of his own age. He is the author of such celebrated poems as *The Scholar Gypsy*, *Dover Beach*, and *Balder Dead*, the latter offering a hint of what an *Iliad* translation by him might have sounded like:

So on the floor lay Balder dead; and round
Lay thickly strewn swords, axes, darts, and
spears,
Which all the Gods in sport had idly
thrown...⁴

Yet as Arnold never did translate Homer, we have instead only his essay, which lays out the rules for doing the job properly. The essay was originally delivered as a series of three separate lectures, a fact that perhaps accounts for its easy-going, conversational readability. Arnold is not infallible; but in its penetrating insights into what makes Homer sing and its fearless citation of ef-

forts that have failed, “On Translating Homer” is nonetheless a master class in such poetic essentials as tone, pace, syntax, and vocabulary.

Arnold’s assumption – not shared by everyone – is that a translation of Homer’s work should sound as much as possible like Homer. Arnold, then, precludes the inspired interpretive approach taken by Christopher Logue, whose *War Music* and other works riff off portions of the *Iliad*. While I am a great admirer of Logue’s work, as also of Alice Oswald’s more recent *Memorial*, which weaves an original elegiac poem out of the *Iliad*’s many descriptions of dying heroes, I concur with Arnold: the offering of a complete translation of the *Iliad* should strive to replicate the Greek original in as many ways as the English language allows, as Arnold states, “to reproduce the *general effect* of Homer.”⁵

A successful translation, according to Arnold, must uphold four principles, which are best quoted in full as he declared them:

[T]he translator of Homer should above all be penetrated by a sense of four qualities of his author: – that he is eminently rapid; that he is eminently plain and direct both in the evolution of his thought and in the expression of it, that is, both in his syntax and in his words; that he is eminently plain and direct in the substance of his thought, that is, in his matter and ideas; and, finally, that he is eminently noble.⁶

Having stated at the outset that he would not translate Homer, Arnold was in the enviable position of being able both to laud Homeric qualities and to launch withering critiques at those translators who had failed to realize them, without, so to speak, setting foot on the Trojan field of battle. To revisit Arnold’s principles after having made an actual translation is a somewhat more awkward business. But, as Arnold implied, translators of Homer are lion-hearted, and I will therefore attempt to explain

On
Translating
Homer's
Iliad

Arnold's principles in the shadow of my own efforts.

RAPID: The swiftness of the Homeric line of verse is principally due to the epic's meter – its rhythm – the dactylic hexameter: an ancient meter believed to descend from Indo-European heroic poetic tradition.⁷ The Greek word *dactyl* means “finger,” and like a finger, the poetic dactyl has one long and two short units: in this case, syllables. The quantity of a syllable, whether it is long or short, is determined by the duration it takes to sound it. A long-short-short phrase, then, is much like a phrase of whole-half-half notes in music. *Hex* is Greek for “six,” and the dactylic hexameter line accordingly consists of six such metrical units. In theory, that is, since the meter allows substitution of two longs (a *spondee*) for a dactyl, and the last unit always has a two-beat ending, usually a spondee, but on occasion a *trochee* (which is long-short). Because individual lines of verse can obviously take a wide variety of metrical shapes, these substitutions allow for great flexibility; this variety saves the *Iliad* from sing-song monotony.

In Greek, this meter moves very swiftly, as can be discerned even in transliteration of the *Iliad*'s opening lines:

Menin a-eide thea, Pele-i-ado Achille-os
oulomenen, he muri Achai-ois alg' etheken,
pollas d'iphthimous psukas A-i-di pro-i-apsen

English metrical patterns, on the other hand, are not determined by whether a syllable is long or short, but by whether it is stressed or unstressed. The word *WONderful*, for example, is a natural dactyl, as is *Po-et-ry*. Thus, when the hexameter is replicated in English – something infrequently done – it does not produce the same effect as the Greek, as can be seen in the most commonly cited example of English dactylic hexameter, Longfellow's *Evangeline*.

Then rose a sound of dread, such as startles
the sleeping encampments
Far in the western prairies or forests that
skirt the Nebraska,
When the wild horses affrighted sweep by
with the speed of the whirlwind,
Or the loud bellowing herds of buffaloes
rush to the river.⁸

Even in what should be a fast-paced action scene, the English hexameter moves at a stately pace. Although Arnold advocated the dactylic hexameter as being, in theory, the best meter for translation, he was able to find in the whole of English literature only one actual example that he commended: the translation of a scant few lines from book 3 of the *Iliad* by the Provost of Eton, which to the modern ear, at least, ring very flat:

Known to me well are the faces of all: their
names I remember;
Two, only two remain, whom I see not
among the commanders,
Castor fleet in the car – Polydeukes brave
with the cestus⁹ (Homer *Iliad* 3.235 – 237)

In short, while the *Iliad*'s specific meter greatly accounts for its epic swiftness, its literal replication does not work well in English. As a consequence, many metrical patterns have been attempted by English-speaking translators. In modern times, Richmond Lattimore used a free six-beat line in his fine translation:

Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son
Achilleus
and its devastation, which put pains
thousandfold upon the Achaians,
hurled in their multitude to the house of
Hades strong souls
of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the
delicate feasting
of dogs, of all birds. . . .¹⁰ (1.1 – 5)

Robert Fagles, in the introduction to his translation, gives a good account of his

choice of a loose five- or six-beat line, expanded at times to seven beats, and even at times contracted to three beats,¹¹ a choice that mirrors the flexible variety of Homer's Greek:

Rage – Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son
Achilles,
murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaeans
countless losses,
hurling down to the House of Death so
many sturdy souls,
great fighters' souls, but made their bodies
carrion,
feasts for the dogs and birds. . . .¹² (1.1 – 5)

In the footsteps of Fagles, I similarly chose a varied beat, allowing the English to contract or surge as occasion and natural wording demands, but, like Fagles, always with an eye on where the stressed beats fall:

Wrath – sing, goddess, the ruinous wrath of
Peleus' son Achilles,
that inflicted woes without number upon
the Achaeans,
hurled forth to Hades many strong souls of
warriors
and rendered their bodies prey for the dogs,
for all birds. . . .¹³ (1.1 – 5)

Meter is not the only feature determining how rapidly a line flows. The sound and very meaning of a word are also considerations. Take, for example, Athena's dash to Earth from Olympus in book 4:

As when the son of devious Cronus hurls
forth a star,
a glittering portent to sailors or vast army
of men,
from which shards of fire stream in
multitude (4.75 – 77)

Swift words like *hurls* and *streams*, even *shards*, help speed the lines in this flashing scene.

Conversely, however, a single word can also drag a line like a sea-anchor. Take for

example the very simple Greek word, much used in the *Iliad*, and my personal nemesis: *therapon*. This noun, according to Liddell and Scott, means “henchman, attendant, companion in arms, squire.” A *therapon* might be a warrior's charioteer; he attends the warrior and stands below him in rank, but is unquestionably “noble.” Translating the word as “attendant” works fairly well in a number of situations, but it does not work at all for the most significant of all *therapons* – Patroclus, who is the *therapon* and companion of Achilles (also called Aeacides, or “descendant of Aea-cus”). This is seen in book 17, when the Achaeans wage a desperate fight over the body of Patroclus, who has been slain by Hector:

But for the others the great strife of hard
contention rose
the whole day long; and always, relentlessly,
the sweat of toil
stained the knees and shins and feet of
each man under him,
and the hands and eyes of those who
fought
about the noble *therapon* of swift-footed
Aeacides. (17.384 – 388)

About the noble *attendant* of swift-footed Aeacides? In this momentous context the word is lightweight and inconsequential. *Comrade in arms* is a mouthful, and also, strictly speaking, not quite correct. *Lieutenant*? But this introduces a modern military sensibility that is not balanced by comparable military-like terminology elsewhere in the poem. *Squire* is the exact and appropriate term. But to drop this word – more evocative of Camelot – into the Bronze Age battle would produce the dragging sea-anchor effect. The line would slow because the reader would do a double-take to accommodate it. Eventually I settled for *henchman* (as did Lattimore; Fagles used *aide-in-arms*), recognizing it as a tough, muscular word, that conjures a right-hand man, and

not a servant. The primary meaning of henchman, according to the OED, is “a faithful supporter or assistant,” while its secondary meaning is “squire or page attending a prince or nobleman.” The negative aspect of this term is, of course, that it has acquired connotations of being “a faithful supporter” in “criminal or dishonest activities.”¹⁴ But, as I rationalized, few warriors in this war had clean hands.

PLAIN AND DIRECT: Homer, Arnold states, is plain and direct in syntax and choice of words; and plain and direct in his matter and ideas. These principles are well demonstrated by an example that is neither plain nor direct, Pindar’s *First Olympian Ode*, composed in 476 BC:

Water is best,
while gold gleams like blazing fire in the
night,
brightest amid a rich man’s wealth;
but, my heart, if it is of the games that you
wish to sing,
look no further than the sun: as there is no
star
that shines with more warmth by day from
a clear sky,
so we can speak of no greater contest than
Olympia.¹⁵ (Pindar *Olympian I* 1–7)

The marvelous tumble of ideas, the lurking-in of the reader through a cascade of images to we know not where, is characteristic of modern, stream-of-conscious poetry. Dazzling and sophisticated, Pindar is neither simple nor direct in either style or ideas.

By contrast, the language of Homer, even in his most high-flying similes, is straightforward; and it is with plain vocabulary and clean, driving phrases that he conjures what appear to be closely observed scenes. Consider book 12, in which the barrage of stones thrown by the opposing Greek and Trojan armies are compared to heavy snowfall:

[A]s flakes of snow pour down in drifts
on a winter’s day, when all-devising Zeus
begins
to snow, showing to mankind these the
shafts of his artillery,
and hushing the winds to sleep, he heaps
the snow steadily, so that it shrouds
the heights of high mountains and peaks
of cliffs,
and blossoming lowlands and the rich
worked-lands of men;
and the snow drifts the bays and beaches
of the gray salt sea,
and the sea swell splashing it is stilled; and
all else
is cloaked from above, when the snows of
Zeus weigh down;
just so did the stones fly thick from both
sides. (Homer *Iliad* 12.278–287)

Like Pindar, Homer deploys a cascade of images, but in his case each is like a brush-stroke applied to the great panoramic scene. The cumulative result is a scene of great power, but evoked through plain, unconvoluted words and phrases.

Arnold, a master of disparagement, further illustrated Homer’s plain and straightforward style by dissecting a translation that failed to honor these traits: namely, Alexander Pope’s celebrated translation of the *Iliad*, published between 1715 and 1720, rendered in heroic rhymed couplet (and famously assessed by the classicist Richard Bentley as “a pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer”).¹⁶ Declaring it “very far from my wish to hold Pope up to ridicule,” Arnold nonetheless cited for condemnation a famous passage from book 8, in which the watch-fires of the Trojan enemy appear like stars on the dark plain:

The conscious swains, rejoicing in the sight,
Eye the blue vault, and bless the useful light.
So many flames before proud Ilion blaze,
And lighten glimmering Xanthus with
their rays.

The long reflections of the distant fires
Gleam on the walls, and tremble on the
spires.
A thousand piles the dusky horrors gild,
And shoot a shady lustre o'er the field.
Full fifty guards each flaming pile attend,
Whose umber'd arms, by fits, thick flashes
send:
Loud neigh the coursers o'er their heaps
of corn,
And ardent warriors wait the rising morn.¹⁷
(8.697 – 708)

Pope, as Arnold puts it, composes with his eye on his style; Homer composes with his eye on the object before him. The objects of Homer's attention, then, whether "moral or material," in Arnold's words, are truly drawn; they are authentic, and their effectiveness derives from the fact that one believes them. Here is the same passage from book 8, unadorned and rendered with what I hope Arnold would deem its Homeric simplicity:

and all the stars are seen, and the shepherd's
heart rejoices,
so between the ships and streams of Xanthos
in such multitude shone the watchfires of
the Trojans' burning, before Ilion.
A thousand fires were burning on the
plain, and by each one
sat fifty men in the glow of fire's
gleaming,
and the horses munched their white barley
and their grain
standing beside their chariots as they await-
ed Dawn on her fair throne. (8.555 – 565)

Because Homer is so straightforward in thought, in syntax, and in language, his Greek, relative to that of other authors', is not difficult to read. This is despite the fact that his language is, in fact, highly artificial, the result of a long oral tradition that accrued its diction and syntactical forms from different eras and dialects. No people spoke "Homeric Greek"; Homer's Greek is a poetic invention.

This raises one of the most difficult questions for a translator: should a translation reflect this artifice? When Arnold wrote his essay, Francis Newman, a scholar and linguist, had recently published a translation that consciously strove to evoke this artificiality. Given that "the entire dialect of Homer [is] essentially archaic," Newman wrote, "that of a translator ought to be as much Saxo-Norman as possible." Consequently, his translation was prefaced by a glossary of unfamiliar English terms like *beeve*, *beknow*, *gramesome*, and *sithence*.¹⁸

Is the translator's duty to Homer's audience, or to his own? The truth is we have no idea of how Homer's audience understood the poems, or even who his audience might have been. And regardless of who made up the audience, how much did the language of his poem, as opposed to its compelling cast of characters and story, matter to them?

The *Iliad* is highly respectful of the past. The epic describes a number of the tools of war – a silver-studded sword, a body-length shield, a boar-tusk helmet – that archaeology has shown belonged to the Mycenaean Bronze Age, a period predating the composition of the poem by at least five centuries. Presumably Homer's audience relished these descriptions of long-ago heirloom objects. Did they similarly relish the pseudo-Bronze Age language? It seems reasonable to believe that they did; but it is unclear where that leaves the modern English translator. Would a twenty-first-century *Iliad* really be better, be truer to Homer, if it were written in Elizabethan English? History gives us an example by which to judge: George Chapman's landmark translation, published between 1603 and 1616, the first ever in English (and the inspiration for Keats's sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*). Chapman's rendering of the watch-fire scene of book 8 is as follows:

And all the signes in heaven are seene that
glad the shepherd's hart;

So many fires disclosede their beames,
made by the Troyan part,
Before the face of Ilion and her bright
turrets show'd.
A thousand courts of guard kept fires, and
every guard allow'd
Fiftie stout men, by whom their horse eate
oates and hard white corne,
And all did wishfully expect the silver-
throned morne.¹⁹

My regard for Chapman translation is very high, but I would not recommend it to a modern general reader as the best means of “hearing” Homer. The distinctive Elizabethan style and language is, in fact, far less suited to Homer’s plainspoken directness than is modern English. As Arnold noted: “between Chapman and Homer there is interposed the mist of fancifulness of the Elizabethan age.”²⁰ Translations, it turns out, can become dated. A humbling thought: translations are for their own time, and only Homer is forever.

NOBLE: The fact that such “perfect plainness and directness” can yield an epic poem of great nobility is one of the wonders of Homer’s craft, and is, according to Arnold, “what makes translators despair.”²¹ And on this point, and indeed on the quality of nobility in general, I respectfully part company with Arnold.

By *nobility*, Arnold explains, he means that Homer “works as entirely in the grand style, he is as grandiose, as Phidias, or Dante, or Michael Angelo.”²² Arnold’s choice of artists for comparison strikes me as very odd. All, possibly, could be called noble, but only Michelangelo – and only in some works – could be called Homeric. Odder still is the attribute *grandiose*, if we take the word to mean, as the OED states, “very large or ambitious, especially in a way which is intended to impress.” Grandiose is the opposite of unselfconsciousness, a quality that greatly contributes to Homer’s plain and direct style. More apt

counterparts, I believe, are those given in a throwaway line in one of Isak Dineson’s letters, in which she includes Homer with such phenomena as “the sea, the mountains and elephants.”²³ Homer, like mountains and elephants, is undoubtedly grand, but never grandiose.

What Arnold means by nobility seems to be a fusion of two aspects of the word as defined, again, by the OED: the possession of “high moral principles,” as well as being “impressive” and “magnificent.”²⁴ All of this the *Iliad* certainly is. Yet these “noble” attributes entirely skirt the essence of the *Iliad*. The *Iliad*’s greatness does not rest upon such lightweight features as good taste, or lordly high-mindedness, or the fact, as Arnold cites, that “prosaic subjects” such as dressing, feasting, and equipping chariots are rendered in an elevated manner. The *Iliad* is great not because it is noble, but because it is epic, meaning “grand or heroic in scale,” like the sea, elephants, and mountains. This sense of epic, of something momentous and profound, burns through Homer’s rapid, plain, and direct style. Almost any random scene will prove this, as when Achilles, denouncing Agamemnon, withdraws from the war:

But I say openly to you, and I swear a great
oath to it –
yes, by this scepter, that never again will put
forth leaves and shoots
when once it has left behind its stump in
the mountains,
nor will it flourish again, since the bronze
axe has stripped it round,
leaf and bark; and now in turn the sons of
the Achaeans
busy with justice carry it around in their
hands, they who
safeguard the ordinances of Zeus – this
will be my great oath:
some day a yearning for Achilles will come
upon the sons of the Achaeans,
every man; then nothing will save you,
for all your grief,

when at the hands of man-slaying Hector
dying men fall in their multitude; and you
will rip the heart within you,
raging that you paid no honour to the best
of the Achaeans. (1.233 – 244)

Or when Zeus gives his pledge to Achil-
les's mother Thetis that he will ensure the
honor of her son:

“Come, I will bow my head for you, so that
you may be convinced;
for among immortals this is the greatest
testament of my determination; for not re-
vocable, nor false,
nor unfulfilled is anything to which I have
bowed my head.”

The son of Cronus spoke, and nodded
with his blue-black brows,
the ambrosial mane of the lord god swept
forward
from his immortal head; and he shook
great Olympus. (1.523 – 529)

The epic tone burns through scenes of
quiet tenderness, as when Hector takes
his leave, for the last time, from his wife
Andromache and young son:

So speaking shining Hector reached out for
his son;

but the child turned away, back to the
breast of his fine-belted nurse,
crying, frightened at the sight of his own
father,
struck with terror seeing the bronze
helmet and crest of horsehair,
nodding dreadfully, as he thought, from
the topmost of the helmet.
They burst out laughing, his dear father
and lady mother.
At once shining Hector lifted the helmet
from his head,
and placed it, gleaming, on the earth;
then he rocked his beloved son in his arms
and kissed him,
and prayed aloud to Zeus and to the other
gods. (6.466 – 475)

Tone is everything. One can dissect the
disparate elements of Homer's craft, but
his genius lies in the unfolding of his story
in the white-hot tone of the inspired speak-
er, forging simple language into scenes of
momentous import so that, like the cries
of men on the field of battle, his story
seems to reach to the brazen sky. This, the
epic voice of Homer, is what transformed
an oft-told tale of a distant war into the
sublime and devastating evocation of War,
and all its mortal tragedy.

ENDNOTES

¹ Matthew Arnold, *On Translating Homer: Three Lectures Given at Oxford* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958).

⁴ Matthew Arnold, *Balder Dead*, opening lines.

⁵ Arnold, *On Translating Homer*, Lecture II, 31

⁶ *Ibid.*, Lecture I, 9f.

⁷ On the Vedic cognates, see Gregory Nagy, *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 229 – 261. For a succinct overview of the different theories about the origin of the hexameter, see Richard Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary – Volume IV: Books 13 – 16* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9.

- ⁸ Henry W. Longfellow, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (Boston: William Ticknor, 1847), verses 630 – 633.
- ⁹ Arnold, *On Translating Homer*, Lecture III, 77f. For comparison, my rendering of the verses follows:
I see them all now, the rest of the dark-eyed Achaeans,
those I know well and could name –
but I cannot see the two marshals of the people,
Castor, breaker of horses, and the skilful boxer Polydeukes.
- ¹⁰ Richmond Lattimore, trans., *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- ¹¹ Robert Fagles, trans., *Homer: The Iliad* (New York: Viking, 1990), xi.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ Unless otherwise noted, this and subsequent translations from Caroline Alexander, trans., *The Iliad: A New Translation by Caroline Alexander* (New York: Ecco Press, 2015).
- ¹⁴ John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
- ¹⁵ Anthony Verity, trans., *Pindar: The Complete Odes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.
- ¹⁶ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland: And a Criticism on Their Works* (Dublin: Pat. Wogan, Old-Bridge, 1804), 568.
- ¹⁷ Alexander Pope, trans., *The Iliad of Homer* (London; New York: Cassell and Company, 1909), 167.
- ¹⁸ F. W. Newman, trans., *The Iliad of Homer* (London: Walton and Maberly, 1856), vi; glossary terms at xxiff.
- ¹⁹ George Chapman, trans., *The Iliad* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press: 1998), 180.
- ²⁰ Arnold, *On Translating Homer*, Lecture I, 11.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 29.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ Isak Dinesen, *Letters from Africa, 1914 – 1931*, trans. Anne Born, ed. Frans Lasson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- ²⁴ Simpson and Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

Philosophy & Its Classical Past

Phillip Mitsis

Abstract: The notion that philosophers can abandon their history and set their arguments on new foundations has a long history. One strain of recent philosophy that traces its roots to Frege has been particularly confident in this regard, and its rejection of a classical past has had widespread influences on the study of ancient philosophy over the past several decades. With the waning of this recent paradigm, however, the possibility of philosophical engagement between the old and new has again led to significant work in several areas of philosophy. I concentrate on one of these, the philosophy of death, and also ask whether ancient philosophy might furnish models that enable contemporary philosophers to rise above their specialisms and address crucial issues in a public discourse, allowing for both mutual intelligibility and criticism.

If you want a future, darling, why don't you get a past?
– Cole Porter

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Back in the 1970s, there was a story in circulation about a newly minted ancient philosopher being introduced to an American philosopher of note, who asked what area of philosophy the younger man was interested in. When he replied “ancient philosophy,” the response he reputedly received was “Ancient philosophy. Really? You mean like Frege?”

I have heard so many versions of this story with so many different names attached to its protagonists that it is hard not to be skeptical about its veracity. Yet, like the opening confrontations of many a Platonic dialogue, this bit of probable fiction neatly encapsulates a set of deeper questions. I remember that I had readied my own cheeky retort to such barbs, just in case: “Oh God no, nothing so vulnerable to a few simple paradoxes as the *Grundgesetze*. I am interested in difficult and complex *PHIL-O-SO-PHERS* like Aristotle and Chrysippus,” throwing in the latter, instead of the more obvious Plato, because it was unlikely that any nonspecialist would know much about ancient Stoicism; and that would afford

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me the opportunity to toss around a few choice tidbits about the origins of propositional logic. But, of course, both the disingenuous put-down and my own overly defensive imaginary retort spoke to an anxiety then present in our field, as well as to a series of more long-standing questions about the relation of philosophy to its past.

At the time, our mythical supercilious philosopher, even if a little fuzzy on the precise historical details, hardly would have been alone in his conviction that Frege had set a distinctly new path for philosophy from which there was no looking back – a path, it is probably safe to infer, he would have thought wound through Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore before reaching an early peak in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) and then continuing on to such august contemporaries as Quine, Sellars, and Dummett. However quaint this kind of story has come to look in retrospect, both as history and in its own right,¹ and however parochial, omitting so-called Continental philosophy and the eclectic nature of most American departments at the time, a general confidence about casting away the chains of history and approaching central philosophical questions in a way that was utterly contemporary was certainly in the air.

Of course, such insouciance toward the past was by no means entirely new in the history of philosophy, at least in the textbook accounts. A long tradition of teaching a small selection of particular texts (or passages) had gradually led to a corresponding view of Descartes as an earlier founder *de novo* of so-called modern philosophy: “modern” because of its methodological and metaphysical turn toward the inner self and the primacy it bestowed on epistemology. To be sure, none of Descartes's contemporaries would ever have thought that he had done something so revolutionary that it would relegate ancient philosophers to the dustbin of his-

tory, especially since most of them were themselves busy studying and reviving arguments from the ancient Epicureans, Stoics, and Skeptics.² So, too, it often goes unnoticed that in the *Discourse on the Method* (1637), Descartes himself characterizes his now famous autobiographical tale of solitary, original philosophical discovery as a “fable” that can act as a useful paradigm;³ a fable that was itself not only rather commonplace at the time, but that also had been current since at least the days of Galen.⁴ Moreover, the Cartesian turn toward epistemology still carried with it the baggage of a long and complicated philosophical prehistory, however dimly felt or understood, that included, at the very least, the rediscovery of the writings of an ancient Skeptic, Sextus Empiricus, and the influence of that great worshipper of antiquity, Montaigne, with his slogan of *Que sais-je?* (literally, “what do I know?”).

