RES DIFF

Contents

NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS

Res Difficiles, the Journal (*Res Diff*) was co-founded in 2024 by Hannah Čulík-Baird (University of California, Los Angeles) and Joseph Romero (East Texas A&M).

Res Diff is currently edited by Hannah Čulík-Baird (culikbaird@humnet.ucla.edu) and Joseph Romero (joseph.romero@tamuc.edu). Project management and editorial support for *Res Diff* 2.1 was provided by Mitzvah Villeda.

Since 2020, the *Res Difficiles* conference series has been a venue for addressing inequities within the field of Classics, examining issues arising out of intersectional vectors of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, class, socio-economic status and beyond. An outgrowth of this conference series*, Res Difficiles, The Journal*—an imprint of *Ancient History Bulletin*, a Green Open Access Journal—invites submissions from individuals, pairs, or groups, addressing "difficult things" within the discipline of Classics and related fields. *Res Difficiles, The Journal* seeks to publish the "traditional" argumentative forms of inquiry standard to the discipline, but also reflections upon pedagogical concerns as well as contributions of a creative, personal, or experimental nature, including interviews. In addition to individual submissions, we welcome pitches for guest-edited special issues.

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Please direct submissions to Hannah Čulík-Baird: culikbaird@humnet.ucla.edu.

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The Matter of Form: Rewriting Our Way to a Changed Field
Maia Kotrosits

Abstract: This essay argues that the conventional and doctrinal forms in which we do our writing and thinking—because of their indebtedness to racializing, pathologizing, and colonial regimes—put limits on our ability to enact change, resistance, and abolition in our work. It suggests that we find our way to experiments in form, and thus to new possibilities for thought and relation, through mundane interruptions in our abilities to reproduce such forms, as well as through other departures from the over-performed and idealized hyper-rationalism of academic work.

Keywords: academic writing, black studies, colonialism, crip theory, disability studies.

Introduction[1]

"The sonnet, like poverty, teaches you what you can do/without," writes Diane Seuss, in the first line of one of her poems from her Pulitzer Prize winning book, *frank: sonnets*. Seuss writes ambivalently here of what we call, just as ambivalently, the enabling constraint of form: the discipline of restriction that teaches you to *make something* with what is there. Seuss may be ambivalent, but she is not romantic about the enabling constraint of form, since she pairs it with poverty: her own literal poverty is some of the content that fills out the form of this memoir-in-sonnets.

In this book, Seuss coaxes both memoir and sonnet, as forms, past their more recognizable selves toward almost perilous new depths as she writes with unvarnished candor about her son's addiction, about the deaths of loved ones, and the idiosyncratic landscape of rural Michigan with its trailer parks and cattails. Her sonnets all have fourteen lines but aren't written in iambic pentameter. They don't end in rhymed couplets. Sometimes they contain a volta, or little twist in thought, but not at the appointed place of Shakespearean or Italian sonnets. Seuss strips down the sonnet to see what it can do—but "what the sonnet can do" is always weighed down a little bit by the encumbrances of "doing without."

I have often thought about academic forms—articles, monographs, book reviews—as constraints, and I have often thought about those constraints as enabling. Indeed, my own story of becoming an academic is tied to this ambivalent need to *structure* my experience of the world, experience which was at the time both visceral and protean: an unstable substance. I needed more language, quickly. I needed containers, badly. And I got them. But right now, what I mean by academic form is something bigger than genre, although inclusive of it. I mean "form of thought," such as rationalist discourse: reasoned, dispassionate, evidentiary argumentation. I mean the norms of citation which can do iterative storytelling

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[1] This paper was first presented at *Res Difficiles* 5 on March 22, 2024. My gratitude to those in conversation there, to my two incredibly gracious and thoughtful anonymous reviewers and, especially, to Michal Beth Dinkler.

and policing of intellectual history.[2] I mean the prestige economy of knowledge production—the way epistemological weight accrues to prestige presses, publications, and institutions—and all that it foundationalizes.

When I say I want to reflect on the constraints of academic form, when I say I want to ask *what* exactly they enable, I mean I want to ask what they enable *at what cost.* What is, shall we say, their poverty? What's more, I want to play with the terminology of formal constraint as enablement in writing and turn it around, to reverse the terms, and suggest *dis*ablement (expansively defined) as having the potential to bend, loosen, or even shatter formal constraints in academic writing. Formal constraints that are, in actuality, *relational* constraints. In fact, now the term "constraints" even seems too light: inasmuch as forms formalize relationships—relationships to others, to time, to that which we study, to the world—forms are social "architecture."[3] Formal constraints are constraints of thought and possibility.

In what follows, I attempt to glimpse the stakes of this question of academic form through my own extended, ongoing experience of struggle and break with academic form. The struggle with form is reflected in part in the form of the piece itself, which has many of the markers of a traditional academic journal article, while also veering into the personal, the impressionistic, and the experiential. I also contextualize our habitual reproduction of normative and doctrinal forms of thought both within late capitalism, and within racial-colonial-pathologizing regimes. My best hope is that this begins a longer conversation about how we might collectively work to depart from doctrinal and normative academic forms of thought. I want us to ask what kinds of knowing, what kinds of relations, are being rehearsed, and what kinds are being precluded, in our habitual taking up of the usual academic forms. Indeed, what will we do if the usual academic forms of thought actually contravene desires for change, resistance, and abolition? Thus, I also want to provoke us to collectively experiment with testing the limits of doctrinal academic forms, to see where else, how else, knowledge about the past might emerge.

Beyond Content

We implicitly think of justice in academic criticism and history in terms of "content". We fill traditional academic forms with better, more just ideas—more just and more accurate pictures of history, for instance. We interrogate power relations in our stories about the past. We choose our sources thoughtfully. We think more critically about whose work we read, who we cite, and why. We call that work ethical, and of course, it is.

At the same time and related to this understanding of our work as *content*, we are working in the middle of a vast content machinery driven by ubiquitous corporatization.[4] It is the constant demand for scholarly and pedagogical materials, driven by various academic benchmarks and evaluations, that serve student-as-consumers and maintains competitiveness in a historically brutal job market. It is social media culture with its constantly moving feeds, its character limits, and bite-sized, instantly legible takes. This is

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[2] Rather than say, as Katherine McKittrick offers, knowledge-sharing, or a story of our own unknowing. See McKittrick 2020: 14-34. On how citation and footnoting has reproduced exclusionary stories of feminist intellectual history, see Hemmings 2011: Ch. five.

[3] This formulation specifically belongs to Michal Beth Dinkler and her forthcoming book.

[4] Newfield 2009, Ward 2012.

machinery indulging in the constant lure and "suicidal cycle" of the "new" that is really variations of the same;[5] machinery that enlists intellectual work that is reproducible or extractable—a theory or skill that can be "applied," or information that can be used or be useful.[6] Creativity that is "digestible," recuperable, evaluable. Machinery that enlists our students, their attentions and their labors, into this cycle of content production and assessment.[7] Machinery that polices the limit and demands work that you can take in quickly and assess easily, using ready-at-hand rubrics—whether in the classroom or the review process. The pace of this content machine is fast. Its demands are terse, its patience short. There is very little time in the content machine.

I am not suggesting the content of our work is incidental. Nor am I suggesting that form and content can be divorced from one another. Rather I'm trying to describe a commodifying logic that produces thought as fungible; a commodity that we own or consume, that can be branded and marketed on the internet, to sell ourselves to institutions, etc. In this logic, we become a product, we become a spokesperson for a theory or an idea. Thought becomes substance, currency, social or cultural capital—citable, quotable, usable—rather than thought as possibility, or relation.[8]

We get worn down, understandably, from questioning the form or sponsoring venue of our expressions in the face of the demand to simply produce more content, better content—even, in some cases, more ethical content. But this wearing down is dangerous. It is dangerous because it is exactly in the isolation of content from form or venue, without scrutiny about the kinds of *relationships* produced and reproduced in those forms and venues, that the ethics of any "content" we might produce meet their limit. It mimics the logic of diversity without justice, for instance, in which the identities of the participants in the institutions and structures might become various, but the institutions and structures themselves remain strategically intractable.

The question of academic form is, at least in part, a question of how to get outside of the commodification of thought, toward a fuller embrace of thought as an unfolding and destabilizing process, as stretching toward a different experiencing of the world, and a different set of relations. These questions became most poignant to me under several corroborating and interlinked conditions, in which I was forced to encounter the limits of the forms, both in terms of genre and in terms of cognition, perception, and assessment, that academic work demands. I offer this set of experiences not as some expression of true knowledge, or even a definitive realization, but as an extended and intense moment of difficulty that is epistemologically rich.

These are the circumstances:

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[5] "The imperial movement of progress is pursued on the one hand as if along a single, straight line of advance, while on the other, it operates in a suicidal cycle where the new can hardly survive the constant and renewable threat of being declared unfit by the newest. The new is an imperial incentive." Azoulay 2019: 32.

[6] This treatment of academic thought as "content" also appears in the way that we value, and tend toward the production of, extractable "information." Approaching scholarship with the question, "What can I use here?" Extraction, the practice of scooping usable bits and the transplantation of concepts with more interest in their currency than their context, is a deeply colonial reading and writing practice, as Eve Tuck and Max Liboiron have argued. See Liboiron 2021: 35.

[7] See Harney and Moten 2013, which differentiates the university as a space of evaluation/accreditation versus as a site of fugitive study.

[8] Again, on good relations in academic writing, see Liboiron 2021: 35.

1) The pandemic and its irrevocable revelation of the violence of the normal, as poet Dionne Brand has named it.[9]

2) My own long period of poor health, some related to long COVID after March 2020, including chronic, almost daily migraines for several years, and the chronic pain of one of my closest friends, also an academic, as we tried (and sometimes failed) to navigate our reading and writing in ways that had integrity for us and met the demands of our careers.

3) The conditions of teaching in a university setting in which students found themselves profoundly exhausted by, struggling against, and captive to the commodification/contentification of education from all angles. They were not only captive to the corporate educational paradigm of acquiring packageable, marketable "skills," but they were captive to it by their very own commodified and consumerist presence in the higher education landscape, as "choosers and buyers." AI plagiarism is a clear symptom of these conditions since AI allows students to enact explicitly their condition of commodified anonymity, with the production of blank and fungible content.

These were entangled conditions of *disability, impairment, and debilitation.* My colleague and I were unable, for several reasons, to produce our usual scholarly content: I with my brain fog and migraines, she with her chronic pain and exhaustion. So too my students were debilitated. Under the ongoing conditions of forced carrying on of business as usual, even while the circumstances of the world and their understandings of it (not to mention the intimate details of their own lives), they were radically revising themselves. My students had generally lost their ability to do the kinds of reading they had always done; in the ways they had always done it. Most of them had trouble concentrating—they could not retain information in quite the same way, were themselves full of anxiety, and couldn't read long texts. This was especially true of the first year or so of the pandemic, but the compulsion to continue despite any extremity is a dynamic that obviously precedes and exceeds that time.

I evoke *debilitation* in this broadened way not to undercut or erase those conditions that we have conventionally housed under "disability." Rather I do so to change the frame away from identity-based analytics that have historically dominated disability studies as an institutionalized discipline.[10] Jasbir Puar, for instance, uses the term debilitation to denote "the slow wearing down of populations instead of the event of becoming disabled."[11] Puar also uses debility in order to name conditions and effects that don't "qualify" under the very racialized recognition politics of disability-as-identity. For Puar, "disability" signals an exceptional condition of a subject, one seeking accommodation and inclusion. Meanwhile, debility signals a set of social, cultural, and political conditions whose "normal consequences" are the unexceptional attrition and injury of psyches and bodies.[12] The carceral state, late capitalist labor exploitation and exhaustion, militarization, and

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[9] Brand 2020.

[10] "Crip theory" signals this move from disability-as-identity to the critique of systemic and structural normativity, a move made with and through queer theoretical paradigms. See especially McRuer 2006, Clare 1999. So too "mad studies" (addressed further on) takes not only a de-pathologizing approach but produces institutional critique. Both subfields seek not accommodation and inclusion but changed epistemologies and altered social arrangements. See also for example Crosby and Jakobsen 2020.

[11] Puar 2017: xiv.

[12] Puar 2017: xiv. Puar is following the work of Christina Crosby and Julie Livingston.

environmental poisoning are among her most poignant examples.[13] Debility, precisely because it is so quotidian, classed, and racialized, never reaches the echelons of state or social recognition—in part because it is constitutive of biopolitical state regimes.[14]

So too Jonathan Sterne, in his "political phenomenology of impairment," has taken up the term impairment to critique the disabled/non-disabled binary. This binary inadvertently naturalizes institutional diagnoses, as well as the social constructions of a "whole" body that can "become" disabled. Through a detailed and personal account of his experience of voice after vocal cord surgery, Sterne works to de-exceptionalize such bodily changes and holds impairment to be something all of us experience at one point or another, to different extents—it is a "quality of experience."[15] "Impairment works in a shady place between function and non-function," he writes. That is, for Sterne, impairment is not only negative, it is not only about failure or brokenness, it is "rich with texture and potential meaning."[16]

I employ debility, debilitation, and impairment to think more expansively than "disability," to draw our gaze toward the conditions that are endlessly enervating populations, exhausting them, damaging, and impeding them. I hope to draw attention to those limits in mind-body experience that we regularly encounter, to different extents and in different ways, as a condition of living.[17] But in asking about debility, impairment, disability, and *form*, the proposition is not negative. The proposition is not how conditions of disability, debility, and impairment inhibit. Thus, I am not asking how to recuperate debility and re-enter the process of production and contentification because, in actuality, it is the very process of contentification of thought that is inhibitive, and prohibitive. Rather, the formulation here is how impairment and debilitation can interrupt, and how they enable other possibilities for thinking. When we are incapacitated from the consumption and production of content, we have to think, respond, and relate in other ways.

The story of figuring out how to respond, in terms of making and breaking forms, to my students' debilitation is not one story, but many. My own is a bit easier to narrate: Over this strange, extended time of brain fog, anxiety, and chronic migraines, I felt like I lived in a cave. My pre-migraine state was a sense of encroaching doom, a tornado in the distance. The brain fog was a wall. Cognitive clarity was, shall we say, not in the cards. Time stretched and collapsed. Fully captive to it all, but needing to metabolize my experience, and still (as

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[13] "Further to this project of unmooring disability from its hegemonic referent, critical ethnic studies, indigenous studies, and postcolonial studies have long been elaborating the debilitating effect of racism, colonialism, and exploitative industrial growth, and environmental toxicities. Yet these literatures, because they may not engage the identity rubric of the subject position of the disabled person, are not often read as scholarship on disability." Puar 2017*:* xx.

[14] "I mobilize the term 'debility" as a needed disruption (but also expose it as a collaborator) of the category of disability and as a triangulation of the ability/disability binary, noting that while some bodies may not be recognized as or identify as disabled, they may well be debilitated, in part by being foreclosed access to legibility and resources as disabled." Puar 2017: xv.

[15] Sterne 2022: 32. One of the challenges of his phenomenology is "how to account for an experience of self that is unstable and ultimately not fully available" (13), which while is emblematic of and concentrated in experiences of pain and extreme exhaustion, is also true of selves at large.

[16] Sterne 2022: 32.

[17] Disability studies and, less so, Crip theory have emerged formally in the overlapping fields of Classics, Biblical Studies, Jewish Studies, and Late Antiquity Studies (all fields with which I'm in conversation). The interests have largely been historicizing, with significant attention to cultural norms, although concerns for method have also emerged. For a few examples across these fields, see Moss and Schipper 2011, Belser 2017, Laes 2017, Solevag 2018, Silverbank and Ward 2020.

always) preoccupied with the past and its literature, I found myself starting to write from this state of mind, one in which the long past and the present were blurred. And so often the language that came to me to express this experience of time was fragmentary and oblique. Its closest form was lines of poetry. I had majored in creative writing in undergrad and was a poetry writer back then (twenty years before), but generally not since.

Over a longer period of 2-3 years, until my migraines became more manageable, I found myself doing writing along two streams: first, some of the more familiar forms of academic writing, and second, a growing collection of these little pieces of writing—poems, micro-essays, and descriptive vignettes that were hard to classify, but felt associatively close to one another. All of the work was invested in roughly the same themes—late ancient Christianity, imperialism, colonialism, hagiography, and so on—but the relationship between the more traditional work I did and the more "experimental" work was tense, mainly because it felt like it was being written by two different people. The formal work was written by someone whose memory and cognition were generally sharp, largely because I could only do that work when I was not in the tunnel of pain. That writer was someone who could schematize, organize. Her segues were clear, her vocabulary professional. The other work was written by someone in a dream-like haze—someone in proximity, always, to pain—who wrote by association and metaphor, and whose associations were sordid but sometimes electric. She was immersed: both more deeply in the present and more deeply in the past. Her writing was economical, condensed out of necessity because she had no energy for long description. She was less coded, more direct. Whatever the writing was, it was not dry.

It felt necessary at some point to give the writer in pain her due, not least because she dominated my experience for a few years. It felt necessary to find a way to understand that the work I was doing was legitimate because it occurred to me how easy it is to write off the work I did in pain, since it was associative, immersive, unpredictable writing. That work is generally classed as not historical, but rather as "interpretive" work, or something like "reception."[18] In other words, a *contrast* to history, even if (as in this instance) done by the same person with the same expertise—even over the same period of time.

The reason such work gets written off is because of the over-identification of professionalized history and critique with rationalism and rationalist discursive modes, which are characterized by a performed analytical distance: apparent even-handedness, categorical distinctions, and taxonomic, genealogical, evaluative thinking. It is also because of the neurotypicality of the academic world, and the world at large, which authorizes and foundationalizes certain cognitive modalities, certain modes of perception, to the exclusion of others. Then we must ask: what is at stake in these dominant cognitive and perceptive modalities?

The Making and Unmaking of the Rational Mind

More critical attention has been given in recent years to the ways modes of perception and cognition are colonial and raced. La Marr Jurelle Bruce's book *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity*, explores the whiteness/anti-blackness of

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[18] The division between "historical" and "interpretive" itself is a heavily policed and politicized divide, one that is racialized and gendered, among other things, with "interpretive" work usually signaling work in which one's subjectivity is not invisible (and of course that disappeared subjectivity is only available to those occupying normative/dominant categories).

rationalism, for instance, writing about what he calls "black madness"—in other words, forms of creativity and expression that are pathologized or foreclosed by the world, understood as "angry," "subrational," or "crazy."[19] So too, Erin Manning has shown how neurotypicality is no less racialized than rationalism. In her book *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*, she takes on the ways whiteness articulates itself in proximity to or as neurotypicality, for instance in its "obsession with individualist independence."[20] Neurotypicality, for Manning, can be understood best through some of its most prized processes and routines, those seen to be "lacking" in those who are neurodivergent. But therein lies the problem, as Manning writes elsewhere, "Neurotypicality is an unspoken but commonly practiced wager that frames knowledge in advance of any question of where else knowing is at work."[21]

Both Manning and Bruce argue for the creativity and perceptive intelligence of those working or cast outside of the norms of rationalism and neurotypicality. But importantly, neurotypicality and rationalism are *operations*. And rationalism, perhaps especially, benefits from a fundamental deception about its own operation: as Donovan Schaefer has shown, "rationalism" has always represented a tense relationship between a performance of distanced neutrality and an obvious recourse to the ways knowing is experienced as felt.[22] But neither rationalism nor neurotypicality, though, are necessary operations we are bound to or even capable of upholding, whether we are classed within normative categories or not.

Because of its resonance with my own experience, for now, I want to focus most on a 2014 article called "Brain Fog: The Race for Cripistemology," in which Mel Chen relates experiences that they describe, with strategic vagueness, as "brain fog." This is a term much more familiar to us post-2020, and because of the ubiquity of impaired cognition after the large-scale debilitation of the pandemic, Chen's piece becomes all the more relevant. In Chen's experience, brain fog includes the haze around migraines, around smoking weed, and around a certain inability to read or think as a kid, which they describe as "feeling stupid." One of the points Chen makes is how completely such states of cognitive density transgress the demands of academic work and their "cognitive tool set: taxonomies, namings, retrievals."[23] "Ultimately," Chen writes, "the academic institutions we inhabit are at this

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[19] Black madness is, according to Bruce (2021: 6-8): "unruliness of mind," "medicalized madness"/psychopathologies, rage, "psychosocial madness...radical deviation from the normal within a given psychosocial milieu."

[20] Manning 2020: 9.

[21] Manning 2024.

[22] Schaefer 2022: 226-227.

[23] Chen 2014: 184. "Cognitive or intellectual disability—and its broader matrix of cognitive variation—represents the near unthinkable for academia (which then, in the light of the connections I have been making, says something about academia's continuing struggles with whiteness). What are we to do with the brain fog that has become our troublemaking buddy in this context, more prevalent than we were told to believe? What if we cannot cancel it, for those of us who arrive here on more secure cognitive ground? Or those of us who have experienced cognitive change with various shifts due to age, illness, injury, or other bodily transitions? What about the cognitive imposters who have always thought 'I don't think' while somehow getting through? And there could also be the fact that cognitive imposters *are* us, in that we have all trained in an unfamiliar specialty of cognitive style that we have paid, not necessarily life and limb, but certainly money, passion, and labor for. Finally, what about those deemed cognitively deficient their entire lives, about whom definitions, sometimes insidiously, vary; and about those trapped by the strange trades between cognitive disability and race? Where and how do all these differences fit into this picture of academia, of cripistemology?" (177).

moment adept at producing what I would call disciplined cognators. What happens to us in that process?"[24]

While Chen is clear about the racializing equivalencies of cognitive states, one of the larger points they make is that these experiences of brain fog, or cognition-blurring, offer an interesting conceptual standpoint from which to work, not least because *no one* is cognitively "clear" all of the time. In other words, in addition to questioning the kind of cognitive subjects we are being compelled to habitually become, if also failing to be, these cognitive blurs have constructive epistemological possibilities, too.

For me, the epistemological possibilities of brain fog (and sometimes literally fevered un-reason) included being suspended from linear, sequential time: the kind of time that modern historical work implies and demands. Linear, sequential, universalizing time, as many have pointed out, is also *colonial time.*[25] So, with fog and fever, I was actually relieved of that reality construction. Related to this suspension from linear time, I could not disentangle the Christian imperialism I was living and the Christian imperialism I was studying—not because I was tracing lineages or analyzing ideological structures. Not mostly, anyway. Rather, I was experiencing it all in a surreal fashion: late ancient history appeared unpredictably in the quirky, intimate details of my daily life and the social structures before me, playing out with immediacy and in real time—fragmentarily, as if under a shell I picked up at the beach. I found this gripping, even as I found it hard to explain using my usual scholarly apparatus. I did end up shaping it into a kind of whole, a manuscript of sorts, and probably an unusual one by academic standards. But I offer this rendition of my experience not to present myself as a shining example, since my experiments with form before, during, and after that manuscript are piecemeal, ongoing, and unresolved, as one might expect. My experience then is only suggestive.

