Graduate Training for the Ancient Historian.
Or, How Best to Study Ancient History in the 21st Century?

Comments: Four Possible Solutions

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We have heard a rich array of excellent observations and good suggestions. Obviously, I cannot respond here to all of them.

Indeed, as Walter Scheidel just said, "ancient historians-in-training face a time-honored laundry list of demands": proficiency in the principal ancient languages, reading knowledge in several modern languages, familiarity with facts, evidence, and modern interpretations. In addition, we heard, they should know something about other historical periods, be trained to teach world history, become familiar with theory and a variety of approaches, and acquainted with the methodologies of modern social sciences such as anthropology, economics, political science, and sociology. No sleep for six years, or ten years including sleep: these clearly are not realistic solutions to the problem. Something has to give, but what? And where should we place the emphasis?

I guess, if pressed, Charles Hedrick would not insist that knowing the history of the discipline — being aware of how and why we came to do history as an evidence-based discipline, and how the idea of evidence gained importance — is the cure for all problems. But he is right that awareness of the roots, significance, and evolution of the methodology we use is important. As Richard Talbert puts it, "For would-be ancient historians to cultivate a sense of where their profession has come from, where it is now, and where it may be headed should prove invaluable." Beth Pollard is no less right in emphasizing the crucial need to pay attention to world history, Scheidel in stressing the methodologies of modern social sciences, Jonathan Edmondson in focusing on the collaboration of History and Classics in training ancient historians, and David Potter in drawing our attention to the fact that to interpret texts, evidence, of whatever type and kind, students must first be able to understand them. Of course, we have to work with translations in fields that are

not our own — I fully agree with Pollard here — but we need to be aware of two problems: translations are most often not written to satisfy the needs of those who want to use texts as historical evidence (compare multiple translations of the same passage in any Greek or Roman literary text with the original, and you will understand what I mean), and in many cases (whether ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, or Indian) the meaning of these texts is fiercely debated even among the experts. Problems, traps, pitfalls everywhere.

I would like to focus here on four possible solutions, most of them mentioned by the speakers in this panel, and all easily combinable. My assumption is that certainly no major but perhaps a small expansion of the time needed for graduate training is possible, though it needs to be justified carefully. These four solutions are: (1) foundation building before graduate school; (2) training ancient historians to be classicists *and* historians; (3) pooling resources nation- and continent-wide to offer additional training through intensive summer-seminars; and (4) networking to increase resources, knowledge, and connections.

First, then, foundation building before graduate school. For the reasons just mentioned, I consider high-level language competence essential at least in a historian's core field. We might consider making better use for this purpose of Post-Baccalaureate Programs. A year of intensive and focused training in both ancient and modern languages *before* officially entering a graduate program will free time in this program for its essential purpose. As it is now, students still working on their basic language skills in the early years of graduate school are unable to take full advantage of graduate courses and seminars: they struggle and make slow progress on all fronts. For let's be clear about this: in graduate school students are supposed to turn from amateurs to professionals and to learn the skills needed to succeed on the professional level. The window of time offered for this transition in graduate school is narrow enough, given the multiple demands discussed in the present panel. In talking about this with prospective graduate students, I use the metaphor of building a house; this too usually needs to happen in a limited amount of time. If we spend too much time constructing the foundations we might never get to complete the roof. Languages are foundations; how can we learn what we should in a graduate seminar if we spend most of the time translating and trying to understand the texts used, and if we are unable to read with sufficient ease relevant German or French scholarship on the topics discussed? In fact, I

suspect, a "post-bac year" would at least partly be compensated for by better and more efficient use of time and thus more rapid progress in graduate school.

Second, training ancient historians to be classicists *and* historians, or vice versa. At least on this panel, there seems to emerge some agreement on this. But "out there" it's still different. Talbert thinks that the future lies in History departments, Potter in Classics departments. For the foreseeable future, I think, the traditional distribution is unlikely to change: there will be jobs in both types of departments. What we need to overcome are the fatal prejudices that make Classics departments suspect the competence in languages and literatures of historically trained candidates and History departments think of classically trained candidates as philologists in disguise. There is no way around it: ancient *history* that deserves the name of history — hard-core history, as I call it, issue- or problem-oriented rather than author-oriented soft-core history — requires training *both* in philology and history. Ancient historians must master the methodologies of both disciplines and be able to communicate in their professional "languages" with colleagues in both. Hence we *must* increase the collaboration between these two types of departments in training and supporting ancient historians. The models set up by Michigan, Toronto/York (as described by Edmondson), and recently by Brown, lead the way: solid training in Classics but focused on the needs of historians (as Potter describes it, less Menander, more Dio Cassius — or perhaps, thinking of Pollard's universal history, more Diodorus), and a carefully selected program in History, including, for example, a methods course, a graduate student colloquium in which ancient historians present their research papers together with all other history students, and a research seminar in an additional historical field outside the Graeco-Roman world. This will provide students with some of the skills recommended by Scheidel, make candidates attractive to departments in both fields and, at the same time, help qualify them for traditional western civilization or even new world history requirements emphasized by Pollard.

Third, pooling resources to offer additional training. The warning cries are correct: we must not overload the program. But in many programs the summers are still under-utilized, and, at any rate, an intensive summer institute of two to four weeks can usually be fitted into any summer plans, whether academic or not. Few Ph.D. programs have the resources needed to teach all the

subdisciplines (such as epigraphy, numismatics, papyrology, and others) an ancient historian needs to be sufficiently familiar with, and not all have specialists in, say, Near Eastern civilizations. Hence my suggestion to pool resources and organize a sequence of summer institutes that offer participants an intensive, full-immersion introduction into these and other fields and thus complement opportunities already provided by archaeological institutions in Greece and Rome. Graduate programs would pay the expenses of their students and a share of those of the teachers, and recent as well as aspiring Ph.D.s from the US and Canada (and, why not, other countries) would be invited. Both the APA's Committee on Ancient History that organized the present panel and the Association of Ancient Historians could serve as facilitators, while certificates would document the student's successful participation. Those taking a sequence of such seminars thus would achieve three purposes: solidifying their training in various methodologies of their field, expanding their horizons beyond the Graeco-Roman world, and engaging in networking.

This is my fourth point: networking. Talbert surely is right: students need to get to know and interact with their fellow-students in other programs, and they need to know and work with professors outside their own discipline and program. The gains of such networking are obvious, and it needs to take place both within the students' home university and beyond. Within our field, programs maintained by the American Academy in Rome and the American School in Athens offer such opportunities. So do integrated graduate programs at Berkeley, Princeton, and the University of Pennsylvania that involve Classics and Near Eastern or Classics and Mediterranean Studies. Summer seminars of the type I suggested could become important here as well, repeated over several summers. Letters of recommendations by classicists and historians from the home institutions and by experts in different fields the students have worked with in the summer, will enhance their dossiers.

All this will not relieve the pressure. We will have to make choices, be selective, and set priorities. As Scheidel points out, programs will differ, and the market will determine which are successful. But, whatever the parameters set by any given program, the four solutions I propose might make it easier to hold on to essentials while expanding competence, nurturing additional interests, and tying ancient historians into a wider intellectual and professional network of fields

and disciplines that extends both horizontally across wider fields of the ancient world (Mediterranean, Near Eastern, and beyond), and vertically across time and disciplines, linking Classics with History and other Social Sciences.