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New Media for Ancient Jewish Studies

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Classical Studies and the Internet

In the field of Classics, there has always been a strong interest in digitizing classical texts. David Packard, son of the Hewlett-Packard co-founder, branched out from his Harvard doctoral research in Minoan Linear A tablets to create the first search engine for ancient texts, Ibycus. Having done searches of Greek words in Homer and then Flavius Josephus on an Ibycus desktop computer at Stanford in the 1980s, I have always felt immense gratitude towards Packard, as well as the creators of the Perseus classical text site at Tufts, which allows students nowadays to read classical texts (including the New Testament) and to click on a Greek or Latin word, receiving not only the possible parsings of a chosen word, but also the lexicon entry.[1] In many respects, the study of the "dead" ancient Greek and Latin languages is really quite accessible and free, except for the cost of the internet connection and device, to modern readers.

The first time I built a webpage for an ancient western history course in Fall 1996, I had to go to the student union at Stanford in order to use a powerful SUN Microsystems computer to program the page in HTML. There was not much useful content on the Internet yet; the Vatican at that time provided by far the most enticing pictures of important Greek vases, such as the black figure of Ajax and Achilles by Exekias, and of Roman statuary, such as the *Augusts Prima Porta*.[2] Twenty years ago, we used glass slides to show our students archaeological sites where we or someone else had taken shots with slide film; today, we can hunt for pictures of practically anything on the internet and create a PowerPoint in ten minutes.

Beyond just the ancient texts and images, we can roam endlessly online to find information pertaining to the ancient world, including reading modern scholarship via JSTOR and Google Books. Determining what is reliable and what is not, however, poses a real challenge to our students. Since not all sites are created equal, as their creators are not infallible, it is reassuring to find high-quality ones, such as AWOL (The Ancient World Online). Named the "Winner of the AIA Award for Outstanding Work in Digital Archeology 2015," it presents a list of open access journals in Ancient Studies and provides frequent updates of publications newly available online in a blog format.[3]

For students who wish to use social media to engage modern audiences with the ancient world, the American Institute of Roman Culture provides remarkable hands-on opportunities in Rome. As explained on its website, AIRC helps students rediscover history on site in Italy via excavation at Ostia Antica, storytelling through social media, and digital preservation efforts.[4] Students from any university can study with AIRC during the school year or summer and receive academic credit through Fresno State for their coursework. There is no doubt that this approach of blending the old with the new will continue to shape and expand the scope of Classical Studies in the future.

New Media and Jewish Studies

Tapping into the growing interest in Public History as a sub-discipline of History, Jewish Studies programs in new media have sprung up at both private and public universities, such as Columbia, and the University of Washington, respectively. The "New Media in Jewish Studies" site describes its collaboration between "scholars and digital storytellers":

> Citizen Film and Columbia University's Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies are instigating collaborations around the country. With partners ranging from Columbia's Center for New Media Teaching and Learning to the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, we use ubiquitous media tools to engage students, professors and audiences in imaginative explorations of Jewish themes. From multimedia portfolios exploring New York photographers and their legacies, to blogs about Jewish life in the Pacific Northwest, young scholars are discovering Jewish history, literature and identity on their own terms; inventing new modes of scholarship in the process.[6]

The University of Washington, meanwhile, trumpets that it is "turning Jewish Studies students into Public Historians" by combining hands-on learning with the digital platform. Lest all this seem a bit too virtual, one need only turn to the March 23rd post, "The Hebrew Alphabet gets an Orthodox Feminist Makeover." As Hannah Pressman describes a video on YouTube:

She [Victoria Hanna] references a common initiation rite dating at least as far back as medieval times: when a young boy began his studies or received his first *humash* (volume of the five books of Torah), his rabbi would bring him a slate or page of letters dripping with honey; the boy licked the honey off the letters in the hopes of beginning of sweet life of Torah study. The biblical text often connected with this highly symbolic ritual was Isaiah 50:4, "The Lord God gave me a skilled tongue [*leshon limudim*, literally a "tongue of the learned" or a "tongue for teaching"] / To know how to speak timely words to the weary."… She connects the letters with her female body, and then enacts the ritual of tasting honey for her female pupils. However, the honey is not just a few drops – it's a thick, viscous pile that at one point in the video flows backwards, reversing history and, perhaps, undoing the male-only tradition of Torah study. At other points in the video she handles clods of earth and glowing flames. Hanna's feminist vision of the Hebrew alphabet is elemental and copious, overflowing all boundaries. It's seductive, energetic, disruptive, and a little bit dangerous.[6]