The reason I situate my experience with this work in cultural studies, though, is so that we might attune ourselves to the ways our cognitive operations and perceptive habits, the very fundamental ways we do our thinking business, are heavy with exclusions. Thus, their interruptions become meaningful. I also want to attune us to the ways apparently "non-ideal" cognitive and/or ostensibly pathological states can be understood as epistemologically rich *because* they are epistemologically difficult. These states-of-mind, or habits-of-perception, offer an escape hatch, if a temporary or fragile one, from the contentification and commodification of thought, with their ability to gum up or slow down, even briefly, the content machines. What's more, their difficulty might very well return us to lively, processual forms of thinking *because* they don't necessarily produce easily harvested information or endlessly replicable methods.[26] In fact, these non-ideal states and otherwise habits of perception need to be valued precisely *for their difficulty*, for their "uselessness" (to borrow from Manning's title).

In other words, to be attuned to these racial, colonial, and pathologizing dynamics of the modalities in which we do our thinking is to feel unsettled by and within the regular forms

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[24] Chen 2014: 178.

[25] Some key texts for me that address colonialism as and through the organization of time, see Chakrabarty 2000, Rifkin 2017, Mize 2024, and already referenced here Puar 2017 and Azoulay 2019. In the field of late antiquity studies, most recently, see Maldonado Rivera 2022.

[26] "1. Write to life. 2. Write to activate the force of the unthought. 3. Write to field the conditions of other ways of living. 4. Write to encounter the quality of existence that exceeds you. 5. Care for how writing makes a world." Erin Manning 2024.

of academic writing. Given the force of these forms, because of the impoverishing work they do, it is incumbent upon us to examine what, exactly, we can 'do/without'—by bending them, letting them bleed at the edges, and seeing where they break. So, I'm not suggesting we abandon traditional academic forms as much as put pressure on them—taking them less seriously—while also urgently seeking and inventing forms of historical and critical work that hold more of the complexity of life. This complexity includes, not *only*, but inevitably, a mix of cognitive conditions and emotional states, forms of perception, and relationships to debility, disability, and impairment.

Breaking Form: An Inconclusion

"Megetia at the Shrine of St. Stephen"

For Jean Kotrosits

"While she prayed at the place of the holy relic shrine, she beat against it, not only with the longings of her heart, but with her whole body so that the little grille in front of the relic opened at impact; and she, taking the Kingdom of Heaven by storm, pushed her head inside and laid it on the holy relic resting there, drenching them with her tears."[27]

I come to you with the desperation of a woman with a broken
jaw, to a saint's femur, bone to bone, across the graveyard
with red electronic candles and plastic flowers, to the center
where you are, only two blocks from your Levittown house, sky blue
siding, yard with no trees, I can see it from here, to try to touch you or touch
the past which has you in it, by touching the soil that contains you. I come to you
little cage to little cage, tired of living, the beige carpet and defunct
railroad tracks of it, the moldy berry and blown-out sparkler of it, its saltwater taste, less poignant
than tears. I come to ask: How did you do it, sing *Que Sera Sera* and Christmas songs, your last
language, until the day that you died? Please tell me what pulled you back
from the gravel and flat, the coal dust and grease of your childhood. And please—
what did it pull you toward? Clasp my legs between your legs again, as if I'm small,
in your bed surrounded by chairs in case I fell out. Please remind me what is precious, what
can hold me, other than you, as I press my face against this grate, my mouth full of ash.

The poem above arrived from a moment of dream-like historical collapse, entertained through a blurred association of myself with Megetia, a late ancient woman who (according to Evodius) goes with a dislocated jaw to the site of the sacred relic of St. Stephen, longing for relief. This little slip of a story I first encountered in Peter Brown's *The Cult of the Saints*, and Brown uses it to attest to the newfound vibrant power of holy bones in Christian late antiquity. The episode reverberated in, melded with, a moment of visiting my grandmother's grave, when I felt the urge, suddenly and desperately, to touch something about her. In physical pain and weighed down by the profound deadness of the extended socio-political moment I was (am) occupying, touching my grandmother meant locating a vitality and connection I couldn't otherwise, at the time, access. This experience taught me to think about relic veneration outside of rational semiotic categories: the ostensible rational ironies

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[27] Evodius, The Miracle of Saint Stephen, 2.6. Translation, Peter Brown 1981: 88.

and particularizing Christian ideology of relic veneration (the aliveness of bones or inanimate objects associated with the dead, the elevation of special dead to divine status, etc.) evaporated into a kind of understanding that held something less decisive and more cohesive, more intuitive—and, simply, *more.* All forms constrain, of course, but the sense- and image-driven expansive, and less-resolved nature of poetry (for example) not only makes room for non-rational understanding and processes but also obstructs the information-harvesting impulses of academic readers, in favor of something like a carrying through toward understanding, an ephemeral experience that is not easily substantized.

Form is, again, not only the shape of our habits of thinking but the form our relations take. It makes sense that we would struggle with form; that traditional academic forms feel both hard to live in and hard to leave. Their hold on us is firm, but not intractable—as work like Manning and Moten and Chen shows. There is a live possibility in playing out and playing with the struggle, in breaking form, in frustrating or interrupting traditional forms, and in experimenting with others. I would even say there will be no real foundational changes in our disciplinary epistemologies without a larger address to and proliferation of forms. Not simply a diversity of style, not more variegated content to satisfy various content appetites; but a proliferation of difficult, unfinished experiments in thinking-through and thinking-with. Experiments that move with the frictive force of life as it is lived, including in its manifold departures from the reasoned, categorical, lucid, and executive mind.

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Reconsidering the Fictionality of Enslavement to Deities
in the Hellenistic and Roman East
Chance Bonar

Abstract: In this article, I offer a critique of a common trend in classical and religious studies scholarship: the treatment of human enslavement to deities as fictional, metaphorical, or otherwise unreal. In conversation with postcolonial and feminist historiographical and philosophical interventions, I explore what assumptions operate in metaphorizing or fictionalizing ancient Mediterranean deities and their role in socioeconomic affairs, including slavery. After providing an overview of how historians and philosophers have challenged some Western historiographical norms that govern the treatment of deities as unreal, I examine inscriptions from three sites (Delphi, Leukopetra, and the Bosporan Kingdom) and how the sale, dedication, and enslavement of humans to deities occurs. I end by analyzing how scholars have often continued to treat such inscriptions, noting how there tends to be a common reading of enslavement to a deity as fictional or a religious smokescreen.

Keywords: ancient Mediterranean religion, epigraphy, manumission, metaphor, slavery.

In this article, I offer a critique from the perspective of a specialist in ancient Mediterranean religions of a common trend in classical and religious studies scholarship over the last century: namely, the treatment of human enslavement to deities as something fictional, metaphorical, or otherwise unreal. Recent scholarship in my primary discipline of early Christian studies, along with postcolonial and feminist historiographical and philosophical interventions, have interrogated several assumptions often at play in the metaphorization and fictionalization of the gods. Such interventions might lead to a reconsideration of how deities participate in ancient Mediterranean socioeconomic affairs, including enslavement, and allow more robust space for non-human actors in our historical reconstructions of the ancient world.

I break down my argument into three sections. The first provides an overview of how various historians and philosophers have challenged some Western historiographical norms that govern the treatment of deities as unreal and urge for more robust frameworks for discussing the gods. The second examines three sites dating between the second century BCE and second century CE—Delphi, Leukopetra in Macedonia, and the Bosporan Kingdom—to explore how the sale, dedication, and enslavement of humans to deities like Apollo, the Autochthonous Mother of the Gods, and the Judaean God may not be as emancipatory as often presumed. I end with a survey of how scholars have treated inscriptions from these sites, focusing on the commonality of reading enslavement to a deity as fictional and/or a religious smokescreen.

Before going further, I have three points of clarification to offer. First, my goal here is not to claim that all language of enslavement to deities in antiquity is meant to be taken as literal rather than metaphorical or fictional, since it is certainly the case that slavery was a widespread analogy used by ancient (and often free) writers to describe their experiences.

As Katherine Shaner has recently argued, the embodied experiences of ancient Mediterranean enslaved persons (such as containment and oversight, systemic scarcity, absorption of risk, exposure to torture and death) do not match the free positionality of some "slaves of god(s)" like the apostle Paul, whose self-designation as an enslaved person of Christ "does not obligate one to perform enslaved labour to the god."[1] In cases like that of Paul, he was not exposed to the same degree or type of experiences of enslaved persons and yet claimed the status of δοῦλος for himself.[2]

Second, as a religionist, I am invested in interrogating how ancient historians (whether classicists or biblical scholars) have often adopted as self-evident a problematic divide between the sacred and the secular. In doing so, gods are often left out of historical and legal analyses because they are deemed incapable of participating in historical and socioeconomic events, or are explained away as a religious smokescreen for the "real" sociohistorical reasons that humans took particular actions. A range of theoretical literature in religious studies has challenged such a treatment of non-human actors and post-Enlightenment historiographical norms, providing a foundation for analyses of ancient Mediterranean deities as full-fledged actors in their world.[3]

Third, regarding my use and critique of *fiction/fictitious* and *fake*, I am not claiming that slavery to the gods did not exist. Rather, I am taking issue with how some scholars argue that sales and consecrations to the gods that are done in the service of manumission tend to downplay or erase deities as historical and economic actors through language of fictionality. Manumission—if it legally occurs at all as it is attested in some eastern Mediterranean inscriptions—often involves enslavement to a deity that needs to be accounted for in our analyses of these legal, social, and ritual practices. Doing so will not only clarify the range of human and non-human actors involved in the transaction and exploitation of enslaved persons, but will help us clarify when, how, and to what degree deities in the eastern Mediterranean were understood to exercise their legal and social rights over humans.

There are certainly clear-cut cases of humans being enslaved to deities, such that enslaved persons were required to perform labor on behalf of gods and were susceptible to oversight and bodily harm. Shaner (2024, 115) points us, for example, to enslaved persons at Didyma responsible in large part for the construction of a temple to Apollo described as "enslaved persons [lit., bodies] of the god" (σώματα τοῦ θεοῦ) or "enslaved persons [lit. children] of the god" (παῖδες τοῦ θεοῦ), who were inventoried as part of the "building materials needed to build a colossal temple complex."[4] More ambiguous cases, however, have historically led some scholars to presume that enslaved persons cannot truly be enslaved to a god. My hope here is to advocate for scholars and students of classical and religious studies to more deeply consider the possibility that ancient Mediterranean religious-historical actors understood humans to be enslaveable by deities.

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[1] Shaner 2024, 110–17, quote on 117. See a similar critique of Paul in Parker 2018.

[2] However, it is argued elsewhere (Bonar forthcoming) that other early Christian writers expand upon Paul's notion of an "enslaved person of God" such that the effects of enslavement (e.g., coerced labor, bodily possession and constriction, absorption of risk, torture and death) become possible and more likely.

[3] Asad 1993, 2003; Orsi 2016; Eire 2023; Keddie 2024, esp. 16–21.

[4] *SEG* 26, 1235 ll. 9–30, discussed further in Günther 1969–1970. On the term παῖς as referring to enslaved persons and its semantic range, see Golden 1985.

I. Gods as Historical Actors: Some Theoretical Advances

Over the last few decades, historians of religion have reexamined how historians write about religious phenomena and historical events. How much should we scholars *describe* events and ideas through the perspective of religious practitioners, and how much should we *explain* events and ideas in terms not available to religious practitioners?[5] Should we describe enslavement to deities in antiquity as something that religious practitioners experienced and wrote about, or should we explain it as a product of a religious imagination?

Many scholars turn to the language of metaphor, particularly Conceptual Metaphor Theory, in order to conceptualize how early Christian writers talked about enslavement. Such work often builds upon the groundbreaking scholarship of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), which sought recognition of the embeddedness of metaphors in material and social phenomena. For example, Marianne Bjelland Kartzow (2018, 21–46) argues that being enslaved to God pulls from two source domains—devotion to the Judaean God and Greco-Roman practices of slavery—in order to produce the target metaphor of "God's ensbslaved person." Others, like Sam Tsang (2005, 11–15), engage with Chaim Perelman and Lucia Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric* (1971) to argue that metaphors of enslavement stem from a *theme* that the author wants to convey and a *phoros* or picture that is used to convey the idea. In both cases, such scholarship begins with the presumption that enslavement to a deity is best understood as a metaphorical or analogical phenomenon—as an attempt to describe one's relationship to God by something that it is *not* (i.e., enslavement).

Other scholars working on various aspects of religious studies and historical methods, however, have offered ways to account for non-metaphorical approaches to deities as historical actors. Postcolonial historian Dipesh Chakrabarty argues in *Provincializing Europe* that European colonialism brought with it a particular brand of historical narrative that presumed various stages of historical progress, homogeneous historical time, and post-Enlightenment social-scientific thought (2008, 3–16). One particular strand of Western historiography that Chakrabarty takes aim at is the secularization of global history. He argues that instead of writing off deities as belonging to a less-developed stage of historical development, deities need to be reckoned with (2008, 16):

> The second assumption running through modern European political thought and the social sciences is that the human is ontologically singular, that gods and spirits are in the end "social facts," that the social somehow exists prior to them. I try, on the other hand, to think without the assumption of even a logical priority of the social. One empirically knows of no society in which humans have existed without gods and spirits accompanying them. Although the God of monotheism may have taken a few knocks—if not actually "died"— in the nineteenth-century European story of "the disenchantment of the world," the gods and other agents inhabiting practices of so-called "superstition" have never died anywhere. I take gods and spirits to be existentially coeval with the human, and think from the assumption that the question of being human involves the question of being with gods and spirits.[6]

Throughout his work, Chakrabarty does not treat deities as fictitious or as an aftereffect

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[5] Here, I borrow the language of description and explanation from Hollywood 2004, 517–19.

[6] On the non-priority of "the social," see Latour 2005, 1–17, 27–42.

of larger social realities (as would traditional European theorists of religion like Marx or Durkheim), but instead argues that historians with a postcolonial/decolonial proclivity ought to reenchant historiography and treat deities as existentially present, agentic entities. As he notes: "Historians will grant the supernatural a place in somebody's belief system or ritual practices, but to ascribe to it any real agency in historical events will be [to] go against the rules of evidence that gives historical discourse procedures for settling disputes about the past" (2008, 104).[7] Western historians working within a closed natural-historical loop struggle to account for divine actors or supernatural interference in historical events. In *History and Presence* (2016), Robert Orsi makes a similar point regarding how Western theories of religion often make gods invisible and unintelligible by making them nothing more than mislabeled experiences of "the social" and an obfuscation behind which "real" historical actors are at play. In doing so, historiographers safeguard human experience from the danger and anxiety of divine presence; however, "constraints on the scholar's imagination become, by means of his or her scholarship, constraints on the imaginations of others, specifically those whose lives the scholar aims to represent and understand" (2016, 64).[8]

Building upon Chakrabarty, feminist historian of religion Amy Hollywood has examined how the thirteenth-century Mechthild of Magdeburg can be understood in light of the limits of modern Western historiography (2004, 514–28).[9] Hollywood wrestles with how to reconcile: (1) Mechthild's self-conception as a "weak, changeable woman" whose receptivity to God depends on her passivity, and; (2) contemporary Western feminist advocacy for women's emancipation and empowerment. Mechthild's conceptions of freedom and authority here are understood to exist in a radically different space than Western liberal feminist conceptions of freedom and authority, such that Hollywood concludes (2004, 528):

> Perhaps only a suspension of disbelief—one that allows Mechthild's self-abjection in the face of the divine other to pierce feminist historiography's emancipatory presumptions—will enable us to glimpse this other freedom.

Such a suspension of disbelief—a temporary repose from our secularized historiographical paradigm—is deemed necessary for the historian to fully wrestle with Mechthild's accentuated abjection. Just as scholars of slavery in the Atlantic World have wrestled in depth with how enslaved persons act in ways beyond liberal models of freedom and agency, Hollywood urges us to consider how subjection to a deity may offer modes of agentic action not legible to modern liberal paradigms.[10]

Other theoretical avenues like Actor-Network Theory and new materialisms have also opened the door for reconceptualizing the place of deities in historical accounts and networks of actants. Bruno Latour, for example, urges us not to begin with a predetermined list of actors (1988, 9):

> We do not have to decide for ourselves what makes up our world, who are the agents 'really' acting in it, or what is the quality of the proofs they impose

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[7] More broadly, see 72–89, 103–4. In particular, Chakrabarty in analyzing Ranajit Guha's work on the 1855 rebellion of the Santals and how Guha resists allowing for divine interference in this historical account. Chakrabarty points to Rudolf Bultmann as an example of how even biblical studies traditionally functions under the belief that deities cannot interact with the world or disrupt a historical continuum.

[8] See also Eire 2023.

[9] See also Keller 2002, esp. 54–72.

[10] See Hartman 1997; Johnson 2003; Fuentes 2016. Relatedly regarding religious women and agency that challenges the preconceptions of liberal paradigms, see Mahmood 2011.

upon one another.[11]

Just as Latour offers this as a corrective to those who view Louis Pasteur as the "Great Man" who discovered the principles of vaccination, by instead highlighting the various other agents, networks, and events that made such an action possible, we might avoid treating deities as "Great Men" that stand outside of history or that are not embedded in networks of texts, objects, and people that act. [12] Within this Actor-Network Theory model, the components of a network cannot be divided hierarchically into *actors* and *those acted upon*, since any entity that does something or is part of a web of "doing" is inevitably an actor. When a network is flattened such that all "doers" are treated in terms of how they interact with one another and impact one another, deities can be viewed as one among many within a social site, whose presence—whose legally-binding contracts, whose threats of bodily harm, whose promise of reward—inevitably changes how other entities go about their own "doing" in the world. In short: deities act because their social presence impacts the actions of other actants.

Such reflections on writing about historical figures and their deities have begun to emerge in the study of religions of the ancient Mediterranean. For example, Stanley Stowers's model of "the religion of everyday social exchange" traces how humans interact with "non-evident beings" in non-systematic, practical ways in order to get by daily.[13] Through his distinction of a religion of everyday social exchange from the religious concerns of "literate cultural producers," Stowers argues that many ancient Mediterranean religious practitioners had no problem conceptualizing gods as beings active in human social life and historical events (2011, 37):

> Four characteristics of conceiving gods and similar beings in this mode of religiosity stand out: People interact with them as if they were persons; they are local in ways that are significant for humans; one maintains a relationship to them with practices of generalized reciprocity; and humans have a particular epistemological stance toward them.[14]

Stowers's work urges historians of the ancient Mediterranean to recognize that "this global move of claiming that these beliefs are essentially symbolic and metaphorical is precisely a move that belongs to the second kind of religiosity of the literate specialist and to modernist thought" (2011, 38). Recent scholarship often sides with Stowers's portrayal of ancient Mediterranean literate cultural producers in how scholars treat enslavement to deities as symbolic, rather than as a relationship and set of obligatory practices understood to be just as "real" as the gods themselves.

Early Christian studies in particular have taken note of non-metaphorical gods in recent years. In her work on Paul's letter to the Philippians, Jennifer Quigley coined "theo-economics" to describe how "people took seriously the possibility of entering into financial

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[11] For a challenge to Latour and a defense of the uniqueness of human agency, see Schatzki 2002, 190–233, esp. 197–200.

[12] A helpful model to do so in terms of paying attention to "micropractices" and their linkages has been proposed by Keddie 2024.

[13] For a helpful summary of this model, see Stowers 2019, 301–25, esp. 301–6.

[14] Stowers goes on to clarify this "epistemological stance" as one of uncertainty about how deities will act based on their moods (39).

relationships with the divine" in the ancient Mediterranean (2021, 16).[15] She especially builds upon Latour's Actor-Network Theory and Jane Bennett's concept of vibrant materiality, which calls for more fervently dealing with the non-human and the "complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies" (2010, 4) and opens a door for treating deities as non-human bodies that cannot be merely collapsed into metaphor. Likewise, Chris De Wet's examination of the late ancient Christian language of enslavement has led to his coinage of *doulology*. Building upon Michel Foucault's treatment of discursive structures, De Wet defines doulology as (2018, 8):

> that enunciative process in which slavery and mastery operate together as a concept 'to think/communicate with'—in this process, knowledge and behaviors are produced, reproduced, structured, and distributed in such a way as to establish subjects in/and positions of authority and subjugation, agency and compulsion, ownership and worth, honor and humiliation, discipline and reward/punishment, and captivity and freedom.

Enslavement, then, is not merely a sociopolitical phenomenon or a religious metaphor, but a system by which ancient Mediterranean historical actors shaped their material and intellectual worlds. Enslavement as a discourse dictates power relations between humans, as well as between humans and deities, as it works to craft particular types of subjects as *enslaved* or *enslaver*. As De Wet notes, doulology in early Christianity impacted the development of Christology, the Trinity, cosmology, pneumatology, hamartiology, soteriology, eschatology, and ascetic practice.[16] De Wet envisions a different mapping of enslavement in antiquity—one that more fully encompasses and acknowledges the reality and impact of deities in human life. Rather than metaphorizing any language that falls beyond the realm of the human or the natural, he suggests that we imagine two intersecting fields of enslavement in antiquity: *horizontal slavery* (e.g., the Roman institution of enslavement; human-to-human enslavement) and *vertical slavery* (e.g., enslavement to God; human-to-deity enslavement) (2018, 18–21).[17] In line with recent scholarship on religious historiography, De Wet urges us to take seriously enslavement to God as something that impacts how one lives their life. (Vertical) enslavement to God can have a tangible impact on whether or not one can be (horizontally) enslaved to others;[18] the two fields of enslavement interact and impact one another.

Between postcolonial and feminist historiographical interventions, reconceptualizations of agency and agents via Actor-Network Theory and new materialisms, and novel applications of such theoretical lenses in early Christian studies, there may be room to reconsider how enslavement to deities is sometimes characterized in the eastern Mediterranean and treated by scholars.

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[15] See theoretical considerations at Quigley 2021, 2–5 and Roman examples of theo-economics at 16–33.

[16] De Wet 2018, 8.

[17] For a similar approach that questions the slippage between metaphorical and literal language in Christian medical discourse and practice, see Mayer 2018, 440–63, esp. 451–58.

[18] A good example can be found in Leviticus 25:42–55, where the Israelite god claims to have brought the Israelites out of Egypt as his enslaved persons (עבדי) and notes that they are not allowed to enslave one another because they are already enslaved to him.

