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Graduate—and Undergraduate—Training for the Ancient History Job Market

I realize that the relevance of this may not be immediately apparent, but my late mother was afraid to fly. Consequently when my father's work required that we all relocate in Austria for a spell when I was nine years old, we crossed the Atlantic on the Queen Elizabeth II. Since the crossing took quite a while, the folks at Cunard Lines came up with various diversions to keep the passengers from running wild and seizing the controls, and one of these was the Fancy Hat Contest. We were expected to devise original chapeaux from whatever miscellaneous items we happened to have brought in our steamer trunks, and somewhere in my attic is a black and white photograph of my nine year old self in the fancy hat with which I won the contest. This of course was prophetic, since the hat I subsequently found myself wearing in my professional life was a rather similar hodgepodge, the product first of training in two different graduate departments, classics and history, and then of years of teaching a wide variety of courses in fields in which I had never been trained—women's studies, film, and

world history, for example, areas in which my teachers never imagined I would be called upon to teach. When I was in graduate school, in fact, getting my degree in a history department and at that time specializing in Roman intellectual history, my advisor noticed that I signed up for a course in Homer in Greek. He asked me if I seriously imagined I would ever find myself teaching such a class, and I replied that I certainly hoped so. And in fact my first job was as an ancient historian in a department of Classics where I had the great pleasure of teaching Homer in Greek on several occasions. I was also offered a job teaching history at that time.

But being offered a choice of two jobs was something that happened a long time ago in a much softer job market. Today things are different. And only at select institutions are students offered the opportunity to teach nothing but ancient history. As a rule they will need to teach a) both non-ancient history and ancient history if they wind up in history departments and b) languages as well as ancient history if they wind up in classics departments. And there's the rub, for with only 24 hours in a day it's difficult to achieve the dual mastery that will make them employable in both history departments and classics departments. It is tempting to say that students who seek jobs in

ancient history need to keep focused on this goal from their first day in graduate school

But is that really so?

Plainly not. On the one hand, graduate departments of classics often give students some time to make up their minds whether they are going to focus in history or some other field, although applicants to history departments normally know in advance which field of history they plan to study. So you don't really always need to know on day one. On the other hand, students who wish to become ancient historians do need to begin their study of the languages well in advance of applying to graduate school. Undergraduates in history departments who manifest an interest in going on in ancient history should be advised by their instructors to begin the study of at least one ancient language and, if they have not done this, to begin looking around at post-baccalaureate programs, which take a year out of your life and big bite out of your wallet. The UCLA program, which is normally completed in 12 months and involves nine courses, is on the expensive side at a cost of over \$9000 dollars. Others scattered around the country are listed on a link at the CAMWS website:

<https://www.camws.org/directories/post-bacc-programs.php>

At the City University of New York, we offer doctorates with a focus in ancient history in both the Classics Department and the History Department. I get many e-mail and phone inquiries as well as completed applications from individuals who have studied little or no Latin or Greek. I once had occasion to meet the parents of one aspirant to graduate study in ancient history whom I had previously told that we required the study of the ancient languages for admission. Mom and Dad treated me with a conspicuous lack of warmth, claiming that this was a very unreasonable policy since, after all, everything had been translated. Repeatedly I have had to explain that we require substantial facility in one of the ancient languages for admission in history, and both languages in classics. In Classics, students can be admitted pending completion of a summer intensive course in the other language with a grade of B or above. In History, we let them study the other language during the summer after the first year, but we're not wild about it, since this will delay their taking courses in which readings are in that language. A number of institutions around the country offer these summer intensive courses—courses that teach four semesters of the language in one summer. But students need to have it explained to

them very carefully that it is *four* semesters we are talking about, not two; that the course they need is one that will prepare them to read literature in the original upon entering graduate school; that there is no time to finish their study of the fine points of grammar during the academic year while in grad school.

One challenge that faces those of us who direct ancient history programs located in history departments is explaining to our department chairs why it is that our students take text courses in the original languages in non-historical authors. After all, those training to become French historians don't generally take courses in which nearly all they do is read Boileau, or even Molière and those training to become Spanish historians don't take many courses in which all they do is read Lope de Vega or even Cervantes, but our students do in fact take courses in which nearly all they do is read Juvenal or Aristophanes. It's easier to explain to our administrations why our students are taking courses in numismatics or papyrology--"old stuff"—than it is to justify their study of literature, i. e., to communicate the full interdisciplinarity of our field. Of course some institutions are fortunate enough to offer programs that are defined from the start as interdisciplinary, and I'll talk about those in a bit.

So: there are challenges in receiving training via both classics departments and history departments. Students getting their degrees via classics may have difficulty persuading history departments that they are qualified to teach courses in post-classical history, and they would do well to seek adjunct positions during their graduate work teaching courses in western or world civilization. Students getting their degrees via history will be spending more time than their classmates working to master four languages, and indeed professors teaching in history departments are sometimes hard pressed to explain to their administrations why their students need to learn those four languages. A few years ago my own graduate history department eliminated the language requirement for American historians—take a few minutes to absorb that—so you can imagine how they feel about a field that requires four languages.

Let's look now at the avenues via which assorted universities across the country, both private and public, train their students for the job market in ancient history, bearing in mind that this is the state of play as of January 2014 and that some of these programs are bound to evolve with the passing of time with changes in such things as philosophies of history, university structure, and personnel.