This kind of digital learning has breathed new life into very old topics, and the Stroum Center at the University of Washington certainly is "reaching broader audiences with interactive online projects." Notable is its Sephardic Studies Digital Library and Museum, which "has collected from members of the local Seattle Sephardic community more than 500 original Ladino books and thousands of documents composed in Ladino as well as other relevant languages, such as Ottoman Turkish, Hebrew and French. Dating between the 16th and mid-20th centuries, the books already comprise one of the largest Ladino libraries in the United States."[7] In fact, this is the "first interactive digital portal into the Sephardic world,"[8] which should be of special interest for anyone living in an environment as imbued with Hispanic culture as the San Joaquin Valley.

Jewish Studies focused on the ancient world also has its own web presence, thanks to university databases and museum sites, individual scholarly and publishers' efforts to disseminate texts, and blogs or Facebook pages. The following is hardly exhaustive but merely representative of the data floating in cyberspace.

University libraries provide remarkable databases, some of which are open to the general public. Yeshiva University presents copious materials from antiquity to the present day, and though many links are available only with an affiliation to the university, some are accessible to all users.[9] Examples of open links include the Internet Jewish History Sourcebook, the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (from 1906), Holy Land Maps, rabbinic manuscripts from the National Library of Israel (in Hebrew), a Tosefta database (also in Hebrew), and the Digital Dead Sea Scrolls from the Israel Museum (in English, with the Hebrew texts). With the photographs of the scrolls at the last web site, thanks to Google, one can click on a verse, which then becomes shaded in red, and a hypertext pops up, such as this one on the Great Isaiah Scroll:

> Chapter 3: Verse 15
> What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the faces of the poor?' declares {my Lord}, the LORD of hosts.
>
> Translation: Professor Peter Flint (Western Trinity University, Canada) and Professor Eugene Ulrich (University of Notre Dame)[10]

What is more, this Digital Dead Sea Scrolls site teaches the readers that these scrolls can differ from the later Masoretic version (in the Aleppo Codex, written around 930).[11]

For a highly organized and chronological list of links to sites ranging from biblical to Zionist texts, one should visit the page created by the Dinur Center for Research in Jewish History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.[12] If one specifically seeks ancient Jewish texts, Duke University has an excellent page with sections (going clockwise from top left) for Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo and Josephus, Epigraphy/Papyrology/Numismatics, and Additional Resources, including manuscripts. To have at one click the "Inscriptions of Israel/Palestine" or "Roman Provincial Coinage Online" is really quite remarkable and helpful.[13]

Duke University's site rightfully singles out Philo and Josephus as crucial authors for our understanding of the ancient Jewish world and provides links to full English translations of their texts. Philo is represented by the 1898 translation of Cohn and Wendland, and though Perseus has the eighteenth-century William Whiston translation of Josephus, the PACE (Project on Ancient Cul-

tural Engagement) site created by Steve Mason has the texts of Polybius (with Walbank's commentary) and Josephus, with both the Whiston and new Brill Josephus Project translations (and commentary) as they become available. There are also glossaries of places and archaeological sites as well as a bibliography, dissertations written on Josephus, and scholarly papers delivered at annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature.[14] For anyone who is interested in the works of Josephus, which were preserved by Christians thanks to his mention of Jesus, his brother James, and John the Baptist, PACE is the right place to start.[15] On the reception of Josephus from late antiquity to the 21st century, the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Oxford in the near future will be exhibiting an online Josephus Reception Archive, an outgrowth of four workshops held in 2013 and 2014.

The newest web site to stir up interest in Ancient Jewish Studies is "Ancient Jew Review."[17] Combining articles, videos, book notes, and resources (for Hebrew Bible, Second Temple, Rabbinic Literature, Late Antique Judaism, New Testament, and Early Christianity), this site created by graduate students conveys a sense of youthful energy and timeliness—especially with its scrolling Tweets. Recent articles have ranged from "The Understudied and Marginal Josephus" by Jacob Feeley to Erin Walsh's "Re-Enacting Nicaea," which describes a course at Duke on "Debating Jesus." Videos include one on the Cairo Genizah and another on Jodi Magness and the Galilean synagogue of Huqoq. Back in January, while I was amazed by the AJR report of a papyrus fragment of the Gospel of John being up for sale on eBay with a starting bid of $99, I was most charmed by the link to the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's recipe for gingerbread cuneiform tablet cookies. Since these are cookies for nerds, the recipe invites one to click on an online collection database of the Penn Museum's Babylonian Section to find good examples to try to copy. [18]