II. Enslavement to Deities: Three Case Studies

Here, I want to point to three examples of enslavement to a deity to highlight the difficulty of escaping from a historical perspective based on such modern Western ontologies and epistemologies: sales to the Pythian Apollo at Delphi, to the Autochthonous Mother of the Gods at Leukopetra, and to the Judaean God in the Bosporan Kingdom.[19] In these cases, classicists and religionists have often treated the deity's role in the sale, dedication, or enslavement as a disguise for "deeper" and presumably more "real" sociohistorical realities—especially in the case of manumission. While more recent analyses are treating the gods with more theoretical and methodological nuance, it is worthwhile to analyze these cases because they demonstrate how easily scholarship can mask or underplay the role that enslavement to deities plays in the economic transactions experienced by enslaved persons in the eastern Mediterranean.

Delphi, located in central Greece, is a famous site not only for its oracle—the Pythia—but also for the inscriptions placed upon the retaining wall of the Temple of Apollo. While the building itself was built in the 4th century BCE, the polygonal walls were covered from the 3rd century BCE onwards with various inscriptions recording hymns, professional organizations, and what have often been deemed manumissions.[20] Roughly 1,300 of these inscriptions deal with enslaved persons and follow a few general formulae to describe the transfer of the enslaved person away from their enslaver.

Some of these transfers of enslaved persons are often considered something close to unconditional manumission—that is, their transfer from the enslaver to the Pythian Apollo will guarantee their freedom in the future. For example (*CID* I 324 [163/162 BCE], 1–8):

> [...] Teleso, daughter of Mnasikrates of Delphi, with her son Kleon also consenting, sold to Pythian Apollo a female body named Ladika, Syrian in origin, for the price of three silver *mnae*. She holds the payment, accordingly as Ladika entrusted the sale to the god, on the condition that she will be free and untouchable by all forever, doing whatever she wants and going wherever she wants. The guarantor in accordance with the law of the city: Astoxenos son of Dionysios. If anyone should lay hands on Ladika for enslavement, let both the seller Teleso and the guarantor Astoxenos provide the sale as secure to the god; if they should not provide the sale as secure to the god, let them be fined in accordance with the law. [...][21]

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[19] Note, alongside Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005, 148, that manumission inscriptions at such sites record only a limited range of manumission practices from the Greek East. Our limited archive affects what can and cannot be said about manumission practices in the Hellenistic and Roman eastern Mediterranean more broadly.

[20] I phrase this as "deemed manumissions" here to highlight the complexity of "manumission" as a reality experienced by those who were still forced to labor for their former enslaver. Much work has been done recently by scholars of American history, highlighting how freedpeople experienced an "incomplete movement from slavery to freedom" (Sharpe 2010, 4; See also Perrone 2019, 256–70). Manumission in Hellenistic and Roman antiquity, likewise, was an incomplete move. See Theophrastus, *Economics* 1344b15–22; Hopkins 1978, 118; Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005, 307–34; De Wet 2018, 21. As Henrik Mouritsen notes (2011, 5), the commonality of formerly enslaved persons going on to enslave others after their manumission makes writing an "'emancipatory' history of the freedman" difficult.

[21] Gibson 1999, 40 notes that even though these Delphic inscriptions are often treated as a fictitious sale by scholars, there is still little clear explanation for why this practice is concentrated in Delphi as opposed to other Greek cities.

[...] ἀπέδοτο Τελεσὼ Μνασικράτεος Δελφίς, συνευδοκεόντος καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ Κλέωνος, τῶι Ἀπόλλωνι τῶι Πυθίωι σῶμα γυναικεῖον ἇι ὄνομα Λαδίκα τὸ γένος Σύραν, τιμᾶς ἀργυρίου μνᾶν τριῶν, καὶ τὰν τιμὰν ἔχει, καθὼς ἐπίστευε Λαδίκα τῶι θεῶι τὰν ὠνάν, ἐφ' ὧιτε ἐλευθέραν εἶμεν καὶ ἀνέφαπτον ἀπὸ πάντων τὸν πάντα χρόνον, ποιέουσα ὅ κα θέληι καὶ ἀποτρέχουσα οἷς κα θέληι. βεβαιωτὴρ κατὰ τὸν νόμον τᾶς πόλιος· Ἀστόξενος Διονυσίου. εἰ δέ τις ἐφάπτοιτο Λαδίκας ἐπὶ καταδουλισμῶι, βέβαιον παρεχόντων τῶι θεῶι τὰν ὠνὰν ἅ τε ἀποδομένα Τελεσὼ καὶ ὁ βεβαιωτὴρ Ἀστόξενος· εἰ δὲ μὴ παρέχοιεν βέβαιον τὰν ὠνὰν τῶι θεῶι, πράκτιμοι ἐόντων κατὰ τὸν νόμον. [...]

In this inscription, Teleso sold (ἀπέδοτο[22]) the enslaved Syrian woman Ladika to the god Apollo with some of the funds that Ladika had herself procured. This money was likely handed over to the deity by Ladika with the expectation that Apollo would use the funds to purchase her from Teleso.[23] After doing so, Apollo is expected (according to some interpreters of the inscription, e.g., Sosin 2015, 328-30) to manumit Ladika "on the condition that she will be free and untouchable" (ἐφ' ὧιτε ἐλευθέραν εἶμεν καὶ ἀνέφαπτον)—a phrase that I will return to below. Importantly, Ladika and Apollo require a guarantor during the process of sale and manumission who can "provide the sale as secure to the god" (βέβαιον παρεχόντων τῶι θεῶι τὰν ὠνὰν) in case anyone attempts to re-enslave her or claim her as their own. The goal of this guarantor, it seems, is to testify to the sale between Teleso and Apollo and demonstrate that no other person (or deity) can lay claim to Ladika as their own enslaved person, except for Apollo himself.

While many of these inscriptions describe a relatively clear-cut process of enslavement to Apollo (that is often characterized as "manumission" and downplays Apollo's social and legal role as Ladika's new enslaver), about one-third of the Delphi inscriptions contain a conditional *paramonē* clause by which the enslaved person is transferred to a new enslaver but remains obligated to their former enslaver. For example, in an inscription detailing the sale of Sostrata from Kallikrateia to Apollo, an additional clause is appended to the standard sale formula (*CID* I 77 [188/7 BCE], 6–16):

> But Sostrata shall remain by Kallikrateia so long as Kallikrateia lives, doing all that she is ordered that is possible, without reproach. But if Sostrata does not do any of what she is ordered by Kallikrateia, as written, though able, it shall be possible for Kallikrateia to punish her however she wishes, and for another on behalf of Kallikrateia, being immune to penalty and unliable to any action and penalty. But if Kallikrateia dies, then Sostrata shall be free, her own mistress, and doing whatever she wishes, in accordance as she entrusted the purchase to the god. But if anyone lays a hand on Sostrata when Kallikrateia has died, then the guarantors shall provide the sale as secure for the god, in accordance with the law. And likewise also those who happen to rescue her on grounds that she is free shall have authority (to do so), being immune to penalty and unliable to any action and penalty.

παραμεινάτω δὲ Σωστράτα παρὰ Καλλικράτειαν ἄχρι κα ζώηι Καλλικράτεια ποέουσα τὸ ποτιτασσόμενον πᾶν τὸ δυνατὸν ἀνεγκλήτως· εἰ δέ τί κα μὴ ποιῆι

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[22] The verb ἀποδίδωμι is often read by scholars working on these inscriptions as pertaining to manumission or release from bondage, rather than as giving over or selling the enslaved person to the deity. See Gibson 1999, 39.

[23] On this form of sale, described as πρᾶσις ὠνή, see Zanovello 2021, 37–38 and 43–51.

Σωστράτα τῶν ποτιτασσομένων ὑπὸ Καλλικρατείας καθὼς γέγραπτ[αι δυ]νατὰ οὖσα, ἐξέστω Καλλικρατείαι κο[λ]άζειν καθώς κα αὐτὰ δείληται καὶ ἄλλωι ὑπὲρ Καλλικράτειαν ἀζαμίοις ὄντοις καὶ ἀνυποδίκοις πάσας δίκας καὶ ζαμίας. εἰ δέ τί κα πάθηι Καλλικράτεια, ἐλευθέρα ἔστω Σωστράτα κυριεύουσα αὐτοσαυτᾶς καὶ ποέουσα ὅ κα θέληι, καθὼς ἐπίστευσε τῶι θεῶι τὰν ὠνάν. εἰ δέ τίς κα ἅπτηται Σωστράτας ἐπεί κα τελευτάσηι Καλλικράτεια, βέβαιον παρεχόντω οἱ βεβαιωτῆρες [τ]ῶι θεῶι τὰν ὠνὰν κατὰ τὸν νόμον. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ οἱ παρατυγχάνοντες κύριοι ἐόντες συλέοντες ὡς ἐλευθέραν οὖσαν ἀζάμιοι ὄντες καὶ ἀνυπόδικοι πάσας δίκας καὶ ζαμίας.

In Sostrata's scenario, she is sold to Apollo but is contractually obligated to remain with and perform productive labor[24] for her former enslaver for the rest of the enslaver's life. During this time, Kallikrateia retains her ability to abuse and control Sostrata without restraint. Whether Sostrata is legally or socially "free" during the period of time under which the *paramonē* clause is active is debated by scholars. I read this inscription as stating that Sostrata will become a freedwoman only "if" (εἰ) and after Kallikrateia dies through an act of manumission by Apollo that has not yet occurred. This reading seems possible since guarantors are needed only after Kallikrateia's death to confirm that Apollo is Sostrata's legal enslaver through a secure (βέβαιον) and legal (κατὰ τὸν νόμον) sale, in order to stave off others who might lay claim to Sostrata as their enslaved person in this moment of potential ambiguity of her legal status.[25] Thus, Apollo is understood to be the legal actor through whom Sostrata can be manumitted after her former enslaver's death.

There are two points that I want to make here before examining the hermeneutical trend surrounding these and related inscriptions. The first is that Apollo, in both the conditional (*paramonē*) and less conditional formulae, functions as what Jennifer Quigley calls a theo-economic actor (2021). In the case of enslaved women like Ladika and Sostrata, Apollo uses the funds that they offer in order to purchase and enslave them, making Apollo the legal entity responsible for them as his property. Sales to deities like Apollo do not exist in a spiritual, otherworldly state that supersedes or circumvents Hellenistic law and economics; rather, they are themselves under threat if someone attempts to lay claim to enslaved persons sold to Apollo. Humans (e.g., guarantors) and deities work together to keep the cogs of the institutions of enslavement and manumission moving.

The second point is that referring to either of these inscriptions as "manumissions" in a straightforward or unqualified manner is potentially misleading. In a reexamination of *paramonē* inscriptions at Delphi and elsewhere in Greece, Joshua Sosin (2015) has suggested that enslaved persons forced to remain under their former enslaver are not in an intermediate half-enslaved, half-free stage.[26] Rather, when Apollo purchases an enslaved person with a *paramonē* clause, he waives the right to exploit their productive labor during the *paramonē* period and manumits the enslaved person only after this labor is finished (2015, 332–33)—as I noted above in the case of Sostrata. In particular, he points to the clause "by which she will be free" (ἐφ᾽ ὧιτε ἐλευθέραν εἶμεν) and argues that the Greek construction "ἐπὶ plus the dative often voiced a required future action, stipulated a condition or

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[24] On the category of productive labor as "activities undertaken to provide, and add value to, resources, goods, and services that fulfill needs and desires," see Keddie 2024, 22–28, quote on 22.

[25] *Contra* Zanovello 2021, 52–53, who interprets the ἐφ᾽ ὧιτε formula as a legal protection that occurs "after manumission" rather than during the deity's time as enslaver.

[26] Examples of this type of argumentation can be found in Westermann 1945, 213–27; Hopkins 1978, 133–71; Finley 1981, 116–32.

provision" (2015, 330).[27] In other words, Sostrata was not immediately manumitted and transformed into a freedperson with a few laborious obligations to her former enslaver at the moment of the inscription's carving; rather, she was enslaved to Apollo even while continuing labor for her former enslaver. This future conditionality extends beyond the *paramonē* clause as well, since it is unclear if the Pythian Apollo necessarily followed through with the manumission of Ladika mentioned above. Rather, there is simply a promise for a *future* manumission of Ladika. In both cases, Ladika and Sostrata did not immediately move into a freedperson or half-freedperson category, but rather were enslaved to the Pythian Apollo until the *paramonē* clause expired or until Apollo moved forward with the process of manumission. Instead of downplaying the role of Apollo as enslaver, we might highlight Apollo's substantial role in the economic transaction and legal manumission of these enslaved persons, as well as the ambiguity regarding when Apollo relinquishes his status as enslaver over them.

While Sosin notes that the Pythian Apollo does not make explicit use of his right to ownership in these inscriptions (2015, 327), this does not mean that other deities did not exploit enslaved labor from those sold or dedicated to them. Of particular interest here is the temple of the Autochthonous Mother of the Gods at Leukopetra, Macedonia. Along with pledging property to the temple, various inscriptions also denote the dedication of enslaved persons to the Mother of the Gods in the late second and early third centuries CE.[28] In many cases, an enslaved person is presented as a gift or donation to the Mother of the Gods not for manumission, but to remain on the temple precinct or labor for the goddess during festivals and holidays (*IL* 16 [184/5 CE]):

> I, Kointa, daughter of Ioulia, [give] the enslaved woman Parmenea as a gift to the Mother of the Gods, whom I raised in the name of the goddess, for serving on the customary days. [Written] when Aelia Kleopatra was priestess in the 216th Augustan year.[29]

> Κοίντα Ἰουλίας Μητρὶ Θεῶν δῶρον παιδίσκην Παρμένεαν, ἥν ἀνέθρεψα τῷ ὀνόματι τῆς θεοῦ, ὑπηρετοῦσαν τὰς ἐθίμους ἡμέρας· ἱερωμένης Αἰλίας Κλευπάτρας, ἔτους ϛισ' σεβ(αστοῦ)

Similar types of inscription stretch across the eastern Mediterranean, such as a second-century CE statue base found in Akkent (Upper Meander Valley, Anatolia) that attests to a benefactor building a temple to Asclepius and providing the deity with "vineyards and

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[27] For example, see *IG* IX(1) 3² 709a (166/165 BCE), an inscription from Phaestinus in Aetolia, in which Lycon sells an enslaved woman named Eutychis to Apollo for five *mnae* "for freedom" (ἐπ᾽ ἐλευθερίᾳ) under the expectation that the sale (ὠνή) to Apollo will lead to her manumission. See Zelnick-Abramovitz 2009, 307. Zelnick-Abramovitz treats both sales to deities with and without *paramonē* clauses as manumission contracts, eliding the distinction between the two and not discussing in depth the role of the deity in the transaction.

[28] Petsas et al. 2000, 29 note that various sanctuaries of goddesses around Beroea were involved in such acts of consecration (e.g., Demeter, Artemis, the Syrian Goddess, Dionysus). As above with the case of Delphi, scholars who work on these Macedonian inscriptions have tended toward reading the donations and sales of humans to the Autochthonous Mother of the Gods as actually signifying manumission, and thus functioning as a fictitious sale. See Petsas et al. 2000, 30–31 on the "motivation religieuse" and 60, where they claim that such consecration "undoubtedly constituted an amelioration of their situation and was almost equivalent to emancipation" ("qui constituait une amélioration indubitable de sa situation et équivalait presque à un affranchissement"). Petsas et al. 2000, 32–33 argue that such enslaved persons did not function as temple personnel at Leukopetra *contra* Ricl 2001, 129 and 133–34, who argues that donated persons become enslaved to the deity and function as temple personnel.

[29] Leukopetra has roughly 120 of such inscriptions dating between 170–250 CE. See Youni 2010, 311–40.

workshops and enslaved persons, and arranged for their income to be worthy for worshipping the gods and the maintenance of the deeds" (ἀνπέλους καὶ ἐγραστή[ρια καὶ δούλ]ους καὶ διατετακχότα εἰς τὸ ἀπ[ὸ τοῦ πρ]οσόδου αὐτῶν θρησκεύεσθαι το[ὺς θεοὺ]ς καὶ ἐπιμελείας ἀξιοῦσθαι τὰ ἔργα) (Ricl and Öztürk 2014). Likewise, a first-century CE inscription of dedication from the Bosporan Kingdom (a Greco-Scythian client state of the Roman Empire) records an intriguing dedication (*CIRB* 1123 [41 CE]):

> To the Most High God, almighty, blessed, in the reign of King Mithridates, loving [...] and patriotic, in the year 338, in the month of Dios. Pothos, son of Strabo, according to a vow dedicated to the prayer house his home-raised enslaved person, whose name is Chrusa, on the condition that she will be inviolable and undisturbed by any heir under Zeus, Ge, and Helios.[30]

> θεῶι ὑψίστωι παντοκράτορι εὐλογητῷ, βασιλεύοντο βασιλέως [Μιθρ]ιδάτου φιλο[...] καὶ φιλοπάτριδος ἔτους ηλτ′, μηνὸς Δείου, Πόθος Στράβωνος ἀνέθηκεν τ[ῇ] προσευχῆι κατ᾽ εὐχὴν θ[ρ]επτὴν ἑαυτοῦ, ᾗ ὄνομα Χρύσα, ἐφ᾽ ᾧ ᾖ ἀνέπαφος καὶ ἀνεπρηέαστος ἀπὸ παντὸς κληρον[όμ]ου ὑπὸ Δία, Γῆν, Ἥλιο[ν].

As E. Leigh Gibson notes, the dedication "in" or "to" a prayer house (τ[ῇ] προσευχῆι) is complicated, since it could conceivably be read as either the location at which the dedication occurred or as the entity to which the enslaved person was to be dedicated (1999, 114–23).[31] Despite the presence of non-Judaean deities in the formulaic dedication, Gibson convincingly argues that the inscription references a Jewish house of prayer.

While some have read this final inscription as only spiritually dedicating Chrusa to the Judaean God (e.g., Schürer 1897), we might push further and ask what obligations befell those dedicated to Jewish prayer houses. There is some evidence, at least in the Bosporan Kingdom, that enslaved persons were obliged to do productive labor for the maintenance of Jewish houses of prayer. Many of these first- and second-century CE inscriptions record the manumission of enslaved persons and the flexibility to move as they please, albeit with two exceptions: "except for flattery and perseverance for the prayer house" (χωρὶς εἰς τὴν προσευχὴν θωπείας τε καὶ προσκαρτερήσεως) and to "serve as a (joint) overseer of the assembly of the Judaeans" ([συν]επιτροπευούσης δὲ καὶ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῶν Ἰουδαίων).[32] Gibson argues that the enslavers in these instances essentially produced a *paramonē*-like clause, through which their enslaved persons were forever obligated to maintain a "labor-based relationship" with the Judaean God's building and community (1999, 144–50).[33] Such a characterization of this relationship between the enslaved person and their enslaver might lead us to reexamine how many of these inscriptions begin with a phrase like ἀφίημι ἐπὶ τῆς προσευχῆς or ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ. While often read as "I release [the enslaved person] at the

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[30] Greek text from Gibson 1999, 166. I have slightly altered the English translation offered here.

[31] Gibson proposes this *contra* emendations offered by Latyschev 1895, 2:209. For example, *CIRB* 74 (Gibson 1999, 163) dedicates the enslaved Thallousa to the deities Ma and Parthenos under a *paramonē* inscription that claims she will be free "under Zeus, Ge, and Helios" after her enslavers' deaths.

[32] *CIRB* 70, 71, 73; *SEG* 43.510 (Gibson 1999, 126–27, 160–62, 172), particularly at the sites of Pnatikapaion, Phanagoria, and Gorgippia. Not all of these inscriptions evoke the Judaean God, but also evoke deities like Asbameus, the goddess of Ma, Zeus, Hera, and Theos Hypsistos (who may be the Judaean God). See also Harland 2014, 24–32. Harland suggests that θωπεία can be read as respect or subservience, whereas προσκαρτέρησις can be read as adherence to or participation in the Judean community through which they are (or will eventually be) manumitted (30).

[33] A similar argument can be found in Nadel 1976.

house of prayer" in light of Delphic manumission inscriptions, these inscriptions could conceivably record some enslavers handing over or transferring their enslaved person to the house of prayer.[34] Between the range of inscriptions that dedicate an enslaved person to deities, the explicit *paramonē* clauses, and the expectation to remain obliged to the prayer house, manumission was complex and did not always include instantaneous freedom from one's human or non-human enslavers. The Autochthonous Mother of the Gods, an Anatolian Asclepius, and the Judaean God are—in some times and some places—provided with enslaved laborers who assist in ritual performances and temple maintenance. Enslavement to a deity could have material, spatial, and bodily consequences for such enslaved persons who were coerced to work for the divine enslaver.

Turning back to Leukopetra, not every inscription necessarily seems to be aimed toward an enslaved person's manumission. In some cases, a *paramonē* clause led to an enslaved person being permanently transferred over to the Mother of the Gods (*IL* 31 [192/3 CE]):

> Good fortune. I, Nepon, son of Lamyrides, citizen of Beroia, inhabitant of Kyneoi, donated my enslaved person Zosimos to the Mother of the Gods Autochthonous, impeccable, so that he shall stay with me as long as I live, and after my death he shall belong to the goddess; if not, whoever disputes shall pay a fine of 15000 denarii to the treasury. The donation was registered when Kominia Philiste was priestess, Kominos Hieronymos curator.

> Ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ. Νέπων Λαμυρίδου Βεροιεος οἰκῶν ἐν Κυνέοις ἐχαρισόμην δοῦλον τὸν ὑπάρχοντά μοι ὀνόματι Ζώσιμον Μητρὶ Θεῶν Αὐτόχθονι ἀνεπίληπτον, προσμίνοντά μοι τὸν τῆς ζωῆς χρόνον, μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἐμὴν τελευτὴν ἴνε τῆς θεοῦ· ἰ δ' οὔ, ὁ ἀντιλέγων δώσι προστίμου ἰς τὸ ταμῖον μύρια πεντάκις χίλια. Ἐγράφη ἡ δωρεὰ αὕτη ἱερωμένης Κομινίας Φιλίστης καὶ ἐπιμελουμένου Κομινίου Ἱερωνύμου.

Donation to the Mother of the Gods involves a lifetime of enslavement for Zosimos—first to his (former) enslaver Nepon under a *paramonē* clause, and then to the Mother of the Gods, presumably to perform productive labor for festivals and temple maintenance. A substantial fine awaited anyone who attempted to dispute the Mother of the Gods' legal right to Zosimos' labor or attempted to enslave him for themselves after Nepon's death.