This time around, however, the threat to the continued relevance of historical philosophers posed by Frege appeared more clear-cut. Not only were many of the proponents of the new “analytic” philosophy more untouched by ancient paradigms than Descartes and his contemporaries, but they also were operating with a philosophical toolbox far more powerful and systematic than the few rather lacunose methodological procedures that Descartes had sketched out. New hard-hitting logical tools were being developed and applied to language in unprecedented ways. Ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, on the other hand, had never undergone a corresponding “linguistic turn” of the sort that was now so profoundly transforming the nature of philosophical methods and arguments, nor did it ever develop something called “the philosophy of language” as a significant discipline in its own right. Nor, importantly, did philosophers in antiquity believe that an inquiry into language could serve as the exclusive point of entry into philosophical

problems – problems that could find their solutions only by reforming ordinary language or by using tools of logical analysis to clarify its structure. Thus, a radical parting of the ways between the old and new appeared unavoidable.

Not surprisingly, one consequence of these larger developments is that, over decades, it led to much handwringing in our field and professional camps were duly formed, some of them rather extreme. One influential group held that ancient philosophers should just crawl back into their scholarly shells, accept the reality that contemporary and ancient philosophy were indeed separate enterprises, and be content to approach Plato and Aristotle in much the same way one might an ancient medical text. We might all agree, for instance, that *On the Sacred Disease* is a text eminently worthy of historical study, but surely we would not go to Hippocrates for technical advice on how to treat a lymphoma of the spleen. Why then should anyone interested in mind and brain relations be expected to turn to, say, Plato's *Phaedo*?

At Oxford, by way of contrast, philosophy had never been a field of study separate from classics, and some prominent philosophers, like Gilbert Ryle, duly took note of earlier versions of current concerns that could be found in the ancients. Accordingly, despite the fact that the study of philosophy at Oxford, as it now proudly proclaims on its website, progressively freed itself institutionally from its “clerical and classical” roots, some scholars of ancient philosophy managed to continue Ryle's tack of isolating ancient arguments that adumbrated modern positions, thereby hoping to retain a voice, however muted, in current discussions. Here the argument was that if one looks carefully enough at, say, Aristotle's *De Anima*, one might just make out how he, too, was a functionalist in the philosophy of mind; indeed, per-

haps, the very first functionalist – well, kind of.

Phillip Mitsis

Perhaps the most visible, articulate, and flattering position for the role of ancient philosophy, however, was staked out by Bernard Williams. This granted ancient philosophy the considerable advantage of being defended by someone who in his own right was among the most respected and influential of contemporary philosophers. Williams argued that philosophy not only is not like science, but that it is inescapably historical, and that practicing historical philosophy properly is very much an instance of doing philosophy, often of the best sort. The last thing that philosophy needs is to recruit more specialized white-coat wannabes unequipped to do real science, while losing touch with the rest of their discipline, and with their culture and history generally. So, for instance, in the face of what he took to be the boring and empty moral theorizing of the day, Williams went about mining deeply relevant philosophical views, even in figures like Homer. This is because, under the influence of Nietzsche, he found in the Greeks a repository of moral views that reflect the way we are likely to think about morality before falling prey to the mutual theoretical distortions of consequentialism and Kant. What was refreshingly new about old philosophers was their ability to take on real moral dilemmas and the kinds of fraught questions about friendship, love, death, and moral luck that had fallen out of contemporary moral theorizing. As he trenchantly put it, contemporary moral philosophy had found “an original way of being boring...by not discussing moral issues at all.”⁵

Regrettably, however, there was one problem that upon his death Williams bequeathed to those wishing to do the history of philosophy philosophically, at least by his lights. Imagine that Mozart, after telling you how boring he finds the music

of von Dittersdorf and Mysliveček, hears some Bach and exclaims: “Now there is music from which a man can learn something.” He then sits down and pens what comes to be known as the Adagio and Fugue K. 546, and urges you to study the music of Bach because it can be a fruitful and inspirational source for your own compositions. Fine advice, perhaps, if you, too, are another composer like Mozart. Fine, too, in the case of ancient philosophy, if you are another philosopher of Williams’s caliber. At the moment, however, it still remains to be seen whether some future Bernard Williams will be able to take up the mantle of doing the kind of history of ancient philosophy that can be regarded by all, in the first instance, as old philosophy that is new.⁶

As we bide our time, what are some of the rest of us von Dittersdorfs doing? At a general level, the current study of ancient philosophy has moved beyond many of those earlier worries about being intellectually shelved with Hippocrates. Williams’s influence has played a role, but there also has been a gradual waning of the dominance of linguistic paradigms along with a growing movement toward the primacy of philosophy of mind and other philosophically productive notions of mental representation. Many of these are more hospitable to ancient arguments. For what it is worth, a recent poll conducted by Leiter Reports: A Philosophy Blog – the main blog for philosophers – charted attitudes toward various specialties. More than twelve hundred voters rated the history of philosophy as more central to the study of philosophy than the philosophy of language.⁷ Of course, the history of philosophy is rather broad, and it does not mean that all those voting were thinking of ancient philosophers. But in another Leiter poll ranking the most important philosophers of all time, Plato edged out Aristotle for the top spot, and even Socrates, who

wrote next to nothing, trounced Wittgenstein and Frege. So I think today’s young ancient philosophers, when introduced to a supercilious colleague, are in the enviable position of responding: “Frege? No, I am afraid I have to limit myself to top-five philosophers. Maybe someday if I have time to work my way down the list, I’ll give another look at my undergraduate notes on the historical influence of the *Begriffsschrift*.”

But on a more serious note, there does seem to be a growing sense, at least among younger colleagues, that they can get on with interesting work without having Frege looking over their shoulder, and that they do not necessarily have to formalize an argument to clarify it or to say something philosophically significant. Cynics may attribute these changes to a general sense that, as in literary studies, many have started to feel that they are losing their way. So perhaps one reason so many philosophers have given in to more laissez-faire attitudes is that the love affair with the linguistic turn is slowly going cold. That is, it is not so much that people no longer dismiss historical philosophers because they harbor hopes of discovering new creative philosophical possibilities, but only because a general disenchantment has given way to a certain wistful nostalgia and a longing, perhaps, for a time when individual philosophers were considered important, even beyond their professional blogs.

Or it might be that as each specialism becomes more entrenched and develops an increasingly technical and complex apparatus, the texts of the past offer a place where one can again think about some of the traditional central issues of philosophy in a more synthetic way. Ancient philosophers typically think in larger systems, and it may be, for example, that Aristotle is wrong to believe that he can explain everything in the world, even the soul, by means of his form/matter distinction. Yet, it is hard not to admire, even wistfully, his

intellectual courage and grandness of ambition in comparison with that of the colleague down the hall who says, “I just do metaphysics. I couldn’t possibly have anything to say about how that relates to the philosophy of mind.” In ancient texts one can again try to see the forest for the trees, especially since philosophical forests are not always on offer at the moment.

Whatever the truth of such suppositions, those studying ancient philosophy these days do seem, on the one hand, less self-consciously desperate for an interface with contemporary work, yet on the other, more likely to fall upon just such a connection, in part, perhaps, because the movement away from earlier more narrowly linguistic paradigms is again starting to blur the divide between ancient and contemporary methods and concerns. Rather than trying to catalog these many possibilities, however, it might be more useful to look at one salient case of a major creative engagement between the old and new in greater detail. In so doing, I will pass by important work that continues to be done in, among other areas, the philosophy of love and friendship,⁸ metaphysical essentialism and ancient modal logic,⁹ ancient cosmopolitanism,¹⁰ aesthetics,¹¹ and, of course, virtue ethics. The latter probably remains the most visible area, though there has been considerable pushback from scholars about how much the ancients actually subscribed to the doctrines about virtue and morality that they have been credited with originating.¹² I want to focus, rather, on the recent resurgence of contemporary philosophical work on death, since, by chance, it also affords the opportunity to raise a more general question about philosophers today and their audience.

The notion that old views of death are new may strike the lay ear as odd; what, after all, could be new about death? Yet, if one were to read what is often taken to be the

fundamental work of political and moral philosophy of the last century, John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* (1971), and compare it to other central texts in the tradition from Thucydides to Hobbes, one striking feature would be how far the subject of death has dropped out of sight, along with the notion that trying to understand the nature of death and the fears it can generate is a fundamental requirement for any systematic ethical or political theory. Moral theorists – the sort that Williams characterized as empty and boring – typically discussed topics like rational deliberation and life plans, and the formation of social contracts in a way that gave scant notice to the fact that we are mortal and that our attitudes toward death may seep into many of our moral and political opinions and decisions. The entry on death in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967), for instance, summarized: “Most Anglo-American analytic philosophers probably regard the paucity of materials on death as evidence of the subject’s resistance to serious philosophical inquiry,” adding the caveat that the subject may be “more adequately dealt with by psychologists and social scientists.”¹³

Hobbes, on the other hand, thought that the fear of death was an important topic for philosophers because it is crucial in the formation of societies; unless agents feared death, it would be hard to see why they might give up their desire for power over others in exchange for what they want most of all: their self-preservation. Thucydides had a more grim view about the possibilities of civil society: he thought that by falling into factions, individuals would willingly sacrifice not only their interests, but even their lives on account of shared hatred, desire for revenge, or partisan political goals. But, in any case, generations of philosophers had thought it important to address this particular disagreement as part of “serious philosophical inquiry.”

Anyone who reads ancient philosophical texts, and those influenced by them (like Hobbes), can hardly fail to be struck not only by the way that questions about death are central components of ancient philosophical discussions, but also by the fact that almost all those philosophers (except, with some qualifications, Aristotle) think that death is not an evil and that it should not be feared, since it cannot harm a good person. Many contemporary philosophers who have become interested in the topic disagree, and this disagreement has sparked a fruitful debate between the old and new.

Indeed, the philosophy of death has recently become an important new area of analysis that cuts across many subdisciplines of philosophy, implicated in a host of questions about personal identity, the nature of time, and the wrongness of killing (including capital punishment, abortion, killing animals for food, and warfare). The extent and sophistication of these arguments about the nature of death and whether it harms us is reflected in a slew of new positions owning precise but forbidding names: *actualist comparativism*, *eternalism*, *subsequentism*, *concurrentism*, and *priorism*, to list a few. In an important sense, these positions have all been developed in an attempt to address a few deceptively simple arguments formulated by the ancient Epicureans, with some defending Epicurus, and others thinking him wrong (although disagreeing about how exactly he is wrong). But it is no exaggeration to say that it was by engaging with these Epicurean arguments that an important new area of contemporary philosophy has taken root, giving rise to classes, graduate seminars, and a steady stream of publications.¹⁴

What are some of these arguments and why have they been so generative? Epicurus begins with the assumption that upon our death we will be annihilated. That

being the case, it is a mistake to think, he insists, that we can be harmed by death. When we are dead we cannot be harmed, since we do not exist. When we are alive, death does not harm us, since we are alive. If one thinks that our death causes us harm, the philosophical challenge is to answer the basic kinds of questions one can ask about any harm: Who was harmed? When did the harm occur? Of what did the harm consist? This turns out to be extremely difficult. One initially might think, for instance, that I am the one harmed by my death. But if I do not exist after my death, how can I be harmed? If I persist in thinking, however, that I am harmed by my death, it may be because I believe that I somehow will be deprived of something when I am dead. But how can something that does not exist suffer deprivation? And how could a deprivation in the future, even if we were to concede that death is a future deprivation, harm me now without appealing to an unhelpful notion of backward causation?

In a paper that has become a touchstone for subsequent work, Thomas Nagel wrangled with these Epicurean arguments in order to defend his claim that if there were “no limit to the amount of life that it would be good to have, it may be that a bad end is in store for all of us.”¹⁵ On the other hand, Bernard Williams defended an opposing Epicurean argument: Lucretius’s belief that we should be horrified by the idea of immortality as defined by traditional religion, Plato, and others.¹⁶ To Lucretius, immortality would be unbearably tedious. Sure, one might be able to stay fresh for the first several million years of teaching intro logic, for instance, but eternity is a very long time; it might start to get a little stale. Also, our personal identity tends to change a bit over time. I am different from what I was in my junior high days (perhaps not different enough for my wife); but after billions of years, is it plausible to think I will remain recogniz-

ably myself, and if not, does it then make sense to talk about my immortality?

David Hume found consoling, though Nabokov found terrifying, another argument from the Epicurean arsenal: the so-called symmetry argument. We normally do not spend much time fretting about our pre-vital existence before we were conceived. This is because, we did not yet exist. If our future death is a relevantly similar state of nothingness, why then should we worry about death any more than we worry about our pre-vital nonexistence? Nabokov, however, in *Invitation of a Memory* (1951) describes a young chronophobe looking at family movies before his birth and experiencing panic at the thought that life had been going on earlier without him. He is terrified at seeing in these movies a brand new baby carriage, “with the smug, encroaching air of a coffin,” empty on the porch, awaiting his birth as if “in the reverse course of events, his very bones had disintegrated.” Again, different intuitions can be explained and defended here – Nabokov’s chronophobe might not have straight all his thoughts about the metaphysical grounds of his identity – but again our conclusions here will depend on a host of intertwining views about personal identity, and our attitudes toward past and future experiences (and nonexperiences, like death). To be sure, these Epicurean arguments are extractable from their ancient context as a set of difficult individual puzzles. But those who, in the spirit of Williams, are paying closer attention to their original context are starting to discover a set of wider implications for our conceptions of death and the ancient claim that philosophy is a form of thanatology.

The detailed work surrounding these questions can be fascinating and deeply stimulating to academics and students alike. Yet, how many people, even among the readers of this journal, are likely to be aware of any

of it? Very few, I imagine. Many more instead will have come across literary critic Stephen Greenblatt’s recent Pulitzer Prize-winning bestseller about Lucretius: *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*.¹⁷ Indeed, many of us obscurely laboring away on Lucretius for the past several decades suddenly became noticed with a new respect by our comparative literature colleagues, and for that puffing up of our chests we owe a debt of thanks.

Greenblatt’s book is a gripping historical thriller populated by brave new intellectuals who – inspired by the rediscovery and transmission of Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura* during the Italian Renaissance – try to save the world from pleasure-hating monks by means of a heady and modern mixture of materialism, sex, and quantum mechanics. It is undoubtedly a narrative tour de force. Of course, one does not have to be Bruno Latour to be vaguely suspicious of a tale in which our modernity depended on a single idea in a single text, especially since anyone familiar with the history of Epicureanism knows that there were many other avenues of transmission for these ideas, and that even confident Epicureans, like Pierre Gassendi, rejected the swerve as nonsensical. So, as much as I wish it were true, I am afraid I remain unpersuaded that the swerve made the world “modern,” whatever that means.

But my purpose here is not to be polemical. I want to conclude with a question that Greenblatt’s book and its provocative title raise about the relation of philosophy to its audience, old and new. Gideon Rosen, a philosopher at Princeton, has recently made the claim that, despite all the current soul searching about the humanities, things are actually just fine. The problem is that humanists naturally have a tough time reaching a wider public because the ideas they deal with are too complicated to be encapsulated in the sort of bullet points and simple narratives that the

lay person comfortably digests. For Rosen, the problem is essentially one of bad press coupled with an intellectually inert public. If their lids get heavy when faced with detailed arguments about actualist comparativism, and if they prefer a memorable but misleading catchphrase about the swerve making us modern, that is their fault and not ours.

I wonder, however, if the problem really only goes in one direction. Especially with respect to today's philosophers, I wonder whether, as they fall further into jargon-filled specialisms, they not only are forfeiting an ability to communicate their ideas to the public, to colleagues in other departments, and even to their own colleagues, but also are risking the loss of something essential to philosophy itself. John Venn, the greatest English logician before Russell, makes this point in *The Logic of Chance* (1866), a book that philosophers should read not solely, as now happens occasionally, for its importance in the history of the frequency interpretation of probability, but even more for its exemplary clarity and directness of expression, its desire to engage others, and its genuinely philosophical spirit: "No science can safely be abandoned entirely to its own devotees. Its details of course can only be studied by those who make it their special occupation, but its general principles are sure to be cramped if it is not exposed occasionally to the free criticism of those whose main

culture has been of a more general character."¹⁸ Venn, who won a Latin declamation prize at Caius College, confided in his diary that he wished that he had learned to speak with the clarity of his models. His great model, of course, was Cicero, as he had been for Locke, Hume, and generations of philosophers until, as proudly proclaimed in today's Oxford, they were able to free themselves from their classical roots.

In a way perhaps not untimely, there has been a recent resurgence of interest (among those working in ancient philosophy) in Roman philosophers, especially Cicero and Seneca. Scholars are trying to understand how Roman philosophers managed to fashion a public discourse that was not only far from being "cramped" in Venn's sense, but that was also able to address the most pressing challenges of the day, all the while armed with philosophy's most technical arguments.¹⁹ As we face our own greatest challenges – the environment, questions of equality and justice, our relations to animals, gender – we can perhaps hold on to the hope that ancient philosophers will not only continue to be of use in presenting us with issues that are not empty and boring, but also that the philosophers of old might again teach today's tongue-tied philosophers to begin to find a voice that can speak to and, in turn, be criticized by "those whose main culture has been of a more general character."

ENDNOTES

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¹ See Carl E. Schorske, "The New Rigorism in the Human Sciences, 1940 – 1960," *Dædalus* 126 (1) (Winter 1997): 289 – 310.

² The best account of the Hellenistic philosophers remains A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (New York; London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. and Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974).

- ³ Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, eds., *Oeuvres de Descartes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Leopold Cerf, 1897; reprinted Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1996), 4.
- ⁴ See Stephen Menn, “The *Discourse on the Method* and the Tradition of Intellectual Autobiography,” in *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Jon Miller and Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- ⁵ Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 9.
- ⁶ See Bernard Williams, *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).
- ⁷ Brian Leiter, Leiter Reports: A Philosophy Blog, <http://leiterreports.typepad.com>.
- ⁸ David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- ⁹ Marko Malink, *Aristotle’s Modal Syllogistic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013).
- ¹⁰ A. A. Long, “The Concept of the Cosmopolitan in Ancient Greek and Roman Thought, *Dædalus* 137 (3) (Summer 2008): 50–58.
- ¹¹ David Konstan, *Beauty: The Fortunes of an Ancient Greek Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- ¹² Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011); and for important pushback and the best recent book on Plato, see Iakovos Vasiliou, *Aiming at Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- ¹³ Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).
- ¹⁴ For a good overview, see Ben Bradley, Fred Feldman, and Jens Johansson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- ¹⁵ Thomas Nagel, “Death,” *Nóus* 4 (1) (1970): 73–80.
- ¹⁶ Bernard Williams, “The Makropoulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality,” in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956–1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).
- ¹⁷ Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).
- ¹⁸ John Venn, *The Logic of Chance* (London; Cambridge: Macmillan, 1866), ix.
- ¹⁹ In addition to the many works of Martha Nussbaum, see more particularly Brad Inwood, *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Joy Connolly, *The State of Speech: Rhetoric and Political Thought in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Explicating Catullus

... nec meum respectet, ut ante, amorem,
qui illius culpa cecidit velut prati
ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam
tactus aratro est.

... nor let her, as before, watch for my love which
through her fault has fallen like a flower at a meadow's
rim, touched by a passing plough.
—Catullus, poem 11.21–24

At the conclusion of one of Catullus's most famous poems, the speaker describes the bitter finale of his love. His striking analogy draws on the epic past (in Homer's *Iliad*, a dead warrior is likened to a garden's poppy weighted by rain) and also on a lyric of Sappho, who compares a virgin deflowered on her wedding night to a hyacinth trampled by shepherds. Readers have long appreciated these allusions, but recent feminist scholarship and new approaches to intertextuality and to the interplay of genres have helped further illuminate Catullus's words. Sexual reversals and generic switches enable the poem now to speak to us in new languages that we readily make our own.

In comparing his love to a flower, the speaker appropriates a feminine image while his "girl" (*puella*) implicitly claims the masculine "plough." Inanimate challenges sensate, practical decorative, brutal delicate. The man's highly charged passion is paradoxically treated as virginal, and the woman's promiscuity, whose coarseness Catullus has earlier disclosed, corrupts and destroys a physical relationship whose nature the speaker considers spiritual and chaste.

In addition to epic and lyric, other literary genres complement and complicate Catullus's images. Flower and plough bring to mind pastoral and georgic. Pastoral poetry projects a realm of make-believe where graceful liaisons and shepherds' songs create a precarious arcadia defined by remoteness from the exigencies of time and history. By contrast, georgic poetry looks to practicalities, to an existence well symbolized by the farmer's plough—blunt metal object, here conjuring a lover's failure that heedlessly fells the vulnerable and sequestered.

Finally, to pastoral and georgic we can join two other poetic types. The first is the epithalamium (marriage song). On another occasion, Catullus composed a wedding hymn whose subjects include the bride's virginity, untouched (*intacta*) before her marriage. Here, instead, in a mordant caricature of a poem of rejoicing, it is the enigmatically masculine lover who is "touched," violated by erotic vulgarity.

The second type Catullus evokes is a propemptikon, poem of bon voyage. Once again generic expectations are disappointed. In standard examples, the speaker bids goodbye to a departing friend. Here it is the speaker who takes his leave to experience the world. At the start of the poem he asks his travelling companions to impart to his dissipated lover at once a curse (*non bona dicata*) and an ironic adieu: "Let her live and fare well with her adulterers" (*cum suis vivat valeatque moechis*). Be well, the speaker wishes her, using obscene language that also suggests the chronic vigor of her sexual adventures.

Just as the images of flower and plough reverse our expectations, so also do the riffs on other poetic forms that enhance lyric. This is an epithalamium in which the devirginized male is the bride, implicitly shorn of life and then abandoned. It is also a song of parting in which the object of separation stays in place and those going away are bidding farewell before embarking—we are led to believe—on a new enterprise suggesting the expansiveness of freedom. Here, as everywhere in classical literature, the poet's imagination speaks afresh to each generation, to our own through deepened appreciation of the complexities of sexuality as well as of the formative friction arising from the miscegenation of poetic forms.

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The Matter of Classical Art History

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Abstract: Though foundational to the study of art history, Greco-Roman visual culture is often sidelined by the modern, and overshadowed by its own cultural and intellectual reception. Recent scholarship, however, has meticulously unpacked the discipline's formative narratives, while building on archaeological and literary studies in order to locate its objects of analysis more precisely within the dynamic cultural frameworks that produced them, and that were in turn shaped by them. Focusing on a passage from Pliny the Elder's Natural History (arguably the urtext of classical art history), this paper explores the perennial question of how the material stuff of antiquity can be most effectively yoked to the thinking and sensing bodies that inhabited it, arguing that closer attention to ancient engagements with materialism can alert us to models of image-making and viewing that are both conceptually and physically grounded in Greco-Roman practices of production, sense perception, and interpretation.

