

Repairing Fragments: Reconciling Archaeological Lecture and Practice in the Classroom

In many introductory Classical Archaeology courses, the professor confidently presents well-known, extraordinary material—highlights of excellently preserved buildings, vessels, and sculptures from the Greco-Roman world. Students, then, get the impression that these are the standard finds in excavation. Such a presentation is made easy by the typical large lecture format at state universities. However, the reality of archaeology is a world of dirt, fragments, and never-ending questions. How does one then reconcile the exceptional finds with the excavation experience in a classroom, especially when tasked with presenting the material from thousands of years of Greek or Roman culture (or both) in one semester? One possible way to enhance student understanding of the disciplinary complexities is to add practical, hands-on, experiential activities which emphasize the nuances in Classical archaeology in a smaller, comprehensible way.

Thanks to the work of my colleagues, our 90-person, three-credit hour, introductory archaeology class now has weekly discussion sections which allowed me to develop a new series of activities with the goal of connecting archaeological concepts with practice. I addressed this challenge through weekly modules by designing enhanced exercises, tackling the fragmentary nature of archaeology, and employing some creative pedagogy. Each of these assignments emphasize a particular issue (cultural property or context), skill (coroplasty or stylistics), technique (painting or composition), or object type (pottery, coins, sculpture, architecture) which build upon material seen or discussed in lecture. With specifically selected (or engineered) examples, these exercises enable students to consider an artifact's "biography" or its history from creation to deposition. At the same time, fragmentary material is deliberately chosen so that

students can begin to connect the broken incomplete objects with the whole, well-preserved pieces from their textbook. It is one thing to say that pottery is found in pieces and another to ask students to reconstruct the character of an assemblage based on pottery that they have sorted themselves, even if the material is modern. Without access to a museum with a Classical collection, I have had to be creative in finding ways to have students experience the past. I have sent students on an architectural treasure hunt searching for different types of structures and concrete. I have asked them to replicate a Greek figurine, sort modern pottery, interpret fictional contexts, and reconstruct vase-painting on terracotta plates. By incorporating hands-on exercises, students can learn, in a controlled environment, the work of archaeologists.

Introducing these changes resulted in real benefits for the students, especially in changing their consideration of the material. Necessary sacrifices, however, result from accommodating this kind of pedagogy. In particular, content must be reduced significantly. The activities are also limited by what can feasibly be done in 50 minutes as well as the cost of materials. To that end, I can only focus on the main methods of Classical archaeologists and these are usually more traditional techniques like style than scientific analysis. Nevertheless, adding more memorable and experiential pedagogy helps students engage with the material in a new and more beneficial way. Through the handling of pottery, clay, metal, or stone, there is a full sensory experience which makes archaeology come alive. When students complete the course, they are left not only with the memory of great monuments, but also a visceral understanding of the complexities in studying objects and practicing archaeology.