

History is by definition a story that relies on evidence, and consequently we expect budding professional historians of antiquity to begin to master the techniques of interpretation of the various types of evidence that have survived. But we should expect anyone who reads history at all to attempt to approach evidence critically: instruction in history that ignores evidence is mere indoctrination. Even beginning students should try to furnish themselves with the tools to evaluate the assertions presented to them in finished historical narratives. These skills will serve them usefully throughout their lives, whether they apply them to the claims of politicians, the reports of newscasters, or the generalizations of intellectuals they meet at cocktail parties.

Such arguments are traditional, even banal, though they endure as persuasive justifications for historical training. In this paper, however, I will argue for something different: the desirability of training graduate students in the history of Classical scholarship, particularly as it touches on the history of the idea of evidence. At one time most graduate programs offered courses on "Materials and Methods," which combined the history of the discipline with an introduction to various specialized techniques of research; the course has survived in few universities. Yet the techniques of source analysis developed by Theologians and Classicists have shaped the contemporary historical profession and the world-view characteristic of modernity. Ancient historians should be aware of this story.

In a recently published book ([Ancient History: Monuments and Documents](#)) I argue that the modern idea of evidence developed between the 15th and 19th centuries; objects were institutionalized as evidence by sequestering them and treating them systematically. In a related development, scholarship was professionalized and lodged in nationalist educational institutions. After a review of this argument I will consider the spread of this new conception of evidence from Europe to other parts of the world in the period of 19th and 20th century colonialism, taking as an example historical scholarship either in Japan after the Meiji restoration or colonial India.