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One day in the 1940s, the classicist Eric Dodds was viewing the Parthenon sculptures in the British Museum when a young man admitted to him, “I know it’s an awful thing to confess, but this Greek stuff doesn’t move me one bit! It’s all so terribly *rational!*” For Dodds, it was unsurprising to find this attitude among young people “trained on African and Aztec art, and on the work of such men as Modigliani and Henry Moore.” The encounter prompted his disciplinary intervention *The Greeks and the Irrational*, which opened shadowy byways – such as divine possession, dream-visions, and magic – to a generation seeking a less “rational” antiquity than that illuminated by the cold light of Hellas.¹ For all their ram-paging centaurs, swirling drapery, and heaving divinities, the Parthenon sculptures themselves would not feature in this rediscovery of Greek primitivism, but remained suspended in the “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur” that Johann Joachim Winckelmann first identified in the art of antiquity in 1755.² It would take several decades before the Parthenon, too, found its narrative of irrationality, in Joan Connel-

ly's controversial suggestion that the central scene of its famed frieze depicts not a joyful civic ritual in honor of the goddess Athena, but a dark origin myth of human sacrifice.³

Greek miracle? Tragic drama? Imperial loot? (Inter)national treasure? The Parthenon sculptures continue to provoke anxious, conflicting responses, none more so than in their current role as poster child for the ongoing debate over repatriation and the role of the "world museum." As aesthetic, political, and ethical touchstones (in all their marble monumentality), they are invested with a status and identity that tell us far more about contemporary concerns over artistic value and cultural ownership than the original significance of the building they adorned. Classicists often point out, in amused frustration, that Pausanias – the travel writer from the second-century AD and our most trusty ancient source on the Athenian Acropolis – fails to mention the Parthenon's frieze at all. How could a monument that has caused such controversy during its *Nachleben* have occupied such a blind spot in antiquity? It is an enduring source of frustration that material objects, with all their physical immediacy, hold out the tantalizing prospect of direct contact with our predecessors, yet do so in silence. Each new generation might attempt to give these artifacts voice, but determining how they should speak, and what they should say, entails a perpetual process of imaginative projection and creative reinvention. Amidst the cacophony that clamors around the classical, Winckelmann's sirenic voice has led many a viewer astray on the alluring fragments of the antique. Meanwhile, the stones themselves remain stubbornly silent.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to suppress the voice telling us that classical artists developed a powerful set of strategies for representing bodies *as if* they might speak: the idea of the breathing, talking, living object

is an enduring theme of Greco-Roman literature, and is fundamental to the visual rhetoric of Greek naturalism. As the myths of Pygmalion and Narcissus remind us, it is at its most recognizably human that the classical provokes its most *irrational* responses. The urge to animate Greco-Roman art also infuses those moments when its beholders are most keen to reject its influence; for instance, Constantine's biographer Eusebius, when describing the emperor's rejection of pagan idols in the early fourth century, recounted how the statues of the gods were marched through the streets of Constantinople, like prisoners in a Roman triumph. At Cornell, where I teach classics and history of art, much of the university's extensive assemblage of plaster casts was – like many such collections across Europe and North America – unceremoniously dumped and destroyed in the 1970s and 1980s. Amidst the dismembered bodies now strewn through Cornell's storage warehouse, the cast of a metope from the Olympian Temple of Zeus, depicting Heracles wrestling the Cretan Bull, looms out of the darkness, daubed with the graffiti *I'MART* (see Figure 1). In such encounters, the constraints of classicism – pushed to the breaking point by the ersatz replication of its best-known incarnations – are violently rejected at the very moment that its invitation to imaginative projection is most enthusiastically embraced. Meanwhile, Heracles labors under the weight of a concept (*ART*) that one might argue he was never meant to bear.⁴

Classical art history is thus faced with a dilemma. Sidelined by a discipline that has focused its attentions on the modern, the contemporary, and, increasingly, the non-Western, it still staggers under the weight of its subject's complex reception over time, haunted by that "dread white army of Greek and Roman statuary, risen from the ground in the sixteenth century and then endless-

Figure 1

Cast of a Metope Depicting Heracles and the Cretan Bull, from the Temple of Zeus, Olympia

Verity
Platt



Dates from late nineteenth century, with graffito dating to the 1960s or 1970s (original dates circa 460 BCE).
Source: Cornell University Cast Collection ; photo by Lindsay France, Cornell University Photography.

ly cloned and imitated.”⁵ This reception history has shaped the very origins of the discipline in which the classical now struggles to find its footing: in the history of art, antiquity is at once the *grande dame* and the awkward guest.

In recent years, scholars have handled antiquity’s cumbersome role with mounting confidence. On the one hand, they have

embraced the challenge of a profound engagement with historiography, exploring the cultural and intellectual climates that shaped the discipline’s founding narratives.⁶ At the same time, they have developed sophisticated approaches to the dynamic and shifting ways in which Greco-Roman art has been – and continues to be – desired and destroyed, restored and ma-

nipulated, collected and displayed.⁷ This means, for example, acknowledging the Parthenon's palimpsestic role not only as Athenian temple, ideological symbol, and Greek national monument, but also as Byzantine church, Ottoman mosque, and Venetian weapons depot.⁸

On the other hand, this enhanced awareness of the diverse voices that have shaped our reception of the antique makes it more possible to listen to the silence of the objects themselves: to push to one side the anachronisms of Renaissance, Enlightenment, or modernist concepts of the classical, and to estrange ourselves from our old friends as we attempt to relocate them more precisely within the cultures they originally inhabited. In particular, this means letting go of familiar narratives, such as that of a teleological drive, in the sixth and fifth centuries BC, toward naturalism. Recent work on Greek sculpture explores how notions of artistic style are deeply embedded in cultural experiences of bodies, spaces, and modes of practice and discourse. Such scholarship also examines how, alongside the seductions of classical naturalism, there existed a "spectrum of iconicity" (to use Milette Gaifman's phrase), in which schematic, naturalistic, and even aniconic forms were made and experienced side by side, often in complex dialogue with each other.⁹ Moreover, while the grip of post-Renaissance models of naturalism on the field has relaxed, notions of classicism within antiquity itself have expanded to embrace a broader range of styles, cultures, and modes of representation (such as Roman appropriations and adaptations of Egyptian art). The field is witnessing a burgeoning interest in comparative premodernities, while post-modernism's enthusiasm for the replica series has liberated Roman art from its reputation as a pale imitation of Greek genius, given that the notion of the "copy" is now reformulated as emulation or cre-

ative adaptation.¹⁰ In the new millennium, this attitude is even being extended to nineteenth-century plaster casts, which are slowly limping out of the warehouse as genuine "antiques" to be rediscovered by a digital generation entranced by analog forms of reproduction and less troubled by the notion of the "original."

If we are to historicize notions of the Antique, understanding them as inherited and continually shifting receptions of the material past, what about the ancients, who, by means of the written word, still speak to us across the centuries? Classical art history has always struggled to define its relationship to the discipline of classics, the latter traditionally dominated by the textual preoccupations of classical philology. It is telling that one of the most influential paradigms for the study of Roman art in the later twentieth century, which prompted a greater interest in material culture amongst ancient historians, in particular, was Tonio Hölscher's concept of *Bildsprache*: a "semantic system" or "language of images" that projects a legible order onto the bewildering stylistic eclecticism of Roman visual culture.¹¹ Although the trend toward interdisciplinarity has encouraged sustained attention to the relationship between "art and text" in recent decades, the predominant impulse has been to absorb the visual into discourse, to focus on dematerialized "images" rather than physical "objects," and further, to prioritize narrative, figural representation over ornament, abstraction, and medium. From Homer's description of Achilles's shield to Pompeian frescoes of the Trojan War, such an interdisciplinary approach has enriched our understanding of literary engagements with the visual, and vice versa. However, this method has attended less to aspects of art-making and viewing that resist translation into the rationalizing and dematerializing language of academic hermeneutics.¹²

Yet just as philologists, fueled by the “material turn” in the humanities at large, are increasingly interested in the physical aspects of the artifacts that have ensured their discipline’s survival, so can scholars of classical art, familiar with antiquity’s creative translations of silent objects into speech, be particularly attuned to the literary nature of their enterprise.¹³ As Jaś Elsner points out, art history writ large is “a verbal discipline of the visual,” driven by “the belief in (or desire for) the potential transfiguration of the visual cast in verbal terms.”¹⁴ A schooling in the rhetorically brilliant ephrastic techniques of, say, Ovid or Philostratus, attunes readers to the subtleties with which ancient authors signal the *insufficiency* of language’s intermedial adventures, while attending to the very qualities that make art objects so compelling or confusing, and to the ways in which art provokes, even desires, language, while eluding its semantic net.¹⁵ Rather than simply reinforcing the canon, recognizing the critical sensitivity of such texts, and the sophistication with which ancient art objects engaged their earliest beholders, can teach an awareness of both art history’s creative potential and its rhetorical arbitrariness; it encourages a sense of responsibility to the voiceless objects that are in our care.

And a sense of responsibility is arguably one of the defining features of classical studies. It is most overtly expressed in a rigorous historicism foundational to the nineteenth-century development of *Altertumswissenschaft* (the “science of antiquity”), and typifies the disciplinary terrain in which art history and archaeology converge, and where the scholarly stewardship of the catalog and site report remain critical to current work. In a rejection of aestheticism and antiquarianism – in vigorous resistance to the politicoeconomic forces that encourage the looting of historical sites – today’s classical archaeologists tend to prioritize historical and physical con-

text.¹⁶ At the same time, the tools with which archaeologists date and interpret their material are often dependent upon techniques of stylistic and iconographic analysis that facilitate the identification of hands, workshops, and places of origin: traditional “art-historical” practices of connoisseurship.¹⁷ Liberated from the constraints of dry formalism, however, and treated as an intrinsic aspect of ancient material culture, objects such as temple metopes, painted vessels, and honorific statues are enmeshed within the dynamic web of social, economic, and political relations that constituted the ancient sanctuaries and cities they once enhanced. Long-term excavation projects at sites such as the Athenian Agora or the city of Aphrodisias in Turkey (whose quarries fed an insatiable demand for marble statuary) have helped to integrate such objects into a thick analysis of the spaces, structures, and activities in which they were made, used, and viewed.¹⁸ In this way, the anonymous foot soldiers of antiquity’s “dread white army” have been individuated and resocialized, emerging as strategically employed pieces in the cultural rituals and high-stakes status games of communities and their elites. They can, moreover, be reimaged in all their technical or glory, now better understood through the painstaking analysis of original polychrome surfaces.

One question that lingers, however, is whether the absorption of “art” into rationalizing histories of material culture can fully address either the complex fashioning of such highly prized objects, or their enduring power to enchant the senses, pre-occupy the mind, and invite dynamic engagement and response. Experiments in polychromy, for example, though often shockingly gaudy to viewers accustomed to the whiteness of the (neoclassical) antique, raise important questions about the ancient phenomenology of color. They de-

mand that we both reassess Greco-Roman formulations of the relationship between medium and form, surface and depth, ornament and figuration, and address the signifying and differentiating potential of specific pigments.¹⁹ Would Dodds's interlocutor have been moved by the Parthenon sculptures if he had seen them finished in paints such as intense Egyptian blue (a form of cuprorivaite recently detected using infrared light), which simultaneously dissolved their marble monumentality and emphasized their mass, projecting them before his eyes in a riot of color?²⁰ Or might they have seemed even more alien, their strong tones and dramatic contrasts designed for viewers with quite different conceptualizations of color and perception, and for whom the Parthenon was still part of a living network of spaces and structures sacred to the gods? The question of how the material stuff of antiquity can be most effectively yoked to the thinking and sensing bodies that inhabited it is an enduringly problematic one, but if we believe that objects *mattered*, then the kinds of questions posed by contemporary art history – with their focus on historically constituted forms of visibility and, increasingly, materiality – have an important role to play in a rigorously historicizing study of the ancient world.²¹

Take, for example, an anecdote passed down to us by Pliny the Elder in his encyclopedic *Natural History*. It is notable that the sections Pliny devotes to sculpture, painting, and gems – which have been traditionally excerpted as an independent work of art history *avant la lettre* – are embedded within a work of natural science, and arranged according to raw materials (metals, earth, and stones). Pliny's story of art conforms to a materialist, Stoic model of all-encompassing *natura*, presenting a narrative of man's acquisition of the skills necessary to work material resources into higher-order objects.²² Here, it is the processes of extracting, manipulating, trans-

forming, and replicating nature that most preoccupy him, in both a celebration of human skill and a repudiation of *luxuria*: the fetishization of matter for its own sake, as opposed to respect for *natura* as a holistic, even divine, system. In his account of the meticulously precise Greek painter Protogenes, Pliny relates his multiple attempts to depict a panting dog. Protogenes, frustrated because “the foam appeared to be painted, not to be the natural product of the animal's mouth,” then

fell into a rage with his art because it was perceptible, and threw a sponge against the offending spot in the picture. And the sponge restored the colors he had removed, just as his diligence had desired, and chance produced nature in the picture.²³

Here, the supreme act of painterly depiction is generated not by human skill, but by a serendipitous impression, in a manner that satisfies the artist, yet warns against the hubristic assumptions that drive human feats of mimesis (such as those of none other than Dædalus!). Sponges, as Pliny observes earlier in *Natural History*, are themselves living beings that engage dynamically with their environment and “possess intellect,” occupying an interstitial category between plant and animal.²⁴ Centuries before Yves Klein's *reliefs-éponges*, the sponge's “raw living matter” proves to be the purest vehicle for paint as a medium, offering an alternative model of (literal) absorption to the bewitching powers of naturalistic illusionism.²⁵ The most precise imitator of the natural world, it turns out, is *natura* herself. By materializing a substance that had eluded the painter's attempts at depiction, the sponge's imprint is both a representation of the dog's drool (by virtue of its formal parallels with foam) and an instantiation of it (through its transmission of liquid), while the artist must himself experience dog-like rage (*ira*) in order to depict the dog correctly. The an-

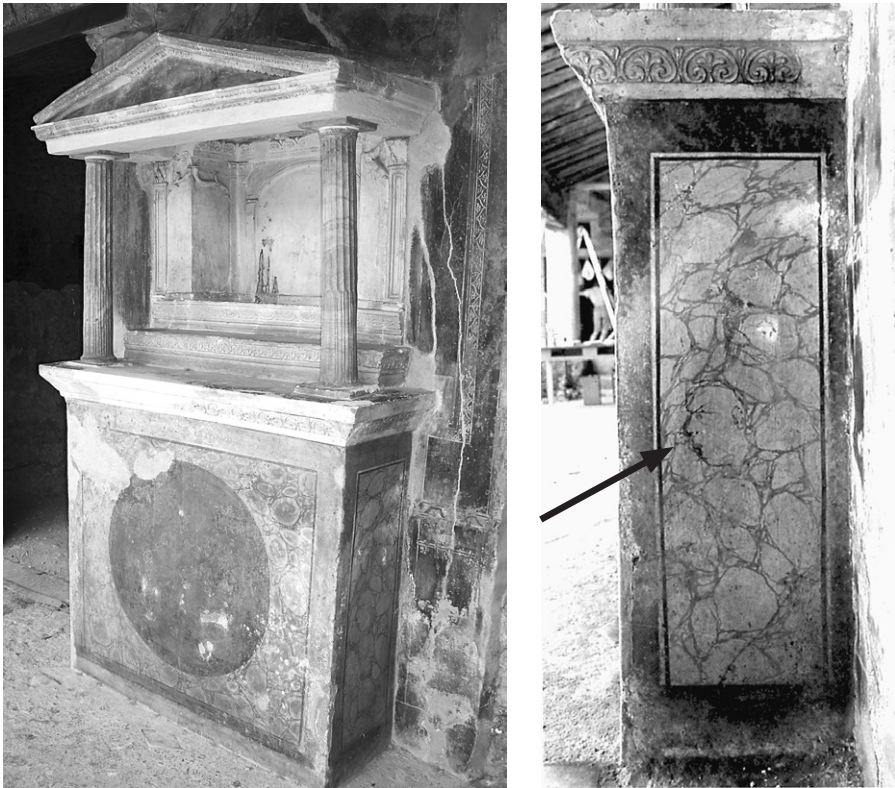
ecdote offers, in effect, an alternative ontology of the image to that of mimesis, a form of “truth” (*verum*) rather than “truthlikeness” (*verisimile*), bypassing Platonic concerns about the deceptive illusionism of representation in order to celebrate the replicative potential of matter itself. Here, painting is not presented as an inferior imitation of reality, but as contiguous with it; the artist plays the role not of transformative genius, but of nature’s unwitting agent. That such a complex aesthetic concept is spun out in relation to a panting dog is typical of the paradoxographical Hellenistic literature that likely formed Pliny’s source, in which the most striking, entertaining, and confusing aspects of image-making and viewing – or the most “irrational” aspects of ancient art – are often the most effective conveyors of its ontological and phenomenological complexities.²⁶

What are art historians to do with such a text? Like most such anecdotes, its authenticity is impossible to verify: no works by Protogenes, nor any other Greek old masters, survive, painted as they were on wooden panels vulnerable to fire and decay. Nor, to my knowledge, do ancient frescoes or vase paintings make use of sponge impressions, although the conceit can be found in other literary sources. Nevertheless, Pliny’s account raises important questions about ancient attitudes toward the artist’s relationship with his materials, and models of perception and representation that were common at the time. Rather than offering us a Pygmalionesque fantasy in which image dissolves into prototype, Pliny gives us the object at its most tangibly present and its most enigmatic: Protogenes’s painting is at once embedded in the material world of which it is part and stands on its own as a wondrous object that reveals nature’s internal structural consistencies.

A similar fascination with the slippage between medium and representation, and

between natural marvel and marvelously contrived illusion, is suggested by a painted shrine from a house in Pompeii, contemporary with Pliny himself (see Figure 2). Here, red and white pigments are used to imitate variegated marble, creating a grand *trompe l’oeil* structure for the household’s gods. Traced within the marble veins is a human face, hinting at the painter’s art (and artifice) while suggesting that marble contains an art of its own, that *natura* is herself a painter. Viewing with Pliny in mind, we might note that the pigments employed for painting are themselves derived from stones, metals, and organic substances, including finely ground marble. The implication of such illusionism is that artistic representation is just one of a continuous series of processes by which one substance might be transformed into another, shaped by the constraints and affordances of matter.

This sense of both material continuity and dramatic metamorphosis is also conveyed by the sponge’s act of impression. This models a form of image-production that was vital to ancient practices of art-making, including the processes of stamping, molding, and casting employed in the sealing of signatures, the minting of coins, the mass production of terracotta figurines, and the lost-wax technique of bronze-casting. As forms of “mechanical reproduction,” such methods were key to the creation, use, and circulation of objects that were worn on bodies (as engraved seal-rings), displayed in homes, and beheld in public spaces. As techniques of replication, these methods exist in a continuum with the replicative processes that are so critical to Roman art, and invite us to view rather differently the practice of “copying” the Greek old masters, denigrated for so long by the inheritors of classicism. In Pliny’s Protogenes anecdote, the ability to transfer an image from one medium to another does not imply an ethical, aesthet-



Lararium located in the peristyle of the House of the Gilded Cupids, Pompeii, dated circa 50 – 79 CE. Note the human profile (right image, center, facing left) incorporated into the veining of the *trompe l'oeil* breccia marble. Source: Verity Platt.

ic, or ontological compromise, but quite the opposite: it is the bearer of “truth.” This is in keeping with the Stoic underpinnings of Pliny’s project, a materialist model of sense perception, in which knowledge is acquired through impressions (*phantasiai*) made upon the soul. The Stoics, following Aristotle, used the image of a seal-ring’s impression in wax as a key metaphor in their philosophy of mind.²⁷ Like the sponge, the seal-ring is the bearer of truth, the transfer of its matrix from one medium to another guaranteeing the endorsement of its owner in an unbroken sequence of matter.

By combining the imitation of nature with its direct impression, Protogenes’s painting juxtaposes two critical models of image-making. While inviting the reader/viewer to consider how familiar objects might combine figural representation with its mechanical replication, the painting materializes conflicting philosophical models of knowledge-acquisition: the dualism of the Platonic school, with its deep suspicion of mimesis, versus Stoicism’s validation of the senses. Pliny’s anecdote is a reminder that while we may work to master or transcend matter, we are also agents and components of it, with all the responsi-

bility (and humility) that should entail. As the “material turn” continues to dominate work in the humanities, it is worth considering not only the materialist models of ethics and epistemology that antiquity has bequeathed us – which can be surprisingly familiar as well as refreshingly strange – but also the thoughtful and sophisticated ways in which these were explored in ancient literary *and* material culture.²⁸ Classical art history, with its close

relationship to both philology and archaeology, and its long tradition of analyzing how artifacts were designed and manufactured, viewed and handled, desired and discussed, can demonstrate that although they lack voice, such objects nevertheless work to materialize thought: as “vibrant” components of antiquity, they still have the capacity to move and surprise, while inviting their viewers to think beyond the limits of the self.²⁹

ENDNOTES

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- ¹⁵ See the seminal new five-volume revision and commentary of Johannes Overbeck’s 1868 classic, *Der Neue Overbeck: Die Antiken Schriftquellen zu den Bildenden Künsten der Griechen*, ed. Sascha Kansteiner, Klaus Hallof, Lauri Lehmann, Bernd Seidensticker, and Klaus Stemmer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).
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- ²² Tanner, *The Invention of Art History in Ancient Greece*, 236–246.
- ²³ Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 35.103.
- ²⁴ Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 9.148, 32.47.
- ²⁵ Yves Klein, quoted in Nan Rosenthal, “Assisted Levitation: The Art of Yves Klein,” in *Yves Klein 1928–1962: A Retrospective* (Houston: Institute for the Arts, Rice University, 1982), 111.
- ²⁶ A term defined as “an ancient literary genre devoted to descriptions of mirabilia, marvelous or miraculous objects.” From Oxford Reference, “Paradoxography,” <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100305169> (accessed December 21, 2015).
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Materializing Ancient Documents

Roger S. Bagnall

Abstract: Two materially oriented revolutions have transformed the study of ancient documents in recent decades: first, a new interest in the ancient production of written artifacts; and second, the concern with the archaeological contexts, and more particularly the taphonomy – that is, the processes at work in the burial – of those same objects. The first, largely driven by the availability of digital images, has given life to the study of ancient writing as a cultural and social phenomenon and to the social life of written objects. In the process, connections between literary and documentary texts have come to the fore and distinctions between these categories have eroded. The second revolution began with an interest in what archaeological contexts of excavated papyri could tell us about the history of the texts, but it has evolved to see the texts themselves as artifacts engaged in an iterative dialogue with both the contexts and other objects found in them.

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Two materially oriented revolutions have transformed the study of ancient documents in recent decades: first, a new interest in the ancient production of written artifacts; and second, the concern with the archaeological contexts, and more particularly the taphonomy – that is, the processes at work in the burial – of those same objects. The first of these has to do with both the raw materials of writing and the act of writing itself, and has been brought to life in the last twenty years by the increasing availability of high-resolution digital images. These revolutions have had major effects on the practice of epigraphy (the study of texts on stone and metal), papyrology (the study of texts on papyrus, potsherds, and wooden tablets), and are now beginning to affect numismatics (the study of coins and medals) as well, though the effects have reached these disciplines in unequal measure: Papyrology, from which I shall draw my examples, is far ahead of epigraphy on the digital imaging front. Epigraphy, on the other hand, has long been more closely tied to archaeology and is only slowly getting traction on digital

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images. Numismatics is now starting to catch up to the others.¹

Before turning to these materializing revolutions, let us acknowledge that they are not the only major changes that the documentary disciplines in classical studies have undergone in recent decades.² The other two are probably more familiar, but they are of enormous importance nonetheless. The first, and older, is the digitization of the papyrological textual corpus and the consequent ease of searching through its seventy thousand texts. The greatest result of this development, as Michael McCormick has stated about the study of the early medieval economy, is the luxury of being able to “fail cheaply, to risk our precious time on uncertain but potentially rewarding questions.”³ We can invest tiny amounts of time and minimal cost in many probes into the data; only a small fraction need to turn up useful patterns for the exercise to be intellectually profitable. Four decades ago, we would not have bothered to ask these questions; the transaction costs were too high to be wagered on the slim chance of a useful outcome.

The other major development is the internationalization of the discipline. Papyrology was always a relatively global field, in large part because it was so small. But today it is largely integrated across national lines, such that local “schools” of papyrology are no longer conceivable. Nationals of one country receive their graduate training in another, and their job in a third, almost as a matter of routine. When I was starting out, this was hardly thinkable. It is still more a European than an American phenomenon, but even that is changing.

There are now tens of thousands of images of papyri, ostraca, and tablets available on the Web, although probably more than half of the published artifacts are still not digitized. This work has been carried out in part by the multi-institutional APIS

(Advanced Papyrological Information System) consortium and in part by many independent projects around the world.⁴ These online collections have made it possible to replace volumes of selected paleographic examples, the limited but expensive guides of a few decades ago, with tools like the remarkable PapPal site created by Rodney Ast in Heidelberg, where visitors can look at images of hundreds of papyri, arranged by date or other criterion, in a gallery format.⁵ Through this medium the user has a broad, near-objective view of the range of handwritings found in any given period that its highly selective print predecessors could have never hoped to achieve. The initial impact, for me, was to destroy any remaining confidence in the precision of paleographic dating.