III. Religiosity and Fictionalization: A Classical Trend

Despite the legal complexity and considerable role of the deities in such inscriptions, scholarship of the last century has generally dismissed sales to Apollo and dedications to the Autochthonous Mother of the Gods as fictional. Instead, such scholarship has at times presumed that enslaved persons must have been freed because deities are not "real" historical actors and thus cannot actually enslave humans. Adolf Deissman, for example, understood manumission as a "solemn rite of fictitious purchase of the slave by some divinity" that did not actually enslave the person to the deity, but rather made them a "protégé of the god [...] a completely free man"—with only a "few pious obligations" remaining to their former enslaver (1910, 326). Likewise, in his examination of epigraphy from Greece and Asia Minor, Alan Cameron (1939) read around the language present in inscriptions so as to avoid the possibility that deities could enslave. Although many

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[34] LSJ s.v. ἀφίημι I.3 and II.1.e.

inscriptions, particularly in Macedonia and Asia Minor, used "to grant/gift" (χαρίζομαι; δωροῦμαι) to indicate handing over an enslaved person to a deity, Cameron argued that "language appropriate to dedication was used even when the real purpose of the act was not simply to convey a slave from the ownership of the dedicator to that of the god" (1939, 145). Cameron decided beforehand that, whatever action the enslaver was doing by dedicating an enslaved person to a deity, it must exist in the realm of the "religious" while masking itself in, as he called it, "secular" terminology. He briefly admitted that enslavement to a deity and service to a temple was possible, but dismissed this as a less likely scenario than full manumission (1939, 146). Cameron goes so far as to create a paradox by arguing that enslavement to a deity actually means freedom: "εἶναι αὐτὴν τῆς θεοῦ (to belong to the goddess) means in effect ἐλευθέραν εἶναι (to be a free person) and does not imply any actual servitude to the goddess [...] the manumitted slave was by a fiction described as the slave of the god" (1939, 149).[35] Early twentieth-century scholars like Deissmann and Cameron made sense of enslavement to deities by claiming that it was fake—a legal fiction by which manumission occurred that just so happened to be called "enslavement" in ancient texts. Rather than reading the gifting of enslaved persons to a deity as terminology befitting even a votive offering,[36] they dismiss the possibility that deities were considered nodes of economic transaction.

Classical scholarship has often followed suit over the decades, treating enslavement to deities as anything but that. Conceptual slippage occurs between the sale (or dedication) of enslaved persons and the manumission of enslaved persons, since such inscriptions often attest to the former but only allude to the future possibility of the latter.[37] This is particularly the case when the adjective *sacred* is latched on (e.g., sacred slavery; sacred manumission) by scholars in order to distinguish it as *something other than* human enslavement and manumission, since such deities are often treated as economic actors that can be ignored in the process of a human's manumission from slavery. Pierre Debord's study of sacred enslavement across the Mediterranean argued that such consecrations to deities were "purely fictive" because enslaved persons could not legally amass funds in order to purchase their own freedom (1972, 136).[38] However, this argument overlooks how manumission might have benefitted the enslaver by providing them with obligated productive labor (*operae*) from the formerly enslaved persons *and* new funds to enslave another person, as well as how an enslaved person often saved funds to purchase manumission.[39] Keith Hopkins likewise states that such manumission is "the by-product of a religious ritual, in which the master set the slave free solemnly and publicly before the god Apollo, his priests and civil witnesses and guarantors," as well as that it gave "a religious sanction to the slave's freedom" (1978, 138, 142). Such a characterization, however, keeps Apollo at a distance from socioeconomic affairs through the language of ritual and religiosity, thereby stripping the deity of legal and historical weight.

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[35] Cameron builds upon Calderini 1908, 70 here.

[36] See Gibson 1999, 47–48; See also Hatzopoulos 1994, 116 on enslaved persons gifted as votive objects.

[37] Zanovello 2018, 137 notes as well that interpreters tend to conflate consecration and manumission, even when the latter is not mentioned or legally enacted in a given inscription.

[38] See also Papazoglou 1981, 173–74.

[39] E.g. *Digest* 40.1.5 on enslaved persons saving a *peculium* that was still property of the enslaver but could be used for manumission. More broadly on the continued exploitation of formerly enslaved persons through the process of manumission, see Roth 2010.

In her dismantling of the concept of "sacred/temple prostitution" in antiquity, Stephanie Budin analyzed Strabo and argued that "it is generally accepted that the type of sacral manumission that led to *hieros* status was a fictitious 'sale' to the deity" (2008, 180). Various scholars and their lines of argumentation can be marshalled to support Budin's claim and highlight the conceptual treatment of gods as actors who can purportedly be sidelined—despite being the very entity to whom enslaved persons were sold. Maria Youni's work on Delphi and Leukopetra treats such inscriptions as evidence of manumission that "appeared as a party to a fictitious transaction of sale" (2010, 316, 327).[40] Kostas Vlassopoulos's discussion of enslaved persons' hopes for freedom presumes that Delphic sales to Apollo simply represented manumissions, and does not comment on the presence of Apollo as the purchaser in such inscriptions (2021, 162–64). Sara Zanovello claims that the sale of enslaved persons to Apollo at Delphi "is only the external form given to the act of manumission: there is no sale taking place between the slaves' masters and the god, nor can we envisage the fundamental legal effect of sale, that is, the transfer of ownership over the slaves from the masters to the god."[41] Deborah Kamen's analysis of consecration or sale to a god (as two distinct but overlapping forms of manumission) similarly tends toward presenting such sales as "effect[ing] freedom" because the enslaved person "lack[s] a human owner" or is "without the supervision of any owner" (2023, 88–92).[42] Even Joshua Sosin, who reads Delphi's inscriptions as indicating enslavement to Apollo rather than immediate freedom, refers to such records as a "sham sale" (2015, 325). Language of religiosity and fictitiousness generally dominate the scholarly landscape, often presuming that the sale cannot *actually* be a real transaction, but must instead be a religiously-cloaked manumission.

Such characterizations also affect scholarly analyses of consecration and dedication. Stephano Caneva and Aurian Delli Pizzi's work on acts of human consecration across the eastern Mediterranean similarly argue that expressions of submission to the deity's service are reasonably assumed to be "rather symbolic and attests a personal will to show one's piety" (2015, 174).[43] Here, they read the language of registration through the lens of "religion" in a way that presumes one cannot truly be registered to or enslaved to a non-human entity. Often, verbs relating to dedication or consecration (e.g., ἀνατίθημι) are treated as sacred manumissions,[44] despite how Roman jurists like Gaius specify that there is a legal category of *res sacrae* that are objects "consecrated to the gods above" (*quae diis superis consecratae sunt*), under "divine right" (*divini iuris*), and cannot be subject to human

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[40] See also Forsdyke 2021, 243, as well as Belayche 2020, 91n18, for another example of treating Leukopetran inscriptions as evidence that the enslaved enter a patron-client relationship with the Mother of the Gods rather than an enslaved-enslaver relationship.

[41] Zanovello 2021, 55, in which she goes on to argue that "once payment is made, manumission has to be considered complete and the slaves immediately became legally free individuals" (55) and that the idea that "as an effect of consecration, slaves became immediately free individuals" (73) is scholarly consensus for inscriptions in Chaeronea as well.

[42] See also Kamen 2012; 2014, 285–89; Zanovello 2021, 93 regarding her claim consecrated individuals being *de facto* rather than legally free because of "the absence of an actual owner who could concretely exercise the powers and rights descending from ownership." *Contra* Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005, 91–99, who wrestles more robustly with the complexity of how the legal/social freedom of an individual might be understood in light of the legal/social status of a deity over them.

[43] Caneva and Delli Pizzi problematically describe *paramonē* clauses at Leukopetra as "actually improv[ing] their life conditions" (176) by reducing the time of obligation to one's former enslaver to *only* their lifetime.

[44] Papazoglou 1981; Youni 2010, 316–18.

ownership.[45] Enslaved persons could, in fact, fall into this category of property (*res*) which deities in the Roman Mediterranean could own and use.[46] Such examples underscore the commonality by which ancient historians have dismissed the possibility that deities might function as historical and economic actors in the ancient Mediterranean, particularly as it pertains to slavery and manumission. This reading strategy functions, as philosopher of religion Wayne Proudfoot argues, as a form of descriptive reduction: "To describe an experience in nonreligious terms when the subject himself describes it in religious terms is to misidentify the experience, or to attend to another experience altogether" (1985, 196). Deities are, at best, treated as a religious obfuscation behind which manumission must occur for vaguely pious reasons.

Enslavement to a deity is not an activity that is somehow more "religious" than other sales of enslaved persons to humans, nor does the fact that these sales often occurred in the vicinity of a temple make them necessarily more distinctly "religious" actions.[47] Such a description of sales to deities betray a modern religious/secular binary. Perhaps what distinguishes selling an enslaved person to a deity rather than to another human in this context, however, is that the deity is understood to have the rights and resources needed to uphold and maintain the transaction. For example, in Petronia Amilla's sale of the enslaved girl Sanbatis to the Mother of the Gods, she notes that "no one will be more of an enslaver than the goddess" (μηδένα κυριώτερον εἶνε ἢν τὴν θεόν) (*IL* 15 [179/80 CE]). This somewhat odd phrase, Youni suggests, highlights the "relative right" by which different parties could claim an enslaved person as their own property: the Mother of the Gods is *more enslaver-esque* than any competing party (2010, 327).[48] Instead of viewing enslavement to the deities as merely a pious ritual practice, it could also be viewed as dealing with some of the most reliable power-brokers in the ancient Mediterranean, whose authority would rarely be questioned—at least, not without substantial fines. The gods themselves participated in the economic *realia* of slavery and had to demonstrate their power over both the enslaved and fellow enslavers in order to remain key stakeholders in their socioeconomic world.

Of course, some have pushed back against the trend of fictionalizing these sales and, by extension, the fictionalization of these deities. William Westermann powerfully argued in the 1940s that Deissmann and others were wrong to read enslavement to deities as fictitious, since "it was clearly an entrustment sale" by which a deity legally enslaved a human (1948, 55; 1945, 215–16). However, he quickly backtracked and suggested that classical Greek deities like Apollo did not technically own enslaved persons, but rather that people were either immediately manumitted or that the assembly would decide what enslaved labor such persons would carry out (1948, 56–57).[49] F. Sokolowski followed soon after and challenged

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[45] Gaius, *Inst.* 2.2–3, 2.9. Latin text from Du Zulueta 1958. On *res sacrae*, see Farag 2021, 11–40, esp. 15–18.

[46] Zanovello 2021, 77–81 on the shared features between Roman law regarding *res sacrae* and local Greek legal thought regarding the consecration of an individual to a deity.

[47] On the sale of enslaved persons (to humans) near temples in Hellenistic and Roman contexts, see Padilla Peralta 2017, 334; Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005, 72–73. Zelnick-Abramovitz (2005, 90–92) also notes the blurred lines between "sacral" and "civil" manumission practices, as well as between "consecration" and "sale," such that we cannot categorize them as wholly distinct from one another.

[48] On the importance of public records of manumission or sale for the protection of the enslaved person, see Zelnick-Abramovitz 2009, 307.

[49] For example, *IG* VII 3314 (second-century BCE) "dedicating her own enslaved persons" (ἀνατίθητι τὼς ϝιδίως δούλως) in a way that was "performed via the council according to the law" (ποιουμένα διὰ τῶ συνεδ[ρίω] κατὰ τὸν νόμον).

Westermann by pointing out how Greek temples often managed and exchanged enslaved persons, suggesting that enslavement to deities cannot be taken off the historiographical table (1954, 173–74). Franz Bömer suggested that the enslaved person formally becomes the property of the deity, in contrast to a wave of twentieth-century scholarship that labeled it as nothing more than a ritualized loophole to acquire freedom (1960, 32). Recently, Dominique Mulliez has noted that the Delphic sale is not fictive but is an actual entrustment sale to Apollo. However, he falls back into language of manumission even in the case of *paramonē* inscriptions, viewing such enslaved persons as merely forced to labor while legally free, despite such labor being labeled as "being enslaved" (δουλεύω) and being potentially punished "as enslaved persons" (ὡς δούλοις) (2017, esp. 14, 18–25). Likewise, Sara Zanovello has made the case that consecrations of enslaved persons to gods involved language of untouchability and lack of belonging to others not to signify *freedom*, but rather that their status as a god's *res* protected them from re-enslavement to others.[50] Such interpretations have challenged the consensus over the last century, but have not yet overturned the more dominant portrayal of the role of ancient Mediterranean deities as fictitious socioeconomic actors who were not truly capable of enslaving humans.

This run-through of classical scholarship is by no means meant to dismiss the excellent work done on sales of enslaved persons to deities throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Rather, I hope to have pointed out some theoretical gaps and assumptions that have led many to downplay the role that deities play in such transactions and in the life-worlds of ancient Mediterranean historical actors. Read in light of the insights stemming from religious studies, the Pythian Apollo, the Autochthonous Mother of the Gods, and the Judaean God are theo-economic actors whose ability to buy, sell, own, and manage property needs to be reckoned with. The avoidance of deities as historical actors in various humanistic fields stymies our ability to conceptualize how ancient Mediterranean people expected deities to interact and intervene in their lives, as well as unintentionally downplays the experiences of enslaved persons forced to labor for deities, temples, festivals, and former enslavers.

IV. Conclusion

The eastern Mediterranean in the Hellenistic and Roman periods was teeming with deities that participated in political and economic affairs, not least in the exploitation of enslaved persons. Due to Western historiographical, ontological, and epistemological assumptions, it has been common for ancient historians to see deities as a non-real stepping stone to some historical or economic *realia*, and thus have at times treated enslavement to a deity as pointing to something other than an enslaved-enslaver relationship between a human and a god. By pointing out this assumption, offering some theoretical approaches that begin to undo them, and examining three sites with enslavement to gods in mind as a tangible and corporeal possibility, I hope to make space for further exploration of deities as enslaving theo-economic entities. Enslavement to deities does not remain in the realm of the metaphorical or religious, since the belief held by ancient Mediterranean historical actors that deities *could* participate in the slave trade normalized and justified the practice of

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[50] Zanovello 2018, 141–42 and 2021, critiqued by Kamen 2023, 88–92, who claims that "they are in effect free because they lack a human owner" (91). As noted above, Zanovello commits to an interpretation that views sold and consecrated individuals as immediately legally free, even though some specific formulae (e.g., regarding untouchability) do not necessarily reflect that freedom.

enslavement, trafficking, and exploitation of coerced labor. As Tyler Schwaller succinctly put it in his examination of enslaved persons in early Christianity: "It matters to understand slavery discourse as never 'merely' theological or metaphorical, since slavery is realized in material form, with corporeal and psychic consequences" (2017, 46). Human-to-human or *horizontal* enslavement makes possible divine participation in the slave market, but *vertical* enslavement gives divine precedent to the enslavement of humans. To overlook this vicious cycle runs the risk of misunderstanding human-divine relationships in the eastern Mediterranean.

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When Learning Greek and Latin Became Hard, and What We Can Do About It
Chiara Bozzone and Daniela Negro

Abstract: The way the classical languages are traditionally taught can constitute a barrier to the entry to the field for many students. This piece reviews the history of language pedagogy over the last two centuries (starting with the Prussian school reform), and makes the case for embracing more progressive approaches to teaching Greek and Latin, informed by contemporary linguistics and second language acquisition studies. It includes a discussion of existing barriers to change, suggestions on how to implement small incremental changes in the classroom, as well as a conversation with an expert who has shifted to teaching Latin communicatively.

Keywords: language pedagogy, second language acquisition, grammar and translation method, active Latin, communicative method, Prussian method.

I. Introduction

One of the few upsides of being on the academic job market is that you get to talk to a lot of people. Over the past few seasons, I have had many engaging conversations about the state of the field with colleagues at large public institutions, small liberal arts colleges, Ivy League schools, and everything in-between. And one topic that always comes up, and that always draws interest, is how to attract more students to the introductory Latin and Greek courses, and how to make sure that those students learn the languages while also enjoying themselves enough that they do not drop out after the first semester.

This is an exciting time in Classics, as many in the field are working to reimagine the discipline in a way that is more progressive and inclusive, both in terms of the topics that are deemed worthy of study and in the type of students and scholars that Classics programs want to attract and cultivate. There is important work being done, and many colleagues (and likely the readers of this journal) share my conviction that the field can only survive and thrive if it can become significantly more open and diverse (and less elitist) than it was in the past. And I am certainly not the only one who has the sense that the way Greek and Latin are taught can constitute a major barrier to entry into the field.

The situation will be familiar to many readers: few students begin university studies with any background in Greek or Latin, and even those who do are not necessarily ready to do advanced work in the languages. The undergraduate "Introduction to Latin/Greek" courses frequently develop a reputation for being arduous, and enrollment numbers drop (sometimes dramatically) from one term to the next. Capable and motivated teachers might find that their methods are not serving the students, and yet feel that they do not have the institutional latitude to alter them. Even the students who persist and complete Greek and Latin coursework during their undergraduate years often need additional time to hone their language skills before they can start their Ph.D.s, hence the development of various offerings such as post-baccalaureate programs to bridge the gap. And yet, language proficiency is often taken as one of the most important factors in graduate admissions—indeed, by some as a key measure of academic promise.

But what type of promise are we measuring, exactly? As a result of the particular history of our field (to which I shall return below), the way in which Greek and Latin are taught at American universities is often remarkably old-fashioned. As a product of an Italian private Catholic high school in the 1990s (where several of my teachers were elderly priests who had carried out their university studies entirely *in Latin*), I was shocked to discover during my Ph.D. training at an American institution that the methods used to teach Greek and Latin at universities in North America could prove more conservative than the ones to which I had been exposed during my teenage years.[1] These "old-fashioned" methods often rely on mind-numbing amounts of memorization and hair-splitting categorization. And, what's even more puzzling, they have almost no connection to the discipline of contemporary linguistics, and more specifically to the vast field of second language acquisition. This stood out to me in very sharp contrast with the progressive pedagogical methods I had come to admire in American undergraduate teaching. Looking into these Greek and Latin classrooms (even the ones run by energetic, caring, and inspiring instructors) is like looking at the light coming from distant stars.

I am a historical linguist: I have devoted a frankly excessive amount of my time to exploring the nooks and crannies of Ancient Greek and Latin grammar. Yet I am fairly confident that if I had been compelled to memorize and recite the "seven types of subjunctives" (on which see more below) as an undergraduate student, and to complete daily "drills" on the Ancient Greek verbs, I might have sought an entirely different career for myself. These types of activities are to linguistics what memorizing baseball scores is to mathematics, and are famously unreliable as indicators of language proficiency (more on this below). They also contribute to the impression that there is something uniquely hard and challenging about learning ancient languages—they turn Latin and Greek into unattainable objects, only accessible to a selected few. And while some might find solace in such a view (I was able to learn the Classical languages, therefore I am special), I would argue that it does far more harm than good.

Only a very small subset of the general student population thrives under these more traditional methods of teaching. These are students who possess a very specific kind of diligence and endurance (what the Germans call *Sitzfleisch*, literally "sitting flesh", meaning "endurance in a sedentary activity"); who are good at following complex abstract rules and paying great attention to detail; who are, I might add, impervious to boredom. These are all wonderful qualities to have, but they are not all necessary or even sufficient to make a great scholar.[2] And they are not the *only* qualities that we ought to select if our goal is to have a field that is vibrant, innovative, and diverse. Bracey (2017) argues that these traditional methods are directly responsible for the lack of racial and socio-economic diversity in the Latin classroom:

> This approach takes a language that was once spoken comfortably by people
> of all backgrounds, social classes, ages, etc. throughout the world and renders

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[1] Incidentally, my training in Greek and Latin wasn't particularly modern to begin with (following the definitions introduced in Section II, it would have fallen squarely within the Grammar and Translation camp). But at the introductory level there was much less emphasis on memorization, categorization, and grammar drills, and at the intermediate and advanced level there was more emphasis on reading extensively above all else, starting with very easy texts (see Section III below for some examples).

[2] These are qualities, incidentally, that would make for the ideal Prussian bureaucrat. But more on this relation below.

it into a complex linguistic jigsaw puzzle that requires an elite mathematical mind to decipher.

Bracey's comment requires an important qualification here (which is in line with Bracey's own thinking): it is not these methods impede diversity in the classroom because "diverse" students do not have "elite mathematical minds" (or rather, as I would put it, a special kind of diligence and endurance). Students of all backgrounds, after all, have learned the Classical languages using traditional methods in the past, and scholars of color (such as William S. Scarborough and Helen M. Chesnutt) have written this very kind of traditional grammar.

But as Bracey explains, these now-outdated methods make the languages artificially (and unnecessarily) arduous to all students, so that only a few "survive the grammar gauntlet, while the rest struggle and eventually drop out". In the contemporary high school classroom (and arguably at the college level too), this type of artificial selection means that "except for the occasional outliers, the overwhelming majority of these [successful] students are going to be the most advantaged ... in the district" (ibidem).[3] As a result, fewer students are going to seek entry to the field to begin with, and the few who do are more likely to come from privileged backgrounds.[4]

Ironically, one might argue that even those students who "do well" under these methods don't end up learning the languages *that well* or *that quickly*.[5] For instance, Palmisciano (2004) laments how in most Italian high schools, excessive hours of grammar-focused instruction dominate the curriculum, at the expense of spending time with the original texts. With reference to the Italian *Ginnasio* (i.e., the first two years of the five-year *Liceo Classico*), Ricucci (2013) is a pilot study showing that more progressive methods outperform the traditional methods for Ancient Greek by a fairly large margin when it comes to student outcomes. Pozzi (2010) shows similar results for Latin.[6] Stringer (2019) reports data on positive outcomes for

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[3] The remainder of Bracey's piece articulates additional barriers to racial diversity in the high school Latin classroom, including outdated and insensitive treatment of topics like colonization and slavery in Latin textbooks (on some of these issues, see Erik [2017]), as well as the lack of Latin teachers of color. These are important issues that need to be addressed, though they exceed the scope of this paper.

[4] The socio-economic background might matter in another way: advantaged students might also come from backgrounds in which topics like Greek and Latin are perceived as particularly worthwhile and prestigious, and thus worth "suffering through". This attitude, anecdotally, is quite evident to this day in Italian high school choice: the *Liceo Classico* (where Greek and Latin take up 10+ hours of instruction per week) still carries more societal prestige in some circles than any other kind of secondary education, so that many wealthy parents not only encourage their children to take on these studies (sometimes against their children's own wishes), but are also willing to invest resources in extensive private Greek and Latin tutoring when their children struggle with the languages. This willingness to pay good money for remedial Greek and Latin instruction has little to do, typically, with a pure love of Cicero and Plato, and much more to do with issues of class.

