ON THE NET

Starting Point for Classical Studies: The Perseus Project?
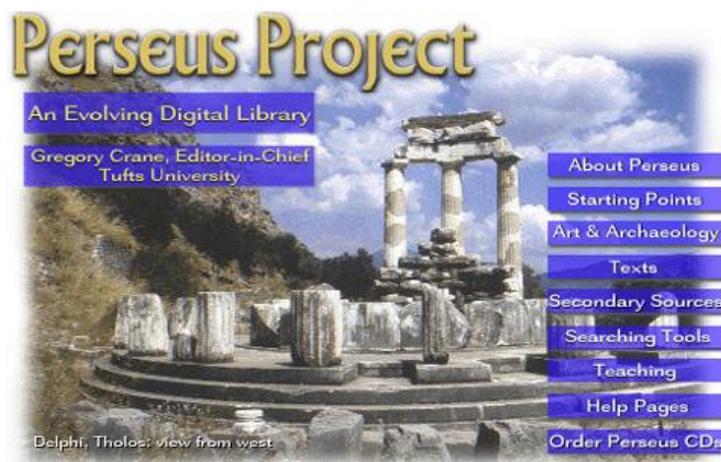
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The number of number of foreign language (FL) related sites on the Internet has been growing exponentially over the past several years, and this trend is likely to continue. While the quality is not necessarily keeping pace with the quantity, the sheer number of pages makes it much easier for instructors to find information, authentic materials, and even ready-made lessons on the net for use in FL classrooms. This is particularly true for teachers of the mainstream modern languages taught in the public schools (French, Italian, German, Spanish). In a previous article (Resources for Instructors and Learners of Less Commonly Taught Languages), we noted the difficulties experienced by teachers of the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) in various areas, including finding materials on the Internet. In this article, we address yet another category of foreign languages: the classical languages (Greek and Latin). Happily, these languages (and their accompanying Classical Studies) enjoy more prominence on the Internet. Indeed, a search for "Classical Studies" yields nearly 20,000 hits on a good day. But, as always, the problem of sifting through this vast number of sites for quality content remains. This article reviews one such quality site The Perseus Project that serves as a remarkable entry page to the exploration of Greek, Latin, and the ancient classical world.

The Perseus Project

The Perseus Project is funded by the Digital Libraries Initiative Phase 2, the Annenberg/CPB Project, the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Getty Grant program, Tufts University, the Modern Language Association, the Berger Family Technology Transfer Endowment, and the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. Support for the project has been provided by Apple Computer, The National Endowment for the Arts, the Packard Humanities Institute, Xerox Corporation, Boston University, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Harvard University. Perseus is a non-profit enterprise and is headquartered at the Classics Department, Tufts University.

The Perseus Project is a vast digital library of resources for the study of the classical world. The initial aim of the project was to construct a large collection of materials, both textual and visual, on the archaic and classical Greek world. More recently, the project has expanded into Latin texts and tools as well as Renaissance materials. Concomitantly, the project has developed new ways of presenting complex resources for electronic publication in formats that facilitate the humanities focus of classics programs. A major project goal has been the development of a framework to contain and make accessible the huge collection of texts, images, plans, and maps that make up the library. To better understand the problem to be addressed, one has only to think about the inherent differences between searching through text and searching through photos. The project is engaged in the ongoing gathering of materials and developing of presentational modes for these materials, as well as improving the searching and indexing tools that make the site usable as well as valuable. The exploration of the archived materials for general readers and specialists alike is a primary goal of the project. Even a cursory look at the site will show how well this goal is met by the extensive searchable collection and the helpful tools for understanding the materials.

Starting Points in Perseus

The Perseus site is quite extensive, but it is well organized and offers several beginning points to help initiate investigation of the resources contained therein.

- **Overview of Greek Culture and History**

Thomas Martin's Overview of Archaic and Classical Greek History provides a brief summary of the history of ancient Greece from approximately 1200 B.C., the period when Mycenaean civilization perished, to 323 B.C., the death of Alexander the Great. The Greek texts included in Perseus fall mostly within this time frame.

- **Introduction to the Primary Texts**

After boning up on the history of the classical period, one can read the writings of the Greek masters (e.g., Homer, Plato, Pindar). These texts are available in English translation or in Greek. A separate font help page offers assistance with installing and using Greek fonts or relying on other conventions to read the text in as near original form as possible. In addition, a page for Text and Morphological Tools Help provides many suggestions and tips for navigating the texts, including searching tools in a variety of languages and directions (e.g., English to Greek) and morphological and lexical tools to help students and scholars interpret the texts, look up topics, and find intertextual connections among all the materials in the database. Links to Greek and Latin dictionaries provide additional support.

Several Latin texts are also available, including those of Catullus and Cicero. A separate site for Shakespeare's Julius Caesar site is also located at the Perseus Project.

Most of the texts are extensively glossed with cross-reference links to other texts, dictionaries, and encyclopedic entries. The idea or person glossed is also cross-referenced with sculptures, artifacts, and images of the era.

- **Introduction to the Art & Archaeology Catalogs**

The Perseus Project offers a massive library of art objects, sites, and buildings. The library's catalogs currently document 523 coins, 1,548 vases, over 1,400 sculptures, 179 sites, and 381 buildings. Each catalog entry has a description of the object and its context; most have images. More than 33,000 pictures are available here. Many of the images appear in both thumbnail and enlarged size. Among the artifacts

and archeological items catalogued in Perseus are coins, vases, fortification architecture, sculptures, and sites such as Delphi.

Perseus Atlas

The Perseus Atlas has been completely renovated and provides an easy means to locate geographically the subject of investigation. This Atlas is integrated with the Perseus Lookup Tool and with the texts of the Perseus Digital Library. Place names referred to in the texts are linked to the Atlas database.

Searches

The Perseus site offers a number of different searching tools. Some are general and use keywords and phrases to find a specific subject in the site. Some have more specific uses, such as word frequency or Latin and Greek words in context (handy for searching out idioms and phrases). The search tools can also be used to browse the architecture, sites, coins, sculptures, and vases entries.

Teaching with Perseus

In this section one finds several syllabi and class notes for a wide variety of courses incorporating the Perseus site, including history, literature, culture and politics, art and archaeology, mythology, and language. Several of the syllabi have detailed descriptions of class assignments and projects. In addition, many syllabi contain further links to Classics sites that the reader will find of interest and that have been selected by other teachers. This section also presents recommendations from teachers who are using Perseus in their classes to their students.

Other Ancillaries on the Site

Navigation and use of the Perseus site is further enhanced by information located on the Help pages and the FAQs . Due to the nature of much of the material contained in the site, an explanation of copyright for the site is also available.

The Perseus site is an excellent example of an evolving digital library. The project has amassed, catalogued, and categorized an enormous amount of material and resources for those interested in exploring the classical world. Unlike many text archives on the Web, this one pays careful attention to helping the user work and interect with the materials presented, and this makes all the difference. While this site may not contain everything you always wanted to know but were afraid to ask about the classics, it is certainly a marvelous beginning for classics scholars and neophytes alike. Using Perseus is a thoroughly enjoyable experience that we recommend to anyone with an interest in the ancient world.