

CLAH4005: Defenders, Conquerors, Vanquished

Lecture 2: Why Greek History?



Studying Greek History

Problems and Solutions



Problem I

A big step backwards



A big step backwards

- Greece had a different culture than ours
- The Greeks spoke a different (and difficult) language
- There is a huge chronological gap between us and the Greeks



Solution!

Keep an open mind



Keep an Open Mind

- Explore the Greek culture
- Question all preconceptions about what the Greeks were like
- There may be no definite answer or too many disparate answers.
- Accept that there are questions we are not able to answer

Problem II

Too many gaps



Too many gaps

- The vast majority of literary material from antiquity is lost
- We know of more than 3500 authors from antiquity. Less than 500 survive in any significant extent.
- There were more than 1000 poleis in the classical Greek world. We can trace the details of the history of less than 10 for the whole of the classical period.
- **Example:** Every Greek city had its own calendar. We can reconstruct the calendar of 4.

Solution!

Use everything



Use Everything

- Even a tiny bit of information is better than no information at all
- Learn to use different sources and evidence.
- Use comparative material



Problem III

Juggling the sources



Juggling the Sources

- Many of the literary sources were written a lot later than the period we study
- Must learn how to use non-literary sources: inscriptions, coins, vases
- Must learn how to use material evidence



Solution!

Persist



Persist

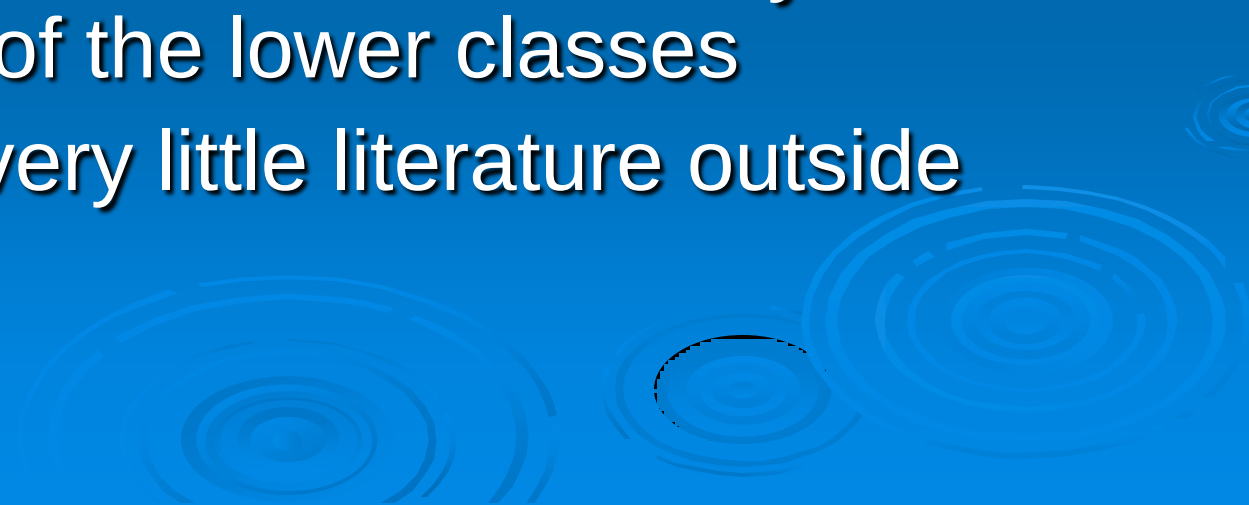
- Find out about the different sources and types of evidence
- Research the author as much as what he says
- Don't avoid unfamiliar types of evidence
- Ask someone who knows

Problem IV

The lost people



The Lost People

- The vast majority of our literary sources were written by members of the upper class
 - We have only a handful of literature written by women
 - We have no literature written by slaves or members of the lower classes
 - We have very little literature outside Athens
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Solution!

Question the sources



Question the Sources

- The sources are not an unquestionable authority
- Trust them but question their viewpoint and their aims
- Remember that everyone has an agenda



Problem V

Modern scholarship



Modern Scholarship

- Modern scholars are not always right
- Modern scholars have their own agendas too



Solution!

There is no gospel truth



There is no Gospel Truth

- Question the modern works
- Always read more than one author/book/article
- Always check the sources
- Never trust blindly



Problem VI

I don't know enough



I don't know enough

- I don't know enough to understand what the source says
- I don't know enough to judge what a scholar says
- I don't know enough to have an opinion



Solution!

Be a historian

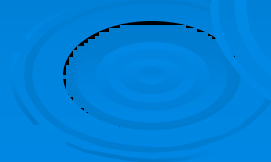


Be a historian

A historian is:

- Someone who is willing to learn more
 - Someone who is willing to question everything and everyone
 - Someone who is willing to express their opinion
 - Someone who is willing to accept they can be wrong
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A COUPLE OF HISTORIAN'S TRICKS



Six Honest Serving-men

- I KEEP six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are **What** and **Why** and
When
And **How** and **Where** and **Who**.

Six Honest Serving-men for the historian I

- What: What happened?
EXACTLY!
- When: When something happened is very important.
Think: how would we interpret history if we thought that WWI came after WWII?

Six Honest Serving-men for the historian II

- Where: Where something happened is important. How would we interpret WWII history if we thought that London was in France?
- Who: The protagonists of any action are important. How would we interpret WWII history if we thought the Hitler was English?

Six Honest Serving-men for the historian III

- How: How things happened is essential in understanding them.
- Why: The why of history is the most important question of them all. We need answers – but remember to keep an open mind and check all the evidence.

The Spider-web of History

- Linear thinking is not for the historian.
Events and issues never simply progress from A to B.
- They usually pass through C, D, and 25.
- Think of the War in Iraq.



Questions?



Follow-up reading

- The follow-up reading is on Moodle!
- You need to read all three articles!

