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Ancient History in Canadian Universities

In Canada, as in Britain, the teaching of ancient history traditionally has been done in Departments of Classics, rather than Departments of History. This division reflects the fact that only in a Classics Department could a historian acquire the necessary command of the languages (Ancient Greek and Latin), as well as the additional skills in technical sub-disciplines (such as papyrology, epigraphy, archaeology, numismatics) required to do serious research on the history of the Graeco-Roman world. This represents a contrast to the situation in the U.S., where the teaching of Graeco-Roman history has tended to be subsumed into the History Department, although faculty in this area frequently have cross-appointments in Classics. During the past decade, however, the situation of ancient history in Canadian universities has begun to change, as reconfiguration of faculty precipitated by major retirements and budget cuts has led to the regrouping of Classics faculty and programmes in a number of universities into larger, multi-disciplinary departments. In the majority of these cases the resultant new units have been enlarged Departments of History (sometimes with a double-barrelled name, 'History & Classics').

The process of accommodation to this regrouping inevitably forces historians of the ancient Graeco-Roman world to think about the extent and the nature of their kinship with historians of other people and places: what are the similarities and differences between the kinds of history we teach and the way we teach it? are there things that the two groups of historians can learn from one another? to what extent can/should the basic training of a student in the research methods and skills of these different fields of history be the same? are there opportunities for collaboration in research and/or teaching between ancient and other historians that can and should be fostered by their administrative grouping into a single academic unit? In all these respects, ancient historians in Canadian universities have much to learn from our cousins in the U.S. who have been living, more or less comfortably, for decades in Departments of History.