Publishing on the Past:

Current Trends in the Classics Publishing Sector

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. The Field of Classical Studies in the United States Today

Perhaps more than any other, the field of classical studies has in recent years found itself at a crossroads of a thousand streets. Owing largely to the discipline's long history and weighty reputation within academia—particularly, though by no means exclusively in the United States[1]—it bears a deep resistance, conscious or no, to the influence of factors outside of its own jurisdiction, whether social or economic, national or global. At the same time, it necessarily reflects external cultural shifts. Whether it be the announced dissolution of Howard University's Classics Department; the repeated exposure of prominent intellectual figures as predatory, abusive, or transphobic; the virtual restructuring of annual conferences; or the opening and shuttering of new and innovative journals, recent conflicts and controversies have led to innumerable debates for both practicing classicists and the national media.

The advent of a society increasingly willing to reckon with longstanding biases and bigotries has had a heavy impact on the field of Classics, due not only to its historic flirtation with the Western tradition of white supremacism but also to its place as a pillar of the Humanities, an institution also under stress. And as questions regarding the viability and value of occupations within the Humanities grow in volume alongside news bulletins showcasing armed fascists entering the United States Capitol bearing flags emblazoned with the Spartan saying *molon labe*, retaining the appearance of aloofness is no longer a viable option for the discipline. In addition, and perhaps also in response, it seems that institutions—of which Howard is only one—are toying more freely with the prospect of decreasing funding for their Classics departments, or in some cases with cutting them entirely. This is damaging not only to the established field but also (and perhaps more devastatingly) to the new generation of aspiring classical scholars seeking professional and financial support within a field that, far from opening itself to them in its time of crisis, appears unable to decide how to deal with this influx of fresh and innovative minds.

More broadly, it is undeniable that academia, despite its own efforts in recent years, remains a largely exclusive and unwelcoming arena.[2] However, this is particularly pronounced within Classics itself, where discussions abound regarding the degree of necessity that should be

[1] A helpful resource may be Briggs and Calder, *Classical Scholarship: A Biographical Encyclopedia*.
[2] See, for example, Calder, "Research Opportunities in the Modern History of Classical Scholarship."

placed upon a strong knowledge of the classical languages (and indeed how strong that knowledge need be),[3] and the near-universal culture of hyper-productivity puts a great deal of mental and physical strain upon many scholars, with underpaid and overworked graduate students arguably suffering the worst. A lingering reactionary undercurrent also often takes the form of targeting and harassment of women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community, as well as making the field particularly inaccessible to people with disabilities. For example, the work of CripAntiquity, an international advocacy organization for disabled and neurodivergent individuals in Ancient Studies, often seeks to highlight the ableist structure of academia and connect its harmful culture and practices to the obstacles many scholars face when seeking to publish their work, such as the great difficulty in simply finding a stable job and thus the time and support needed to write and publish. The rigorous and difficult path to even achieving a faculty position also serves to exclude marginalized individuals from the traditional process of publication, with the culture of PhD programs and the prevalence of strict language exams serving to drive out innumerable passionate and innovative students seeking to find a home in Classics. While these elements of the discipline have come under greater criticism in recent years, change has been slow and the future of student and scholar conditions within the field remains uncertain.

It is with this context in mind that this survey will approach several particular trends within the field bound to the modern history and future of the production and publication of classical scholarship.[4] In sum, it will primarily seek to provide a picture of the modern position of the field through close observation of its relationship to the publishing industry and with reference to the experiences of scholars at the University of Illinois, a major research university in the American Midwest. Subsequently, it will also propose plausible directions that the field may take in the future and form a set of tentative conclusions on the above from the student perspective. Its larger goal is not to present itself as exhaustive or conclusive in its findings, but rather to offer commentary from a particular avenue of experience with the goal of continuing the ongoing discussions within the field regarding the topics to which it refers.

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[3] A discussion which is by no means new. See Africa, "The Owl at Dusk: Two Centuries of Classical Scholarship," 162.