The first work to use large numbers of images to powerful effect was a dissertation based on analog images written in the years just before APIS began its work: Raffaella Cribiore’s *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (1996).⁶ By gathering and analyzing hundreds of photographs of so-called school texts, Cribiore was able to reconstruct the handwritings of both teachers and students in Greco-Roman Egypt, and the processes by which students advanced in learning. In effect, she showed what such a quantity of images could do, making the utility and urgency of digitization that much more obvious.

By contrast, when she and I later began to work on *Women’s Letters from Ancient Egypt* (2006), most of the photographs were digital, and the online version of the book is illustrated with hundreds of them.⁷ We sought, on their basis, to move beyond the debates about literacy launched by William Harris’s book *Ancient Literacy* one-quarter century ago.⁸ Harris’s low general estimate of literacy rates had led to a host of studies seeking to identify the extent to which different groups in ancient societies were able to read and write. As we examined

how women used writing, both their own and that of those around them, it became clear that identifying women's hands was far from the straightforward matter we had imagined. We concluded that there were no visible differences between men's and women's handwriting. This kind of study depends on the large-scale provision of images, and it gives a type of information about every aspect of not only handwriting, but organization, layout, and key elements – in short, *diplomatics* – that could not have been had until now; or at least not without superhuman energy and endurance, not to speak of a lot of money. Once again, the investment required for scholarly inquiry has been reduced to more manageable levels.

Such possibilities and successes also introduce a need for changes in the style of editing documents. Jean-Luc Fournet has called attention to the presence in late antique documents of a series of characteristics, including handwriting, layout, and the use of diacritical marks, drawn from the usage of literary *papyri* and from teaching practices in schools. These are what he calls part of a literarization of documentary practice, visible mostly in the documents produced by those at the top of the socioeconomic and cultural ladder, to be sure, but which also trickled down to much humbler documents. We can also see a comparable migration of habits from the less literary and more business/administration-oriented parts of the educational system into less exalted levels of document-writing, notably in private letters of people of more modest station, even monks and estate managers. These observations led Fournet to point out that the editing and digital presentation of papyrus texts do not support such inquiries into the physicality of the *papyri*. Not only do editors not always record features like layout in their editions, but these characteristics are not well provid-

ed for in the toolkit we use for digitizing documentary texts. *Roger S. Bagnall*

But the new focus on materiality goes well beyond ink and how it is laid on the page. It goes also to the recognition of the importance of materials other than papyrus itself, most importantly ostraca, the potsherds used for a wide variety of ephemeral texts not only in Egypt but in much of the rest of the ancient world.⁹ In winter 2015, Clementina Caputo, one of the ceramicists working at our excavations at Amheida – a buried Egyptian city in the Dakhla Oasis – completed a study of the sherds used for the nearly nine hundred ostraca discovered at our site so far, with remarkable and unexpected results. Contrary to the prevailing belief that a person needing a sherd to write on simply picked one up at random, Caputo has shown that the ceramic fabric was chosen because it could easily be broken into suitable pieces by a blow or two from a flint or a hammer; other fabrics shatter. Second, what ceramicists call diagnostic sherds, like necks and bases, are almost never used for writing. Rather, someone who needed ostraca picked the large pieces of vessel walls, which are relatively flat, and then broke and shaped them as needed. Third, the shapes are not random either; people hacked vessel walls up into pieces of standardized shapes for particular purposes, like the labels stuck into mud jar stoppers on top of wine jars (see Figure 1).

Made possible largely by digital images and databases, this work – and much more I have not mentioned – has tended to reconstruct the ecosystem of writing as a whole: who wrote; how they were educated in different types of writing competence; what materials they used when, where, and for what purposes; how they displayed their education, importance, and concern for their correspondents by the way they laid out, wrote, and marked up what they wrote. In this way, the material characteristics of writing materials and



Source: Photo Excavations at Amheida. Trimithis (Amheida), third-to-fourth century AD.

writing itself have come to support inquiry into the entire social dimension of the technology of writing in ancient society.

This seems to me the more easily digested of our two revolutions, even though it has obviously brought significant change to scholarly investigation. More complicated is the developing relationship between papyrology and archaeology: in particular, the growing interest in the archaeological contexts of documents. From a documentary point of view, this has started out mainly from asking: what can we learn about our documents from their context? But we may also ask what we can learn about our archaeological contexts from the texts found in them, just as we might from any other artifact. This is, in fact, the direction things are going.

We may trace the roots to Peter van Minnen's 1994 article "House-to-House Enquiries: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Roman Karanis."¹⁰ Van Minnen's recognition that papyri were artifacts, that they could be, at least where the records were adequate, traced to the depositional units in which they were found, and that these units belonged to actual houses in which other artifacts had been found, represented a genuine breakthrough in the field. He was at pains to argue that the papyri he identified as belonging to the tax collector Sokrates of Karanis were found in a primary context: namely, Sokrates's house.

The article received little criticism at the time, in part perhaps because readers not in proximity to the Kelsey Museum at the University of Michigan did not have access to the full data on which the case rested. In

more recent years, as a new generation of scholars has pushed deeper into the Karanis archives and assessed the excavation and recording practices of the 1920s and 1930s – which were state of the art at that time – doubts have grown about the reliability of the data on which van Minnen based his arguments. These doubts have sometimes been expressed in the context of a broader skepticism about our ability to relate texts and their places of discovery, as in Lisa Nevett’s demonstration of the uncertainty that can beset such inquiries even with more recent and better-documented excavations, like at ancient Kellis, modern-day Ismant el-Kharab, Egypt.¹¹

In the same period, an interest in secondary contexts began to grow, driven in large part by the excavations conducted by an international team first at Mons Claudianus, an important quarry site in the Eastern Desert of Egypt, and then in the series of explorations carried out under the direction of H el ene Cuvigny, with Jean-Pierre Brun leading the archaeological work, at the forts along the desert roads, as well as by a team working at the port of Berenike on the Red Sea. In these sites, almost all of the material found – well more than ten thousand ostraca in all – came from dumps; hardly a sherd was found where it was originally received and read. House-to-house inquiries, or room-by-room, were out. The only important question was whether the dumps were themselves primary or secondary dumps: a nearby rubbish bin or a dump where rubbish was carted away from place of first tossing. The close collaboration of the papyrologists with the archaeologists in the fort excavations produced an acute investigation into the formation of dumps, and the consequent pursuit of stratigraphy within the dumps, in which dating information in the ostraca was used in a kind of virtuous feedback loop to help refine the stratigraphy and its chronology.

To return to the more pressing questions of papyri in the proximate context of discovery: Traianos Gagos, Jennifer Gates, and Drew Wilburn have provided a good summary of the history of thinking, or lack of thinking, about this problem.¹² They have shown how the ambitious goals with which the Karanis excavations began were lost in the postwar period, and that most papyri in collections came onto the market without any kind of context; we will never be able to reconstruct most of what has been lost. Even if papyri come from excavations, as is the case of much of what was found at the ancient Egyptian sites Tebtunis and Oxyrhynchos, the archaeological record is inadequate to support a detailed reconstruction. Yet work on bringing together the different finds and approaches can still help recreate the larger context, even if the microcontexts are mostly lost.

If the 1990s were the era of optimism about what was possible with Karanis, then the past decade has been an era of caution. Robert Stephan and Arthur Verhoogt’s article “Text and Context in the Archive of Tiberianus” is exemplary of this.¹³ In it, they show, through meticulous analysis of the records, that with respect to a papyrus dossier, the excavators did not actually distinguish finds in two successive levels in their reporting, but attributed them all to the earlier level, even in the case of a physical space said not to have been in use in that period. But Stephan and Verhoogt do not despair; rather, they argue cogently that one may reattribute the particular group found in a particular space to the later level. But there is a catch: these papyri apparently were cleared away and put in the space where they were found not as part of their primary use, but when the house was being renovated. If not exactly a dump, the space can be seen as a place of secondary storage or disposal. The conclusions drawn about the actual use of the house by the persons involved in the documents are restrained

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but not defeatist: patient reconstruction – reengineering the Karanis database, one might call it – is not a completely hopeless errand.

But it is far from simple. The pessimist's case was made convincingly in Tom Landvatter's paper presented at the 2013 papyrology congress in Warsaw on the so-called House of the Nilometer at Karanis.¹⁴ The excavators again seem to have attributed papyri to the highest level that had undergone alteration; again the papyri in the house were not found in their lifetime location of use, but in a place that represented storage or discarding. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that some of the supposed archive was found in the street outside, with even individual papyri divided between house and street contexts. Their place of finding is thus not necessarily even their point of discarding, let alone their place of lifetime use.

With Karanis and the Nilometer archives, this argument seems impossible to refute; the gulf in dating is too wide, even if the ceramic chronology might be open to challenge. But I would not go beyond this to adopt a nihilistic approach to attributing documents to occupation levels, or to abandon all hope that we may speak of a house as belonging to an individual or family.

I say that on the basis of comparing two houses excavated by our team at Amheida. One of these belonged to a rich man; it was a large house, with spacious rooms, several of them painted in high Roman style. The central room, with a dome, had mythological scenes in bands above a dado imitating polychrome stonework. The other house is more middling, being half the size and, as far as we can see, rather plain. The large house was well preserved, up to and above the height of doorways; the small house, in a location more vulnerable to the wind, was highly eroded and had less secure contexts. In the rich house, we found numerous ostraca with the same individ-

ual's name, in locations breathing abandonment and discarding, in good contexts, sometimes with associated datable coins, above floors and below collapse. In the small house, the far fewer ostraca offered no such hooks and were rarely found even in good contexts of abandonment. I do not have any doubts that the rich house is that of a man named Serenos, who, we deduced from one of the letters found in the house, was a member of the city council. I would not hazard identifying the owner of the small house except in the most generic fashion. And it does matter. To know that a city councilor had Homeric scenes on his wall, and a graffito with a line from a now-lost play of Euripides, is not trivial knowledge.

Let us now turn back to the question of dumping. This does not, as my colleagues Rodney Ast and Paola Davoli have shown, reflect a single, straightforward phenomenon, but rather several possible stages in the use and reuse of materials.¹⁵ Not all of these apply to any one object – here we are talking mainly about ostraca – but they make up a coherent sequence.

Consider an ostrakon that is inserted into a mud jar stopper, which is slapped on top of a jar of wine, with a vine leaf protecting the wine from the mud (see Figure 2). The jar travels from farm to city, its contents are consumed, and the mud stopper, still with ostrakon in place, is thrown away, probably at no great distance. The unfired stopper normally disintegrates relatively quickly, leaving the ostrakon separated from its original frame: instant decontextualization.

At some point, soon or late, the debris is carted away and dumped elsewhere; this is now a secondary dumping action. At Amheida, unlike the desert forts, this is the abandoned parts of a Roman bath, which were used in the late third and early fourth century as a place to dump all sorts of material, from construction debris and

Figure 2
Vine Leaf on Underside of Mud Jar Stopper

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Source: Photo Excavations at Amheida. Trimithis (Amheida), third-to-fourth century AD.

ashes to jar stoppers with their ostraca (or the two now separated). Some decades go by, and the debris-filled area of the former baths is sold off as building lots. The purchasers take some of the accumulated garbage and spread it around the whole area to level it for building. The dumped material is now in a third-stage use. A street is laid out over it, and next to it a mansion is built. A little to the north of the house a school is added on.

In the course of construction, thousands of sherds are needed for chinking; they are placed in walls and in vaults between bricks, partly as spacers, partly to help turn rectangular bricks into curving vaults. Some of these sherds are ostraca; all come from previously dumped material, whether in the baths (as seems most likely) or perhaps partly from elsewhere. In this use, which is

also tertiary in character, the sherds begin a new life. Someday, the vaults collapse, and perhaps the walls fall over as well, as the weight of external sand pushes against them. The brickwork breaks apart, the sherds are released from captivity, and they enter a layer of collapse debris, often difficult to tell apart from occupation debris that was on the last floor of the house or walking surface of the street.

Use and reuse thus take many forms. When we excavate these contexts, we find ostraca and transcribe and edit them. Since most of them have no independent means of dating – and even the regnal years on some could belong to multiple reigns, with no imperial names being given – the stratigraphy is of the utmost importance. At the same time, as ostraca are dated, they help, in company with coins, to anchor their

strata. This is an iterative process: the ostraca as texts and the ostraca as artifacts are mutually reinforcing. Understanding the ostraca in a stratigraphic unit can help the archaeologist reconstruct the formation of that unit, not simply its place in time.

This history was intelligible to us only because the contents of the ostraca possessed an internal coherence that allowed the archaeologist to refine the initial description of the process of formation of the physical record. From the papyrologist's point of view, understanding this process of formation makes it possible to connect ostraca found in similar contexts with the same kind of formative processes, even if they have not a trace of the verbal links, like shared names or official titles, that usually allow papyri and ostraca to be connected into an archival mass. The stratigraphic information in effect functions as a kind of meta-verbal text for the ostrakon. The two revolutions thus connect at an interesting juncture: where they complicate the notions of texts and archaeology as separate domains with different types of information that can scarcely be brought together. The focus on the artifactual character of writing emphasizes what we might call the nontextual side of textual witnesses; and the careful exploration of stratigraphy can lead to archaeological contexts providing a kind of meta-textual characterization that ties directly into the textual analysis of the documents.

Much of what I have said is, in a sense, inward-looking. It argues for the advantages that documentary studies and archaeology can both draw from the artifactual turn in papyrology, despite the many hazards and pitfalls along the way. But there is also a case to be made that this approach is more likely than traditional philology to help us connect with other fields. One example is the study of the Cairo Geniza – a mass of three hundred thousand Jewish manu-

script fragments found in Old Cairo – with which papyrology shares a massive range of shared concerns, including diplomatic and paleographic challenges and the twin problems of the taphonomy and the non-stratigraphic excavation of these written artifacts. I am certain that similar common ground exists with all sorts of other ancient and medieval documentary contexts, and I am equally certain that there will be many rewards in exploring these commonalities.

There are, of course, plenty of limits and cautions. For example, even if we can be confident that we have identified the house of Serenos at Trimithis, the ostraca from that house are not the kinds of discursive documents that tell us much about the family that lived with him in it, except to mention the mistress of the household. Otherwise, the ostraca speak more to the household and its economy than to the family, behaving – oddly – much more like the archaeological side of the ledger than like the textual. It will undoubtedly be exceptional, especially in an era of expanding settlements and rising water tables, to have it all. But that does not mean we should lose sight of the desirability of that goal.

We should recognize that these directions are not neutral or accidental. They represent the results of a secular shift in the makeup of the field of papyrology and in the kind of training that papyrologists have received, away from the mostly literary and philological approaches and education prevalent a generation or two ago and toward history in a very broad sense, including particularly religion and archaeology. One might say that we have moved from being interested only in the text of a new fragment of Sappho to wanting to know who was copying and reading Sappho.¹⁶ I am overschematizing and exaggerating, of course; a more traditional kind of literary papyrology still goes on as before, sometimes seemingly untroubled by statements like “provenance unknown.”

And papyrologists still have to know the languages well to do what they do. But interest has undeniably shifted in the direction of the broader cultural horizons of the ancient world in their embodied form, and

away from disembodied canonical texts. This neither is, nor should be, the end of philology. But if it were the end of an isolated philology, that would be no bad thing.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ See, for example, Online Coins of the Roman Empire (OCRE), <http://numismatics.org/ocre/>.
- ² Space constraints prevent me from discussing the comparable developments in other parts of the ancient world, but whether dealing with cuneiform tablets or inscriptions from medieval Vietnam, similar changes are visible throughout the study of antiquity.
- ³ Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick, eds., *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 83.
- ⁴ See the Papyrological Navigator and the Papyrological Editor – produced by several partnering institutions, including APIS, the Duke Collaboratory for Classics Computing, and Columbia University Libraries – at <http://papyri.info>.
- ⁵ See <http://pappal.info>.
- ⁶ Raffaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).
- ⁷ Roger Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt, 300 BC – AD 800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).
- ⁸ William Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).
- ⁹ I discuss this in chapter six of Roger S. Bagnall, *Everyday Writing in the Graeco-Roman East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
- ¹⁰ Peter van Minnen, “House-to-House Enquiries: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Roman Karanis,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 100 (1994): 227–251.
- ¹¹ In Beryl Rawson, ed., *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman World* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
- ¹² Traianos Gagos, Jennifer Gates, and Drew Wilburn, “Material Culture and Texts of Graeco-Roman Egypt: Creating Context, Debating Meaning,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 42 (1–4) (2005): 171–188.
- ¹³ Robert P. Stephan and Arthur Verhoogt, “Text and Context in the Archive of Tiberianus (Karanis, Egypt; 2nd Century AD),” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 42 (1–4) (2005): 189–202.
- ¹⁴ See Thomas Landvatter, “Archaeological and Papyrological Inquiry at Karanis: Problems and Potentialities,” paper presented at the 27th International Congress of Papyrologists, held in Warsaw, Poland, July 29–August 3, 2013.
- ¹⁵ My reflections here grow out of conversations with Amheida Project field director Paola Davoli, and with Rodney Ast, my papyrological colleague in the excavation; their thinking may be found in Rodney Ast and Paola Davoli, “Ostraka and Stratigraphy at Amheida (Dakhla Oasis, Egypt): A Methodological Issue,” paper presented at the 27th International Congress of Papyrologists, held in Warsaw, Poland, July 29–August 3, 2013.
- ¹⁶ For the former, see Simon Burris, Jeffrey Fish, and Dirk Obbink, “New Fragments of Book 1 of Sappho,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 189 (2014).

Memory, Commemoration & Identity in an Ancient City: The Case of Aphrodisias

Angelos Chaniotis

Abstract: The ancient Greek city of Aphrodisias in Asia Minor presents abundant source material – inscriptions and images – for the study of memory and identity from the late second century BCE to the seventh century CE. These sources permit the study of overlapping civic, social, and religious identities, the expression of changing identities through name changes, the significance of memories of war and foundation legends for the transmission of collective and cultural memory, the agency of elite benefactors and intellectuals, the role played by inscriptions in the construction and transmission of memory, and the adaptation of identity to changing contexts, including emerging contacts with Rome, competition with other cities, an elevated position as provincial capital, and the spread of Christianity. In late antiquity – when the importance of religious conflicts increased – personal names, religious symbols, and acclamations became an important medium for the expression of the identity of competing religious groups.

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New impulses in the study of Greek and Roman history come from various sources: the discovery of new and important documents in the forms of inscriptions and papyri; the dialogue with other historical disciplines and with the social sciences; and both new theoretical models and modern experiences and challenges. In the last six decades, new epigraphic finds have significantly changed our understanding of ancient religion. Papyri, such as the Qumran texts and the Judas *evangelium*, have revolutionized the study of early Christianity. Quantitative methods in the social sciences have contributed to the study of ancient demography, and the study of ancient democracy has profited from input from the political sciences, anthropology, and sociology. Performance theories and theories on rituals have inspired new research of the political culture of Greece and Rome. The feminist movement gave new directions to the study of gender and society; dialogues with the neurosciences, psychology,

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and modern history have generated vivid interest in the study of emotions and social memory in classical antiquity.

The study of some of the subjects mentioned above, including religion, memory, demography, and democracy, has a long tradition in ancient history; but in recent years, research has been exploring new hermeneutic paths. Subjects such as gender and sexuality were novelties in the 1970s and 1980s, but now belong to the thematic canon of ancient history. Other subjects, such as theatricality, performativity, and emotion, have only been introduced into the field in the last decades. Identity, the subject discussed in this essay, belongs to the latter category. It has emerged as an important research object in the last decades in part through dialogue with the social sciences, and partially because of the significance of identity in communities facing the challenges of globalization and multiculturalism.

Around 360 CE, a fortification wall was completed at Aphrodisias. Old material was recycled for its construction: parts of older buildings, blocks of funerary monuments, and statue bases, many of them inscribed. Most of the texts honor members of the elite, mentioning their services to the city, the offices they had occupied, the honors bestowed upon them, and the achievements of their ancestors. A posthumous honorific inscription for a woman, from the first or second century CE, is a good example:

The council and the people buried and honored Apphia, the daughter of Menestheus, son of Eumachos, wife of Hermias Glykon, son of Hermias, who belonged to one of the first and most prominent families, one of those who together built the city, a woman who also herself excelled in prudence and modesty, lived a life worthy of her ancestors and her husband, and was honored many times through decrees.¹

At the time of their original use, these monuments were truly memorials. But a semiotician should forbear saying that the Aphrodisians fortified their city with stones preserving memory. The inscribed stones were used as building blocks because they had become irrelevant and obsolete as memorials; the families who would have cared for the memory of the ancestors had gone extinct, or had left the city, or were indifferent to such memory.

Aphrodisias is not the only city in the Roman East that recycled old monuments and carefully selected what was to be preserved in order to reshape its public memory and identity. It is an ideal case study because of the abundance of artifacts, inscriptions, and other sources from the late second century BCE to the seventh century CE. These sources allow for a study of transformations of identity, their agents, and their historical contexts, over the course of a millennium. This study addresses subjects that have been at the forefront of contemporary ancient studies.²

We can define identity as the response to the question *who are you?* or *to whom do you belong?* When Herakleides, a traveler from the third century BCE, visited Plataia, the place of the Greeks' decisive victory over the Persians in 478 BCE, he described its citizens as having "nothing to say except that they are colonists of the Athenians and that the battle between the Greeks and the Persians took place in their territory."³ This was the Plataians' answer to the question *who are you?* Such an answer involves a historical narrative, real or imaginary – "we are colonists of the Athenians," or "the Persians were defeated in our land" – and an association or affinity with another group ("we are Athenians"). What defines identity is the context in which the question is asked: *Who wants to know? What consequences will the answer have?* The context of communication leads to different – sometimes

overlapping, sometimes contradictory – expressions of identity.

The elementary identity of a member of an ancient community was his civic identity, the identity of a man as a citizen of Athens or Ephesos, for instance. In Aphrodisias, even this simple civic identity evolved: when the city first acquired the status of an independent *polis* circa 188 BCE; when it joined the neighboring community of Plarasa in a sympolity, likely around the mid-second century BCE; when the city absorbed all neighboring communities under the name Aphrodisias in the late first century BCE; when it could proudly declare that it was “the most glorious city of the most distinguished People of the Aphrodisians, allies of the Romans, friends of the emperor, free and autonomous”; and when it became the provincial capital, “mother-city of Karia.”⁴

Civic identity was occasionally overlaid by other forms of consciousness, solidarity, and loyalty. Since the earliest times, the Greeks held the feeling of belonging to a group broader than that of their civic community. The three most widespread forms of such identity were the culturally defined Hellenic identity, based on language, custom, and common cultural memory; the regional identity, as in the case of the Cretans; and kinship with another group of cities, as illustrated by the Dorians, or with settlements claiming to have had the same founder.

Within the community, civic identity could be overlaid, and at times undermined, by social identity, loyalty to a political group, or adherence to a religion that required initiation or the acceptance of a set of principles. Social identity, in turn, was shaped through participation in various types of communal organization and performance. In Hellenistic/Roman Greece and Asia Minor, such organizations included civic subdivisions, important for

the celebration of festivals; the gymnasium, an exclusive place of athletic training where bonds of friendship were made; the council of elders; age classes for boys and girls; the clubs, including professional and cult associations; and (in late antiquity) the circus factions.⁵ In certain historical periods, especially in late antiquity, religious identity could become more important than any other form of allegiance.⁶

Various media were drawn upon for the expression of identity. They included ethnic, civic, or geographical designations (such as “Greek,” “Aphrodisian,” or “Karian”), personal names, commemorative anniversaries, peculiar rituals and cults, symbols, attire, comportment, linguistic choice, and even culinary preferences. Which identity was displayed and how it was expressed depended on the context of its manifestation: a festival, a commemorative anniversary, a meeting of the assembly, a religious celebration, an internal conflict, an external threat, or perhaps a diplomatic mission.