[5] Many of us who feel that we have reached some amount of fluency in reading Greek or Latin have typically attained this capacity after doing extensive independent reading in the languages rather than after mastering the introductory grammar textbook. Crucially (and tragically), these traditional methods, which turn the languages into abstract, algebraic systems and do not reliably lead to language proficiency, often engender career-long insecurity about the languages even among those students who performed well under such conditions.

[6] With respect to the test administered, the Greek students following a progressive method (i.e., a communicative method using *Athenaze* as a textbook) surveyed by Ricucci (2013) on average answered 91% of the questions correctly, while students of the Grammar and Translation method answered correctly only 50% of the time. The Latin students surveyed by Pozzi (2010), who were administered a different type of test, showed comparable results, with students of progressive methods (who used Ørberg's *Familia Romana* textbook*)* scoring an average of 98% vs. students of traditional methods scoring an average of 53%.

progressive methods in North American high schools, encompassing student enrollment, retention, and performance.

The field, in a way, is like a mountaineering club that insists that everybody should climb mountains in flip-flops. There might be a long tradition of doing so (perhaps because better footwear was not available in the past), and some members of the club might feel that they have become quite good at it, and that, in fact, climbing in flip-flops is a good gauge of whether somebody is a talented mountaineer or not. But we cannot pretend that there aren't better and more sensible ways of climbing mountains available nowadays, and that insisting on outdated and ineffective footwear won't alienate a majority of the population.

What is the solution? Am I perhaps calling for a relaxation of the academic standards that our field has aspired to in the past? Should we "get rid of the languages" and not ask our students to learn the Latin *consecutio temporum* before they can read some Virgil? The languages are hard (*res difficiles*) and they require dedication, some might respond; only a few students possess the special talent and enthusiasm needed for these studies, and thus the selection is only natural. I disagree on both accounts. On the one hand, nothing would be more ungenerous on our part than not equipping the next generation of scholars with the best tools to carry out their work on the original texts. We wouldn't want to create, so to speak, a French major who gets off the plane in Paris and can't carry out the most basic interactions in the local language. As for "innate" talent and drive, I would argue that the disciplines that emphasize them the most are precisely those where the pedagogy is most lacking. In other words—is it that most students are just not cut out for the languages, or is it that we have picked a way of teaching the languages that is deeply unhelpful to most students (i.e., the metaphorical flip-flops)? This is not to say that "talent" and motivation do not matter, but I believe that a teacher's job is to make sure that they are not *the only factors* that determine learning outcomes. And of course, many topics are difficult, but we should make sure we are not artificially making them harder than they need to be out of sheer inertia—or even worse, out of the desire to inflict upon others the same suffering that was inflicted upon us (and thus perpetuate a sort of intergenerational trauma). Modern linguistics teaches us that all languages are, after all, languages (all equally complex, all equally interesting and worthy of study).[7] And human brains are excellent at learning languages, when given the right conditions.[8]

The solution, then, I would argue, which amounts to one of the most important challenges for the future of Classics as a field, is to find better, more effective, and more inclusive ways to share the Classical languages with a wider and more diverse student population (a population, moreover, which might be now less and less likely to thrive under nineteenth-century methods of teaching, though this is a topic for another paper). As a linguist, I feel that this is one of the areas where my training can be of help. As we shall see below, it was in part my scholarly predecessors in the 1800s who created this problem, and I would like to do my part to help solve it. This article aims to offer a first step in the direction, especially for those colleagues who have felt some frustration with the current state of

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[7] On the myth that "some languages are better than others", see Harlow (1998). On the myth that "some languages are more logical than others", see Lodge (1998).

[8] This is not to say that some languages might be easier for some learners to acquire, given their personal linguistic background (e.g., a speaker of Italian will have an easier time acquiring Spanish than Japanese; German will come easier to a speaker of Swedish than to a speaker of Tagalog), and that some individual learners might overall be faster at acquiring languages than others. On the myth that "some languages are harder than others", see Andersson (1998).

affairs but who have not yet uncovered an alternative path. Of course, many teachers and scholars have dedicated their whole careers to working on these issues;[9] the goal of this contribution is simply to provide a starting point amid a sea of resources and sometimes conflicting advice, especially for those who are just now beginning to wrestle with this problem.[10]

Because the issue of language pedagogy stands at the intersection of intellectual history, institutional policy, and personal practice, the remainder of this paper takes an eclectic approach to making the case for more progressive teaching methods. Part II will present a short history of the methods for teaching second languages in general and classical languages in particular. This contributes to the argument in two ways: first, there is much confusion as to what counts as a "traditional" vs. "progressive" method for teaching Latin and Greek, and this overview is meant to clarify the issues and relevant terminology. Second, I believe fewer colleagues will be inclined to defend traditional methods tooth and nail once they see them in their historical context (as opposed to "the one and only way for learning Greek and Latin"). Recognizing that most teachers do not have the capacity to radically alter their approach to the languages right away, Part III offers a number of suggestions on how to tweak the more traditional methods of teaching Greek and Latin in order to achieve better results in the classroom, without completely overhauling one's approach to language pedagogy. Several barriers are in place to adopting more progressive methods when teaching the Classical languages (which we will discuss below), and there are benefits to taking a more gradual approach. Still, a powerful case can be made for going even further, and I believe the most persuasive arguments in this sense often come from personal experience. For this reason, Part IV is a conversation with an expert and a friend who has spent over a decade grappling with these issues in the trenches of Italian higher education, and who has decided to implement a radically more progressive (i.e., communicative) approach to teaching Latin in her classroom. The conversation touches upon all the topics treated in the article and weaves them together in a single cloth. Finally, the Conclusions summarize the main points of the paper and reflect on some of the remaining barriers to reframing the way the Classical languages are taught.

II. A Very Short History of Second Language Teaching

People have learned Greek and Latin as second languages for a very long time,[11] but most histories of the modern field of second language teaching begin with the so-called "Grammar and Translation" method, as it came to be practiced in the first half of the nineteenth

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[9] It seems to be the case, both for North America and the United Kingdom, that universities are typically the bastions of the most traditional approaches to the Classical languages, while colleagues working at the high school level have a stronger record of exploring new and more progressive pedagogical approaches (there are, of course, important exceptions). Ramsby (2020) documents the rise of interest in "Active Latin" methods in secondary Latin teaching over recent years.

[10] The bibliography is (luckily) bounteous. For those looking for a place to start, Adema (2019) is a compact but rich introduction to Latin learning and instruction as a research field. Hunt (2023, 2022), and Lloyd and Hunt (2021) are book-length treatments that offer a wealth of applied advice and case studies on running a Latin classroom. Gruber-Miller (2006) similarly combines theoretical insights and practical examples. Carlon (2013) makes a forceful case for applying the finding of second language research to Latin pedagogy.

[11] See Dickey (2016: 4–6) for how the ancients did it, Miraglia (2020: 20-31) for how the Humanists did, and Archibald, Brockliss, and Gnoza (2015) for a broader historical perspective. Coffee (2012) covers some of the same ground I cover in this section, but with a greater focus on the origins and evolution of communicative approaches to Latin specifically.

century, and specifically in the version that was known as "the Prussian Method", since it was developed for instruction in Prussian *Gymnasia*.[12] Richards and Rodgers (2014: 6-7) describe the method as follows:

1. The goal of foreign language study is to learn a language in order to read its literature or to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development;

2. Reading and writing are the major focus; little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening;

3. Vocabulary selection is based solely on the reading texts used, and words are taught through bilingual word lists, dictionary study, and memorization. In a typical Grammar-Translation text, the grammar rules are presented and illustrated, a list of vocabulary items is presented with their translation equivalents, and translation exercises are prescribed;

4. The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice;

5. Accuracy is emphasized;

6. Grammar is taught deductively;

7. The student's native language is the medium of instruction.

Now if this description sounds familiar, it's because this is precisely how many of us were taught the Classical languages (and, in some cases, some modern languages as well). "Grammar and Translation" is still, in many ways, the default way to teach the Classical languages today: one can find contemporary, up-to-date, and beautifully produced textbooks for introductory Greek and Latin which embody every single aspect of this method.[13]

What did linguistics have to do with the Prussian Method? The 1800s were the period when modern linguistics was first being established as a science in Europe and North America.[14] Many steps in this direction were made by scholars who endeavored to systematically describe the abstract structures of the old Indo-European languages and tried to reconstruct the historical processes that shaped them. These scholars produced beautiful, finely detailed descriptions of the phonology, morphology, and morphosyntax of Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit (among other languages). The idea that languages could be described as a series of abstract rules (i.e., "grammar") was solidified at this time. It was seen as modern and scientific to apply these findings to language pedagogy, following the assumptions that: a) languages could be learned by memorizing said abstract rules (i.e., that a method for

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[12] Sears (1844), titled "The Prussian Method of Teaching the Elements of the Latin Language", is the first effort to export this "trendy" method to the North American classroom. Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (Part 11, Ch. 2) provides a vivid depiction of a Latin class through which poor Hanno Buddenbrook (born, in the novel, in Lübeck in 1861) must suffer, which reflects the principles of the Prussian Method.

[13] This method, we should add, does not survive for Greek and Latin alone. Even though "it has no advocates" (Richard and Rogers 2014: 7), it is still used sometimes in second language instruction, either on the sheer force of tradition, or because (while it does not present many advantages for the learners) it does present several advantages for the instructor: it takes relatively low mastery in the target language to implement (since all of the teaching happens in the students' first language), it leaves the instructor firmly in control of class activities (as opposed to more contemporary methods that emphasize collaboration and the joint construction of knowledge), and it more closely meets the expectations of a strict classroom hierarchy, which might still be favored in some cultural settings.

[14] This was due, in no small part, to extensive contact with the much more insightful grammatical and linguistic traditions in India; see Kiparsky (2022) for an overview of the ancient grammarian Pāṇini's grammar of Sanskrit, especially §5 for its intellectual influence on linguistics since the 19th century.

language description could also be a method for language pedagogy), and b) that the fine detail discovered by historical linguists and philologists would also always benefit language students. The issue with this method, for all of its supposed modernity and scientific creed, is that students did not really seem to effectively learn the languages from it, as many official reports lament over the following decades (see, e.g., Miraglia 2020: 101-4). As an Italian committee report on higher education from 1909 summarizes (ibidem):

> The method adopted in Italian schools for teaching the classical languages is at the same time the hardest and the least effective.

In other words, this method built additional (and gratuitous) hardship into the teaching of Greek and Latin, and thus solidified the status of the classical languages as something arduous and only fit for the elites (the goal of the Prussian *Gymnasia*, after all, was to educate the children of the higher classes, as well as to reproduce existing class divisions). If we look at contemporary accounts of Classical training in German *Gymnasia*, we get the sense that additional and gratuitous hardship (rather than language proficiency) was actually the whole point of the method (Miller 1904: 98):

> It will be seen by a glance at this curriculum that Latin is its most important element, if we are to judge by the amount of time allotted to that subject in comparison with the others. And such is the case. Latin is made the ground on which the hardest battles of a boy's education are fought out. Here he receives his severest mental drill and training.

The imagery is unmistakable here: Latin was not being treated as a language, but as a type of military training for the mind.[15]

While the Prussian method has been exceptionally long-lived in Classical studies, resistance to its application to the instruction of modern languages had started to develop already by the 1860s. Experimental educators like Heness, Saveur, and Berlitz pioneered approaches that are now described as "the Natural Method", whereby teachers who were native speakers would begin speaking the target language to their students immediately and almost exclusively, focusing at first on oral communication (asking simple questions, using gestures, illustrations, and using contrast and association to convey meaning), and teaching the grammar only inductively and at a later time. Unlike the Prussian method, this approach was successful with young children, as well as with individuals who had undergone less formal education (Ruyfflaert 2020).

Many principles of the Natural Method would be incorporated in the Reform Movement of the 1880s, which Richards and Rodgers (2014: 9-11) summarize as follows:

1. The spoken language is primary and this should be reflected in an oral-based methodology;

2. The findings of phonetics should be applied to teaching and teacher training;

3. Learners should hear the language first, before seeing it in written form;

4. Words should be presented in sentences, and sentences should be practiced in meaningful contexts and not be taught as isolated, disconnected elements;

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[15] The immediately following paragraph in Miller's description is also worth reporting: "Incidentally, it may be remarked that Latin is considered in Germany distinctly a man's language. Except in the most up-to-date private schools, it is not taught to girls and women, who are supposed to either have no practical use for this study, or not to be equal to the mastering of its difficulties" (ibidem).

5. The rules of grammar should be taught only after the students have practiced the grammar points in context–that is, grammar should be taught inductively;

6. Translation should be avoided, although the native language could be used to explain new words or to check comprehension.

Many of the scholars associated with the Reform movement were linguists involved with the nascent field of phonetics and the International Phonetic Association. Unsurprisingly, these scholars argued that the spoken language should be the core of language teaching and emphasized the importance of teaching correct pronunciation, which would be aided by the employ of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Wilhelm Viëtor, whose 1882 paper is often regarded as the beginning of the movement (see Howatt 1982, 1984), was a teacher at a German *Realschule* (a type of secondary school lower in prestige than the *Gymnasium*, whose graduates would not qualify for subsequent university study). He wanted to develop a method that worked better for his less academically-inclined students, one that would require less independent work and memorization from them. A key concern for Viëtor was the issue of *Überbürdung* or 'overburdening' of the students with excessive and ineffective homework, which was of central importance to his reform efforts (see Howatt 1982: 264).

The principles of the Reform Movement were continued, in the 1900s, by the Direct Method; they are most clearly exemplified by the Berlitz Method (as it is continued to this day). By now they will be familiar (Richards and Rodgers 2014: 11-14):

1. Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language;

2. Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught;

3. Oral communication skills were built up in a carefully graded progression organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes;

4. Grammar was taught inductively;

5. New teaching points were introduced orally;

6. Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects, and pictures; abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas;

7. Both speech and listening comprehension were taught;

8. Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

In England, W. H. Rouse was a proponent of the Direct Method as applied to the Classical languages, specifically. One can read a breathless account of the modernity and effectiveness of his teaching at the Perse School in Cambridge in Miraglia (2020: 13-16, with references), and a very dismissive account of the same facts in Wingate (2013).

What is fascinating to discover—and which exemplifies a general trend in Classical language pedagogy—is that, despite the various "reformist" declarations, the didactic materials produced by Rouse himself for Greek tell a more conservative story. The Grammar (if not Translation) elements are still alive and well, but are *supplemented* by more "progressive" activities, such as the adoption of a constructed, continuous text, and the reliance on spoken exercises in the classroom.[16] For instance, the beginner student using *A*

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[16] This is, of course, not to say that Rouse's methods might not have been effective. My intention is to highlight a constant feature of "progressive" pedagogy for the Classical languages, namely, that it often

First Greek Course (Rouse 1916) begins by learning the alphabet (Lesson I), then reads a grammatical description in English, which includes paradigms for the interrogative, relative, and indefinite pronouns, the first class of adjectives, the definite article, and the present conjugation in -ω. Afterwards, the student is given a hefty vocabulary list, is asked to carry out a few grammatical exercises, and only then is instructed to start reading (but not translating!) the continuous constructed text contained in the reader *A Greek Boy at Home* (Rouse 1909).[17] After that, the more "communicative" portion of the lesson begins, whereby the teacher asks comprehension questions (in Greek), asks the students to re-tell the story (in Greek), and finally to re-write it (in Greek). There is nothing inductive in how the grammar is presented to the students, only a different sequencing of topics that serves the purpose of starting to read a continuous text as soon as possible. The vocabulary is similarly presented as a list to be memorized *before* reading the text, rather than as material to be learned "unconsciously" through encountering it repeatedly in context.

Many "progressive" approaches to Greek and Latin teaching nowadays largely follow Rouse's model of combining explicit, deductive grammatical instruction with a constructed continuous text and vocabulary lists (with more or less emphasis on the spoken language component). This is essentially the Reading Method or Inductive Method, which is exemplified by textbooks like *The Cambridge English Course* for Latin or (partially) by *Athenaze* for Greek. If these textbooks are used without emphasizing the active usage of the target language (either on the part of the teacher or of the students), and class activity largely revolves around translating a continuous text and discussing grammatical topics in the students' language, the result is essentially a slightly modified version of Grammar and Translation that uses long constructed texts instead of short sentences (constructed or not). These methods can be more successful than sentence-based Grammar and Translation at building the lexicon (since the texts are repetitive), but they can be criticized for relying on non-genuine texts and potentially not preparing the students sufficiently for the hardships of translating real authors. Alternatively, one can use Rouse's method in a way that is more faithful to the author's original intentions, with an emphasis on speaking and writing Greek and Latin in the classroom. This is what many colleagues today would label the "Communicative Approach".[18]

A particular continuation of the Direct Method, developed in Denmark in the 1940s, is called the Natural Method and was specifically designed for independent study. It embodies the principles of the Direct Method more closely than Rouse's textbooks. It employs a continuous constructed text (for modern languages, this is accompanied by complete transcriptions in the IPA), in which the vocabulary and the grammar are introduced entirely inductively (see Figure 1).

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embraces new labels (be it the Direct Method, the Communicative Method, or, most recently, Content-Based Instruction) while in fact keeping large portions of the teaching methodology virtually unchanged.

[17] Another reader, titled *A Greek Reader* (1907) presents a selection of short texts by Greek authors, authentic but grammatically simplified and/or shortened, to supplement the materials in *A First Greek Course.*

[18] One should note that this is not to be confused with "Communicative Language Teaching", a method of second language teaching that has been popular since the 1980s (and is still used in many modern language textbooks), to which we shall return below. For a discussion of what is meant by "Communicative Approaches" to the ancient languages nowadays, see Lloyd and Hunt (2021: 1–3).

Fig. 1 Jensen 1942: English by the Nature Method
Image licensed under Public Domain Mark 1.0.
https://archive.org/details/english-by-the-nature-method/page/n7/mode/2up?view=theater;
link accessed April 27, 2025.
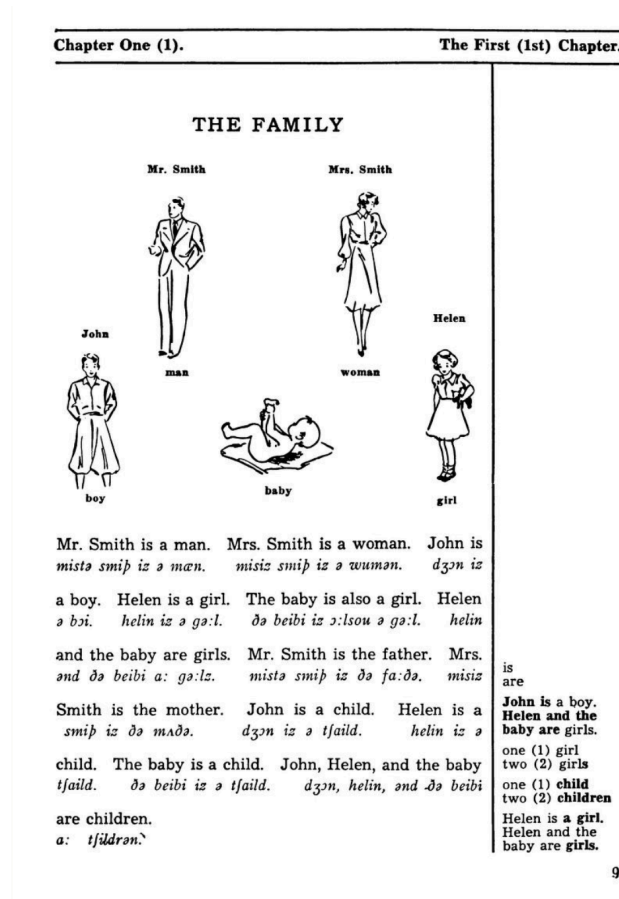
Jensen (1942) is the English. The Latin, written by Hans H. Ørberg (1957), is still employed today as the textbook *Lingua Latina per se illustrata* (to which we shall return in Part IV below).

By the 1920s, the popularity of the Direct Method for foreign languages had somewhat declined, and it came to be combined with more traditional grammar activities in the students' language (as we have already seen with Rouse).[19] The Coleman Report (Coleman 1929), a multi-year study of the status of foreign language teaching at US institutions of higher education, argued that teaching conversation skills was impractical for most American students and that *reading knowledge* should be the goal of instruction instead. But this reactionary wave didn't last long: the course of World War II convinced the American government that actual *spoken competence* in the target languages should be the principal

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[19] Some contemporary scholarship, like Wingate (2013), presents the arguments advanced at the time against the Direct Method as unsurmountable criticism, and argues for a return to Grammar and Translation in the field of Classics. What is ironic is that no approach to teaching modern languages has ever argued for a return to the Prussian Method, and even the scholars who leveled criticism to the Direct Method did so in order to improve upon it, not to bury it. Such is the case for Harold Palmer, cited by Wingate, who was directly involved with the development of the "Oral Approach", which was influential in the UK for decades, and, as the name suggests, hardly marked a return to "Grammar and Translation".

goal of foreign language instruction, and all of the following methods of second language teaching returned their focus on the teaching the spoken language first and foremost (Richards and Rodgers 2014: 13).

As a result, all of the major methods and approaches to language teaching that were developed in the second half of the twentieth century (be it the Oral Approach, Situational Language Teaching, Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, or Content-Based Instruction) can essentially be seen as continuations of the Reform Movement, in that they emphasize the primacy of the spoken language and the attainment of communicative competence over the mastery of abstract grammatical rules.

Without going into much detail (for which see Richards and Rodgers 2014), trends that became more and more established in second language teaching in the second half of the century include: extensive (if not exclusive) usage of the target language in the classroom; inductive and needs-based presentation of grammatical topics; an emphasis on communication; development of fluency over accuracy alone; acquisition of vocabulary from usage in context (as opposed to vocabulary lists); interactive and collaborative class activities (which simulate authentic interactions in the target language) along with a flatter classroom hierarchy (where the teacher is the facilitator but not the "boss").