[4] Accounts of the larger industry for academic books include Thompson, *Books in the Digital Age*; the *Academic Book of the Future* "Initial Literature Review"; Faherty, "Academic Book Discovery, Evaluation and Access"; and Luey, "The Organization of the Book Publishing Industry."

II. Faculties, Journals, and Publishers

The publication of material related to classical studies, for both scholarly and popular interests, has long been a pillar of the industry, ranging from the heavy emphasis on Greek texts (in and out of translation) in John Fell's 1675 program for the Oxford University Press to the introduction of the Penguin Classics series with the *Odyssey* in 1946. This range reflects a division between (1) the publication of translations and other forms of classical literature generally aimed at popular or student markets and (2) the publication of academic scholarship, primarily monographs in philology and associated subfields.[5] However, the overlapping authorship of these "genres" of classical literature, and the valuable comparisons that can be made between them, affirm the importance of including the former in any earnest study of the extant classics publishing industry.

This author had the opportunity to engage directly with one aspect of this intersection when speaking with Dr. Brian Walters, an Associate Professor of the Classics and Translation Studies at the University of Illinois, whose work is centered on the history and literature of the late Republican era, in particular the writings of Cicero. Walters published *The Deaths of the Republic: Imagery of the Body Politic in Ciceronian Rome* with the Oxford University Press in 2020, while also having composed a translation of the poet Lucan's *De Bello Civili* for release with Hackett Publishing in 2015. The diversity of these texts evinces the larger structure of the publication process from composition to release and highlights the impact of their publishers' distinct interests with regard the field of classical studies. We will return to the primacy of Oxford in the interconnected web of an evolving discipline shortly; at present, however, it is important to note the background and history of the latter house, Hackett, as informative of the process of publishing translations of classical literature in the modern era. In contrast to Oxford, Hackett is a relatively new independent publisher from the American Midwest, having opened its doors in 1972, and is consequently a great deal smaller than the European giant. Hackett is also dedicated explicitly to the Humanities, and its catalogue offers a great number of classical texts in translation, as well as a selection of commentaries, grammatical handbooks, and scholarship, ancient and modern. Among them are the many translations of Stanley Lombardo, which Walters noted in selecting a publisher for his edition of Lucan. Lombardo remains a popular and influential figure in modern

[5] See also Schatz, "Some Thoughts on 'The State of Academic Publishing.'"

classical publishing, ranking among his contributions to the field translations of both Homer and Vergil in a unique style of conversational English, which remain popular choices for students, as well as readers outside of the field. Walters' experience in this regard aligns with those of other classicists and suggests the importance of publishing history and genre focus in shaping the individuality of publishing houses, and in turn the multifaceted interests of classical scholars seeking to publish their work.

As suggested by the reputation of translators such as Lombardo, new editions of ancient texts-in-translation with broader market appeal remain popular, and thus continue to provide crucial financial support to such houses that publish them. Unsurprisingly, a primary example of this is perhaps the largest publishing house with vested interest in classical studies, the Oxford University Press. The largest university press in the world, Oxford's long history and place within a renowned institution have ensured its status as the most prestigious press for academics in Classics. This remains evident despite the broad scope of its publishing activities: Dr. David Morris, the Librarian for Classical Studies at the University of Illinois, notes that while Oxford—like its fellow leader in the international market, Cambridge—publishes a broad variety of texts, ranging far beyond the discipline, much of its revenue remains in fiction and famous literature, a longstanding pillar of which continues to be the Classics. It is thus that translations of the famous poets and tragedians, among others, fill out not only student booklists but also bookstore shelves dedicated to poetry or to classical literature.[6]

When considering scholarship above the student level, it is clear that Oxford is also the publisher with which the University works most (by a great margin), due to both its size and the longtime centrality of the Classics to its identity and product line. However, as Morris notes, though Classics remains a very print-centric discipline—with the Library bringing in hundreds of print books per year—in recent years upwards of 70 to 75% of its current budget is spent instead on electronic resources such as serials and databases. Providers of these materials include the European Studies Section, as well as several storied independent organizations such as the German