Regarding memory, we should take care to distinguish between things remembered because they have been collectively experienced, also known as *collective memory*, and things transmitted orally, in writing, or through rituals and monuments, known as *cultural memory*.⁷ Inscriptions were the most important media for the construction and transmission of collective and cultural memory in Aphrodisias, and in most cities during the Hellenistic and imperial periods.⁸ Public inscriptions referring to the past are based on an existing version of the past, which is selective and constructed. How the act of inscription changes the character of a text is illustrated by a letter Octavian sent to Samos around 31 BCE. When the letter was inscribed in Aphrodisias more than two hundred and fifty years after its composition, it was no

longer an administrative document, but part of historical commemoration:

Imperator Caesar Augustus, son of Divus Julius, wrote to the Samians underneath their petition: you yourselves can see that I have given the privilege of freedom to no people except the Aphrodisians, who took my side in the war and were captured by storm because of their devotion to us. For it is not right to give the favor of the greatest privilege of all at random and without cause. . . . I am not willing to give the most highly prized privileges to anyone without good cause.⁹

The recipients of Octavian’s hand-written response certainly did not inscribe it on stone; successful petitions were recorded in inscriptions, not failures. The Aphrodisians, who probably received a copy through a citizen in Octavian’s service, selected it as part of a dossier of documents evidencing the relations between Aphrodisias and Rome, and the privileges awarded to their city: freedom, autonomy, exemption from taxes, and the inviolability of Aphrodite’s sanctuary. This dossier was inscribed on a wall of the theater around 230 CE.¹⁰ (See Figure 1.) The compilers of the dossier also intervened in the document’s content; they omitted the petition and only published the response. And since Octavian was better known as Augustus, a name he received a few years after he had sent the response in 27 BCE, they also added that name. When the document was inscribed, the sacrifices of Aphrodisias were no longer collective memory; they had become cultural memory, an abstract symbol of heroism and loyalty.

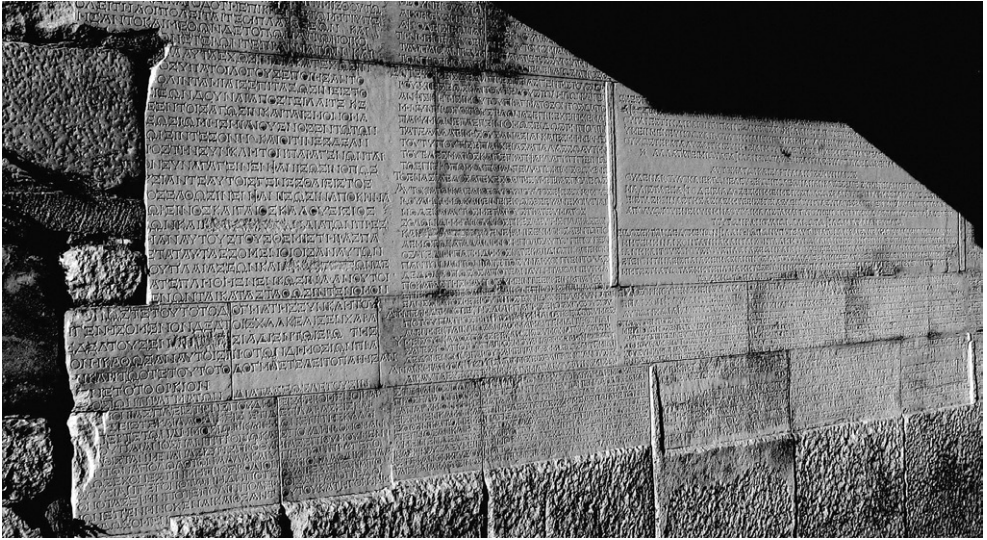
Such inscriptions construct and control memory. They present a curated version of the past intended to become the authoritative version of past history. The places they were displayed were places of commemoration.

No matter how identity is defined, a name constitutes its most elementary expression. Before it was renamed around 200 BCE, the city of *Aphrodisias* must have been named *Nineuda*. The artificial name *Aphrodisias*, “the city of Aphrodite,” highlighted the cult of an Anatolian war goddess the Greeks associated with their Aphrodite. Then, in the second century BCE, Aphrodisias joined Plarasa in a sympolity, forming one community whose official name was “the people of Plarasa and Aphrodisias”; but before the end of the first century BCE, Plarasa disappears from the record. And, finally, by the mid-seventh century CE, Aphrodisias was renamed *Stauropolis* (“the City of the Cross”). These changes of name reflect changes in the very way this community wanted to present itself to citizens and foreigners.

Another important element of identity is the commemoration of a group’s origins. By the early second century CE, different traditions about Aphrodisias’s origins coexisted. The foundation (see Figure 2) was attributed to the mythical hero Bellerophon, who was believed to have built it long before the Trojan War; this tradition made Aphrodisias one of the oldest cities in Asia. At the same time, the city’s foundation was attributed to Ninus, the spouse of the legendary queen Semiramis, a long time after the Trojan War; this explained Aphrodisias’s early name, *Ninoe* (a variant of *Nineuda*). More plausibly, some elite families claimed that their ancestors founded Aphrodisias in the second century BCE.¹¹ A city having multiple founders is not unparalleled in history. Just as Aeneas and Romulus could coexist as founders of Rome, so, too, could the historical founders of Aphrodisias coexist with the legendary ones; this added prestige to the descendants of the families that founded the city.

These different versions of the city’s origins reflect both a complex history and ad-

The Case of *Figure 1*
 Aphrodisias Public Documents Evidencing the History of Aphrodisias
 Inscribed on a Wall of the Theater, circa 230 CE



Source: Photo by the author.

Figure 2
 Relief Panel in the Civil Basilica of Aphrodisias



This panel features Bellerophon, the mythological founder of the city, together with Apollo and his horse Pegasus. It dates from the late first century CE. Source: New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, Aphrodisias Archive. Photo: Mehmet Ali Döğenci.

aptations of identity to changing contexts. Aphrodisias was a city with a population of diverse origins.¹² The indigenous inhabitants must have been speakers of Karian, an extinct Anatolian language. A new population arrived when the successors of Alexander the Great settled soldiers serving in their armies: primarily Greeks, a few Iranians, and most likely a number of Jews. And to these military settlers, we can attribute the initiative to have their city recognized as an independent city-state, probably after 188 BCE. In a world dominated by Greek culture and political institutions, the public image of Aphrodisias was Greek. In the inscriptions of the late Hellenistic and imperial periods, the indigenous population is almost invisible, except for a few personal and place names. Not a single Jewish name is attested in one of the hundreds of surviving epitaphs earlier than the fourth century CE; only a single grave monument decorated with a menorah was found in a necropolis at Gök Tepesi.¹³ The Jews either lived in the countryside, distancing them from the inscriptions and cemeteries of the better-preserved urban center, or, upon death, were buried in a still-unexcavated cemetery or interned without a clear indication of their religious identity.

The Aphrodisians participated in the “assembly of the Greeks” of Asia, and their Greekness is explicitly mentioned in a letter sent by Hadrian in 119 CE.¹⁴ Built in the mid-first century CE to serve the imperial cult, the Sebasteion displayed one hundred and ninety relief panels with cult scenes, engaging with themes connected with Greek and Roman mythology: Bellerophon and Pegasus, Orestes at Delphi, Achilles and Penthesilea, centaurs, the deeds of Herakles, Aeneas’s flight from Ilion, Romulus and Remus, and allegorical representations of the first Roman emperors. This iconographical program displayed Greek education, stressed the significance

of Hellenic culture, and connected the Roman emperors with Greek mythology.¹⁵

Although Aphrodisias had a predominantly Hellenic identity, the survival of local culture can still be observed in religious practices. The public dedications were addressed to Aphrodite, but when simple people sought divine protection, they did not address their prayers and vows to the public patron of the city; rather, they addressed their prayers to local gods, whose epithets derive from Karian place names: Nineuda, Spaloxa, Plyara, (Zeus of Nineuda, Zeus of Spaloxa, and “the Virgin of Plyara,” respectively).¹⁶ Non-Greek heroes also featured among the mythical founders, and the local historian Apollonios referred to early Aphrodisias as a city of Leleges, a non-Greek population. In late antiquity, long after the last speaker of Karian had died, the Aphrodisians labeled themselves as Karians, because their city was the capital of the province of Karia. In the Roman East, a Hellenic identity could easily coexist with a regional “barbarian” one. Which identity was displayed through the use of mythological themes depended on Aphrodisias’s relations to others: to Rome as an ally, to other Greek cities as a peer, or to Karian cities as their *metropolis*.¹⁷

Among the stories that ancient communities commemorated, two were more important than others: foundation legends and wars – preferably victorious ones. A defeat was commemorated when it could be connected with a sacrifice that served either as an exemplum or as a new beginning: Aeneas’s flight from Troy, for instance, represented in the Sebasteion temple complex, alluded to the destruction of one great city and the foundation of another. Although Aphrodisias is primarily known for its urban development and its statuary, built in a period of undisturbed peace, war memories were also an impor-

tant element of memory and identity. The citizens were descendants of military settlers; military training was part of civic identity until the third century CE. Their privileges were justified by their sacrifices during war. Aphrodisias was a loyal ally of the Romans in the wars against Mithridates VI in 88 BCE; the city fought against the renegade general Labienus around 40 BCE; and it supported Octavian (Augustus) in the last civil wars of the Roman Republic. For centuries, war was the most important component of local commemoration. Thus, the Aphrodisian declaration to a Roman proconsul in 88 BCE was, centuries later, inscribed as a reminder of their self-sacrifice:

Our entire people, together with the women and the children and all the property, is willing to risk everything for Quintus and for the Roman interests, for we do not wish to live without the leadership of the Romans.

The dramatic situations the Aphrodisians faced, along with their loyalties and their sufferings, were evidenced by documents inscribed on a wall of the city's theater in the early third century CE (see again Figure 1). Surprisingly, the one theme that we would expect to find in this documentation – kinship – is absent. Aphrodite was the mother of Aeneas; consequently, her city should be regarded as a kin of the Romans. In a period in which many communities stressed kinship, based on myths, the Aphrodisian leaders chose a different strategy, recalling war exploits and the foundation of the city by their ancestors.¹⁹ And they had good reasons to do so. Aphrodisias was not the only city of Karia with an important sanctuary of Aphrodite; many other places could have claimed kinship with the Romans. In a competitive environment, the city needed a distinctive achievement. More important, the Roman authorities, who were interested in pragmatic arguments, were the primary ad-

dressees of their diplomacy. The Athenians had allegedly learned this lesson in 87 BCE, when Sulla besieged their city and their envoys confronted him with stories of their past military glory:

When they made no proposals which could save the city, but proudly talked about Theseus and Eumolpos and the Persian Wars, Sulla said to them: "Go away, blessed men, and take these speeches with you; for I was not sent to Athens by the Romans to fulfill love of knowledge, but to subdue rebels."²⁰

The consideration of Roman attitudes and priorities affected the Aphrodisian identity promoted by the city's elite.

Changes in name and memories of a city's origins, such as those sketched above, are evidence for a conscious and continuous reshaping of identity. In some cases, we may identify the agents of these changes as members of the elite. One of them was Apollonios, high priest of the imperial cult and author of a local history.²¹ Another was the poet Longianus, honored for the recital, in 127 CE, of his poems in Halikarnassos, a "relative" city of Aphrodisias. The foundation of both cities by Bellerophon may have been a subject of his poems.²² But magistrates and benefactors also shaped memory: when they initiated or funded the construction of buildings decorated with mythological images, when they published old documents describing Aphrodisias's relations with Rome, when they built statues and authored inscriptions that expressed targeted values, and when they engaged in the commemoration of their own families.²³

One of the first images that the classical visitor of the Sebasteion saw – after descending from the podium of the temple of the emperors – was that of Aeneas's flight from Troy. The family that funded the building selected this image because it highlighted the relation between the

city of Aphrodite and the son of Aphrodite, the founder of Rome. Many members of the elite were named Aeneas for precisely this reason.²⁴ The memory promoted by the elite also concerned recent historical personalities. Kallikrates, for instance, in the mid-first century CE, restored the statue of an ancestor who had excelled in the wars of the late first century BCE; he inscribed a copy of a decree praising him as a warrior and benefactor; and he restored a statue of Nike that linked his family with Octavian.²⁵

Representations of myth and history presuppose “agency”: of authors, of promoters, and of interpreters. As they all competed with alternative reconstructions of the past, they were subject to adjustments and reinterpretations. In some cases, we know why a theme was chosen. Aeneas’s flight from Ilion, for example, reminded viewers that the founder of Rome – and of Rome’s ruling dynasty – was the son of the local civic goddess. The mythological representations in the Sebasteion evoked the world of Greek culture and religion, into which the Roman emperors were to be incorporated; further, they reconciled imperial rule with Greek culture. The reliefs that decorated the civil basilica included images alluding to local foundation legends. As noted before, Semiramis and husband Ninos recalled the earlier tradition of Ninioe. Gordios was the mythical founder of Gordiou Teichos, a neighboring community incorporated in Aphrodisias; Bellerophon was the founder of cities in Karia and Lykia (see again Figure 2). Mythological reliefs from the Agora Gate, dating from the late second century CE, represented battles between Greeks and barbarians, and probably glorified recent imperial victories against the “new barbarians,” the Parthians.²⁶ In the past, fights between Greeks and symbolic representatives of barbarity and chaos (such as Amazons and centaurs)

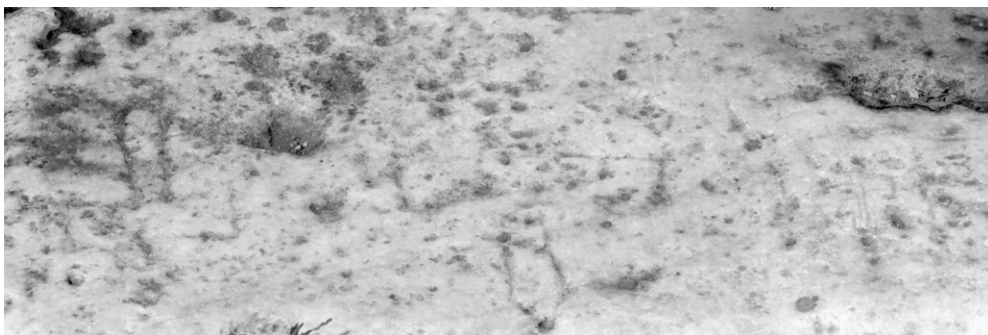
had been depicted in a similar way to commemorate victories over the Persians and the Gauls.

A dedication by “the demos” was paid for by public funds; consequently, these works were subject to approval by the assembly. What we see today is the outcome of successful proposals. We simply do not know how many times a mythological theme may have been rejected as inappropriate, but such discussions did take place. The actions of the elite depended on negotiations with the Roman emperors, the citizens whose support had to be won in the assembly, competitors among their peers, and rivals in Asia Minor. The surface of concord and homogeneity conceals tensions and conflicts.

Although issues of identity may have been debated, there is no indication that such debates undermined the city’s cohesion. This changed dramatically in late antiquity, when the importance of religious identity increased over other forms of self-representation. Only then – in response to the aggressive spread of Christianity – did the strong community of Jews in Aphrodisias express their own separate identity by using biblical names and incorporating Jewish religious symbols into public buildings.²⁷

A small Christian community must have existed at Aphrodisias as early as the third century. Enjoying the support of the emperors, but divided as a result of dogmatic conflicts, Christianity advanced in Aphrodisias as it did in the rest of Asia Minor, but not without resistance. A strong Jewish community existed in late antiquity, as well, confidently displaying its religious symbols in public buildings. Even anti-pagan legislation failed to stop pagan ritual practice; the resistance of the last Hellenists lasted until 529 CE, when Justinian ordered the conversion of all inhabitants of the Empire.

The Case of Aphrodisias Figure 3
Representation of Double Axes on the Pavement of the Tetrapylon



These symbols of the Karian Zeus can be found on the gate to the sanctuary of Aphrodite, dating from late antiquity. Source: Photo by the author.

Figure 4
A Partly Erased Representation of a Menorah and Shofar on a Column of the Sebasteion, Aphrodisias



Source: Photo by the author.

Figure 5
A Public Document on a Wall of the Theater

Angelos
Chaniotis



The pagan name *Aphrodisias*, in the fourth line, was erased by the Christians. Source: Photo by the author.

Christians, Jews, and a strong group of philosophically educated followers of the polytheistic religions all competed in Aphrodisias for the support of citizens who were asking the same questions: *Is there a god? And how can we attain a better afterlife?* Before imperial legislation awarded victory to Christianity, a long period of religious dialogue and mutual influence – but also of violent conflict – dominated life in Aphrodisias.²⁸ Inscriptions and graffiti reflect this religious atmosphere, and the predominant role religious identity played in the city. While the Christians engraved their religious symbols (the cross, fish) and acclamations, the pagans engraved theirs, such as the double axe (see Figure 3). Representations of *menoroth* in the Sebasteion indicated that shops in respective areas were owned by Jews (see Figure 4). Around 480 CE, an honorary epigram

for Pytheas, a prominent statesman, began with the words “City of the Paphian goddess and of Pytheas,” provocatively reminding the reader that his fatherland was still the city of Aphrodite. At the same time, a flourishing group of philosophers, under the leadership of Asklepiodotos, defied anti-pagan legislation. Even in the last years of the fifth century CE, pagans performed sacrifices anticipating the restoration of the old cults.

In the context of a religious competition, the construction of identities becomes the predominant concern of religious groups. Rituals, liturgical texts, names, symbols, and the use of specific religious terms served as the means by which specific identities were constructed and expressed. In a deeply divided community, personal names were instrumentalized in order to express religious identities. Two Jewish donor in-

scriptions in Aphrodisias preserve the names of members of a particular group; both inscriptions present an abundance of names in closed contexts. Thirty-nine of one hundred Jews recorded had Biblical or Hebrew names such as Benjamin, Zacharias, Judas, and Samuel; another large group had rare names related to religious values, often translations of Hebrew names. The Jews in Aphrodisias used their names as a means of identity and separation. Similarly, the majority of Aphrodisian Christians bore names that revealed their religious identity, including names of apostles, evangelists, and angels, and a name related to the Lord, *Kyriakos*. Their names also revealed their religious values: *Iordanes* al-

luded to baptism, *Athanasios* referred to the immortality of the soul, and *Anastasios*, to the hope of resurrection.

We know the winner of this conflict. The Christians occupied the temples, erased the names of the Jews in the town hall and a menorah engraved in the Sebasteion, and destroyed the statues of Aphrodite. The embarrassing name Aphrodisias was the victim of *damnatio memoriae*: the city was renamed to Stauropolis, the city of the cross. The old name was erased from public inscriptions (see Figure 5) in a case of collective amnesia – not without parallel – that aimed to support a new Christian identity.

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The Environmental Fall of the Roman Empire

Kyle Harper

Abstract: Global environmental history is currently being enriched by troves of new data, and new models of environmental variability and human impact. Earth scientists are rapidly expanding historians' knowledge of the paleoclimate through the recovery and analysis of climate proxies such as ice cores, tree rings, stalagmites, and marine and lake sediments. Further, archaeologists and anthropologists are using novel techniques and methods to study the history of health and disease, as revealed through examination of bones and paleomolecular evidence. These possibilities open the way for historians to participate in a conversation about the long history of environmental change and human response. This essay considers how one of the most classic of all historical questions – the fall of the Roman Empire – can receive an answer enriched by new knowledge about the role of environmental change.

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On the twenty-first day of April in AD 248, Rome celebrated her one thousandth birthday. For three days and three nights, the haze of burnt offerings filled the streets. An exotic menagerie befitting the seat of a tricontinental empire was presented to the people, and massacred: thirty-two elephants, ten elk, ten tigers, sixty lions, thirty leopards, six hippopotami, ten giraffes, the odd rhinoceros, and innumerable other wild beasts, not to mention one thousand pairs of gladiators. The *ludi saeculares* (“century games”) summoned forth a host of archaic memories, “skilfully adapted to inspire the superstitious mind with deep and solemn reverence,” in the words of Edward Gibbon.¹ The celebration still carried shadowy associations with the underworld; the rituals encouraged the diversion of pestilence. Despite the deliberate primitivism of the rites, the *ludi saeculares* could be credited, like so much else, as a creative re-discovery of the imperial founder, Augustus. The *ludi saeculares* were in every sense an imperial affair, a stage-crafted display of the awesome power that

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Rome enjoyed, unbroken for centuries on end. Little did contemporaries know they were witnessing a sort of valediction: the last secular games of Rome.

It is easy, from our distance, to imagine that there was some measure of denial in such an exuberant celebration of the Roman millennium – as if the inhabitants of Rome were enjoying the ancient equivalent of cocktails on the deck of the Titanic. But perhaps we are blinded by hindsight. The Rome of AD 248 offered much to inspire a sense of familiarity and confidence. The *pomerium*, or urban boundary, remained a construct of the imagination in an unwallled city that sprawled over into its hilly countryside. The coins minted to honor the games maintained a ponderous texture of true silver; to hold one of these coins even today is to feel the combination of precious metal and public trust that steadied the value of the imperial money. The Romans' ancestral polytheism, nested in the very fabric of their civic life, gave historical assurance that the city's place was written in the stars. Presiding over the spectacle was Emperor Marcus Julius Philippus, also known as Philip the Arab. Though he hailed from the southern reaches of Syria, he was not a conspicuous outsider in an empire whose integrative capacities are virtually unmatched in history. Early in his reign, he had shown impressive energy: he attempted administrative reforms in Egypt, oversaw a great burst of road improvements in places as removed as Mauretania and Britain, and enjoyed a satisfying victory over northern barbarians. Above all, as Philip clearly recognized, the city herself demanded obeisance, being the critical, central node of power at the nexus of people, army, and senate. In Rome, campaigns were planned, careers plotted, fortunes decided.²

Philip's Rome would have felt familiar to Augustus, its first emperor. And yet, just one generation on, we find ourselves

in a truly alien world. The serene confidence of the empire had been rudely shaken. Hulking stone fortifications, the Aurelian Walls, went up around a city in which distance and mystique had so recently seemed protection enough. The silver had dissipated from the empire's coins, which, now spewed in super-abundance from the mints, more resembled crude wafers. A new kind of man – the Danubian soldier with little time or awe for the *urbs* – had irreversibly wrested control of the state from the moneyed senatorial aristocracy. Careers were made and unmade in the barracks of northern garrison towns, rather than in the old capital. Beneath the imperial city itself, in the honeycomb of burial caverns known as the catacombs, there is evidence that the obscure cult of Christianity was, for the first time, making uncanny strides toward becoming more than a marginal curiosity.

In short, in the space of a single generation, the lineaments of the period we now call *late antiquity* had come into view. No period of Roman history is so screened from our gaze as the generation that passed between Philip and Aurelian; and few were so momentous. How we imagine the changes that occurred in those tumultuous decades, often beyond our ken, will decisively shape how we view that fathomless historical episode: the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

Gibbon described the subject of his famous history as the triumph of “barbarism and religion.” This was a vantage formed in the heady world of Enlightenment letters. Gibbon's genteel disdain for superstition nurtured a sense of remote affinity for the Romans. And his ravaging critical faculty, turned against the partisan ancient and ecclesiastical histories, made his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* a landmark then (in the late eighteenth century) and a monument still. In its sources and preoccupations, Gibbon's text is resolutely a prod-

uct of its own age. Indeed, every generation looks upon the past through the eyes of the present. It is no surprise or disservice for us to return anew to the Roman past, awakened to the fact that the *environment* can be a protagonist in human history, armed with radically new tools for reconstructing the relationship between humanity and nature.³ While explanations for the fall of Rome have never lacked, it might seem surprising that environmental change has nonetheless remained such a marginal candidate. The sudden assimilation of environmental history into the mainstream of our historical consciousness is a testament to just how quickly we have come to know the drama of environmental instability in times past and present.

The environment is not an inert backdrop to human history: from the cold winter to the dry year, we experience seasonal and interannual variation. We are trained to notice and to respond to climate variability on annual scales. Most of us are also at least dimly aware that the hospitable climate we currently inhabit – the Holocene, circa 10,000 BC to the present – is really an interglacial, a periodically friendly interlude between ice ages. The Holocene has been an epoch of relatively warm and stable climate relative only to the jagged Pleistocene, when snowcaps could blanket the mid-latitudes, and vast tracts of the earth's surface became uninhabitable in the geological blink of an eye. The clinching evidence for natural climate variability during the Holocene has come principally from a new kind of physical archive. Natural archives, like ice cores, tree rings, marine deposits, and cave minerals, can stretch back thousands to tens of thousands of years. Over the last few decades, glaciologists, dendrochronologists, and other intrepid explorers of the earth's past have submitted to historians the possibility of reconstructing climate history on civilizational

time-scales with razor precision.⁴ The cold season became the frosted decade; the dry year became the arid century. The discovery of Holocene variability, on a scale and at speeds significant enough to influence human fortunes, has been a revelation.