This does not mean that the Grammar and Translation method has disappeared entirely: it is exceptionally hard to kill. Textbooks that embody the principles of more progressive methods can always be used in a way that makes them more traditional (and, in theory, vice versa). Anecdotally, the textbook used in my middle school English classes reflected all the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT),[20] but our instructor effectively used it as a reader for a Grammar and Translation-style course.[21] After three years, I had a solid "grammatical foundation", but it took a lot of independent work (and a lot of English media consumption) for me to become fluent. Our French teacher used a similarly CLT-style textbook, but followed the CLT methodology much more closely, and had us speaking and listening a lot more in the classroom; when we went on a school trip to France, we felt somewhat confident in our abilities to interact with the locals.[22]

What are we supposed to do with all of this knowledge, as teachers of Greek and Latin? The first step is to recognize the challenge ahead of us, and the tension between what many of us might have perceived as "the one and only way of teaching Greek and Latin" and the

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[20] Note that CLT itself is so vast and varied that no single version of it exists (see discussion in Richards and Rodgers 2014: 86-87). Howatt (1984: 279) speaks of a strong version of CLT, which "stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes", and a weak version of CLT, which "advances the claim that language is acquired through communication". CLT textbooks typically feature a number of short dialogues (to be listened to and acted out), topical readings, and interactive class activities, with each chapter organized around a specific communicative goal or topic of interest (e.g., asking for directions, talking about hobbies, interviewing for a job, etc.) while keeping the explicit grammatical instruction on a needs-only basis. The textbooks themselves often have a very recognizable graphic style, full of illustrations, photographs, and colorful typography, all meant to bring the "real word" into the classroom.

[21] To this end, she had to dictate the explicit grammatical rules to us, which we wrote down in a separate notebook, and were asked to memorize. I still remember the rules that she gave us for the irregular plurals in English—e.g., that the plural of *handkerchief* is *handkerchieves* (now I know that, as it is often the case with prescriptive grammatical rules, this does not always hold: the variant *handkerchiefs* exists too, and it might be preferred in some varieties).

[22] On the downside, I am still able, to this day, to draw diagrams representing the usage of the English tenses, but I could not begin to tell you the names of the French moods or tenses, or list which French nouns have irregular plural forms.

needs of the students in our classrooms. We should also acknowledge that radical change does not happen overnight, and that many institutional barriers are in place that make rethinking language pedagogy challenging. The good news is that there are many ways forward, and they are not mutually exclusive. I see two paths ahead of us: we can either stick to Grammar and Translation, but update it in ways that improve it substantially and alleviate its worst pitfalls. Alternatively, we can venture in the direction of more radically communicative language teaching, accepting that it might require a more profound overhaul of our teaching methods, our language curricula, and the type of training that we provide for language teachers. Section III explores the first route. Section IV provides evidence as to why we might want to attempt the second one, as well as some practical advice.

III. Improving the Traditional Method

Some of us might not yet feel quite ready to give up the traditional approach entirely. This might be for several reasons: it worked well enough for us (or so we think)—we might even have enjoyed it; it allows us to use textbooks and resources with which we are already familiar (i.e., the devil we know); and it matches the expectations of the type of knowledge our students are supposed to demonstrate later in their training. If our students will be graded on accuracy rather than fluency, and on their capacity to identify grammatical phenomena (whether real or invented by earlier scholars, such as the infamous "dative of military accompaniment"—see Smyth 1916: §1526),[23] we might as well "teach to the test".[24]

Furthermore, we might also be persuaded that the different goals that we have for the Classical languages (reading them fluently and understanding their linguistic structures, as opposed to speaking or even writing them) might justify a pedagogical approach that is more strongly reading-based. Why spend time speaking imperfect Latin in the classroom when we could be reading the ancient authors instead?[25] Institutional factors play a fundamental role too: if our teachers are trained in the Grammar and Translation method, we cannot ask them to switch methods without (time-consuming) additional training, and we cannot ask them to pursue that training on their own time and at their own expense. If our curricula and programs are designed following a traditional Grammar and Translation schedule, new methods could lead to disruption and logistical challenges. And if teachers trained to use communicative methods are few and far between, an institution wishing to try more progressive methods might still need to keep offering traditional classes next to new and progressive ones.

Regardless of where we stand on the issues above, and operating within the institutional limitations that we might face, we can still opt to experiment with a handful of newer pedagogical principles and graft them onto the more traditional methods, and thereby begin to reap some tangible benefits in our classrooms. A short list of strategies that I have found

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[23] This "maximalist" approach to grammatical description can be criticized on both the theoretical level (i.e., it does not reflect anything real in the competence of a native speaker) and on the pedagogical one (how does it truly help the student to be able to identify such minuscule shades of meaning as they translate their texts? Non-native speakers can understand and use the dative case correctly without passing each instance through such an artificial filter).

[24] Several of the suggestions below have to do with teaching grammatical concepts, which still constitute a component of many types of more communicative teaching methods.

[25] Section IV will explore some reasons why these activities might nonetheless be profitable.

helpful in my own teaching practice is given below,[26] as well as available online resources.[27] Keeline (2019) collects a number of suggestions for implementing a "mixed approach" (traditional *and* Active Latin) in beginning Latin classes, undergraduate reading classes, and graduate seminars.

Grammatical analysis and terminology

1. Support the development of a grammatical vocabulary

The Grammar and Translation method relies heavily on students being conversant with traditional grammatical terminology, yet most students nowadays do not receive traditional grammatical training in school. Terms for the parts of speech, such as "verb, adjective, preposition, adverb", as well as syntactic concepts, such as "verb phrase, prepositional phrase, subordinate clause" may inspire only bafflement in many university students.[28] If we fail to ensure that our students are properly equipped with the core concepts in this domain before handing them a traditional descriptive grammar of Greek or Latin, we are setting them up for failure. Here, there are many potential paths to success. At the university level, we might recommend that our students take a class on "Introduction to the Study of Language" (Linguistics 101 or the like) before or alongside their introductory language courses. This recommendation applies likewise to prospective Greek and Latin teachers. Textbooks such as Ringe (2018) are specifically designed to teach foundational grammatical concepts for second language learners. I am personally writing a book provisionally titled *Short Lessons in Greek Linguistics* which is meant to cover these topics for the benefit of students of Ancient Greek specifically. At the very least, instructors can brush up on their own knowledge of grammatical terminology and so make sure that they are capable of providing simple explanations and examples to their students in their first language first, and the target language second.[29]

As an example of how inadequate our definitions and discussions can be, consider the passive voice, a topic that English speakers often find challenging to grasp (in both Latin and English). For one, the term "passive voice" in English is often popularly understood as designating any rhetorical strategy where an agent is not mentioned, regardless of whether a genuine grammatical passive is involved or not (so that the sentences *there were casualties*, or *Remus died at the hands of Romulus* might both be labeled as "passive voice" even when they are both, grammatically speaking, active clauses). Some older textbooks (such as Allen and Greenough) leave the passive voice entirely undefined, and just state that "it works like in English". More recent ones often give very brief explanations, which, although correct, may

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[26] A general principle in the classroom should, of course, be that teachers should play to their strengths. I took inspiration for many of the strategies below from my experience in teaching linguistics, because that field is familiar to me; still, I believe these practices might be helpful to others, too.

[27] Additional online resources: https://www.chiarabozzone.com/post/when-learning-greek-and-latin-became-difficult-and-what-we-can-do-about-it; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025.

[28] In my experience of teaching "Introduction to the Study of Language" to hundreds of undergraduates, I observed, to my surprise, that the most challenging week for the students was not the week devoted to phonetics, when they had to learn the principles of articulatory phonology and to use the International Phonetic Alphabet. It was, instead, the module on syntax, during which they had to learn how to diagram a sentence like "The child saw a squirrel in the park with binoculars".

[29] A basic textbook in linguistics, such as Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2014), may prove useful in this regard.

prove insufficient for some students. See, for instance Libatique and Machado (2022: 10):[30]

> Voice expresses the relationship between the action of the verb and the subject. Like English, Latin has two voices: **active**, in which the subject is performing the action of the verb ("I love"), and **passive**, in which the subject is receiving the action of the verb ("I am loved").

What does it mean to *receive* the action of the verb? Is this enough for a student to grasp what the passive is doing and why would a speaker want to use it? An adequate grammatical explanation of voice requires that we understand the concepts of *verbal valency* (i.e., how many arguments a verb can bind; transitive verbs vs. intransitive verbs) and the difference between *semantic role* (e.g., agent vs. undergoer), *syntactic function* (e.g., subject vs. object) and *morphological marking* (e.g., nominative vs. accusative nominal endings; active vs. passive verbal endings). An understanding of why writers and speakers might use passive constructions requires introducing basic concepts of discourse and information structure.[31] If, as teachers, we ourselves lack clarity about these topics, explaining them to inquisitive or puzzled students may prove challenging. And this is without even taking the complexities of the Greek middle voice into consideration![32]

I don't want to give the reader the impression that one should earn a doctorate in linguistics in order to teach introductory Latin, but being conversant with the relevant grammatical terminology (as ideally refreshed through the equivalent of a college-level introductory linguistics course) is certainly desirable. Another plus of this type of linguistic awareness is that other modern languages (often spoken in the classroom) can be brought into play. For instance, a discussion of gender and number agreement in Greek or Latin adjectives can be illuminated by using Spanish language examples. This practice, moreover, helps remove Greek and Latin from the pedestal upon which traditional teaching methods can inadvertently place them.

2. Approach grammar inductively

A progressive principle that is now firmly established in second language acquisition literature is that one should teach grammar first through *induction*, and that one should encourage students to *observe and analyze* the structures of the language (as opposed to simply memorizing them). We are all familiar with the way that many grammars of Greek and Latin begin with an explanation like the following: English expresses syntactic roles

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[30] These authors have thought a lot about how best to teach the Latin passive specifically, and they make a number of persuasive suggestions in Libatique and Machado (2021).

[31] Often, passive constructions are used to ensure that referents that we care about (typically human or high in animacy, typically the topics of the discourse) are encoded as syntactic subjects, even when they are semantically undergoers. However, different languages may exhibit different preferences—a classic study in this direction is Du Bois (1987), who coined the term *Preferred Argument Structure.*

[32] When teaching at the university level, I have found that defining the Ancient Greek middle as a *valency-reducing derivation* (when providing the right examples) is helpful for many students, provided that the concept of valency has already been adequately explained. Transitive verbs bind two arguments (typically an agent and an undergoer, realized in Greek as a subject and an object); a valency-reducing derivation *reduces* the amount of arguments a verb can bind. When such a derivation is applied to a transitive verb, the result is a verb that only binds one argument. Note how the phrase "I wash the cat" has two arguments (me and the cat), while the phrase "the cat is being washed" only has one (the cat). Note also how the phrase "the cat washes itself" only has one argument (again the cat, who both carries out the action and undergoes it). The latter two examples cover a large portion of the usages of the middle in Greek.

through word order, while Greek and Latin use cases. A much more effective (and entertaining) exercise would be, instead of giving students any such explicit explanation (which, again, may be potentially terminologically obscure), to hand them the problem set shown in Table 1, and to ask them, based on the examples provided, to translate the following sentences into Latin:

1. Black cats love milk

2. Mario gives the cats to the cat

3. The cats give milk to Mario

4. Mario is a black cat

Table 1. Latin and English sentences

Latin	**English**
1. Marius cattum amat	1. Mario loves the cat
2. Marium cattus amat	2. The cat loves Mario
3. Marius cattōs amat	3. Mario loves the cats
4. Marium cattī amant	4. The cats love Mario
5. Marius cattō fuscō lactem dat	5. Mario gives milk to the black cat
6. Mariō cattus lactem dat	6. The cat gives milk to Mario
7. Mariī cattus fuscus est	7. Mario's cat is black
8. Mariī cattī fuscī sunt	8. Mario's cats are black

To complete this task (which can take up to thirty minutes), students must perform what we call *morphological analysis* (i.e., the bread and butter of many undergraduate linguistics classes). Without any previous knowledge of or information about the language, they have to figure out which words, and, crucially, which parts of the words contribute which meaning to the sentence. The lexical similarities between Latin and English (Mario = *Marius*, cat = *cattus*[33]) and the studied variation in the examples give students clear indications as to how the pieces fit together. As they move through the exercise (individually, or preferably in small groups), students have the opportunity to develop a concrete understanding of some basic facts of Latin cases and word order. This exercise is challenging enough to win the enthusiasm of students who enjoy puzzles, and (perhaps most importantly) it does not depend on any preexisting grammatical concepts or knowledge of grammatical terminology on the part of the students.[34]

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[33] *Cattus* (sometimes spelled *catus*) is a Late Latin word, similar in form to other words denoting cats in many Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages, to the point that its origin is hard to pin down. This won't perturb most beginning Latin students.

[34] Each time that I have used this very problem set in the class, students (typically first-year undergraduates at a large public university) have remarked on how "fun" this activity was and have been able to complete it without my intervention.

After the students have produced their translations, we can ask them to explicitly comment on what they have observed. How is Latin different from English in how it orders words? Why do Latin words have so many different word forms? The goal at this point is not to introduce the complete second declension or the first conjugation, but merely for the students to observe (i.e., discover) that the final parts of many Latin words "change" depending on which meanings are being expressed. We can then point out to them that this feature is similar to the behavior of some English words (*loves* vs. *love*; *Mario* vs. *Mario's*), only that Latin does it to a greater degree. A sequence like *cattō fuscō* corresponds to English "to the black cat" (somehow both the "the" and the "to" are not expressed through separate words in Latin; for now, we can point this out without explaining it), or that Latin can move around its words more freely than English does.

The (surprisingly many) facts gathered from this short activity can act as scaffolding[35] for the acquisition of specific grammatical knowledge that students will discover later in the class. Asking the students to collect all the different forms of the words *Mario* and *cat* creates a concrete basis for the concept of "paradigm" (which in other models is simply imposed upon the students). In later meetings, students can be tasked to assemble a paradigm themselves by "hunting" for the necessary information in an appropriately selected (or constructed) text. Imagine the excitement of finding a new case form "in the wild", never before encountered, and needing to figure out what it means. In my experience, knowledge won in this inductive fashion (and through trial and error) is a great deal more memorable for the students than the abstract and tidy systems presented by descriptive grammars. We are still far from a communicative approach (although the students will leave their first Latin class proud to have produced a few sentences in the language!). We are still using the language as an object of meta-linguistic reflection and analysis (i.e., we are talking about the language instead of simply speaking the language), and we are still using translation as a tool—but we are inviting the students to use their own problem-solving abilities and curiosity as opposed to memorizing raw facts.

A lighter version of this method of linguistic analysis (which is akin to what students would encounter if they did coursework in contemporary linguistics) is to present the students with simple examples *first*, and ask them to produce a grammatical observation before providing them with a grammatical rule. For instance, if the students are already familiar with the present indicative, the imperative can be introduced by presenting them with the following sentences:

1. *legis librum* 'you are reading the book'

2. *lege librum!* 'read the book!'

3. *legitis librum* 'you (pl.) are reading the book'

4. *legite librum!* '(you (pl.)), read the book!'

Then, the instructor asks the students to explain what meaning the new word forms of the verb *legō* seen in the examples express. The idea is to teach them to carefully observe the language itself, rather than the textbook. Once they have converged on the idea that these new word forms can be used to express a command, examples from another conjugation can be given (e.g., *amā*, *amāte*), and the students can be asked to predict what the forms for the remaining conjugations will be. For instance, students can be asked to turn simple sentences

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[35] Scaffolding, of course, is a fundamental concept in education, based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978). For a general introduction, see Kurt (2021).

containing second and fourth conjugation present indicatives into commands.

3. Embrace what is helpful

When teaching an introductory class, it is usually not helpful to burden the students with detailed explanations of historical phonology or morphology (and the same is true for extended, abstract lectures on vocabulary and its usage). Nonetheless, I have found that a few well-placed historical linguistics notes can be enlightening, mostly because they can help students remember and understand facts of the language that would otherwise be entirely arbitrary, alleviating the need to memorize irregular paradigms.

A well-known example concerns rhotacism in Latin (i.e., the historical sound change whereby [s] became [r] when between two vowels). A good place to introduce this development is when studying present active infinitives. Once students have become familiar with forms like *amāre* and *legere*, they might be puzzled by the seemingly exceptional form *esse*. This makes for an appropriate moment to mention that *esse* (morphologically segmented as *es-se*) in fact contains the original form of the infinitive morpheme, namely, *-se*. In *amāre* and *legere* (etc.), the original [s] became [r] between two vowels. The very morpheme *-se* is also found, unchanged, in the perfect active infinitives, such as *amavīs-se*. Knowing this simple rule allows students to recognize a single, unified morpheme *-se* among several disparate surface forms. Similarly, the basic rule of rhotacism is helpful when dealing with third-declension nouns of the type *honos, honōris*. In these nouns, the nominative retains the original [s] because it isn't followed by a vowel, while the rest of the paradigm shows the new [r] between vowels (the nominative later changed analogically to *honor*).[36] This explanation takes just a few minutes, and it can help students to remember and connect some facts of the language that they otherwise might not have noticed.

For Ancient Greek, a few topics of historical phonology that I have found similarly helpful in my language teaching include the differences between primary and secondary long mid vowels in Attic (e.g., <ω> vs. <ου> and <η> vs. <ει> respectively), the developments of [s] and [j] in combination with other sounds (which account for a large portion of the complexities in the historical phonology), and, on the side of historical morphology, the different types of present-stem formations (i.e., thematic vs. athematic presents, reduplicated presents. *-je/o-* presents, nasal infix and suffix presents, etc.).[37] These are all cases where a little bit of analytical knowledge can greatly alleviate the amount of otherwise arbitrary information that a student would need to memorize.[38]

Not all teachers will choose to provide these details to their students, and not all

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[36] And, as is the case for most possible sound changes, Latin is hardly alone in having experienced rhotacism of [s] (via [z] > [r]). Have you ever wondered why English *was* alternates with *were*? There too, an [s] between vowels was changed to [r]; see Ringe and Taylor (2014: 82–4). (This change, of course, happened for Germanic languages at a very different place and time than it did for Latin). For Latin, we can precisely pinpoint the time when this change occurred: Lucius Papisius Crassus (consul in 336 BCE) was the first of his *gens* to adopt the spelling Papirius for his *nomen gentilicium*, indicating that the pronunciation of /s/ had changed to [r] (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares*, 9.21). For a systematic and thoroughly engaging collection of the evidence for how Latin was pronounced, see Allen (1978).

[37] Explanations concerning all of these points can be found at the following sections of *The Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek*: Primary and secondary long mid vowels in Attic, §1.23. Developments of [s] in combination with other sounds, §1.91, 1.92. Developments of [j] in combination with other sounds, §1.77, 1.78. Present stem formations, §12.22–12.44.

[38] Major and Stayskal (2011) apply similar principles to teaching the Greek verbs.

students might benefit from them, but I have seen them work very effectively (even with high-school-aged students) when used strategically and sparingly. The goal here, of course, is not to teach the entire linguistic history of Latin or Greek to the students (needless to say, there are graduate-level courses and advanced handbooks dedicated to that), but to select a handful of facts that could be concretely helpful and are easy to grasp, and would reduce the amount of gratuitous memorization.

4. Break free from unhelpful categorizations

The teaching of syntax (more properly, morphosyntax) for the Classical languages is traditionally saddled with an abundance of minute classifications, which students are supposed to actively reproduce each time that they encounter a given category and every time that they translate it. When discussing the function of the Latin subjunctive, for instance, Allen and Greenough (1903: 278ff.) list four categories with several sub-functions (i.e., Hortatory, Optative, Deliberative, Potential). Flocchini, Guidotti, and Moscio (2001: 352–358) list *seven* categories (Hortatory and Negative Imperative; Concessive; Desiderative or Optative; Dubitative or Deliberative; Potential or of Modesty, Of Supposition or Hypothetical; Of Irreality).[39] Wheelock (who uses his own terminology, like Jussive Subjunctive), explicitly states "in order to master the subjunctive (...) you must: 1) learn a definition for each clause type, 2) know how to recognize each, and 3) know the proper translation for the subjunctive verb in each type" (Wheelock 2010: 195).

But is this formal (and clearly handbook-specific) categorization really the best point of entry for learning the Latin subjunctive? And is it truly necessary for students to go through these steps (*definition, recognition, translation*, as Wheelock suggests) in order to learn how to deal with this mood? Wheelock's steps are attractive because, as teachers, they give us something to do (provide definitions and examples, require that students reproduce said definitions and recognize examples thereof) and something to test for (Which subjunctive is this? What is the conventional way we agreed upon for translating this type of subjunctive?). But they are, pedagogically speaking, "teaching everything about the thing rather than the thing itself".[40] Students are learning a meta-language rather than acquiring a language. And as we all know, the steps often break down in practice: we have all encountered students who can reproduce the definitions, but can't then comprehend and translate subjunctive forms appropriately in context. These approaches can also result in translations that are extremely stilted or unnatural ("translationese"), simply because the students are trying to follow strict, artificial rules.

For beginner students, a better strategy would be to simply invite them to *notice* that different endings are being used and ask them to observe the contexts in which they are used (using short examples with English translations, as with the imperatives above, can be helpful at this stage). If we want to provide a very broad generalization, we could suggest that the indicative expresses *reality* (i.e., something that definitely happened or that is happening), and that the subjunctive expresses *what is outside of reality* (wishes, requests, possibilities, doubts, etc.). Ideally, the students should form their own sense of what the

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[39] Note that my point here is not that these descriptions are without interest or value (I personally quite like Flocchini, Guidotti, and Moscio's analysis and find it superior to Allen and Greenough's), but there is no reason to believe that these generalizations are the most appropriate place to start when teaching the subjunctive to first-year students of Latin.

[40] Cf. Rouse and Appleton (1925: 2).

subjunctive means by encountering multiple usages in the texts (again, we can invite them to *notice* the subjunctive and ask them to reflect on whether the verb expresses something within reality or not). Meanings are learned much more effectively by encountering them in context (where the context itself works as a guide) than by reading abstract definitions and disconnected examples.[41] Extensive categorizations like the ones provided by Flocchini et al. (2001) might be useful *later on* in the learning process, to solidify the intuitions and observations that students have already begun to construct for themselves, but do not replace contextual learning.

Selection and gradation of materials

1. Embrace the power of repetition

Repetition is key in language learning: this is true for vocabulary, but also for grammatical topics. In naturalistic language acquisition, learners are repeatedly exposed to the same structures before they master them (this is key to learning to understand and use these structures "unconsciously", i.e., quickly and without effort). In second language acquisition, too, we should aim to provide repetitive and redundant data as much as possible. To this end, it is important to select texts (real or constructed) that are extended and repetitive: a continuous reader is thus much more helpful than a series of disconnected sentences. Additionally, staying with a single author for an extended period of time guarantees that the lexicon, as well as the grammar, remain constant, thus increasing the opportunities for mastery.

2. Spend time with easy, non-canonical authors

If you use constructed texts at the beginning, you ideally want to move as quickly as possible toward real, extended texts composed by real, ancient authors. There are aspects of Latin and Greek that even the best contemporary translators cannot faithfully reproduce (in part because there is still much that we do not fully understand when it comes to Greek and Latin word order and discourse specifically), and there is a richness to the native usage of a language to which students need to adjust (the sooner the better). That said, the texts we choose need to be accessible and repetitive. This means that we might have to look somewhat at the margins of the usual literary canon, and not be too anxious for our students to read the very famous (but often complex) authors that usually dominate the study of Greek and Latin literature.