[6] On the publishing of literature for the mass market, see Barry, "The Neo-Classics: (Re)Publishing the 'Great Books' in the United States in the 1990s," and Jensen, "The Deep Niche."

publishing house De Gruyter (established 1749), [7] the Belgian Brepols (1795),[8] and the Dutch Brill (1683), which, unlike Oxford and its fellows, operate outside the university structure. Many, including these, are not dedicated solely to the Classics and instead focus on the Humanities generally, although even this gives the Classics primacy and pride of place, if not a major market share. Smaller, independent houses, due to their reduced size, are also more likely to limit their scope to individual subjects, with examples of this being the Classics editorial Collection Budé, housed in France, or the Oxford-based Archaeopress, which specializes in scholarship in archaeology and related subjects. Meanwhile, much of monograph publishing is done by, in addition to the suite of European houses, numerous North American state school presses as well as such popular private university presses as Harvard and Princeton. Indeed, a third of the materials published by American university presses—approximately 5,000 of almost 15,000 total—are monographs, and four-fifths of these are in the Humanities, if not strictly within the scope of the Classics.[9]

Let us now turn to an evaluation of the publishing sector from the perspective of professional scholars, for whom a strong and successful collaboration with a reputable press remains a necessity for achieving tenure, itself a critically important boon to career and financial stability. In this section, I will draw heavily from the experiences of two recently tenured members of the Department of the Classics at the University: Dr. Daniel William Leon Ruiz (*Arrian the Historian: Writing the Greek Past in the Roman Empire*, University of Texas Press, 2021), whose main area of research concerns Greek and Roman historical narratives, and Dr. Clara Bosak-Schroeder (*Other Natures: Environmental Encounters with Ancient Greek Ethnography*, University of California Press, 2020), founder of CripAntiquity, whose work targets the intersections between Classics and the environmental Humanities. I find that their experiences with publication very much reflect the diverse trends currently moving within the discipline and thus may also serve to inform our perspective on its past, present, and future. I will also refer to the experiences of Morris and Walters for comparison and elaboration.

[7] For example, see De Gruyter's recent publication of the relevant study *Classical Scholarship and Its History* by Stephen Harrison.
[8] See also Brepols' "Catalogue Classical Studies 2016."
[9] Watkinson, "The Academic Book in North America," 10.

The first notable aspect of faculties' relationship to the industry is the trend toward selectivity on the part of both the prospective author and prospective publishers. We have seen thus far that select houses, depending on their size and scope, have specialized foci with regard to what and how they prefer to publish, and this, in accordance with the equally specialized audiences of academic publications, has shaped the relationship between faculties and houses as it exists today. Like Walters, Leon and Bosak-Schroeder selected presses that they believed fit best with the genres of their manuscripts. For example, Leon notes that Arrian is an author read mostly for the specialized content of his works, and therefore Leon chose Texas for its record of publishing texts under the umbrellas of military and political history. Bosak-Schroeder faced another potential obstacle in publishing their book, that being the tendency of many classicists to avoid engaging with a field other than their own, or with analytical or theoretical frameworks not common or "standard" in the field of classical studies. This, while not a major inhibitor for publication, certainly played a role in the process of peer review: it was a task for their editor to seek out potential reviewers who did not share this bias, and perhaps who recognized the slowly broadening scope that has brought classical studies into collaboration with fields dedicated to other cultures, literatures, and interpretative styles.

An additional element of the relationship between author and publisher that has grown in importance in recent years is the ever-increasing price of the academic book. As tenure-track positions become fewer and farther between, and as many adjunct faculty and PhD candidates alike struggle to find financial support within the discipline, the prospect of a needed piece of research material easily topping the hundred-dollar mark can severely impede the larger process of research and publication. In response, many faculty members have brought their concerns about the high price of print books into consideration when selecting publishers for their work; Leon, for example, notes that he decided against several potential publishers primarily due to the high prices of their publications. Meanwhile, this problem is compounded for aspiring scholars not yet or no longer tied to an institution; for, as we will see, it is the relationships between prominent institutions and publishing houses that provide the students and faculties therein with the support and access that make research possible. Moreover, it is an issue that current discipline standards, in conjunction with factors disincentivizing or outright disallowing open access publishing, have made exceedingly difficult to address. These standards and factors are discussed below.