The history of human health and disease is also a story of environmental change. The physical testimony of human bones, the stories frozen in their isotope chemistry, and the expansive possibilities of gene sequencing are enabling historians to trace deep transformations in human health and disease in ways that were previously inconceivable. The patterns of change emerging from the bioarchaeological record are both stark and surprising. For instance, accumulated skeletal evidence has inescapably shown that the Romans were short in stature, unimpressive relative to their Iron Age predecessors and Dark Age successors.⁵ (Julius Caesar, reputed to have been tall, may have stood imposing only among a population in which the average man stood five feet, five inches.) Achieved stature is a function of both genes and environment, and the environmental contribution, in turn, is the result of net nutrition, or the income of nutrients during development minus the expenditures of labor and disease. For the Romans, the heavy burden of infectious disease drained their bodies' metabolic resources and stunted their growth.

Deciding how to integrate environmental change into the story of Rome's decline and fall will intersect with some already well-worn tracks in the historiography. Gibbon set a pattern that many have followed since: he looked *inward*, to the flaws inherent in the very constitution of empire, to find the cause of Rome's fall. He wrote: "The decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the causes of destruc-

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tion multiplied with the extent of conquest; and as soon as time or accident had removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight.”⁶ The environment might well have a place within this internal chain of causes. Just ten years after the final volumes of Gibbon’s history were published, the mother of all endogenous models appeared in the first edition of Thomas Malthus’s *Essay on the Principle of Population*. Malthus’s core insight was simple, and remains elegant: because of the limits on food production, population and well-being stand in an intrinsic and inverse relationship to one another. Growth, if not forestalled by some constraint, inevitably recoiled back upon itself, as “sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague, advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and ten thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear.”⁷ The reverend’s theory makes ecological catastrophe the ironic fate of human development.

Conversely, environmental catastrophe does not have to be self-induced. Powerful exogenous determinism has its advocates. As John Brooke writes in *Climate Change and the Course of Global History*, “Until the onset of modern accelerated population growth, no pre-modern society of consequence occupying a reasonably adequate biome suffered a purely endogenous ‘Malthusian crisis’; rather, adversity, crisis, and collapse were fundamentally shaped by exogenous forces: the impacts of drought, cold, and epidemic disease drove episodic and abrupt reversals in societal complexity and the human condition.”⁸ Up until the Industrial Revolution, climactic fluctuation was unmoved by human stimulus, and climate variability was driven foremost by changes in the amount of radiative energy entering the atmosphere. On geologic timescales like

the Pleistocene, the mechanics of our orbital journey around the sun create icy spells lasting millennia. Within the Holocene, solar cycles of shorter periodicity altered the amount of heat received by the earth, while volcanic eruptions coughed up clouds of sulfates that prevented energy from reaching the planet’s surface. The oceans and the atmosphere form a coupled system, and the circulation of heat through the deep, interconnected, and variously salty waters of the earth is responsible for pulses of climate change, whose rhythms and effects are far from completely understood. Until the very recent past, the climate system has varied on its own tempo and terms, blissfully indifferent to human endeavors.

However, to lay the patterns of epidemic disease exclusively at the feet of nature would too easily exonerate humanity in coaxing along the evolutionary history of our own microscopic rivals. Quite unawares, we humans have had a determining part in the evolutionary destiny of the very bacteria and viruses that, until recently, were the most important agents of human mortality. The niches we construct for ourselves have inadvertently shaped the evolutionary conditions of the microbes that haunted our forebears. The role of infectious disease has been exogenous, only in the narrowest neoclassical sense of the term, which predicts that mortality rates are determined by real-wage levels.⁹ Malthus can inspire more capacious readings that urge us to look for other pathways of feedback between civilization and environment. Even in the case of climate variability, it will benefit us to give special attention to the precise means through which environmental turbulence sometimes did – and sometimes did not – stretch societies beyond their capacity to endure. As with any good story, the drama of environmental history lies in the interplay between structure and contingency.

At this moment, as new models of environmental change and human impact gather momentum, the watchword is *resilience*: the capacity of human societies to respond to the shocks of nature, to draw on batteries of stored energy to fund the recovery from the lashes of climate change and disease.¹⁰ Resilience is not infinite, however, and to look for it in ancient societies is also to be alert for the signs of persistent stress, and the realization that just beyond the threshold of endurance lies cascading change and systemic reorganization. Resilience asks us to consider the ecological specificity of a social system, in which lie its reserves of strength, as well as its tensions and vulnerabilities. The notion of resilience lets us look anew at Rome in the middle decades of the third century and allows us to see, perhaps, not a society waiting for its “principle of decay,” as Gibbon phrased it, to unfold in course, but one whose depleted stores left it exposed to the unforeseeable strokes of environmental misfortune.

If you could go back in time from the secular games of AD 248 to the very foundation of the city of Rome – nearly ten “ages of man” – you would have found an inauspicious, but typical, Iron Age agglomeration of huts along the hilly banks of the Tiber River. The eighth century BC was an age of beginnings, but for a long time, the western reaches of the Mediterranean stood in the shadow of the Aegean and Near Eastern experiments. Centuries elapsed before there were any signs of the coming Roman miracle; when it did arrive, it seemed sudden and inexorable. The Romans stepped forcefully into the imperial space created by Hellenistic kingdoms and, after razing the Carthaginians, their only western rival of any importance, seized hegemony of the Mediterranean. The Roman package – aggressive colonization, assimilation through military

service, open pathways to citizenship, co-optation of local elites, and, of course, civil engineering *nonpareil* – meant that by the time Augustus brought the last significant stretches of Mediterranean shoreline under Roman dominion, it was no idle boast for Romans to refer to the sea as *mare nostrum*, “our sea.”

What kind of empire did the Romans build? Foremost, it was an agrarian tributary empire. A comparative framework trains our eyes to see the all-important annual cycle of tax gathering as the central dilemma of Roman statecraft. It also threatens to flatten out the real uniqueness of Roman ecological and economic achievements, which constituted the true source of Rome’s vulnerability, and its ultimate demise. This distinction begins with the obvious – but extraordinary – fact that the Romans stand as the only people ever to unify the basin into a single political organism. Yet this fails to capture the full geographical accomplishment of Roman *imperium*, whose deep continental annexes reached north across the 56th parallel, while the southern edges dipped below the 24th parallel north. “Of all the contiguous empires in premodern history, only those of the Mongols, Incas, and Russian czars matched or exceeded the north-south range of Roman rule.”¹¹ Few empires, and none so long-lived as the Roman empire, grasped parts of the earth reaching from the upper mid-latitudes to the fringes of the tropics.

This empire was a network of cities looking toward the waters, and there is no doubt that the Mediterranean Sea was at its core. The Mediterranean basin is one of the globe’s most complex climate regimes. The delicate, moody features of the Mediterranean climate – arid summers and wet winters against a relatively temperate backdrop – are recognizable around the world. But the Mediterranean itself is unique; the dynamics of a giant, inland

sea, combined with the crenellated texture of its inland terrains, pack extreme diversity into miniature scale. The region is a patchwork of microclimates.¹² And because of its position at the juncture of the subtropics and mid-latitudes, the Mediterranean zone is crossed by an array of distinct climate processes. The western territories are subject to the influence of Atlantic patterns, in particular North Atlantic pressure gradients, which decide whether the storms carrying all-important rains will pass into the Mediterranean or spin north over the European continent. The controls on the Eastern Mediterranean are even more complicated, still including the sweep of westerlies from the Atlantic, but also hypersensitive to other mechanisms that influence the levels of winter precipitation. And Egypt, the breadbasket of the empire, plugged the Romans into wholly other climate regimes; the life-bringing Nile floods originated in Ethiopian highlands, watered by the Indian Ocean monsoons.

Control of grain production along the Nile's verdant flanks gave the Romans a natural insurance policy to buffer against the vagaries of the Mediterranean climate. And this was only one of many. The Romans had the advantage of building an empire atop countless indigenous risk-management strategies, a stock of peasant knowledge accreted over millennia. Over that ground cover of local wisdom, the engineers of the Roman empire built a machinery of food provision and water management that was political in nature, and monumental in scale. Despite the renown of the aqueduct and the grain dole, what is truly striking is the extent of the imperial food system left to the market. Public granaries provided a margin of protection, and in times of acute crisis, the government inserted itself. But the best insurance policy was the network of roads and sea lanes, along which private merchants moved bulk

goods with ease. The high Roman Empire is notable for the distinct absence of severe food crisis.¹³ Dearth is always relative, but Malthus's "gigantic inevitable famine" seems not to have stalked the Romans, so much as periodic bouts of high prices.

The Roman economy defied the dour logic of Malthusian pessimism, according to which the teeming populations of the empire should have crunched the food supply. The high empire stands as one of the most significant phases of economic "efflorescence" in the centuries before industrialization. In this period, the gains from trade and the diffusion of technological improvements allowed a large-scale society to forestall the real and overarching limits of the land's productivity. The Roman economy achieved growth, even on a per-person basis, straight into the teeth of population expanse. The best evidence comes from the dry sands of middle Egypt: recovered papyri enable fragmentary reconstructions suggesting that, here in a province subjected to heavy fiscal extraction, the wages of the most ordinary laborers (diggers, donkey drivers, dung haulers) increased across the first two centuries of Romanization.¹⁴

Trade and technology let the Romans outrun the Malthusian reaper for no short season. But the success of the imperial economy seems to have had another accomplice: the climate. The "Roman climate optimum" emerges from a range of proxies as a distinct phase of late Holocene climate. In the Mediterranean, it was a period of unusually hospitable alignment: warm, wet, and stable. Levels of total solar irradiance were consistently elevated, and there was a striking absence of signatures of major volcanic eruption. Of the largest twenty-five eruptions in the last two and a half millennia, none occurred between the death of Julius Caesar and the year AD 169.¹⁵ Proxies of warm temperature, like the glaciers that retreated up the Alps,

stand in affirmation. Heat was matched with moisture in the West; Spain and Italy appear to have been well-watered. The effects in the East were uneven, although the Levant enjoyed a persistent cycle of humidity, for which the most concrete testimony is the evidence of shoreline settlements high above the Dead Sea. And the sacred floods of the Nile River revealed a period of astonishing dependability.¹⁶

Climate, then, stood in alliance with commerce and technical progress, as the Roman efflorescence defied or deferred the paradoxical laws of premodern development. People crowded the basin. If there is a sign, though, that quietly points us toward a qualification of this optimistic picture, it is the Romans' short stature. Biological well-being remained as – or more – elusive than ever for the inhabitants of the imperial Mediterranean; life expectancy was low, even by ancient standards. The inadvertent consequence of more people was a more insalubrious environment.¹⁷ In Rome, the dog days of summer brought on an awful tide of gastroenteric illnesses, with an autumn surge of malaria following on its heels. Malthus, we might say, was right for the wrong reasons. The poor health of the Romans was unmediated by food shortage or low wages. In a scenario not unlike the “antebellum paradox,” when American stature suffered a setback in the mid-nineteenth century *despite* the arc of development, urban density and imperial connectivity in the Roman Empire were as conducive for microbial ecology as human prosperity. Thanks to their imperial ecology, the Romans were rich, but sick.

Wealth offered no escape from the brutal facts of life and death. The wife of the emperor Marcus Aurelius bore him at least fourteen children – six girls and eight boys – yet only one of the girls and one of the boys verifiably outlived both of their par-

ents. In the letters of Marcus, we catch glimpses of the fevers and diarrheas that laid low so many little scions of the imperial line. Yet the reign of Marcus was the apex of what Gibbon, with justification, called “the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous.”¹⁸ Today we might look back on the happiest age and see not a lurking principle of decay waiting to unwind, but a society in which cumulative ecological pressure was entailed by the very terms of development. Such a perspective prepares us for what happened next: in the middle of the AD 160s, a pestilence arose in the immediate wake of an eastern military campaign. The Romans believed the soldiers who impiously sacked the city of Seleucia on the Tigris had unlocked a deadly vapor. In reality, the unfamiliar pathogen was probably introduced into the virgin populations of the Mediterranean via Rome's bustling Red Sea trade. It was smallpox.¹⁹

The Antonine Plague, as it is known, can claim to be considered the world's first pandemic; it is the prime exhibit for what William McNeill called the convergence of the civilized disease pools of Eurasia.²⁰ Highly communicable and highly lethal, the disease was conducted along the very networks that held the empire together. Signs of the plague, both giant and subtle, are ubiquitous. Building virtually ceased. Mass graves provide chilling testimony, and confirm literary reports of unprecedented mortality. Invocations to Apollo, the diverter of plague, appear across the empire. Emergency military conscriptions were levied. The price of goods leapt. Although the scale of the Antonine Plague's impact is hotly debated at the moment, it is not unreasonable to believe that the pandemic was as devastating and consequential as the introduction of smallpox into the New World. Marcus

himself succumbed, probably, to the disease.

In a cruel coincidence, the pacific regime of the Roman climate optimum ended almost simultaneously with the advent of the great mortality. A massive volcanic eruption in AD 169 spelled the inevitable end of an unusually stable chapter of climate history. The climate of the next centuries would be disorganized and indecisive, before a sharp and unmistakable descent into what is starting to be known as the “late antique little ice age.” While the Roman Empire was never quite the same after the appearance of the smallpox pandemic, the reality is that the empire did persist, and in recognizable form. A new dynasty of Libyan and Syrian heritage held sway for nearly half a century. If they failed ever to please the Roman Senate entirely, there is no disguising the basic success of their restorative enterprise. Roman citizenship was made universal, and Roman law entered its classical heights. It was in these years that the sour churchman Tertullian proclaimed, “Everywhere there are households, everywhere people, everywhere cities, everywhere life!”²¹ To use the terms we have laid out before, the imperial system, with the Roman people and the Senate at its center, endured without fundamental reorganization, though stressed by new levels of environmental turbulence. The populace reveling in the secular games of AD 248 was not deluded to think that Rome would still be the center of the world after another age of man had passed.

In AD 244, the Nile waters failed to rise. Two years later, they failed again. These patterns are inferred from haphazard scraps of papyri. In March of AD 246, a provincial official in the Oxyrhynchite district of Egypt ordered that all private stocks of grain be registered.²² The provincial government, which usually set prices in com-

pulsory purchases to its own advantage, was grabbing wheat at prices that were shockingly high even for the fair market, implying acute desperation. One papyrologist sensitive to the nuances of these data, has deemed this a sign of “unusual severity.”²³ The contemporary bishop of Alexandria, the great metropolis at the mouth of the Nile Delta, described the Nile riverbed as drier than a desert.²⁴ The reverberations of a catastrophic food crisis in Egypt could be felt empire-wide. Worse was yet to come. If one purpose of the secular games was to ward off the evils of pestilence, the millennium celebration was shortly to prove a stupendous failure.

The weather can induce famines or fan the movements of people that stir sickness. The weather can also upset the hair-trigger ecological equilibria that sometimes control the reproduction of disease vectors like mice or mosquitos. We cannot say if the volatility of the mid-third century climate contributed to the outbreak of epidemic disease that again visited the empire. Contemporaries noted the coincidence of drought and pestilence, but to their ancient eyes, this was a sign of divine wrath rather than environmental disturbance. Whatever the cause, just a few generations after they had recovered from the first attacks of the smallpox virus, the Romans experienced what might be considered the second wave of pandemic disease in global history. The Plague of Cyprian, named after the bishop of Carthage whose sermons provide our most detailed description of the disease, ravaged Alexandria in AD 249. By AD 251, the plague had reached the Western capital. For nearly twenty years, it blazed sporadically across the Roman world.

The Plague of Cyprian has managed to evade serious attention from historians.²⁵ But if we look anew at the period, with our eyes open to the power of environmental fury, the pandemic can be seen every-

where. It is far better supported than the Antonine Plague, despite appearing at the worst-documented moment in imperial history. Pagans and Christians, from both East and West, independently and unanimously insisted on the plague's devastation. While the crisis summoned forth the full range of our witnesses' rhetorical virtuosity, it also inspired some crucially detailed reportage, from Cyprian's excited account of the disease's hemorrhagic presentation to Dionysius's surprisingly specific claims about its demographic impact. Alexandria had lost 62 percent of its urban population, judging from the number of recipients on the public grain dole. Five thousand corpses a day were wheeled out of Rome. According to the pagan historian Zosimus, the Plague of Cyprian infested both towns and villages, and "destroyed whatever was left of mankind. No plague in previous times wrought such destruction of human life."²⁶

The Plague of Cyprian did not cause the fall of the Roman Empire, but it did instigate a phase of crisis that pushed the imperial system beyond the threshold of resilience. When it struck, the fabric of empire unwound. The Romans had faced challenges before: dynastic conflict, external invasion, class violence, and – yes – famine and plague. Even in the sunniest days of Antonine rule, these adversities were not unfamiliar.²⁷ But their concurrence and intensity in the AD 250s induced cascading change. Barbarians no longer just menaced the frontier; they pillaged unwalled towns in the imperial interior. The struggle for dynastic legitimacy turned into imperial dissolution.

The coinage of the period is a perfect objective correlative: its fiduciary value withstood repeated debasement of the precious metal content, until it did not. In this crisis, its value finally collapsed, and only the reorientation of the entire currency system around gold lifted the economy from

the spiral of inflation. The ageless civic paganism of the Mediterranean seemed to sputter, losing ground to an obscure, if vocal and highly organized, rival that seized the mission field opened by the deep social dislocation and painful inefficacy of the ancestral gods. Although late Roman rulers loved to advertise their "restoration of the times," this was clearly special pleading. What was ultimately to emerge from the wreckage in the later third century has rightly been called "a new empire."²⁸

Human societies are embedded in their natural environment, and the challenge for historians is how to assimilate the mountains of new knowledge about the past environment rising up around us. For centuries, historians have been able to explain the transformations of the later Roman world, including the crisis of the third century, without needing to consider the blunt factors of climate change and disease. It takes patience, as well as some imagination, to go back and pretend we do not know the ending. The proud urban people who cheered in the circus, or sang in the processions of the *ludi saeculares* in AD 248, could little have imagined that dynamic cycles in our proximate star, or the chance mutation of a virus in a far-off forest, would rattle the foundations of the familiar world they inhabited. That was the revenge of the giant imperial ecology they created, at the very moment in history they chose to create it. It is exhilarating, if also a little daunting, for us to be confronted with the evidence of global environmental history, which is just beginning to let us reimagine the human past, while allowing, always, an occasional and wary glimpse to the present.

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The Scientific Study of Antiquity

Sudden dramatic breakthroughs in archaeological science, intertwined with new approaches to the understanding of classical texts and of depictions in various media, promise major new insights into both the physical realities and the mentalities of the classical world. DNA analysis of humans, animals, and pathogens; strontium isotope analysis of movements of individuals over the course of their lives; source analysis of clays and metals; plus technical studies of the *chaîne opératoire* of pottery manufacture establishing whether the inspiration, the pot, or the potter moved illustrate the rapid advance of archaeological science. A recent DNA study of a corpse from the time of Justinian revealed a pathogen of the same strain of bubonic plague as that which ravaged Europe from AD 1347–1351. Holistic analysis of the 430–426 BC burials in the Kerameikos of Athens during the Great Plague, including DNA and strontium isotope analysis, paleopathological and histological analysis, dietary pattern and dental microwear studies, plus calculus biomolecular and biodistance analysis will add much new information, while new approaches to the study of texts and funerary rituals will shed light on how the survivors in classical Athens understood and reacted to the disaster. Understanding how societies respond to catastrophes is as relevant to our likely future as to our comprehension of ages past.

The study of the fifteen hundred skeletons from the rescue excavation of the recently discovered cemetery in the deme of Phaleron in Athens, covering the period c. 750–470 BC, some with hands bound and showing evidence of torture before death, combined with the study of the pottery and other objects buried with the bodies, will provide a vast amount of new information about the history of Athens, including the identity, behavior, and beliefs of its inhabitants. In all such interdisciplinary efforts, a thorough grounding in the relevant texts and archaeological evidence is essential to avoid error and understand the historical significance of the information recovered. Similarly, the very recent presentation of strong scientific evidence regarding the burial of Philip II of Macedon in Tomb I rather than Tomb II at Vergina, accompanied by what are believed to be the bodies of his wife and newborn daughter who, although murdered after Philip's death, are now thought to have been interred beside him, sheds dramatic new light on the dynasty that produced Alexander the Great.

The wealth of new categories of data becoming available and new approaches to the interpretation of the past will require interdisciplinary skill sets. A number of universities are rising to the challenge. For example, Sheffield University has long combined the study of archaeology with archaeological science; Cambridge University, at the behest of its vice chancellor, is considering how the new age of the storage and organization of “big data” can be brought to bear on the vast amount of material recovered by archaeological excavation; Harvard University has begun a program on the Science of the Human Past (SoHP) and entered into a collaboration with MIT and the Max Planck Institute in Jena to study ancient DNA; and the University of Arizona has created a new interdisciplinary program via a Center for Mediterranean Archaeology and the Environment (CMATE) offering joint degrees for comajors in one area of Mediterranean archaeology and one field of archaeological science. The state-of-the-art Laboratory for Archaeological Science will open this spring at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. The future belongs to those prepared to cross narrow academic boundaries. Interdisciplinary, arise!

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What is Ancient History?

Ian Morris & Walter Scheidel

Abstract: Every society has told stories about ancient times, but contemporary ancient history was the product of two main developments. The first was the invention of writing, which made scholarly study of the past possible, and the second was the explosion of knowledge about the world from the eighteenth century onward. Europeans responded to this explosion by inventing two main versions of antiquity: the first, an evolutionary model, was global and went back to the origins of humanity; and the second, a classical model, treated Greece and Rome as turning points in world history. These two views of antiquity have competed for two hundred and fifty years, but in the twenty-first century, the evidence and methods available to ancient historians are changing faster than at any other time since the debate began. We should therefore expect the balance between the two theories to shift dramatically. We close by considering some possible areas of engagement.

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Ancient history is the study of beginnings, and is thus organized around two central questions: 1) how to define the subject matter whose beginning is being studied; and 2) what that beginning means for the world that the students live in. Across the centuries, the answers ancient historians have offered to these questions have changed significantly, largely in response to new evidence and new methods. But now, in the twenty-first century, the evidence and methods available are changing faster than at any time since the eighteenth century, and we should expect the answers ancient historians offer to do the same.

Ancient history has always been with us because, so far as we know, every society has had stories about its beginning. In the absence of writing, however, ancient history could never be much more than myth-making. Such stories usually describe the world's creation and peopling, as well as the origins of the particular group telling the myth. Since most adults in the world were still illiterate as recently as 1960, for most of our time on earth, these hazy,

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once-upon-a-time worlds – worlds which Aboriginal Australians describe with the wonderfully evocative term “the dreamtime” – were the only ancient history possible.

Writing introduced vastly superior evidence for antiquity, and every literate civilization has produced its caste of ancient historians. Remarkably, though, almost all of these groups did much the same as their predecessors with the available data, choosing a particular piece of their own ancient history and pronouncing it exemplary. The best example of this is probably the case of China, where, by the first century BCE, scholars had already nominated the sage Confucius, who lived in the fifth century BCE, as an ancient paragon of virtue. This anointing took place even though – or perhaps because – Confucius himself claimed merely to be reviving the virtues of a still earlier paragon, the Duke of Zhou, of the eleventh century BCE: “I transmit but do not create,” Confucius wrote, “I am an admirer of antiquity.”¹ Confucius’s popularity went up and down, but until well into the twentieth century, the texts attributed to him remained at the center of elite education in China.

In this way, each civilization produced its own version of exemplary ancient history, and until the eighteenth century, no serious challenge to this way of thinking about the distant past appeared. Only then, and only in Western Europe, did new facts make such stories of beginnings seem inadequate, and thinkers responded by coming up with two new ideas that have dominated ancient history ever since. The basic problem – and opportunity – was that ever since Marco Polo came back from Cathay in 1295, evidence had accumulated that there were things in heaven and earth that just did not fit into Europe’s exemplary history; and by the 1720s, groups

of radicals, especially in France and Scotland, were responding to the anomalies by proposing a new paradigm.

