

## "Modern, Ancient, Awesome": Academic Classics in the Early 21st Century

At the beginning of the 2014-2015 academic year, I needed to attract the attention of potential participants in a production of *Oedipus the King*. By that time, I had already combined the most modern of technologies—3D scanning and printing—with one of the most ancient—linen theatrical masks (for which we printed plastic molds), and the publicity idea that emerged seemed obvious. We blanketed the campus with postcards that featured an image of Oedipus from a red-figure vase next to a QR code and the text: “Modern, Ancient, Awesome.” Viewers were instructed, “just use the code,” which led them, if they used their smart phones to scan it, to a website with audition and crew information about the play.

The campaign and the cards exemplify the seamless and expected integration of modern technology in my classroom, research, and outreach. This paper demonstrates how I use various technologies in all aspects of my work—from beginning Greek flashcards to student mythology podcasts to online ticketing to those 3D-printed molds—but my list will be much like any classics professor’s list. The paper’s focus is, rather, on the “expected” part of the integration, with the essential observation that, in 2016, students are digital natives and see electronic technology as a given in every aspect of their lives, not least the classroom. The question for us ought to be, I believe, to what extent should we satisfy that expectation and to what extent should we disappoint it.

As we all know, classics has embraced the potential of electronic technology from early on. Our training as precise users of language made us ideally situated to cross over into computer coding when circumstance demanded it or inclination drew us. We were among the earliest of digital humanists: I remember well discovering the work of the Packard Humanities Institute while I was in college. Founded in 1987, PHI’s databases were already essential tools

as I headed to graduate school in 1990. That's pretty ancient for electronic technology. My guess is that many more of us, no matter what our generation, have adopted digital technologies in our classrooms and research than have our colleagues in other humanities fields. This tendency is to be applauded and celebrated as part of classics' inherent relevance and adaptability to our age, and it responds positively to the expectations of our students.

But our field of study is also the perfect ground upon which to question those expectations. Our τέχνη extend to every sort of material and intellectual tool, and what to use in the classroom can itself be a lesson for students about the culture and capabilities of the ancient world. Is a tried-and-true pedagogical technique ineffective simply because it doesn't make use of a computer? Which classroom activities have only now reached their full potential with the advent of electronic technology, and which are better with an older technology—the book, the board—or with no technological mediation at all? When is there inherent value in learning an old method, or by means of an old method? When is the value rather in the illustrative comparison with new methods? How does the ancient world continue to speak through and speak to modern technologies?

This paper, then, advocates both for the happy entanglement of digital technologies in our work and for a vigorous engagement with the questions that entanglement poses, not just among ourselves at a panel such as this one, but *with* our students. “Modern, Ancient, Awesome” meant that my students worked on the neat new technology, but it also meant they were part of reconstructing truly ancient technology: both things were awesome, as was the intersection between the two. That dynamic strikes me as fundamental to the work of classicists as we connect to the Greek and Roman past to our present American students.