

Squaring the Circle Again: STEM Resources for the Greek Language Classroom

Our students live in a world where scientific achievement and knowledge are profoundly important, just as they were to the Greeks. And, even at liberal arts colleges, the lure of lucrative careers in STEM fields draws many students away from the humanities. Thus it becomes increasingly important to ensure that the language requirement is as enriching an experience as possible, not only for students in the humanities, but also for those pursuing medical and engineering tracks. The Greek legacy includes a vast repository of fascinating texts that cover many topics of interest and relevance to the modern reader. And, with a little imagination and care, language instructors can incorporate these riches to augment the canon in language classes at all levels. Of particular interest is the Greek scientific corpus. Employing scientific passages in the Greek language classroom helps restore the totality of the Greek intellectual experience, exposes the student to a variety of authors and styles, and resonates with the current intellectual climate where pride of place is given to STEM fields of study.

Although Archimedes may be better reserved for an advanced class in Greek, many scientific texts are accessible to intermediate (and even beginning) Greek students. More texts survive from antiquity that can be classified as “scientific” than any other genre; the ancients considered these texts interesting, relevant, and useful, and reading them directly enhances the student’s experience of Greek culture, history, and literature. Such texts, carefully selected, allow for discussions on culture and values, and they emphasize that the rules of syntax and prosody are not restricted to the canonical literary authors, but rather they are universally employed by authors who explore many topics. Presocratic fragments, in particular, are attractive for their brevity (especially, for example, those of Heraclitus). They can challenge but do not overwhelm, and they can spark interesting discussions regarding the preservation and transmission of Greek

texts (and biases therein). Additionally, the Greek literary canon resonates with scientific inquiry. Thus, even in courses on Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus, Euripides, and many other authors, students can consider the Greek achievement as the “seed of STEM”.

Here we shall explore further some resources (including background reading, commentaries, and a forthcoming article that presents annotated Greek STEM passages for use in the intermediate classroom) and caveats for incorporating scientific texts into Greek language classes at all levels.

A handout of pertinent bibliography will accompany this presentation