What if, they asked, the hunter-gatherers and herders that missionaries, traders, and conquerors had met in other continents were actually survivals of how everyone had once lived? What if, rather than representing the beginning, Jesus and the other moral exemplars of antiquity were really just actors within one stage of history? And what if history had really begun with a worldwide state of nature and had then improved, until humanity reached the heights of enlightened Paris and Edinburgh?

This wild new theory, which its champions called *philosophical history*, shook up salons all over Europe. But by the 1750s, it was already generating a backlash. Philosophical history, its many critics (particularly in Germany and England) observed, had not actually proven that humanity had climbed from foraging, through herding and farming, on to the current age of commerce. To them, the whole endeavor should really be called *conjectural history*, not philosophical history.

What was needed, these critics argued, was not just-so stories about civilization’s emergence from so-called “savagery,” but serious scholarship – like that being done at the time on the literature and sculpture of ancient Greece and Rome. Faced with the mass of new facts being generated by philologists and connoisseurs, conjectures about hunter-gatherers were revealed as not just unprovable, but also unimportant. What really mattered to these reformers was that two-and-a-half-millennia earlier, the Greeks had invented a unique civilization based on the principles of reason, freedom, and beauty. The towering intellects of ancient Greece – Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides – had wrenched humanity out of its long slumber. This, and not conjectures about Am-

azonian hunters, was the beginning we should be studying.

In one sense, classicists of the eighteenth century could legitimately be accused of trying to go back to an exemplary model of antiquity, but in another sense, they were moving far beyond it. They accepted the emphasis of conjectural historians on comparison with the new data coming in from other continents, but insisted that what that comparison actually showed was that the Greeks and Romans were incomparable. When Johann Joachim Winckelmann in 1755 contrasted the “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur” of the Greeks with the decadence of Etruscan and Egyptian art, he saw it as evidence for the complete superiority of the Greeks; and by 1808, Wilhelm von Humboldt was ready to go much further.² “Our study of Greek history,” he wrote, is “a matter quite different from our other historical studies. For us, the Greeks step outside the circle of history. . . . We fail entirely to recognize our relationship to them if we dare to apply the standards to them which we apply to the rest of world history. . . . [F]rom the Greeks we take something more than earthly – something godlike.”³

Unable to compete with classicists’ methodological sophistication and weight of data, conjectural history collapsed in the early nineteenth century. However, it is hard to keep a good theory down, and as information from other fields of scholarship continued to accumulate, it soon came back revived and revised. In the 1850s, Herbert Spencer, the first theorist to use the word “evolution” in something like its modern sense, argued that every field, from geology and biology to history and metaphysics, could be tied together in a single story of “the advance from the simple to the complex.”⁴ Classical civilization was just one stage in a larger story, Spencer asserted, and “had Greece and Rome

never existed, human life, and the right conduct of it, would have been in their essentials exactly what they are now.”⁵

Many evolutionists, including Marx and Weber, granted Greece and Rome a bigger place in the story than this. However, by 1900, it was clear that *cultural evolution*, as the theory came to be known, was not going to collapse like conjectural history; it was able to organize far too many facts, and its theoretical frameworks were far too robust for that. The invention of radiocarbon dating in the 1940s and the calibration revolution of the 1970s provided a global framework for comparisons, and fossil and DNA data pushed the story of mankind’s beginnings back millions of years.

Despite the high quality of much of the scholarship being done on Greece and Rome, the twentieth century was one long retreat for the classical vision of ancient history, in part because evolutionism proved vastly more exportable on the world stage. Herbert Spencer was one of the first English-language nonfiction writers to be translated into Chinese and Japanese, and his work quickly spawned Asian imitators. European classical scholarship did have a significant impact on the methods of Asian ancient historians (China’s “Doubting Antiquity” movement and Japan’s Tokyo and Kyoto Schools all drew inspiration from European *Quellenforschung*, the philological analysis of sources) but its core claims about Greco-Roman exceptionalism were largely ignored.

Within Western education, evolutionary and classical approaches to beginnings coexisted, the former mostly colonizing the new social science disciplines, and the latter dominating the older humanities fields. But even within the humanities, the classical vision steadily lost ground. The University of Chicago, where both the authors of this article once taught, is a good example. The university is probably best known for its commitment to the social

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sciences, but it has also been a staunch defender of the classical heritage. When the university was founded in 1892, it organized separate departments of Greek and Latin, because classics was too important a field to confine within a single unit; the Classics Building, which opened its doors in 1915, is still one of the finest structures on campus. However, by the time we arrived in Chicago (Morris in 1987, Scheidel in 2000), Greek and Latin had been condensed into a single classics department, and its denizens had been penned into one corner of the second floor. There were rear-guard actions, to be sure: In 1948, the history department began offering a wildly popular course on the history of Western civilization (which both of us once taught). This year-long sequence, running – as student wisdom put it – from Plato to NATO, was required for all undergraduates for decades. Even in the 1980s, by which time the course was optional, most students took it anyway, and some still camped out overnight to get into their preferred sections. In 2003, however, the university closed it down.

In the mid-2010s, the sheer bulk of archaeological evidence organized by evolutionary models, the elegance of evolutionary theory, and the rhetorical power of narratives like Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1997) or Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens* (2011) seem to have won over educated opinion.⁶ Now, the origin story that seems to matter most began not in first-millennium-BCE Greece and Rome, but with the invention of agriculture in the Middle East more than ten thousand years ago, or the evolution in Africa of modern humans more than one hundred thousand years ago, or of the genus *Homo* nearly three million years ago.

Given this view of history, Greece and Rome might be interesting topics, but they just are not very important ones. In Morton Fried's anthropological classic *The Evolu-*

tion of Political Society (1967), read by tens of thousands of college students, Greece and Rome each show up on just three of the 270 pages. They fare better in David Christian's hugely influential world history *Maps of Time* (2004), each cropping up sixteen times – but that book has 642 pages.⁷

And yet at Stanford, where both of us now teach, nineteen of the twenty-seven professors whose research focuses on any aspect of humanity before AD 600 work chiefly on Greece and Rome. Our casual survey of websites suggests that Stanford is in no way unusual; many American universities devote twice as many faculty to Greece and Rome as they do to the rest of the ancient world combined. Even if the lopsided distribution of resources is, in large part, a matter of institutional inertia, the battle over beginnings that opened in eighteenth-century Europe is clearly far from over.

That said, it might be time to take the battle in a new direction.

One of the most remarkable things about the 250-year-long back and forth between evolutionary and classical models of ancient history is how little each side has engaged with the other's arguments. This is most obvious in the classical model, which willfully ignores millions of years of history along with most societies that have ever existed. A century ago, classical historians regularly claimed that Greece and Rome were the beginning of the history that mattered, but nowadays the very few who do so tend to be dismissed as reactionaries or racists. Most classicists seem to be getting on with careful research, without worrying too much about the wider significance of their work, even though this seems likely to ensure the classical model's continued retreat.

However, a similar dynamic is at play within the evolutionary model. No one

familiar with conventional history could fail to be struck by the way that evolutionary histories tend to have a lot to say about the agricultural revolution and the origins of states, and about the integration of the world in the early-modern period and the subsequent industrial revolution, but very little about anything that transpired in between. The geographer Alfred Crosby apparently speaks for many when he says, in his wonderful book *Ecological Imperialism*, that “between [2500 BCE] and [the] time of development of the societies that sent Columbus and other voyagers across the oceans, roughly four thousand years passed, during which little of importance happened.”⁸

This flyover zone, of course, includes almost all of recorded history. It saw the world’s population increase one hundredfold, the largest cities grow twentyfold, and writing, markets, money, wealth, inequality, empires, war, institutional capacity, and the stock of knowledge each transform the human experience. A version of history with a blind spot that obscures all of these changes is arguably little better than a version that cannot see anything outside the history of Greece and Rome.

It seems to us that this peculiarity of evolutionary history confronts classical historians – whichever part of the world they may work on – with both an opportunity and an obligation to respond. Evolutionary historians often seem to imply (or, in Crosby’s case, state explicitly) that once agriculture began in the Near East after 9600 BCE, everything else followed automatically, with cultural differences counting for little. This is a huge claim to make, with enormous implications for where the world might go in the centuries to come; and no one is better placed than classical historians and archaeologists to find out whether it is true.

Rising to the challenge and obligation, however, will necessarily take classical his-

torians far beyond the field’s established comfort zone. Deep knowledge of particular cultures and mastery of their languages will remain important, but perhaps no more so than broad knowledge of world archaeology, quantitative methods, the social sciences, linguistics, and evolutionary theory. Conventional boundaries between prehistory and ancient history, ancient and medieval history, and cultural traditions will lose much of their meaning.

Equally important, engaging with the evolutionary vision will have consequences for how ancient historians are taught. Currently, in most institutions of higher learning, ancient history is part of a humanistic curriculum, emphasizing languages and the details of a specific literary, historical, artistic, and philosophical tradition. Simply adding more requirements to graduate programs that are already too long does not seem like a very good solution, but neither does turning training on its head, and abandoning the knowledge of primary sources and particulars that has always been classical history’s strength in favor of the training that comparativists receive in the social sciences.

Possibly the least poor compromise would be to approach ancient history in a manner similar to how anthropology used to be taught. A graduate student interested in, say, how politics functioned in prestate societies was not expected to learn everything that could be known about every acephalous group on earth. He or she might, instead, combine a broad cross cultural survey with immersion in one specific group, learning its languages, living among its people, eating its food, and catching its diseases. Insights, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz once suggested, are not made by “regarding a remote locality as the world in a teacup or as the sociological equivalent of a cloud chamber,” but by recognizing that “small facts speak to large issues . . . because they are made

to.”⁹ Studies of the size of ancient Greek houses or Athenian worker’s wages or the cost of raising foundlings as slaves in Roman Egypt do not have to speak to broader theories of how premodern economies work – but they can be made to.¹⁰

So far, the topic that has attracted most attention of this kind is probably the “Axial Age,” which lends itself to a variety of approaches that could potentially combine classical and evolutionary thinking about ancient history. Struggling in the 1940s to come to terms with the moral crisis of his own day, the German philosopher Karl Jaspers coined the phrase to describe the middle of the first millennium BCE because, he said, this had been the axis around which the world’s history had turned. From China to the Mediterranean, the centuries on either side of 500 BCE saw an explosion of moral thinking, producing Confucianism and Daoism in China, Buddhism and Jainism in India, and Greek philosophy and the Hebrew Bible in the Mediterranean region and Near East. This really was the beginning of the history that counted, Jaspers asserted, because this was when “man, as we know him today, came into being.”¹¹

Jaspers did not gloss over the deep differences between Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Israelite, and Greek thought; after all, no one could possibly mistake Plato’s *Apology* for Confucius’s *Analects*. He observed, however, that all the way from Greece to the Yellow River, intellectuals began debating similar questions at roughly the same time. The new thinkers tended to be similar kinds of people, usually coming from the lower ranks of the elite and from small, marginal states rather than from great empires. They also tended to reach the conclusion that while the nature of goodness was indefinable, people could still transcend the evils of this world. Attaining *ren* (Confucius’s “humaneness”), *nirvana* (the Buddha’s “snuffing out” of

consciousness), *dao* (Zhuangzi’s “way”), or *to kalon* (Plato’s “good”) was a matter of self-fashioning, looking for the answers within rather than waiting for kings or priests to provide them. The secret, however, always involved compassion. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, the Axial Age founders said, and you will change the world.

For some decades, social scientists seemed to find the Axial Age more interesting than humanists did, perhaps because the roughly simultaneous appearance of similar intellectual systems in such distinct cultures, without much evidence of diffusion, was easier to analyze in evolutionary terms than within the culture-specific frameworks that classical historians favored.¹² There were exceptions, but in the last few years classical scholars have begun claiming the topic as their own.¹³ Few scholars have the talents to master the relevant skills thoroughly enough to become experts on the primary sources from multiple Axial Age civilizations (the eminent historian of ancient science Geoffrey Lloyd is the obvious exception), but there are other ways to approach the problem.¹⁴ For instance, scholars might set focused studies of the Presocratics, *Upanishads*, or Mencius against the larger Axial background, or, more broadly, ask why there was no Axial Age in the second millennium BCE, or the New World.¹⁵

In their teaching and research, ancient historians deal with one of the most consequential phases of human cultural evolution, a time when modestly sized local groups of people – villages, towns, chiefdoms, and the like – were increasingly absorbed into ever-larger networks of cooperation and, more often than not, control. Models of social organization differed considerably, from small but cohesive independent communities to large but heterogeneous and highly hierarchical empires. The ancient Mediterranean produced both

of these outcomes in paradigmatic form: the Greek city-state culture, the largest of its kind in all of history, and the Roman Empire, the biggest empire ever to exist in that region, which, in an added twist, had grown out of a small city-state.

For several reasons, these developments are best studied from a comparative perspective. Since empires tended to appear wherever ecological conditions allowed, the driving forces behind the rise and fall of any one of them cannot properly be assessed in isolation. That modern scholars have managed to propose more than two hundred different reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire strongly suggests that conventional academic focus on just a single case is simply a dead end, and that comparative analysis of a process that occurred so many times in history promises far more compelling results.¹⁶

Moreover, the tension between city-state and empire as competing and complementary forms of sociopolitical organization throws light on a very big problem of history more generally: the relationship between state formation and human welfare. Our colleague Josiah Ober has powerfully argued that the pluralism of the Greek city-state culture delivered important benefits, especially when it sustained participatory democracy, as it did in classical Athens.¹⁷ At the same time, one of us has found that human social development peaked whenever some of the largest premodern empires were at the height of their power.¹⁸

Understanding the costs and gains associated with different forms of macrosocial cooperation has been a major challenge across academic disciplines, and ancient history has much to contribute. After all, the modern West grew out of a highly competitive state system that had gradually emerged from the wreckage of the Roman Empire. Unlike in other parts of the globe, where failed empires were often replaced

within a few centuries by new empires, no comparable behemoth ever again took over all of temperate Europe. The Roman state and the Chinese Qin and Han Dynasties had built huge empires that became more similar as they matured, and yet Europe and China embarked on very different trajectories once these early superstates had failed.¹⁹ The subsequent divergence between the periodic restoration and abatement of universal empire in East Asia (and elsewhere) and enduring polycentrism in Europe requires explanation, a task only made possible by systematic comparison.

Global contextualization of this kind forces ancient historians to reformulate their own questions: If the Roman Empire was unique, why did it appear in the first place? By privileging its decline and fall over its rise, have we trained our sights on the lesser challenge? Are there specific environmental obstacles to empire that the Romans somehow overcame – and how could we possibly hope to know them unless we also look at other parts of the world? Most importantly, does the lasting disappearance of the Roman Empire help explain one of the most momentous historical transformations, the Industrial Revolution, and the resultant “Great Divergence” between the West and the rest of the world? The reasons for this breakthrough remain contested, with some scholars favoring relatively recent or contingent factors and others arguing for the relevance of more deeply entrenched, long-term causes.²⁰ By fostering competition and preserving alternative pathways of development, did the absence of anything like the Roman Empire in the West prepare the ground for modernity?²¹

However one chooses to approach these big questions, both the Axial Age and the successive political and economic divergences between Europe and the rest of the world strike us as areas where twenty-first-century classical historians have im-

portant things to say about the beginnings of the world we occupy and where it might be going next, as classical and philosophical historians alike tried to do in the eighteenth century. But just as both these groups of scholars did a quarter of a millennium ago, if today's classical his-

torians want to make contributions to explaining beginnings, we will need to raise our game, master new evidence, methods, and questions, and recognize that the ancient world was much bigger – and ancient history much longer – than our predecessors made them seem.

ENDNOTES

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¹ Confucius *Analects* 7.1, 12.1.

² Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1987), 33.

³ Wilhelm von Humboldt, “The History of the Decline and Fall of the Greek Republics” (1808), sec. 1, as cited in *Humanist Without Portfolio: An Anthology of the Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt*, ed. Marianne Cowan (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), 79.

⁴ Herbert Spencer, “Progress: Its Law and Cause,” *Westminster Review* 67 (1857): 465.

⁵ Herbert Spencer, *An Autobiography*, vol. 2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904), 43.

⁶ Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997); and Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015).

⁷ Morton Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967); and David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

⁸ Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900 – 1900*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 42.

⁹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 23.

¹⁰ We have immodestly chosen examples from our own work and that of Richard Saller, our colleague and collaborator, formerly at Chicago and currently at Stanford. See Ian Morris, “Economic Growth in Ancient Greece,” *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 160 (4) (2004): 709 – 742; Walter Scheidel, “Real Wages in Early Economies: Evidence for Living Standards from 1800 BCE to 1300 CE,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53 (3) (2010): 425 – 462; and Richard Saller, “Human Capital and Economic Growth,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 73, 85.

¹¹ Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953), 1.

- ¹² See Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); Johann P. Arnason, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, and Björn Wittrock, eds., *Axial Civilizations and World History* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2011); and Robert Bellah and Hans Joas, eds., *The Axial Age and its Consequences* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2012).
- ¹³ See especially *Dædalus* 104 (2) (Spring 1975), “Wisdom, Revelation, and Doubt: Perspectives on the First Millennium B.C.”
- ¹⁴ Geoffrey Lloyd, *Adversaries and Authorities: Investigations into Ancient Greek and Chinese Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Geoffrey Lloyd, *The Ambitions of Curiosity: Understanding the World in Ancient Greece and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Geoffrey Lloyd, *Ancient Worlds, Modern Reflections: Philosophical Perspectives on Greek and Chinese Science and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin, *The Way and the Word: Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002).
- ¹⁵ For the thoughts of one of us on the latter questions, see Ian Morris, *Why the West Rules – For Now: The Patterns of History, and What They Reveal About the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 254 – 263; and Nicolas Baumard, Alexandre Hyafil, Ian Morris, and Pascal Boyer, “Increased Affluence Explains the Emergence of Ascetic Wisdoms and Moralizing Religions,” *Current Biology* 25 (1) (2015): 10 – 15.
- ¹⁶ See the 210 factors identified in Alexander Demandt, *Der Fall Roms: Die Auflösung des Römischen Reiches im Urteil der Nachwelt* (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1984), 695; and Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vols. 4 – 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939). Toynbee’s work embraced a global vision of the fall of civilizations, but we have since come a long way in terms of both methodology and factual knowledge.
- ¹⁷ See, most recently, Josiah Ober, *The Rise and Fall of Classical Greece* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015).
- ¹⁸ Morris, *Why the West Rules – For Now*, especially pages 281, 332, and 385 for notes on the period up to 1500 CE.
- ¹⁹ Walter Scheidel, ed., *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Walter Scheidel, ed., *State Power in Ancient China and Rome* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- ²⁰ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Peer Vries, *Escaping Poverty: The Origins of Modern Economic Growth* (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2013). Vries offers the most comprehensive survey of the debate.
- ²¹ One of us very much thinks so. See Walter Scheidel, *Escape from Rome: The Death of an Empire and the Birth of the Modern West* (forthcoming Princeton University Press).

Classics: Curriculum & Profession

Peter T. Struck

Abstract: The challenges currently facing classicists are not so different from those our profession has faced for the last one hundred and fifty years, and with each challenge, a discipline sometimes imagined by outsiders to be slow to embrace the new has shown itself naturally disposed to experimentation. The discipline's agility derives from the unique degree of variegation in the modes of thinking required to thrive in it: from interpretive, to quantitative, to those relying on knowledge of culture and context. As the value of education is increasingly judged in terms of workforce development, we stand our best chance to thrive by sticking to our strengths, and anchoring our curricular goals and messages to the value of the liberal arts as a whole, as well as the intellectual dexterity that it fosters.

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The shape of undergraduate training in the classics has changed dramatically. Up through the 1970s, it would be fair to say that our departments modeled curricula with the goal of producing the next Wilamowitz. We have since instituted programs with a wider view of desirable outcomes, and most of us have even allowed that some students could earn degrees in our field without any knowledge of Greek or Latin. That is a profound shift, but it is not the only dramatic change of its kind; in fact, it's not the half of it. A snapshot from one hundred years ago shows how far down this path we have come. In the May 1912 issue of *The Classical Journal*, Ellsworth D. Wright of Lawrence College was taken aback by the results of his survey of 155 of the most reputable and representative American universities and colleges (public and private), with regard to the study of classical languages.¹ (He excluded technical schools and colleges for women "for obvious reasons.") The requirement for ancient languages across the country had shrunk to an average of only five years. It is eye-opening that this would appear to be a regression. But it is downright stunning that Wright was surveying the language requirements not just for

those specializing in classics, but for any Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree from these institutions.

Wright's discussion is poignant. He speaks of a past, only forty years prior to his day, during which there was wide agreement about what a B.A. degree meant. Training in the classics was so central a component of it that he wondered whether it would be "fair or honorable to label with a B.A. that which is devoid of the classical element." To Wright, the classical element provides rigorous and systematized training in logical thinking, language use, and oratory; further, it grants us a "gallery of lives" through which to contemplate virtue. Citing his recent commencement address at the University of Michigan, Wright points to the decline in study of the classics as the chief reason for "the declining love of noble letters and noble art – the declining respect for tradition and authority, for the heritage and the faith – the declining splendor of the ideal."² While we have toned down our language in the last hundred years, it is harder to claim we have much departed from the general sentiment: ardent, defensive, a bit hectoring, and ultimately appealing to our better angels. All of which is justified, knowing what our discipline can do for those that take it up. What classicist wouldn't offer some kind of defense during such retrenchment? But, then again, the familiar ring of this concern gives pause, particularly to our academic tribe. One wonders, how many men of 1912 would it have taken to move a boulder lightly thrown by one man from the earlier time?

There were reasons – apart from a declining respect for our heritage – for the changes made during Wright's time. Universities were undergoing a massive expansion at the turn of the twentieth century. Their numbers had doubled over the forty years prior, and the number of bach-

elor's degrees awarded had quadrupled, increasing at almost twice the pace of the increase in population. Of particular concern for him was the rate at which state universities were multiplying. These schools were charting a different course, in which ancient languages were less consistently required. The land-grant schools were – by law, after all – mandated to provide training in "such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and mechanic arts. . . . in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes."³ Certain other newcomers, such as Leland Stanford Junior University (which Wright knew by this lengthier name) were supported by business money, and they no longer valued the classics at their cores. Charles Francis Adams, the son and grandson of the Adams presidents, gave voice and form to a new idea of college training: on June 28, 1883, he told the Harvard chapter of *Phi Beta Kappa* that the attachment to the classics was an outmoded "fetich."⁴ Minds were changing; and the idea of college as exclusively a finishing acculturation into an aristocracy of the learned (an idea that was itself inflected by the earlier core goal of training clergy) was being left behind. Universities were now tasked to prepare a broader cross-section of the public in the practical arts.

It is not too far a stretch to see an analogous change taking place in our own recent past. The percentage of the population that has a B.A. has continued to swell. It crossed 5 percent in 1940 and sits now at 30 percent, a number unimaginable one hundred years ago. Just as the land grant expanded the notion of what training for the B.A. could look like, so, too, most of the increase since the 1970s has been attributable to the addition of students pursuing formerly unknown college paths. The fields of criminal justice, basic business, and health support, which used to rely on on-the-job training, now require the B.A.

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as standard, entry-level certification.⁵ Not so different from a century ago, we are now at a point at which huge new populations of students are aiming for a B.A., and are in turn changing the larger picture of what purpose the degree serves. We are still right to be concerned about how to position our field most advantageously with this changing student body.

Appeals to shape the minds of moral men, while not irrelevant to what classicists now do, are probably no longer central to their work. In terms of its general shape, our curriculum is not unlike other core disciplines in the liberal arts – emphasizing critical thinking, clear expression, and careful use of evidence – with a certain added intensity deriving from the study of the languages. But with respect to method, and to a degree unmatched by any of the other liberal arts, our field expects us to engage in an extraordinarily wide range of discipline-based modes of thinking, varying from the literary, historical, and topographical, to the linguistic, philosophical, and art historical. We are as interested in strictly quantitative problems of measurement as we are in broadly interpretive questions of meaning and questions of context through thicker understandings of culture and history.