However, it is first necessary to observe that print publishing within Classics is not in danger of fading away. Instead, due to the continued demand for print copies of monographs (on the part of both authors and readers) and the steady influx of new scholars into the discipline, it has only threatened to grow over the course of the 21st century. Morris confirms that while the relationship between print and digital resources is quite different from how it was at the turn of the millennium, such that to begin building a repository today would be a radically different process, the collection that the University of Illinois Library holds today continues to grow. The inherent positive to digital materials is the lack of physical space needed to store them, which, at least at first glance, exempts them from the ever-present pressure of renovation plans and budget cuts that threatens libraries in the modern era, especially those dedicated to the Humanities. The trend toward digital resources is clearest when surveying serials, which due to their many issues can quickly fill the available space in library repositories. Adding to this problem is the fact that the cost of serials, Morris notes, is increasing more rapidly than the pace of inflation.[10] This has increased not only the pressure on library budgets, but also the number of journals leading the shift toward online publication. It seems also that reference materials have followed suit, and unsurprisingly so, as the digitization of print dictionaries has coincided with the release of several free resources for the classical languages (such as Tufts University's Perseus Digital Library and the University of Chicago's Logeion dictionary database), which fulfill student and scholarly needs more quickly and easily than is possible for a library-held print book. However, as noted, there also appears to remain a clear preference for printed works, especially monographs, among faculty and graduate students alike,[11] which is distinct from the structural forces inhibiting online publishing.

Print, then, remains popular, although undeniably expensive and, for faculty seeking tenure, necessary—if in some regards regrettably so. Let us return, then, to the discipline standards and associated factors disincentivizing or prohibiting digital and open access publishing. "Classics," Walters confirms, remains "a very traditional field," particularly in that faculty applying for tenure generally need to have published a book in order to achieve success.[12]

[10] See also Kellsey, "Serials Price Information for Journals in Classics and Cancellation Decision-Making" and Darnton, *The Case for Books*, 32.
[11] "Joint research from Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press: Researchers' perspectives on the purpose and value of the monograph, 2019."
[12] See also Darnton, *The Case for Books*, 79.

Moreover, in the same way that there continue to be incentives in this regard to publish with reputable and well-known houses, having a book released only online or open access is discouraged and is often "not considered to be acceptable or respected." Bosak-Schroeder adds that they were advised against doing so "by senior colleagues…worried about the stigma that is attached to open access in some areas of Classics," the false perception that it amounts to publishing in a sort of vanity press with the goal of bypassing the review process.[13] This perception, arguably built upon the discipline's historically high status amidst academia and perhaps an infatuation with a problematic portrait of professionalism, hits aspiring authors hard, and the denial of publishing practices that are more accessible and equitable can, I think, only hurt the field going forward.

It is crucial to recognize too that the sky-high prices of monographs are the result of interconnected financial factors throughout the publishing process, and that the relationship as it currently exists is fundamentally unsustainable. Part of the reason for such pricing is that monographs not only are noticeably more expensive to manufacture than trade books, but also are published in small numbers for an equally small market, which includes libraries with limited space and limited budgets.[14] Despite those limitations, Morris remarks that the number of titles published annually still seems to be increasing, a fact that likely corresponds to both the growing number of young scholars seeking to make their voices heard and the need for each to publish in print if they hope to have any chance at achieving greater financial and professional stability. Yet still both faculty and students continue to face difficulties in acquiring these necessary research materials due to their high cost, leading us to speculate on what role open access publishing may take in the future, and whether it can address some of the varied issues currently troubling the field.

