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Ancient History in a Global Age: Connecting and Transcending Cultures and Disciplines

A couple of years ago I had the opportunity to ask a number of Greek and Roman historians about their experiences as historians teaching in either classics or history departments in North American universities. The responses were revealing and frustrating. The long-standing gap between these departments seems as marked and deep as ever. Ancient historians trained in classics departments often are not taken seriously by their colleagues in history because they are considered philologists rather than historians, and those trained in history departments are viewed with suspicion by classicists because, to put it simply, they are seen as historians rather than philologists. Insufficient control of the ancient languages and literatures on the one side, insufficient familiarity with methods and theories of the social sciences on the other: these deficiencies, whether real or only suspected, routinely tend to exclude a large part of the job applicants from a large part of the available positions, and in the process perpetuate the rift.

As serious as this problem is, it can be overcome. Several universities have recently created various types of integrated and interdisciplinary graduate programs that in some way or other all aim at training ancient historians who are both classicists and historians and thus, ideally, are acceptable to both types of departments. But while one problem is being addressed, others crop up that aggravate the difficulties. One is that, for more than a generation, ancient historians have been applying with considerable success theories and methodologies of other social sciences, especially anthropology (it is difficult to overestimate the impact Moses Finley or the "French School," of Vernant, Vidal-Naquet, and others had on our field), political science, sociology, or demography (I mention, *exempli gratia*, Josh Ober, Richard Saller, Brent Shaw, and Walter Scheidel). More recently, an increasing number of job descriptions have favored connections between Graeco-Roman and Near Eastern history. Some of the most successful graduate programs emphasize links between history, archaeology, and religion. The demands are constantly growing: simply to be a Graeco-Roman historian well trained in the traditional methods used in our field (the interpretation of literary texts, inscriptions, and coins) seems no longer sufficient.

In my presentation I will explore the possibility that the dilemmas imposed by these developments on the field of ancient history also represent opportunities. Thorough training in the core fields (classics and history) remains indispensable. The pursuit of special interests linking us to other disciplines is invaluable. But even the most brilliant and daring among us can pursue only a limited number of such links. None of us can do all and please all. Rather, I suggest, ancient historians should recognize that they are positioned ideally in the middle of a network of potential connections with other disciplines. Such connections differ in nature: some of them focus on theories, methodologies, and approaches; others on subject matter and categories of sources; yet others on interaction and comparison between various ancient or early cultures, both within the traditional core area of the ancient Mediterranean and far beyond it. Ancient historians can build, foster, and exploit such connections. Precisely because of their

position in the middle they can facilitate interaction and collaboration between disciplines and help transcend disciplinary boundaries. I shall end my presentation by discussing a few concrete examples of such "networking," and the unique opportunities it offers both for research and teaching.