Conclusion and Caveat

Given the exponential growth of digital resources for Ancient Classical and Jewish Studies, faculty already have incorporated new media into their teaching and research, especially as libraries cease purchasing hard copies of books. I do have my doubts about the loss of hard copies, however, when I get eye strain from reading the screen too much, and I think students prefer text on pa-

per for "deep" reading, but no one can dispute the ease of using a small device to check a reference or short passage.[19] To have so much information at one's fingertips without having to schlep around tomes is really quite revolutionary, since it not only saves an enormous amount of time and money, but it also makes everything so much more accessible to those with physical disabilities.

As someone who first used in-house email at Stanford in 1984, I welcome improvements to the ways in which we communicate information, but I know there will always be a need for human discernment in figuring out what is useful and good vs. what is silly or worse. For instance, do not go to the Facebook page for "Flavius Josephus" expecting a nice Jewish Studies site: there is no typical drawing of Josephus in a turban—on the contrary, the visitor is greeted with a picture of a private investigator, employed by the Goodnight Detective Agency, in fatigues and holding a rifle, with all sorts of strange posts filling out the page. It's enough to chase you off the Internet, but don't give up; instead, invest some time surfing the sites I have listed for inspiration from ancient sources and scholarship. If nothing else, you may just find a clever recipe when you least expect it!

NOTES

[1] For Ibycus, see http://www.tlg.uci.edu/about/ibycus.php; Perseus has classical texts at: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collection?collection=Perseus:collection:Greco-Roman.

[2] http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html. On the Internet, see http://www.internetsociety.org/internet/what-internet/history-internet/brief-history-internet: "On October 24, 1995, the FNC unanimously passed a resolution defining the term Internet. This definition was developed in consultation with members of the internet and intellectual property rights communities. RESOLUTION: The Federal Networking Council (FNC) agrees that the following language reflects our definition of the term "Internet". "Internet" refers to the global   information system that -- (i) is logically linked together by a globally unique address space based on the Internet Protocol (IP) or its subsequent extensions/follow-ons; (ii) is able to support communications using the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) suite or its subsequent extensions/follow-ons, and/or other IP-compatible protocols; and (iii) provides, uses or makes accessible, either publicly or privately, high level services layered on the communications and related infrastructure described herein."

[3] http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com: "AWOL is a project of Charles E. Jones, Tombros Librarian for Classics and Humanities at the Pattee Library, Penn State University."

[4] http://romanculture.org.

[5] http://newmediajewishstudies.org.

[6] http://jewishstudies.washington.edu/israel-hebrew/the-hebrew-alphabet-gets-an-orthodox-feminist-makeover/.

[7] http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16786coll3.

8 http://jewishstudies.washington.edu/sephardic-studies/sephardic-studies-digital-library-muse-um/.

9 http://www.yu.edu/libraries/online-resources/databases/jewish-db/.

10 http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah#3:15.

11 On the Aleppo Codex specifically, see http://www.aleppocodex.org/homepage.html.

12 http://jewishhistory.huji.ac.il/links/texts.htm.

13 http://guides.library.duke.edu/content.php?pid=24422&sid=2712121.

14 http://pace-ancient.mcmaster.ca/york/york/texts.htm.

15 For a free translation of Josephus's works from the Loeb Classical Library, one need not purchase the digital version, as noted in the March/April 2015 issue of *Biblical Archaeology* Review ("Josephus Digitized," p. 18), since the Loebolus web site has 273 free PDFs of Loebs, including Josephus (L. 203 and 210 are *The Jewish War*): http://ryanfb.github.io/loebolus/.

16 http://www.orinst.ox.ac.uk/research/josephus/.

17 http://www.ancientjewreview.com. For its Facebook page, see https://www.facebook.com/ancientjewreview.

18 http://www.penn.museum/blog/museum/how-to-make-cuneiform-tablet-cookies/. *Nota bene*: a reader has corrected the article under "Comments" to point out that the knife (in a picture) used in decorating the cookies with cuneiform is a *fish* knife, not a cheese knife. To read such distinctions on the Internet shows that even in the digital age certain niceties of a bygone era—think *Downton Abbey*—still exist.

19 Naomi Baron, *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World,* Oxford University Press, 2015.

20 https://www.facebook.com/flavius.iosephus.