

Understanding the ancient world in full requires moving beyond classical texts, epigraphy, and papyrology to consider the wider sample of sources that inform us about antiquity. How can we incorporate these (re)sources into teaching ancient history more effectively? As a practicing archaeologist invited to join this panel, I rarely need to ask, or answer, this question. But as ancient history has become increasingly marginalized, or miniaturized, within academic curricula and university faculties, we should all apply our minds and classrooms as to how material culture might help rescue it from extinction.

In order to do so, we need to interrogate how we currently use it, in different kinds of classes as well as in textbooks. Too often a “top-down approach” treats images or monuments primarily to *illustrate* an important event or principle recorded in texts. Instead, material culture can introduce far more unsettling lessons: often it may offer contradictions of an ancient “fact,” and provoke a more critical confrontation with an ancient text, a stimulus to research when such discrepancies become a fresh lesson. Moreover, innovative visual teaching aids now enrich many different disciplines, and ancient history can exploit these techniques to help students imagine and explore ancient environments. However, some reconstructions can homogenize ancient life, and we need to apply our training as social scientists to monitor what kind of sample size we offer in instruction, and whether it skews an initial perception.

Three examples from the ancient world that treat Greek texts as iconic or exemplary can be complicated instead by exploring their material setting. By selecting three arenas—the political and cultural hegemony of Athens versus Sparta (Thucydides 1.10); the social environment of Greek domestic life (including the visibility of women and slaves), as they are referenced in Lysias VII, Pseudo-Xenophon, and Pseudo-Demosthenes; and the physical health and urban history of populations across the Greek –barbarian divide (applying Aristotle and Arrian with bioarchaeology to the site of Apollonia in Illyria), I hope to inject debate from recent research into the classroom experience. In particular, contextualizing certain over-used passages from classical texts has often lead to simplistic juxtapositions and justifications for the way we read those texts, instead of locating that text within a matrix of competing and complementary scenarios of human experience in the past.

Making ancient narratives come alive in the classroom is not the greatest challenge: the ancient world seems more popular than ever on stage, in film, fiction and popular history. But the field of ancient history, like ancient art, continues to shrink within the academic community of historians and art historians. Moreover, while we have popularized classics in translation and reception to expand offerings and attract students, we still struggle to preserve ancient language instruction on university campuses. A greater challenge lies beyond the classroom, and here we have opportunities to make material culture an ally in the campaign to consolidate a broader base of support for ancient studies and their future.