Ancient History is housed in Classics at the University of Cincinnati, a public institution and one of the largest universities in the United States. Cincinnati has the advantage of having a huge collection of papyri. There, Kathryn Gutzwiller tells me, they don't train expect their ancient historians to go into history departments, and apparently it hasn't happened for quite a while. UC students are not required to have any training in time periods beyond antiquity. Instead, there's a lot of emphasis on training them in epigraphy, papyrology, numismatics, etc. They're also required to take courses in archaeology and literature, and they work with faculty in those areas on interdisciplinary research projects. As Kathryn reports, they are kept very busy, and may not get theoretical preparation in history and historiography, but they should be able to get a bit of theory in various courses in the department. As she puts it, "There is just so much to learn now!"

At Stanford, Classics offers a home for an ancient history program that reflects the interests of its faculty by offering a distinctive emphasis on the social sciences. Students there in addition to obtaining a solid grounding in classical languages and culture take seminars in such departments as economics, political science, history and anthropology.

Every university is unique; Yale has the advantage of a huge numismatic collection, a large collection of Greek, Demotic, Coptic and Arabic papyri, and a great deal of archaeological material from the eastern Roman city of Dura Europos. The graduate training of ancient historians is undergoing reconstruction. The website of the Department of Classics advertises several tracks—philology, ancient history, classics and philosophy, classics and comparative literature, classics and renaissance studies, and classical art/archaeology, but in fact at the present time the ancient history students have moved over to the History Department, where they will also take courses in other fields of history, enriching them as historians and making them more marketable to departments of history.

Many other institutions offer their ancient history degrees via departments of history. Ohio State, for example, trains its students in its history department. Ancient historians there are required to have training in archaeology, epigraphy, and numismatics but must also undergo rigorous training in the classical languages, entailing advanced course work in Latin and Greek and a battery of examinations of increasing difficulty. Ancient history degrees are also now offered

through the history department at Emory, which has just begun a new and promising program capitalizing on the strengths of its faculty in Greek and Roman social history and law, Hellenistic history, late antiquity and early Christianity, gender, and ancient medicine. Students there can also take advantage of the growing collection of ancient Mediterranean art in the Michael C. Carlos Museum and the opportunities to work in the field at Samothrace.

A degree in Ancient History can be earned in either Classics or History at the City University of New York, a public institution that has a consortium with Fordham and New York University, where our students may also take courses free of charge, and our location in New York City gives access to the American Numismatic Society as well as the huge Metropolitan Museum of Art. NYU, a private institution despite what its name might lead you to believe, has now spawned the interdisciplinary Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, which focuses on the study of both the classical world and the near east, with a large dose of material culture, and sponsors a large number of events open to the public.

Then there are the self-proclaimed interdisciplinary programs. These would include, for example, Brown, Princeton, Penn, the

University of Michigan, and Berkeley. Of course, all ancient history is inherently interdisciplinary; it always was, and with the modern emphasis on epigraphy, archaeology, and numismatics, not to mention gender studies, anthropology, demography and statistics, it is even more so. But now some universities are identifying their programs as unbound by departmental walls. Some of these draw not only from the curricula of classics and history programs but from other disciplines as well. Students at Brown are introduced not only to demography, statistics, numismatics, archaeology, and papyrology but also to such fields as religious studies, Egyptology, anthropology and art history. At Princeton the Program in the Ancient World, as their interdisciplinary program is called, offers a curriculum with offerings from four departments: Art and Archaeology, Classics, History, and Religion, with back-up available from the departments of Anthropology and Near Eastern Studies. The extension of studies into the near east is common in these interdisciplinary programs. The Graduate Group in Ancient History at Penn defines itself as “a program that coordinates a curriculum encompassing the whole of the ancient history of the Near East and the Mediterranean Basin” and draws faculty from Anthropology, Art and Archaeology of the Mediterranean World,

Classical Studies, History of Art, Religious Studies, History, and Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. At Michigan, students must be examined not only in Greek and Roman history but also in a comparative historical topic or theme and in an ancillary field such as archaeology, epigraphy, legal history, numismatics, papyrology, or an ancient language other than Greek or Latin, or must fulfill that requirement by coursework or writing an extended research paper. Some programs place a strong emphasis on material culture. Thus Berkeley's program calls itself the Graduate Program in Ancient History and Mediterranean Archaeology; its over twenty faculty are affiliated with seven Berkeley departments and the Graduate Theological Union.

In short, ancient history training is not what it was when I was in graduate school in the 1970s. The days of text-based education in ancient history are waning. Increasingly, students are encouraged and frequently required to familiarize themselves with other ways of learning about antiquity than reading the printed word, and other aspects of antiquity to study than maps and chaps. I've talked about ancillary disciplines; there's also the whole realm of theory, which I haven't had time to discuss. The Mediterranean world is often

presented as extending beyond the universe of those urban males who spoke Greek and Latin. It still remains a problem that students who receive their degrees via departments of classics may not have sufficient training in the post-ancient world to be marketable to history departments beyond an elite pool of schools who can afford to indulge them in their habit of thinking about antiquity alone, and students who receive their degrees in history departments need to take great care to take intensive course work to show that they are good bets for classics departments. So as you train in ancient history, whether as an instructor or as a student, I encourage you to keep your eye on the double job market that lies ahead. And it is difficult. As Kathryn Gutzwiller put it, "There's just so much to learn now!"

Some suggested readings about the study of ancient history:

Kurt A. Raaflaub, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Reflections on the Role of Ancient History in a Modern University," *Classical Journal* 98 (2003) 425-31.

Michael C. Alexander, "History and Text: Two Kinds of Ancient History,"
Arethusa 46 (2013) 499-535.