

Mapping Antiquity: An Approach to Using Mapping Technology in Classics

The present paper argues that the use of a simple instructor-led mapping tool is a method and approach that easily integrates the use of mapping technology and historical GIS within a Classics course. In this way, students can benefit from the abilities of mapping technologies to promote inquiry, collaboration, and collect alternatives to the logo-centric presentation and analysis of history.

In response to the issues and questions concerning the use of mapping technology and its marriage to teaching, working with a programmer I developed a mobile application, called *the Nearchus Project*, to be used in various Classics courses. The tool is a mobile optimized application that provides a collaborative, interactive mapping tool where the instructor can lead a course by choosing locations and creating fields with specific questions. Students can then access the program, chose a location and create their own narratives that then appear with the respective data as a “pop-up bubble” on a Google Map. The tool has been effective and has indeed promoted inquiry and collaboration. For example, students in Roman history courses used their collaborative maps to discuss the geographic variables that affected how Rome managed its provinces. In an introductory Greek language course, the tool was used to familiarize students with the geography and various *poleis* of ancient Greece by creating a digital map of the city-states that were involved in the Peloponnesian War. The present paper will discuss both the use of this tool and case studies from several courses where it has been employed.

In *Placing History, How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS are changing Historical Scholarship*, Knowles notes that the use of GIS by historians can go beyond the illustrative and in creating a historical GIS, one can gain an intimate knowledge of

sources and subject area. Hence, historical GIS can inform research and provide another method to analyze the past (2008: 2-13). Bonehammer argues that by allowing historians to offer and view alternative perspectives, GIS technology can serve as a catalyst for further inquiry and analysis (2008: 222-3). And although the initial growth of historical GIS was slow (Gregory and Ell, 2007: 15-16), the past decade has seen rapid change and an increased use of historic GIS in research (Elliot and Gillies, 2009). GIS mapping tools are becoming increasingly popular for research and although the efficiency and effectiveness of historical GIS and mapping software as teaching tools are areas that need more attention, there are indeed pedagogical advantages to using mapping technology in Classics.

As an alternative to using complicated software, integrating a course-specific mapping tool within a Classic course provides students with an introduction to historical GIS, and by using such mapping software and creating their own digital maps or historical GIS, students can understand better the content of the course. In addition, they can also examine the benefits and limitations of using mapping technology in Classics.

Bibliography

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