For Latin, Libatique and Machado (2021) report success using the *Fabulae* of Hyginus. Eutropius' *Breviarium ab urbe condita* (an extended summary of the history of Rome) is

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[41] In first language acquisition, lexical meaning is precisely acquired contextually rather than by definition: we don't typically tell a child what a bird is, but we point out several exemplars of birds and say 'Look! A bird!'. This type of learning results in the "fuzzy", gradient categories that characterize human language usage, whereby some types of bird are more prototypically "birds" than others (i.e., a blackbird rather than an ostrich), all the while maintaining a general sense that all birds belong to the same category (cf. Rosch's *Prototype Theory*, first developed in the 1970s). While we know that adult students of second languages can benefit from explicit instruction, their need for exposure to large amounts of input is still paramount. When it comes to teaching Latin, our goal should not be to have our students memorize all the names and features of all birds (i.e., all "subjunctives"), but simply to have them be able to recognize a subjunctive when they see it ("a bird"), and to have a sense of the meanings it can express in context, whether it happens to be a blackbird or an ostrich, so to say.

another option that combines very accessible language and a wealth of culturally relevant information. For Greek, the extended mythographic treatments in the *Library* of (Pseudo-) Apollodorus and Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica*, *IV*) have the similar virtues of being both highly repetitive, naturalistic, and providing important cultural knowledge. Going forward, students might be encouraged to do their own extended readings (a further step in Greek might be Herodotus; in Latin, Cornelius Nepos) with the help of facing translations (this might not be standard in North America but is common practice in Italy). The procedure here should be for the students to try to read and understand the original first and only refer to the facing translation when a lexical item or a construction proves unclear.[42]

3. Tailor your teaching to your target text

While vocabulary building is fundamental to attaining language fluency,[43] there are reasons to opt out of the practice of having students *memorize* vocabulary from a list (for one thing, remembering an item from a list is cognitively a very different task from understanding a word in its context). But regardless of how we decide to work on vocabulary (some alternative options are discussed below), we should take advantage of modern corpus linguistics and use frequency data and collocational data [44] to determine which items would be most helpful for our students to acquire (either in general or specifically for the texts that we have selected for them). *The Vocabulary Tool* on *Perseus* can be used to obtain a list of the most frequent words within a text, or within a larger corpus.[45]

We also know now that words are learned best in context and in company. Rather than focusing on isolated words, it can be particularly useful to look at lexical bundles, and collocations (or even larger constructions) that are particularly frequent in a given text. These can be found using concordance software (or by asking a digital humanities colleague in your department). *Perseus under Philologic*, for instance, has the capacity to generate collocational data (even in the form of a word cloud); Figure 2 shows the word cloud for the word ναῦς 'ship' in Homer, for example.[46]

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[42] When using this method, I usually recommend students cover the translation with a postcard and try to read independently as far as they can. When they encounter a lexical item or construction that they cannot quite understand, they can underline it in the original and check for the translation on the facing page, underlining that as well. This leaves a record on the page of items they might want to look at more carefully, or that they might need to review if they are preparing for a sight-reading exam.

[43] For a theoretical treatment of the role of lexicon in second language acquisition, see Tokowicz (2014).

[44] See Major (2008) for an application of this principle to Beginning Greek. For the use of corpora in language education in general, see Breyer (2011).

[45] *The Vocabulary Tool* on *Perseus*: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/help/vocab#tfidf; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025.

[46] *Perseus under Philologic*: https://perseus.uchicago.edu; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025.

Fig. 2. Word cloud for the word ναῦς 'ship' in Homer.
Generated by Perseus *under* Philogic.

Δαναοί Ζεύς Πρίαμος Τρώς αἱρέω βάλλω βαίνω γε γλαφυρός γῆ δή δίδωμι δῖος εἰ εἰμι εὔσελμος θάλασσα θεός θοός θυμός κακός κλισία κοῖλος κτείνω λαός λείπω μάλα μάχομαι μέγας μέλας μένω μετά μιν νῦν οἶδα οὐδέ οὔ2 πίπτω παρά πατρίς περ περί ποτε πρῶτος πόλεμος πόλις πόντος πῦρ σφεῖς σύ σύν τίθημι τεῖχος τότε υἱός φέρω φίλος φεύγω φημί χείρ ἀνά ἀνήρ ἀπό ἀτάρ ἄγω ἄλλος ἄρα ἄριστος ἅλς2 ἅμα Ἀργεῖος Ἀχαιός Ἀχιλλεύς ἐθέλω ἐμός ἐπεί ἐρύω ἑταῖρος ἔνθα ἔπειτα ἔρχομαι ἔτι ἕκαστος ἕπομαι Ἕκτωρ ἠδέ ἡμεῖς ἤ ἱκνέομαι ἶσος ἵππος ἵστημι Ἴλιος ὁράω ὄλλυμι ὄφρα ὅσος ὅτε Ὀδυσσεύς ὑπό

Concretely, if I were working with my students on Homeric vocabulary, I would have them practice not just the word 'ship' by itself, but also the collocations 'fast ship', 'hollow ship', and 'black ship' (i.e., some of the most prominent lexical words in the cloud). Now, when they encounter 'ship', they have a better chance of recognizing some of the other words that surround it. A similar author- or text-specific approach can be used to determine the ideal gradation of grammatical topics (thus not necessarily proceeding in the traditional order, but rather tailoring the presentation to the demands of the chosen text or author).[47]

Classroom activities

Even within a more traditional classroom, much can be gained by introducing a handful of individual or group activities that reflect a more communicative or active approach, or that leverage multiple kinds of media. Below are just a few examples (more examples of communicative activities and assignments are discussed in Part IV).

1. Priming vocabulary and using visual media

Before working on a translation or reading task, it might be beneficial to prime the students' lexical knowledge by asking them to "brainstorm" the terminology they are likely to encounter in the text based on its general topic (e.g., "We are about to read about a shipwreck; what are some terms that we are likely going to need?" "What is another word for *sea* that we know?"). Images could be used here as well: in the current example, it might be helpful to show them an image of a ship and discuss the terminology they already know (or don't yet know) directly on the image (e.g., "What is the term for *mast*?"). Images can also be useful when introducing grammatical topics: a lecture on the Latin perfect can start with a small comic portraying two characters talking to each other and using perfect indicative forms (with known vocabulary). Games of Memory (where students match tiles with an image of an object and tiles with the name of the object, which can be done by either printing

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[47] Libatique and Machado (2021) talk about altering the traditional gradation of grammatical topics based on the target text (in their case, the *Fabulae* of Hyginus) and the known challenges for English learners of Latin. While this is a good strategy, I find their rushed dismissal of communicative methods as surpassed, and their claim to be applying Content-Based Instruction (while in reality proposing a slight variant of the Grammar and Translation method) to be unpersuasive.

out physical tiles or by using a software) are another way of integrating a visual element into the study of the lexicon.[48]

2. Small dialogues and mini-interactions in the target language

Even if most of the classroom instruction takes place in English, it is beneficial to give students some opportunities to use Latin and Greek communicatively. Some recurring interactions could take place in the target language (while the examples in this paragraph are Latin, Saffire and Fries [1999] provide a number of scripts that can be used in the Greek classroom). Greetings and basic questions and replies (e.g., "Salve/Vale" "Suntne omnia plāna?" "Suntne interrogāta?" "Non audīvī/Non intellexī" "Possumne ad lātrīnas īre?") could be a good place to start. More advanced students could be asked to take part in small role-playing exercises. When introducing interrogative pronouns, for instance, one could set up the students in pairs, and have them ask each other basic questions while looking at a picture (e.g., "Quis est Carlus?" "Carlus pater est"). For students who are not used to speaking the target language in the classroom, giving them the opportunity to first write down a small dialogue or scene (bonus points for silliness) as a group activity (or even as a homework assignment), and only later acting it out in front of the class, can be a good way of easing them into active language usage. Asking them to summarize a reading in one or two sentences (borrowing words and even entire phrases from the original) is also an effective strategy, whether done orally or in writing.

IV. Embracing Communicative Language Teaching

The adjustments suggested in Part III might make for a good starting point for some teachers and some students, but they do not amount to a complete overhaul of traditional language pedagogy. What follows is a conversation with a long-time friend and fellow graduate in Classical Philology at the Catholic University of Milan, Daniela Negro, who has been teaching Latin and Greek at the high school level in Italy for over a decade. DN made the switch to communicative language teaching for her Latin classes a few years ago and is now a strong advocate of these methods (especially, as she explains below, because she finds them to be considerably more *inclusive* than the traditional ones). Her answers address many of the doubts and practical issues that face those teachers who want to follow a more progressive path.[49]

CB: How would you define your current method of teaching Latin, and what does a typical lesson look like in your classroom?

DN: At the moment, I'd say I teach Latin with a (mostly) communicative method. I work at an Italian high school (*Liceo*), where Latin is a mandatory subject. My students are usually aged

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[48] Many Learning Management Systems employed by universities, for instance, allow instructors to create interactive H5P exercises (https://h5p.org/; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025), which include Memory Games as well as many other types of activities that might be helpful for language teaching (e.g., Dialogue Cards, Crossword puzzles, Word search games, etc.).

[49] The following conversation has been condensed and edited for clarity. References and notes have been added. Other testimonials for communicative approaches to Latin (which in the English-speaking world are now often referred to as "Active Latin"), can be found in Coffee (2012) and Shirley (2019).

fourteen to sixteen. I use the textbook and workbook *Familia Romana*.[50] A typical class meeting starts with a quick review of our previous lesson (I usually ask my students to read their homework out loud, and we discuss what they did). Afterwards, we usually work on some new material: this can be reading a text, watching a video, or analyzing some sentences. Starting from that material, I discuss a new grammatical topic and/or some important vocabulary. At other times, I have students work individually or in small groups on reinforcement activities. Most importantly, as much of the class as possible takes place in Latin.

CB: How long have you been teaching with a communicative method?

DN: I have been teaching with the communicative method since about 2021. Before then, I could have been the poster child for the Grammar and Translation Method: I learned Greek and Latin in that way in a very conservative *Liceo Classico*, and most of the classes that I took during my undergraduate and graduate studies followed those same principles. After a Ph.D. in Classical Philology and a year of teacher training, I started teaching Greek and Latin in 2013, and I taught them (unsurprisingly) in the only way that I knew how. In 2019, I started taking an interest in communicative methods and, after some training, I first implemented these strategies in the classroom in 2021.

CB: How has your classroom experience changed since then?

DN: I have observed an enormous improvement. The change of method has helped me tear down a wall between me, my students, and Latin. Now they don't come into the classroom expecting an experience that is both boring and stressful. I would even dare to say that they have fun in my Latin class—at least most of the time.

CB: Would you say your students are achieving the same results as before, or better?

DN: On average, they are achieving better results. They develop a better grasp of the basic grammar, and they are much faster when it comes to reading and understanding the texts. Grade-wise, I see fewer failing grades than I did a few years ago.

CB: How does this method perform with students with diverse educational needs and backgrounds?

DN: I have found that communicative methods are considerably better when dealing with students with different linguistic backgrounds. While in the past many of my students who were non-native speakers of the language of instruction struggled in my Latin courses because they felt the need to translate the Latin into their own language first, and then into

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[50] DN: I find *Lingua Latina per se illustrata* (Ørberg 2011) to be effective as a coursebook: my students usually have the reader at hand (*Familia Romana*—or, for more advanced classes, *Roma Aeterna*) as well as the corresponding workbook (*Exercitia Latina*). The course provides other materials as well: a second workbook, a student's manual (*Latine Disco*), dialogues (*Colloquia Personarum*), short stories, a glossary, as well as grammatical explanations and charts in various modern languages. (In English the grammar and glossary portions are available jointly as *Lingua Latina: A Companion to Familia Romana*).

the Italian we used in the classroom, I have found that teaching communicatively removes such a barrier, resulting in much better learning outcomes.

Similarly, I have found that teaching communicatively leads to much better outcomes for students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia (who might, for instance, understand grammatical concepts in isolation, but struggle to apply them during translation work): this is true both in terms of their academic performance and in terms of their enjoyment of the class.

How can we explain such a radical difference in outcomes, if I am the same teacher, and not a particularly strict one at that? These experiences made me realize that the communicative method isn't simply more effective—it is more inclusive as well. One of its cornerstones is to present the learner with a variety of inputs: written language, spoken language, images, and even real-world objects.[51] This is beneficial to students who might struggle when it comes to certain reading and writing tasks. While communicative methods do not eliminate the study of grammar,[52] they do put an increased emphasis on understanding the text as a whole before worrying about single words—and, sometimes, on understanding single words by looking at the general context. This approach will generally be more effective for students who have reading difficulties, and who might easily misunderstand a word because they misread a letter or reversed two syllables.

Moreover, when employing the Grammar and Translation method, we unwittingly combine two separate language learning goals: we ask students to translate the text in order to show us that they have understood the meaning, but we also take this translation as the one and only proof that students "know" the grammar. With a direct approach, it is easier to only test one skill at a time. We can either test for understanding (and we can pick from a host of options, depending on what's appropriate in the moment: a paraphrasis in their own language, answering some open and/or multiple choice questions; even a translation), or we can assign an exercise focused on a grammatical skill.

Overall, when we opt for a communicative approach, we give each student more chances to succeed in at least some of their assignments. This way, we can gain a more accurate picture of each student's strengths and weaknesses. And, most importantly, we can boost student morale by giving them the chance to feel effective, and thus believing that they can succeed. This, of course, is a much better foundation for learning.

CB: What persuaded you to seek a different approach?

DN: In 2019 I felt like I was at a crossroads. I had been teaching Latin for about ten years, and each year I could see that my methods were proving less and less effective. At that time, I

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[51] DN: To introduce masculine, feminine, and neuter inflection, for instance, I usually take three objects to class: a bag (*saccus*, masculine), a bottle (*lagēna*, feminine), and a cup (*poculum*, neuter). I then proceed to talk about them to demonstrate different cases and constructions (e.g., "ecce saccus" "ecce lagēna" "ecce poculum'" "lagēna in saccō est" "lagēna et poculum in saccō sunt" "quid est in lagēnā?" "aqua in lagēnā est", then pouring water into a cup "nunc aqua in poculō est").

[52] DN: It has been my experience, even with the type of communicative method that I use, that students who lack basic grammatical notions (e.g., students who don't know a noun from a verb, or who don't know what a prepositional phrase is in their own language) will still be the ones who struggle the most with Latin. While it is perfectly possible for children especially to learn languages through simple exposure, research shows that some explicit grammatical instruction is beneficial for adult learners; see Carlon (2013) for an application of this principle to Latin teaching specifically.

was teaching a quite promising group of students; yet most of them struggled with Latin, and I could not find a way to help them. I tried everything that the Grammar and Translation method had to offer: teaching them to find the verb and to identify grammatical structures, assigning lots and lots of translation work, and giving them long lists of words to learn by heart. Nothing changed—and this wasn't the first time an entire class of mine was struggling. I was furious with myself: my students were doing their job, so why was I unable to teach them, and why couldn't I help them fall in love with a subject that I cared about so deeply? Something had to change. I told myself: "either I change the way I do my job, or I get another job". That was when I first started looking into communicative methods.

CB: What type of training did you pursue, and how long did it take?

DN: When I started taking an interest in communicative methods, I followed some webinars held by the *Centro di Studi Classici Greco Latino Vivo*—one of the few organizations in Italy that is committed to a completely modern approach to Classical language pedagogy.[53] I immediately realized that I had my work cut out for me: I had to learn Latin all over again, so that I could become a confident and somewhat fluent speaker, with an active (rather than passive) knowledge of vocabulary. Additionally, I needed to learn concretely how to teach Latin with a communicative approach. Using a small grant provided by the Italian state for continuing teacher training, I followed a one-year course with *Greco Latino Vivo*: once a week, I sat in on an entry-level Latin class, and two days later I would meet with the instructor in order to discuss the pedagogical methods I had witnessed. After a year, I had acquired the skills needed to teach communicatively, but I must say that this kind of approach requires constant, ongoing training: I find it useful, for instance, to consume as much Latin-language media as possible (these can be texts, podcasts, videos, or even online classes) in order to maintain a good level of fluency and vocabulary.

CB: How did you approach having to speak the languages with the students?

DN: I was terrified at first, as I'm assuming most people would be. During my training, the first time that I was asked a question, I confidently opened my mouth, as I had perfectly understood the question itself... and I stood there, silent, unable to put my answer into words. Much has changed since then, but some of that fear comes back every time a student raises their hand to ask a question.

On the students' side, they at first tend to be puzzled. Here in Italy, they often come from a different method, or have heard stories from older siblings and friends who studied Latin in a different way. But after a few attempts, they usually do enjoy actively using the language. I discovered that the secret, as in most of teaching, is to cultivate a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. It is important that the students feel safe making mistakes, and that they know they won't be reproached for them (this is what my teachers called "lowering the emotional filter").

When I first started my training, I admit I felt quite skeptical about speaking Latin in the classroom. But now I have experienced first-hand just how powerful speaking can be for language acquisition: the repeated usage of vocabulary and grammatical structures is

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[53] https://www.grecolatinovivo.it; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025.

extremely effective for retention. And it makes for a much more dynamic classroom experience.

CB: Were you not concerned that you (and the students) would make mistakes that would become entrenched?

DN: I wasn't just concerned that it would happen, I *knew* that it would happen—and it did. My favorite mistake is forgetting that *dum* only takes a present indicative: when I speak or write quickly, I often end up using other tenses. My students have their favorite mistakes too. What I can do as a teacher is to try to anticipate the mistakes before they happen, and try to defuse them afterwards. So, for instance, when I first introduce *dum* to my students, I warn them that I will probably use it wrong from time to time, so they need to be extra careful—and they are obviously allowed to correct me if they think I made a mistake. This way, they can use my occasional lapses as a way to think about the correct usage of *dum*. I also normalize making mistakes by openly admitting to them (again, the emotional filter). And once I get to know my students, I can try to warn them ahead of time when they are about to use a word or a grammatical structure that they usually struggle with.

Laughter can be a powerful tool as well. Of course, one should wield it carefully—no one likes to be the object of ridicule. But within an open and supportive class environment, where students feel safe and respected, joking about a mistake (and, crucially, not about the person who made it) can be a very effective strategy. Miraglia (2020: 116–117) writes about a situation of this kind, in which a student, talking about the content of a nest (*nīdus*), used the word *ovēs* ('sheep') instead of *ova* ('eggs'). At this point, the teacher asked "Num bālant ovēs in nidō?" ('Do the sheep bleat in the nest?'). The students corrected themselves while joining in everyone's laughter, and no one forgot the difference between *ovēs* 'sheep' and *ova* 'eggs' anymore.

CB: How did these methods affect the pace of teaching? Were you able to cover the same topics you did in the traditional approach?

DN: When I first started to teach communicatively, I thought I would be able to cover all the topics at a much faster pace. After all, I would not have to waste time on technicalities and exceptions until they were necessary. I must admit, I quickly discovered that I was mistaken. The pace of the class itself didn't slow down, but the time I saved on explicit grammar instruction was now entirely devoted to making students talk, and to growing their vocabulary.

On a more general note, I realized that ever since I started teaching communicatively, I have had an easier time monitoring whether my students are following or not, and whether I need to stay on a topic longer in order to ensure that everybody "gets it". Because the students have a more active role in the classroom, they can't just nod along and hide. And they are getting a lot more Latin data, in a more concentrated form.

With the Grammar and Translation method, I would explain a grammatical rule in Italian and give a few examples. Then we would move on to translating a few easy sentences, or to reading a text where the structure recurred maybe once in twelve lines. Overall, that's not a lot of Latin exposure. Now we start from the examples (in Latin), and after the explanation (mostly in Latin) we spend a lot of time on multiple focused exercises (in Latin), and on

vocabulary training (in Latin), and each student has to speak multiple times (you get the gist).

What I said so far is true for teaching high school (where I need to grade the students often, and where their level of motivation varies). When I teach private classes, and I work with adults who are highly motivated and do not need constant testing, things can move much faster. In this situation, a 72-hour course can take students from zero to almost the end of *Familia Romana.* This means having covered all of the morphology except for the tenses of the subjunctive and all of the syntax apart from the usages of the subjunctive (in the CEFR Model—the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages—this is roughly a B1 level).

CB: How concretely do you grade your students and on which types of activities/tasks?

DN: As per the standards of Italian high schools, each student needs to complete at least six written examinations and four oral examinations per year. I personally try to test my students as frequently as I can (within reason): this allows me to quickly figure out if something is not working, and it lowers the stakes for each individual test (if something goes wrong on one particular test, it's not the end of the world). A typical written examination starts from a text, usually chosen from the teacher's materials of *Familia Romana*, or sometimes written by me. I ask the students to answer some questions to demonstrate that they understood the text; these can be either open-ended questions, true/false questions, or multiple choice. Next comes a section focusing on the main grammatical points covered in the text. Questions in this section may include modifying sentences from the text (e.g., *Marcus amandus est Liviae > Livia dēbet Marcum amāre*, or vice versa), or exercises in which students must inflect a word or a phrase. At the end, I usually have a section where students have to translate part of the text into Italian. This is not traditionally part of a communicative method, but I do this to accommodate the expectations for high-school Latin in Italy (crucially, the state examinations at the end of high school still require Latin-to-Italian translation). Oral exams typically start from an image like the one shown in Figure 3.

Fig. 3 Example of an image used during an oral Latin exam.
Image by Ali Salah Photographie from Pexels licensed under CC0.
https://www.pexels.com/photo/newlywed-couple-smiling-16903588/;
link accessed April 27, 2025.

For beginners, I typically ask students a simple question about what they see (e.g., *Quid facit vir?* Expected answer(s): *Vir fēminam amat*; *Vir fēminae rosam dōnat*). When students have more vocabulary and structures they can use, I give them a few minutes to look at the image, and then have them describe it to me. I might ask a few additional questions in order to help them, or to force them to use specific words or structures they did not include on their own. I have also experimented with having students write a short text starting from one or more images, or with having them work in groups to prepare a role-playing scene: for the latter option, I would give them the scenario, the characters, and some grammatical structures they need to include in the dialogue, and let them be creative with it.

When grading written work, I tend to focus more on accuracy; when I evaluate speaking skills, I focus mainly on vocabulary and syntax, and I worry less about minor grammatical blunders (i.e., using the wrong inflectional ending and the like).

