

Introduction: Reassessing Greece & Rome

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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

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

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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 *Dædalus* 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 Herculaneum 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 *Dædalus*.
- 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.