While our degree of breadth is atypical among the disciplines, it is emblematic of a core strength of the liberal arts as a whole. Liberal arts have traditionally produced intellectual agility through a distribution of engagement across domains of knowledge. The breadth of the classics epitomizes this. Further, by housing these variant methods under one disciplinary tent, we move beyond the paratactic aggregation of skills, and contribute to the development of a different kind of intellectual aptitude. We sharpen our students' abilities to move between these methods, along with their judgment in selecting the

most advantageous approach, or set of approaches, to a particular problem. The liberal arts as a whole expects such an outcome, but rare is the curriculum that takes specific steps to promote it. The classics thrive by bringing these methods together, and classicists stand to benefit from being more self-conscious and deliberate about this task, especially given the rapidly increasing complexity and interconnectivity of the wider world, in which nimble minds are ever more valuable.

To some extent, our recent openness to a variety of ways of thinking has been an accommodation of necessity. In response to the changing definitions of the university, some of which were inclined to define us out of existence, we felt a particular urgency to reach out to other disciplines. But this impulse resides in another deep legacy of the field. In fact, a certain restlessness of method has been characteristic of the discipline from its modern beginning, and marks some of its greatest contributions. It was no accident that a classicist, Walter Burkert, first harnessed developments in early cognitive psychology and developmental biology for humanistic gain; nor that George Walsh, of the classics department at the University of Chicago, was among the first to realize the possibilities of computer technology for digital texts in the humanities; nor that an ancient historian like Walter Scheidel has advanced our discipline through conversation with demography, genetics, and geospatial imaging. It took a discipline attuned to the anthropology of religion, to the power of the concordance, and to the insight provided by measurable quanta – of the earth and the human organism – to realize the possibilities in these cases.

Even in the case of Wilamowitz himself, the *Wortphilologie* of his predecessors was not enough; he sought to advance, from Welcker, the importance of a larger investigation, the *Totalitätsideal*.⁶ After gaining

praise for his philological method, Wilamowitz famously remarked: “There simply isn’t any – any more than a method to catch fish. The whale is harpooned; the her- ring caught in a net; flounders are stomped upon; the salmon speared; the trout caught on a fly.”⁷ Finally, it is also no surprise that the linguistic turn – probably the single most consequential intellectual development in the last century of the humanities – arguably emerged from the ascesis of philology with Wilamowitz’s school- mate and *bête noir*, Nietzsche, whose *On Truth and Lying in the Extra-Moral Sense* was published in 1873, when Saussure was bare- ly sixteen years old.

The urgency our field faced four decades ago is felt now to an increasing degree across the liberal arts. What does it mean to pursue knowledge for its own sake, given the dramatic expansion of pre-pro- fessional attitudes among our students, dramatically shrinking research budgets, and increased calls for accountability from outside the academy? Each of these in- stitutional factors presents a headwind; all three taken together form an incoming tide. The liberal arts, as a whole, need to press the case for pure research with more intensity, and should be at the forefront of making the case for disinterested *Wis- senschaft*. Our colleagues in the sciences are ahead in this mission, having advanced a tradition of popularizing books, and even television shows, to help engage the public through the raw power of discoveries in their fields. Such avenues have mostly not been pursued by classicists. A more delib- erate approach here – making specific ef- forts to disseminate our knowledge and bring the public along through our pro- cess – is a pressing need. The classics, as a core piece of the humanities, has contrib- uted to the development of new ideas that continue to reshape the world in which we live.

New modes of teaching online, through massive open online courses (MOOCs) of- fer promise here. The medium (an inven- tion of pure research, by the way) has low- ered the barriers for reaching a wide audi- ence. By now, many universities have made a version of their teaching, fit to the pa- rameters of the delivery system, available for free to anyone with an Internet con- nection. Such offerings in our field have included Gregory Nagy’s Harvard Univer- sity course “The Ancient Greek Hero,” and my own “Greek and Roman Mythology” at the University of Pennsylvania. No other development has such potential for mak- ing our case to the broader public, promot- ing our larger message, and conveying the value of what we do on our own terms. As of this writing, two hundred thousand po- tential students have at least signed up for my class, over four iterations. First, this represents a substantial public interest in our field, irrespective of how many follow through. We should do more, as a field, to satisfy it. And when one finds out that twenty thousand *have* done all the work to fin- ish the course, that gives one pause as well.

With respect to our own classrooms, such developments also have a place. Calls for caution are appropriate, of course, since some boosters of the delivery system have their sights set on increasing economies of scale through a more efficient transfer of knowledge. Such a narrowing of the teaching mission would be a disaster. But when harnessed to supplement and not to replace a traditional classroom, these courses offer a growing and rich array of teaching materials similar to no-cost text- books. Some of these materials will be better than others, as classroom teachers will determine. At that point, further ad- vantages to this development will accrue directly. It will go some steps toward mak- ing our teaching a public good, and help to bring the level of scrutiny of it closer into

line with the kind of scrutiny we expect in our research lives. Our system of publication and peer review has been enormously effective in motivating our best research work, and one can imagine a future in which an amplified public dimension will help shape our best teaching.

Much of this is already mappable onto long-standing currents in our fields. Attention to the traditional strength of our methodological catholicity has been a core

piece of creating the modern shape of the discipline. And further attention to our potential advantages in claiming a central position in liberal learning is not so far afield from the position of classics about which Ellsworth Wright was concerned one century ago. The outcome is as much in doubt now as it was then, which makes the deliberate actions we take to shape it all the more urgent.

ENDNOTES

¹ Ellsworth D. Wright, "Foreign-Language Requirements for the A.B. Degree," *The Classical Journal* 7 (8) (1912): 323–337.

² Ibid.

³ Morrill Act of 1862, Public Law 37-108, 37th Cong., 2nd sess. (July 2, 1862). Found in *United States Statutes at Large, Volume 12*, <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=012/lls1012.db&recNum=534>.

⁴ Charles Francis Adams, Jr., *A College Fetich: An Address Delivered Before the Harvard Chapter of the Fraternity of the Phi Beta Kappa, in Sanders Theatre, Cambridge, June 28, 1883* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1884).

⁵ While the percentage of students in this larger pool who major in the humanities has gone down, the number, when measured against the whole college-aged U.S. population, has not. In fact, it has gone up, more than doubling since 1950. See Ben Schmidt, "A Crisis in the Humanities?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 10, 2013, <http://chronicle.com/blognetwork/edgeofthewest/2013/06/10/the-humanities-crisis/>.

⁶ William M. Calder III, "How Did Ulrich Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff Read a Text?" *The Classical Journal* 86 (4) (1991): 344–352.

⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*; see also Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Erinnerungen 1848–1914*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Koehler, 1928), 233.

Greco-Roman Studies in a Digital Age

Gregory Crane

Abstract: What is the audience for the work that we professional researchers conduct on Greco-Roman culture? If the public outside academia does not have access to up-to-date data about the Greco-Roman world, whose problem is it? Frequently heard remarks, observed practices, and published survey results indicate most of us still assume that only specialists and revenue-generating students really matter. If we specialists do not believe that we have a primary responsibility to open up the field as is now possible in this digital age, then I am not sure why we should expect support from anyone other than specialists or the students who enroll in our classes. If we do believe that we have an obligation to open up the field, then that has fundamental implications for our daily activities, for our operational theory justifying the existence of our positions, and for the hermeneutics (following a term that is still popular in Germany) that we construct about who can know what.

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Many traditional humanists have objected – quite correctly – that digital humanists focus too much of their attention on questions of *how* we should exploit new forms of technology in our teaching and research and not enough on questions of *why*. Of course, in many cases, such criticisms underestimate the immense challenges that humanists face as they attempt to implement universally desired capacities in a digital space that require far more expertise than amateur digital humanists can usually acquire. (The production of annotations that we can manage across different editions of a text and over many years is one such deceptively simple but essential task.) Of course, even if there is much that requires the attention of us digital humanists (in which we can justifiably focus upon the question of *how*), the most important questions always return to our motivations for using technology in the first place.

The digital question now before all academics is the extent to which the shift from print to a digital space changes how our particular fields can contribute to society as a whole. From a Darwinian per-

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spective, we need to reflect upon the degree to which new forms of technology may alter the social contract upon which our departments, our positions, our place in the curriculum, and our research funding (such as it is) depend. When we ask why we might use new methods (digital or otherwise), the first question is not how these methods can improve specialist-on-specialist discourse or even the experiences of our tuition paying students, but why our particular discipline should exist at all. We cannot insist upon theorizing the humanities in a digital age or demand a new hermeneutics for them unless we explicitly consider as well how our new theorizing and hermeneutics affect the reasons why professional academics should exist.

Figures published in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Humanities Indicators demonstrate the degree to which professional academics explicitly exclude from serious consideration the hard question of how our fields contribute to the intellectual life of society as a whole. That exclusion stands out when we observe the factors that faculty consider important for tenure: the most important single judgment to which faculty are subject. Even the initial hire to a tenure-track line is subordinate to the subsequent tenure decision, and most departments are careful only to hire those candidates who have shown that they will (or at least can) meet the requirements for tenure.¹

The Academy's data show predictable and remarkably complementary perspectives about the importance of teaching and research at both teaching- and research-oriented institutions: at primarily undergraduate institutions, roughly 90 percent of the respondents report that good teaching is essential for tenure, as opposed to 50 percent who cite strong research as essential; at research institutions, the figures

are reversed, with roughly 90 percent citing strong research and 50 percent citing strong teaching as essential. But at both sorts of institution, faculty agree on one factor for tenure: only 1 percent of those surveyed consider "public humanities (making the humanities and/or humanities scholarship accessible to the general public)" essential for tenure. By contrast, in both cases, 70 percent of respondents asserted that making the humanities accessible to a general public was either unimportant or marginally important for tenure. About 30 percent stated that such work was important or very important, but the final figure shows (in my view) the true value of such work: 99 percent of those polled agreed that making the humanities and/or humanities scholarship accessible to the general public was not an essential part of a tenure dossier. And given the pressure on junior faculty to win tenure, they understandably can only afford to focus on those essential parts of their work.

For Greco-Roman studies (as well as English and History, the two biggest humanities majors), the figures were even more striking; the respondents were unanimous: 0 percent considered it essential that humanists demonstrate an ability to explain the humanities or humanities research to a wider audience.² Anyone who has spent time as a faculty member, especially a faculty member in the argumentative humanities, will recognize how hard it is to get any group of professors to agree on anything (other than, perhaps, the belief that they should be paid more, given more research support, enjoy more general respect, and teach less). When 100 percent of the faculty from three major humanities fields independently agree that a mission is not essential, we have an extraordinarily telling piece of data.

By contrast, the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathe-

matics) maintain a steady marketing campaign to justify the support they receive on the basis of the economic, medical, and other tangible goods that they deliver to society as a whole.³ Scientists are challenged to reflect on the general importance of what they do: reviewers for the National Science Foundation (NSF) are formally charged to evaluate every proposal on the basis of two criteria: “intellectual merit” and “broader impacts.”⁴

Scholars of Greco-Roman antiquity are not producing new drugs; we are not pioneering ways of better harnessing solar energy, or creating new forms of mathematics that may, in the future, revolutionize some branch of scientific inquiry. Instead, we advance the intellectual life of society, and we can do that only if we make the public humanities a central focus of our work. If there are potential dangers in popularization, the humanities suffer even more damage from overspecialization and inbred scholasticism.

Fields like Greco-Roman studies recognize only three sources of input: specialists in the same university (the need for service), specialists in the same field (the need for research), and students (the group that ultimately pays for most humanities-faculty salaries). The need to attract students is the one saving force that subjects those of us who teach Greco-Roman culture to the judgments of nonprofessionals and challenges us to view the field itself and its purposes from at least one different – and arguably broader – perspective. In this, we enjoy in the United States an odd advantage over colleagues in a country like Germany. In Germany, ancient historians and Greek and Latin philologists teach a steady stream of prospective primary and secondary school teachers who must have a background in ancient history to teach European history, or to join the ranks of the nine thousand Latin teachers needed to teach the seven hundred thousand-plus stu-

dents of Latin in Germany. That American professors of Greco-Roman studies cannot rely upon a comparably steady stream of majors makes their life anxious, but also challenges them.

Although the number of students enrolled in foreign language courses increased from 1 million in 1968 to 1.6 million in 2009 and the relative percentage of Greek and Latin students declined in this period, the number of students in Greek and Latin had, at least in absolute terms, remained essentially the same (there was a disturbing 20 percent dip from 2009 to the figures released for 2013, but this may reflect a short-term anxiety about more transparently practical measures after the financial crisis).⁵ Also, although precise figures are not available, the big classics Ph.D. programs seem to be basically as large as they were in 1985 – perhaps up or down by one faculty position, but essentially the same. In Germany, by contrast, we can point to fifty-one chairs of Greek, Latin, ancient history, and Greco-Roman archaeology listed as *gestrichen* (cut) in the same time period.⁶ It may well be that the lack of a guaranteed clientele has benefited the field in the United States by pushing us to address the needs of a wider and more mobile prospective student base rather than serving a captive audience.

But the focus on serving these revenue-generating students has left not only Greco-Roman studies but the humanities as a whole exposed. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), for example, provides almost three times as much support to its federal/state partnerships for public humanities (\$42.5 million out of a total budget of \$146 million in 2015) as it does to its traditional research programs (\$14.5 million, or about 10 percent of the overall budget).⁷ Even if we include investments in preservation and access (\$15.4 million) and in digital humanities (\$4.4 million), the overall funding for research

remains relatively modest and accounts for less than one-quarter (23.5 percent) of the 2015 NEH budget. And even that modest support attracts sometimes virulent criticism from members of Congress and from political candidates. Unfortunately, insofar as professional humanists care only about other specialists and revenue-generating students, they undermine their claim to support from public funding. If we are subject to attack, we have, for the most part, brought it on ourselves. On the other hand, if we can manage to shift our focus and assert, seriously and tangibly, a commitment to advancing the contributions of the humanities and of humanities research to society as a whole, we have a chance of reestablishing, over time, the social contract by which various aspects of the humanities justify their existence.

So, what does this mean in practical terms for Greco-Roman studies? We can take several steps now, and for some of these, digital technology has a crucial role to play. First, if we are to advance the intellectual life of society as a whole as effectively as possible, we need to shift not only to *open access* (resources available to the public free of restriction or charge) but to *open data* (source data available to the public for their own use and manipulation). An analysis of 780 websites for German and U.S. faculty in Greco-Roman studies revealed that perhaps fifteen of these researchers were actively contributing to the fundamental task of creating open resources and building the sort of open infrastructure needed for study of Greco-Roman culture in a digital age. A handful of faculty, for example, have made an effort to make their work available under an open-access license, and a handful of publications (such as the now venerable *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*) do make their content freely available. But making the thousands of publications cited on these websites available

under an open-access license would be a necessary, though by no means sufficient, condition for reaching beyond this closed academic network.

Second, we need a new theoretical foundation for Greco-Roman studies in a digital age, one that takes into consideration our new ability to advance the intellectual life of society as a whole. When we speak of advancing human understanding, we may imagine an idealized expert who has internalized all the primary and secondary literature and who has gained a new perspective (notice that I carefully avoid positivistic references to knowledge). Such an idealized expert provides, however, only one perspective. If there is no plausible pathway from the impact of that professional to anyone beyond other specialists, then I am not sure how strongly we can argue for the value of that new perspective. We need a theoretical foundation that accounts for what happens in the brains of many different people, starting with students but extending to nonspecialists as well, including not only members of the general public but also professors in other disciplines. Such a theoretical foundation will help us prioritize the unbounded range of research topics that we can pursue. If we assume that the most important case is the idealized, all-knowing expert, we will prioritize in one way; if, by contrast, we primarily wish to advance understanding beyond specialist circles and see idealized expert knowledge as a means to this larger end, then we will have very different priorities.

Third, we need to ponder what information we wish to represent, given the very different capabilities of born-digital publications. For me, the classic case is the digital edition: I think we should as a matter of course encode morpho-syntactic interpretations, geospatial and social networking data, our interpretations of where one text references another, and explicit align-

ments – on the word and phrase level – between our source texts and translations into multiple languages. What we choose to encode, of course, depends upon both our research objectives and the audiences we wish to reach. But one fundamental change is clear. In print culture, there was pressure to distinguish scholarly editions, with elaborate textual notes aimed at professional scholars, from bilingual editions, with (for the most part) much briefer textual notes, but with facing translations into English, French, German, Italian, or some other modern language. In a digital space, we can personalize the data that we present to different audiences, and include many more kinds of data, including much more expressively encoded textual notes and translations into multiple languages.

Fourth, there is the challenge of “big data,” which in this case is largely textual data. This challenge appears not only as we begin to grapple with the billions of words of Greek and Latin already available in the millions of digitized documents now available, but also as we begin to work with proliferating categories of automatically generated annotations (including, as mentioned above, linguistic annotations, geo-spatial and social networking data, text reuse detection, general optical character recognition [OCR], and topic modeling). We have to understand how to work with error rates. We need to integrate distant and close reading and we need to understand how to sample our data and to consider how certain we can be of our conclusions. We need to think algorithmically and we need to understand the implications of text mining and visualization for the ways in which we conceptualize our sources; these new media rewire our brains and we need to study that as best we can.

Fifth, we need to open up the field and to engage citizen scholars (or citizen scientists as they are called in Germany, where Greco-Roman studies and physics are both

Wissenschaft). This is necessary in part because we just have too much data for a handful of advanced researchers and professional scholars to process. But we also need to do this because opening up the field transforms the contributions that Greco-Roman studies can make to society: insofar as our fellow citizens can join us, not just as anonymous members of a crowd, but as individuals who can develop increasingly sophisticated skills as they contribute over time, we thus advance the intellectual life of society beyond academia and attack the intellectual scholasticism that is documented in our commercial publications and in the data collected by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Sixth, we cannot in a globalized world continue to use the term *classics* as synonymous with ancient Greek and Latin language and literature or *classical civilization* as coextensive with Greco-Roman culture. I still find it hard to believe that my professional association in the United States recently changed its name from the American Philological Association to the “Society for Classical Studies,” formally asserting in the early twenty-first century that professors of Greco-Roman culture represented classical languages and literatures as a whole. The department from which I received both of my academic degrees still defines itself as the “Department of *the Classics*” (italics mine), with the definite article driving home the point that other classical languages including classical Sanskrit, classical Chinese, classical Arabic, and classical Persian are free to find space elsewhere in the university, but they are not *the classics*. I do not know anyone, however conservative, in our profession who would actually advance such a position. But somehow we have simply accepted past usage (just as we continue to publish articles and monographs in the same basic formats, through the same commercial channels, and for the same specialist

audience). The equation of classics with Greek and Latin comes from a very problematic tradition of European hegemonic thought, and emerges from shared assumptions of European privilege that are neither acceptable nor realistic in a world where nations such as China and India are global powers.

And so, the final step we can take is to evolve from a regional discipline, conducted almost entirely in a handful of European languages and focused on Greco-Roman culture, to one that participates in a global network of historical languages and cultures, many of which are now considered classical (as of 2014, India had six official classical languages: Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia,⁸ with some arguing that Pali should be included as a distinct language in this group).⁹ To do this, we need to redesign our departments, forming strategic partnerships with colleagues in our universities (such as with professors of Sanskrit or classical Arabic, if we are lucky enough to have them), and making creative use of new communications technologies to work with colleagues not only in other universities but in universities beyond Europe and North America. We need students in Tehran and Texas reading classical Greek and classical Persian together, establishing in the process dialogues across boundaries of space, languages, and culture. Bilingual editions that face Greek and Latin texts with translations into English (Loebs), French (Budés), German (the Tusculum editions), or Latin (older series like the *Patrologia Graeca* in France or the Bipontine Editions in what is now Germany) are not enough. We need editions that can support readers of non-Western languages like Mandarin and Arabic, while also offering much better support for Spanish and Portuguese readers. We need serious research into the limits of what ideas we can represent in formats that can be quickly translated across lan-

guages and customized for different cultural perspectives. Here, the growing coverage of non-English versions of Wikipedia provides a better model than any of the rigid workflows from conventional Western academia.¹⁰

Those of us who have the privilege to earn a living as students of the Greco-Roman world have a decision before us about the field we wish to build. We can continue producing publications to which only other specialists have intellectual or (because we hide them behind paywalls) practical access, doing what we need to attract and hold revenue-generating students, and ignoring (if not disdaining) members of society as a whole. We can continue writing and teaching in much the same way we always have, exploiting new digital methods as ancillary tools by which we compose more traditional articles and books, rather than asking ourselves what the purpose of our research and teaching should be and then exploring new forms of intellectual activity and production. We can even continue to conflate the idea of classical with Greco-Roman and, in so doing, define ourselves as, at best, a parochial community. Deviating from any of these paths will be difficult: it entails redefining our field and thus inevitably challenges established structures of authority and institutional power. But the potential benefits are immense, and there will be opportunities for anyone in the field, at whatever level of seniority, to contribute to and flourish within the world we collectively fashion.

Author's Note: Some of the ideas expressed in this essay were first disseminated in 2015 as blog posts; see Gregory Crane, "Essays on Digital Classics and Digital Humanities," Perseus Digital Library Updates, <http://sites.tufts.edu/perseusupdates/2015/07/28/essays-on-digital-classics-and-digital-humanities/>. I would like to express my thanks for the comments I received at that time, as well as for the editorial suggestions I received in submitting this piece to *Dædalus*.

- ¹ Humanities Indicators, *2012 – 13 Humanities Departmental Survey (HDS-2)* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2014), <http://www.humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicator/doc.aspx?i=457>; and Susan White, Raymond Chu, and Roman Czujko, *The 2012 – 13 Survey of Humanities Departments at Four-Year Institutions* (College Park, Md.: Statistical Research Center, American Institute of Physics, 2014; study conducted for the American Academy of Arts & Sciences' Humanities Indicators Project), "Table 7: Considerations in Tenure Decision Made by Humanities Departments (All Disciplines Combined), by Institutional Type, Fall 2012," 14, www.humanitiesindicators.org/binaries/pdf/HDS2_final.pdf.
- ² Humanities Indicators, *2012 – 13 Humanities Departmental Survey*, 65 (English), 97 (history), and 185 (classical studies).
- ³ See, for example, Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, and National Academy of Engineering, *Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2007); and American Academy of Arts & Sciences, *Restoring the Foundation: The Vital Role of Research in Preserving the American Dream* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2014).
- ⁴ National Science Foundation, "Merit Review Facts," http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit_review/facts.jsp#1.
- ⁵ David Goldberg, Dennis Looney, and Natalia Lusin, *Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2013* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2015), 19 for the overall rates, 23 for Latin, 24 for Greek, https://www.mla.org/content/download/31180/1452509/2013_enrollment_survey.pdf.
- ⁶ See the Arbeitsstelle Kleine Fächer (Johannes Gutenberg–Universität Mainz), www.kleinefaecher.de.
- ⁷ National Endowment for the Humanities, *Appropriations Request for Fiscal Year 2016* (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities, 2015), 9, http://www.neh.gov/files/neh_request_fy2016.pdf. In fiscal year 2015, out of a total budget of \$146,021,000, \$14,784,000 went to research programs, but \$42,528,000 went to the federal/state partnership, "the liaison between the National Endowment for the Humanities and the nonprofit network of 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils."
- ⁸ "Languages of India – Classical Languages," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_India#Classical (accessed January 22, 2016); for the press release on Odia, the most recent language declared classical, see the Press Information Bureau of the Government of India, "Classical Status to Odiya Language," August 14, 2013, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=98244>.
- ⁹ Binay Singh, "Removal of Pali as UPSC Subject Draws Criticism," *The Times of India*, May 5, 2013, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/Removal-of-Pali-as-UPSC-subject-draws-criticism/articleshow/19890980.cms>.
- ¹⁰ My colleagues at Tufts led the way for me. Steve Hirsch has taught ancient China and the Greco-Roman world for years. Anne Mahoney has relentlessly maintained a curriculum in Sanskrit – an array of courses that will finally appear as formal offerings in our course catalog. We were able to bring Maxim Romanov, an expert in classical Arabic, and, thanks to Vickie Sullivan, Riccardo Strobino, an expert on the intimate relationship between Greco-Roman and Islamic Cultures and the debt that the West still owes to its Islamic brethren, into our department of classics. If we could do more, we would. At Tufts, I am a professor of classics and work in a department of classics, and I say so now with assurance and invitation: my colleagues have been true leaders in developing a field that we can truly call classics or classical studies.

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