CB: What types of supplementary materials have you found useful for your students?

DN: My Gen-Z students, perhaps unsurprisingly, love video content. I mostly use materials on YouTube by US-based communicative teachers (see fn. 27). My students especially enjoy watching videos about Roman society, customs, and places. Usually, we read a list of questions first, and then we watch a video two or three times in order to find all the answers.

It can also be useful to provide extra reading materials: some good (though somewhat dated) options are: *Iulia* (Reed 1962), a reader that follows at first the adventures of a little girl, and then moves to narrating Greek and Roman myths, with increasing grammatical and lexical complexity; and *Ritchie's Fabulae faciles* (Kirkland 1903), a selection of short mythical stories.

Additionally, I like to use dedicated software to create self-correcting versions of exercises from the *Familia Romana* workbook, which saves a considerable amount of class time, as students can receive instant feedback on their performance.

CB: Would you say these methods work better with large or small groups of students?

DN: Over the last few years, I was able to experiment with all sorts of class sizes, from two people all the way to thirty. I would say that a small-to-medium group (something between five and fifteen people) tends to work best. With fewer people, the class quickly becomes boring and tiring, because there is no variety in interactions, and the students constantly need to be fully focused. Moreover, class sizes that are too small preclude group work—and we all know that cooperative learning and peer tutoring can be very valuable additions to our teaching. With more than twenty people, on the other hand, it is tricky to make sure that each student is talking and interacting as much as the method requires.

CB: When it comes to the time and effort that you have to invest in preparing each class, how do you feel that the communicative method compares with more traditional methods?

DN: I must admit that preparing a communicative class takes significantly more work than preparing a traditional one. I saw this very clearly during the current academic year, since I am teaching a traditional introductory Greek class (I was given no choice as to the method) alongside my usual communicative Latin classes. The Greek class virtually prepares itself: I take a quick glance at the next topic in the textbook, select some exercises from the workbook, and I head to the classroom. If I am in a real rush, I can teach without any preparation at all—after all, I remember the first declension pretty well, and I can easily write it out on the board, have my students copy it, and then decline a few nouns that are listed in the workbook.

Communicative classes on the other hand, always require some advance planning (and this is especially true for teachers who are new to this approach). When I introduce my students to a new chapter in *Familia Romana*, I do what I call a *praelēctiō*, i.e., a quick preview of significant new vocabulary and grammatical structures in context. This means that I first have to compile a list of all the main lexical and grammatical points in the text (not everything new must be introduced in advance, some new words can, for instance, be understood in context as we read the chapter). I typically prepare images and examples in order to clarify each point, and sometimes I even design some quick exercises to check for student comprehension.[54] After the reading portion comes the practice portion, and as few communicative Latin workbooks are available, I sometimes have to develop the materials myself. Alternatively, I take the time to turn the exercises in the workbook into the types of self-correcting activities I mentioned earlier. Even preparing an in-class quiz or exam is easier under the traditional approach: it only takes a few minutes to select a Greek or Latin

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[54] DN: While it is better in general to first read the text and then talk about it, and only later have the students practice and memorize a given vocabulary item or grammatical pattern, sometimes it can be a good idea to check whether the class has a general grasp of a new structure. Let's take the Latin passive periphrastic construction as an example: if students do not understand that the expressions *Marcus laudandus est mihī* and *Dēbeō Marcum laudare* are equivalent in meaning, going ahead and reading the corresponding chapter in the text might not be helpful. The students might not, at this point, be able to use the structure actively, but they need at the very least to be able to understand what it means.

text for the students to translate from one of the many available textbooks and workbooks, lifting it from a chapter dedicated to the same linguistic topics.

All of this can sound demotivating, but there are two important "buts". First, and foremost: my experience this year has shown me once again that, the more communicative the class is, the more the students are interested and engaged, and the more they control the language. My Greek students tend to forget, after five months, the meaning of basic high-frequency words such as γράφω, 'I write,' or λέγω, 'I say,' (precisely as I did when I was their age). As long as our linguistic competence is passive, and our knowledge of vocabulary comes from a list, it is difficult to feel really in control of a language. This is not only true for students, but for teachers too. Teaching Latin in a communicative way has, without a doubt, greatly improved my own Latin competency. Until a few years ago, even after completing a Ph.D. in Classics, I always had the feeling that I could not understand a Latin text immediately upon approaching it (the way I understand, say, and English or French text): I needed to stop often, find the verb, then the subject, and so on. Now, I almost always read and understand what I see, and I only very rarely need to slow down and resort to grammatical analysis to untangle a particularly challenging passage.

My newly-found confidence in Latin also made me realize how differently I feel with regard to Greek. I have had few occasions to approach Greek in a communicative way, even less to teach it so, and as my class moves beyond the most basic topics, I always have the feeling that I am forgetting something, or that I am making a mistake. I sometimes feel like I am not actually in control of the language. And, for sure, I need to consult a dictionary more often, even when I am simply preparing lessons for an introductory class.

The second "but" is more practical in nature: after a few years of communicative teaching, I have put together a large archive of lesson plans, slides, exercises, and additional materials. Therefore, I can prepare at least beginner communicative lectures almost as quickly as I would more traditional ones.

CB: What is your recommendation for teachers who are interested in these more progressive methods, but are not sure where to start, and whether the change will be worthwhile?

DN: Surprisingly enough, I would not advise anyone to "dive right in". A change of method, much like any change, needs some amount of planning. Otherwise, we might end up thinking that the method is bad, when we simply were not applying it correctly. This of course does not mean that all change needs to wait until a complete re-training has taken place. If a teacher feels unhappy with their current method, I would advise them to apply the "+1 rule": what is one thing that I can change now in order to move towards a more communicative approach?

A good starting point could be to work more systematically on vocabulary (perhaps using one of the strategies mentioned above). Or maybe, start teaching grammar more inductively, by showing some examples first as opposed to just stating the rule (as discussed in Part III). If we (and our students) are happy with the results, we can think about more structural changes next—and here some additional teacher training will likely be necessary. One word of warning: if our students come from years of learning Latin with a more traditional approach, they will likely be puzzled by the changes at first. Just give them time: in a few weeks they will enjoy not having to thumb through their dictionary all the time, and working on their vocabulary by reading texts or watching videos instead.

V. Conclusion

As Classicists work to reimagine a new and more inclusive version of the field, rethinking the way the Classical languages are taught will be a crucial step in making the study of the ancient world more accessible and attractive to a wider and more diverse set of students. The Grammar and Translation method, with its roots in a classist conception of higher education and in a nineteenth-century version of linguistics, needs to gradually give way to more progressive approaches, more in line with what the study of second language acquisition has long established as best practices for teaching the modern languages.

More progressive methods will remove one artificial barrier to entry into the field, making it easier to recruit and retain students from a variety of backgrounds. More progressive methods will also alleviate challenges for students with specific learning disabilities,[55] and for students who do not speak the language of instruction natively. Finally, by bringing more students to a higher level of proficiency in the languages, these methods will benefit the field altogether by creating scholars who feel secure in their language skills and thus in their capacity to do original work on the texts.

These changes do not need to happen at the same speed, or in the same way, for each teacher and each classroom, but they do need to happen. Of course, the burden cannot fall on individual teachers alone: the training provided to teachers must shift, and graduate programs that choose to prepare their students for more progressive teaching methods will need to find room in the curriculum for some additional linguistic training, ideally including both coursework in linguistics in general (either an introductory linguistics course or, potentially, a course on the linguistics of Greek or Latin specifically) and coursework on contemporary language pedagogy (as well as the opportunity to practice said pedagogy).

Teaching communicatively requires a higher level of language proficiency on the part of instructors than traditional methods do: this might mean allowing for more time for graduate students to build their language skills before they are tasked to teach introductory Latin or Greek, or providing funding for them to attend a spoken language immersion program. While the internet abounds with useful materials (e.g., videos, books, and podcasts in the target languages), more Greek and Latin textbooks embracing the communicative methods need to be written (ideally featuring a more modern and sensitive treatment of cultural and social topics than, say *Familia Romana*), as the current selection of textbooks is heavily skewed towards Grammar and Translation.

This does not mean that individual teachers are powerless in experimenting, within the limitations they operate under, with more progressive practices and approaches. This paper is meant to provide some historical context, actionable advice, and personal anecdotes to get started along this journey.

The pedagogy of the Classical languages has always had a tendency to be more conservative than it claims to be. In part, I believe this is due to a kind of survivor bias: the field, after all, has spent close to two hundred years selecting precisely for those people who could do well within those traditional methods. This process, perhaps unwittingly, has helped keep the discipline for the few. It has fashioned learning the languages (a task for which human brains are generally very well suited, under the right conditions) into an elaborate and exclusive trial, which (moreover) does not always lead to proficiency. If we

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[55] On this topic, see Iovino (2019).

care about the future of our discipline, it is time to take a different path. It is time to stop climbing mountains in flip-flops.

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Minoritizing Classics
Erin Lam

Abstract: This piece is a call-to-action for those who work with ancient greco-roman material, often identified as "classicists," to minoritize the field of classics by adopting a stance of disciplinary and individual humility. This includes critically examining the assumption that classics is exempt, or will even benefit, from the political persecution of racialized, queer and trans, disabled, and other minoritized populations. Current diversification attempts to combat this state of affairs by incorporating minoritized viewpoints via reception, though well meaning, ultimately bolster the colonial supremacy of the discipline. Minoritizing classics requires a varied, widespread, and communal imaginative labor aimed at completely revising the hierarchized valuation of greco-roman material and classical (philological) methodologies.

Keywords: disciplinary humility, decolonizing classics, minoritized knowledges.

Res Difficiles continues to explore and encourage diverse forms of scholarly expression. This piece departs from traditional article format by combining the invitation sent to speakers with the opening remarks from the Minoritizing Classics Colloquium, held at UC Santa Barbara on February 8, 2025. The following text serves both as a record of the event's framing and an invitation to reflect on the evolving shape of academic discourse.

I'm delighted to have present in this room many colleagues whom I greatly admire on both an intellectual and a personal level—thank you to Kelly Nguyen, Adriana Vazquez, Sukaina Hirji, and Hannah Silverblank for so generously sharing their unpublished work with us. Unforeseen circumstances have prevented Mathura Umachandran from being here, for which they send apologies. Their presence will be sorely missed, but undoubtedly felt through the profound influence their thinking has had on the conception of this colloquium. The speakers I have invited model creativity, intellectual curiosity, courage, integrity, political investment, and a deep sense of ethical responsibility. Every single one of them has acted consistently with their values at great risk to themselves and their careers, whether it be standing at the front lines of the encampments last spring, actively supporting graduate student strikes, or advocating for the fair and respectful treatment of their students and colleagues. They have done so not out of a sense of performative victimhood or martyrdom, but simply because it was the right thing to do. This is to say nothing of their contributions to the field and beyond, which speak for themselves and will be the subject of our discussion today.

In a time of dehumanizing legislation designed to terrorize, including the confiscation and withholding of trans people's identity documents as part of an effort to deny trans existence, rampant ICE raids targeting people who have lived and contributed to the American economy and society for decades, the governmental funding and denial of genocide despite widespread popular protest, the mass-disabling event that is the ongoing pandemic, the defunding of higher education meant to stifle academic freedom, and many

other crises that disproportionately affect minoritized populations, but also touch the lives of the most privileged, whatever illusion the discipline of classics may have held of its objectivity and insulation from current political issues is undoubtedly crumbling.[1] It has been proven over and over again that much work published, condoned, and cited in this discipline actively bolsters the worldview of white supremacists and their interpretation of canonical texts.[2] Whether that work does so intentionally or not is beside the point. As Sukaina Hirji's paper argues, debating whether this is the effect of misinterpretation or misunderstanding risks stagnation and futility. No, this is an inherent feature of classical texts, upheld by those who interpret them, inseparable from the contexts in which they have been read.[3]

In response to this state of affairs, well-established scholars including Dan-el Padilla Peralta, Patrice Rankine, and Johanna Hanink have called for burning the classics—destroying what exists and starting fresh.[4] Critics of their position tend to flatten it into the condemnation that classics is rotten to its root, for which the solution is nothing short of total annihilation, without hearing the second part of their provocation: that this destruction is only necessary if the discipline as-it-is refuses to change by making way for BIPOC and other marginalized points of view. As someone living in the ongoing aftermath of the recent LA fires—and I know many others in the room also remain deeply affected—I can tell you from personal experience that it is the continued suppression of minoritized knowledges, in this case, the pointed refusal to implement prescribed burns and other centuries-old land management techniques of the Tongva people, that leads to true devastation.[5] It is not those who point out the misogynistic, racist, ableist, and colonial history and present of the discipline that are setting it destructively ablaze, but those who refuse to acknowledge that history and present, opting instead to cling steadfastly to the imagined comfort of the past while pretending they do not smell the smoke.

So if it is to avoid completely succumbing to the flames, what might the discipline do? Mathura Umachandran has argued that to combat the racism and colonialism endemic to the field, classicists must adopt a position of humility, decentering the field and by extension

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[1] An illusion upheld by the mistaken belief that minoritized individuals do not exist in the field, or that they consist of so small a demographic that they are not worth consideration. On the lie of objective "pure philology," see Rankine, P. 2019. "Classics, Race, and Community-Engaged Scholarship." *AJP* 140.2, 345-59.

[2] E.g. Zuckerberg, D. 2018. *Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Ranger, H. 2024. "Critical Reception Studies: The White Feminism of Feminist Reception Scholarship," in *Critical Ancient World Studies: The Case for Forgetting Classics*, ed. by M. Umachandran and M. Ward. London and New York: Routledge, 213-33.

[3] Hirji, S. Forthcoming. "Ancient Greek Philosophy as Ideology," in *Crafting Race in Plato and Aristotle*, ed. by P. Marechal and J. Proios. New York: Oxford University Press.

[4] On Padilla Peralta: Poser, R. Feb. 2, 2021, updated June 15, 2023. "He Wants to Save Classics From Whiteness. Can the Field Survive?" *The New York Times Magazine.* https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/02/magazine/classics-greece-rome-whiteness.html; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025; Rankine, P. Nov. 14, 2024. "Fiery Towers: A Professional Classicist's Manifesto." Penn Public Lectures on Classical Antiquity and the Contemporary World; Hanink, J. Feb. 11, 2021. "A New Path for Classics." *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* https://www.chronicle.com/article/if-classics-doesnt-change-let-it-burn; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025.

[5] Plevin, R. Jan. 19, 2025. "The Tongva's Land Burned in Eaton Fire. But Leaders Say Traditional Practices Mitigated Damage." *Los Angeles Times.* https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-01-19/tongva-ancestral-land-burned-eaton-fire; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025. See "Gabrielino/Tongva Nation." https://gabrielinotongva.org/; link accessed Apr. 27, 2025. See also the forthcoming Fall 2025 volume of *Res Difficiles*, "Rez Diff: Indigenous Perspectives," ed. by A. Lance and T. Wells.

ourselves in the process.[6] Building on their work, I propose that we minoritize classics: not diversify it, the milquetoast liberality of which Sara Ahmed has convincingly demonstrated.[7] Diversification, after all, fuels consumption and assimilation while allowing the diversifiers to congratulate themselves for recruiting those who are tokenized-as-diverse into the project of empire.[8] Minoritizing is instead a move to turn this colonial impulse on its head—seen, within reception studies, to enable classicists to "claim" cultural products that span a vast geographical and temporal spread. In focusing primarily on connections to greco-roman antiquity, the field via reception produces its own relevance by continuing its much-critiqued extractive impulses.

Contrary to the main currents of reception studies today, minoritizing classics asserts that works classified as reception are not worth studying *because* of their interaction with greco-roman antiquity, but rather are creative projects in their own right that *happen* to converse with the fodder of classicists, and deserve to be approached as such.

What is the difference in insisting, on the one hand, that one must have read vergil and/or homer to understand Ocean Vuong's "Aubade with Burning City," or that one must have knowledge of the Vietnam War, on the other?[9] Both claims seek to historicize, contextualize, and prioritize, but surely the ethical and political valence differs. What about the myriad other burning cities that one may have historical, cultural, familial, and/or personal knowledge of? The most recent escalation of violence against Palestinians, for instance, exceeds Vuong's authorial intent, but surely and rightly influences what readings we might produce today. In reading and teaching Vuong's writing, one ought not to extract only those poems that interact with the classical tradition, but to also discuss those across his *oeuvre* that pointedly do not, discover how those in other fields and outside the academy read his work, consider emotional and artistic responses to his poetry, and so on, in an effort to respectfully understand and represent his creative agency—areas that traditionally fall outside of a classicist's "lane," requiring curiosity, humility, and yes, much discomfort and labor.[10] This is one way to avoid positioning the classicist self as a masterful expert, the tradition as the guiding principle, instead truly dialoguing with the material at hand in its own right and drawing on the bounty of undisciplined knowledges.

Queer theory, building on Black feminist theory, validates personal and community-based experience as legitimate knowledge that one can use to theorize.[11] Perhaps a corollary

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[6] Umachandran, M. 2022. "Disciplinecraft: Towards an Anti-racist Classics." *TAPA* 152.1, 25-31.

[7] Ahmed, S. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life.* Durham and London: Duke University Press. See also Padilla Peralta, D. 2018. "The Death of a Discipline." *Arcade (Stanford Humanities Center)*; and Kotrosits, M. 2023. "The Ethnography of Gender: Reconsidering Gender as an Object of Study." *Studies in Late Antiquity* 7.1, 5-28, esp. 21-24 on the problems of diversifying (ancient) gender.

[8] Cf. Greenwood, E. 2022, 188-9 on "diversity as ethnographic fallacy." "Introduction: Classical Philology, Otherhow." *AJP* 143.2, 187-97.

[9] Vuong, O. 2016. *Night Sky With Exit Wounds.* Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 10-12.

[10] On this point, I depart from the limiting statement that "a *philological* journal for Classics cannot be asked to consider all manner of history and culture, American or otherwise [emphasis his]." Rankine 2019, "Classics, Race, and Community-Engaged Scholarship," 357.

[11] Black feminist theory: influential examples are hooks, b. 1991. "Theory as Liberatory Practice." *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 4.1, 1-12; Collins, P. H. "Black Feminist Epistemology," in *Black Feminist Thought (2nd Edition).* New York and London: Routledge, 251-71. On Queer theory: Sedgwick, E. K. 1993, 9: "there are important senses in which 'queer' can signify only *when attached to the first person* [emphasis hers]." "Queer and Now," in *Tendencies.* Durham: Duke University Press, 1-20. Cf. Mel Y. Chen's (2012, 197-202) use of the autobiographical in theorizing "toxicity" in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect.* Durham and London: Duke

for our field is that the specialized knowledge of greco-roman antiquity that a classicist offers can be considered as part of any experience that one can bring to the table: no more or less valid than any other, albeit acquired through years of higher education and gatekept disciplinization. To minoritize classics thus does not consist merely of including "othered" voices and knowledges, but to consider them as important as, if not more important than, greco-roman antiquity and hetero-patriarchal colonial logics. The cultivation of disciplinary humility is beginning to take root.[12] It is, however, a duty that has fallen primarily on the minoritized, those who are already forcibly humbled by the white supremacy of the discipline—and whose burdened shoulders will continue to bear its weight, though it is my hope that they will not continue to do so alone.[13]

At its core, minoritizing classics is a reminder that every argument is political, *especially* those that refuse to acknowledge politics, and thus has profound ramifications for how real people are treated in the world. This is not an intellectual exercise. This is a call to shift your thinking, your speech, your writing, and above all, your actions to challenge the inequities of the status quo, *especially* when doing so decreases your own access to the privileges afforded by wealth, institutional power, masculinity, education, whiteness, class—the list could continue forever.

We envisage this space as a supportive one in which we can discuss how the identities projected upon and manifested through our bodies, configured by historical and ongoing colonialisms, shape the state of the discipline. We ask you to sit in discomfort when it arises, allowing it to mark areas for further examination, feeling, and growth, rather than topics to be avoided.[14] The world that minoritizing classics is inviting you to co-create will only be realized if we have the humility to take responsibility for our mistakes, ignorance, and complicity in oppression, so that we can commit to doing better. The effect of these discussions will undoubtedly reverberate beyond this room. Thank you all for being part of this conversation.

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University Press; and José Esteban Muñoz's (2019, 67-73) use of personal memory to theorize queer gesture in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (10th Anniversary Edition)*. New York: New York University Press.

[12] Notable examples are: Haselswerdt, E. 2023. "Sappho's Body as Archive: Towards a Deep Lez Philology," in *Critical Ancient World Studies: The Case for Forgetting Classics*, ed. by M. Umachandran and M. Ward. London and New York: Routledge, 121-37; Nguyen, K. 2021. "Queering Telemachus: Ocean Vuong, Postmemories and the Vietnam War." *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 29, 430-48; Nguyen, K. 2023. "Queering Feminine Movement: Sappho, Hồ Xuân Hương and Vi Khi Nao," in *The Routledge Handbook of Classics and Queer Theory*, ed. by E. Haselswerdt, S. Lindheim, and K. Ormand. London: Routledge, 303-15. Umachandran, M. 2023. "Speculation on Classical Reception: Queer Desire and N. K. Jemisin's 'The Effluence Engine,'" in *The Routledge Handbook of Classics and Queer Theory* ed. by E. Haselswerdt, S. Lindheim, and K. Ormand. London: Routledge, 472-86.

[13] This sentiment is inspired by Umachandran 2022, "Disciplinecraft," 27.

[14] See Umachandran, M. and M. Ward 2024, 24 on how "settler moves to innocence seek to address the discomfort itself rather than the structural problem it underscores." "Towards a Manifesto for Critical Ancient World Studies," in *Critical Ancient World Studies: The Case for Forgetting Classics*. London and New York: Routledge, 3-34.

The following unpublished papers were presented at the colloquium:

Hirji, S. "Ancient Greek Philosophy as Ideology," in *Crafting Race in Plato and Aristotle*, ed. by P. Marechal and J. Proios. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lam, E. "The Irreverent and Mischievous Genius of Johanna Hedva's *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain.*" Ch. 1 of *A Hermeneutics of Irreverence: Queer of Color Poets Playing with the "Classical Tradition."*

Nguyen, K. "The Promise of the Classics: Nguyễn Mạnh Tường and the Yoke of Cultural Imperialism." Ch. 2 of *Critical Classicality and (De)colonial Vietnamese Writings.* Oxford University Press.

Silverblank, H. "Time for Astrology, or, Astrology for Crip Time."

Vazquez, A. "Virtual Libraries: Epic Totalization and the Arcadian Tradition." Ch. 3 of *Arcadia Ultramarina: Studies in the Neoclassical Literature of Portuguese America.*