[13] See also Maron, "The Costs of Publishing Monographs" and Frass et al., "Peer review in 2015: A global view." On the other hand, it is possible that the prospect of self-publication may eventually exert influence on the Classics as the broader market continues to evolve. See Hui-Yi et al., "Authors, Publishers, and Readers in Publishing Supply Chain."

[14] See Maron, "The Costs of Publishing Monographs," and Fisher and Jubb, "Discoverability, Demand and Access."

III. A Renewal of the Field

Even at a cursory glance, it becomes clear that in the modern era the cultural and financial struggles over open access will be held not only in the realm of journals and publishers, but also in and through the libraries which work with them. It is to our benefit then, that Morris's work also provides us with a comprehensive perspective on the maintenance of the classics library in the modern era.[15] The University of Illinois's Classics collection is one of the largest in the world, numbering over 50,000 volumes. In addition, as part of a major research university included in the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA), a collaborative effort between a suite of world-class institutions in the American Midwest, the University library functions as both a bastion for the goal of collecting research materials and a nexus for the trends that are slowly reshaping the field it represents.

The relationship that the Classics Library has with publishers functions on two distinct levels. First, through the person of the librarian, the library retains close working connections with individual houses and, more broadly, the industry as a whole. (Librarians, as well as faculty, note having met with representatives of associated houses at conferences.) However, the role of the librarian, and of the collections over which they preside, have been slowly altered by the recent shift toward the primacy of the university as a larger administrative body over the maintenance of the library and the acquisition of new materials. Increasingly, Morris notes, negotiations regarding these processes, and major decisions related to the library itself, are being made at the institutional level. This is reflected in one regard by the BTAA often seeking agreements between the Big Ten as a whole and major publishing houses, rather than allowing individual libraries to take the lead. This is very much a modern phenomenon: it was only in the past decade that the first of these, with Oxford, was made. This shift has also had a deep impact on the ongoing friction between physical and digital materials within library collections and thus accessible—in some cases—only to associated institutions. For example, it is now common for each of the fourteen universities in the BTAA to receive monographs and conference proceedings virtually, with only one print copy to be shared between them, potentially making that print copy largely inaccessible for students and scholars. Undoubtedly the financial motives for pursuing alternatively print or digital releases are

[15] Green, "Publishing Without Walls: Building a Collaboration to Support Digital Publishing at the University of Illinois."

many,[16] as are those for publishing houses facing the decision of whether to focus on the ever-growing reservoir of classical scholarship or to diversify their holdings in the hopes of increasing revenue. These issues, alongside the future of academic publishing, seem to hinge on the intersecting issues of financial support and accessibility, as a field with more aspiring writers than ever before struggles to shape itself into a sector that can support them.

Thus, perhaps the greatest of the forces inhibiting online publishing is the prevalence of institution-only and subscription-based digital resource repositories, a trend that extends from university-led online sharing programs such as Illinois's I-Share to the institutional access granted to resources such as JSTOR and the Loeb Classical Library. Institutional initiatives in this regard constitute a sort of double-edged sword; while a lack of access can be devastating to the research capabilities of faculties and students, I-share and similar programs offering digital sharing capabilities are also crucially important for smaller institutions. The University of Illinois again provides a strong example of the benefits of online sharing technologies, as it has been able to leverage its status as an elite institution—which itself serves a largely more affluent section of the nearby population—to grant resource access to institutions in underprivileged areas across the state. Morris suggests that systems such as these reflect the larger question of the country's commitment to free, fair, and accessible paths to knowledge and information, and it is in this regard that the future of digital, and indeed open access, publishing is crucial to the future of academics and the sharing of information within the United States and around the world.

The prospect of open access publishing, and thus the pursuit of a freer and more just system of information, incorporates many of the factors that currently influence both the role of the library and the experience and reception of publication.[17] It also ties openly to the political and socioeconomic landscape of nations, primarily the Western imperial core where many of these institutions and houses alike reside. Within the field, though, perhaps its most pressing role is as the consummation of the movement against the many restrictive, traditional, and reactionary elements that have long hindered aspiring scholars of marginalized identities from gaining support and success.

[16] For a global perspective, see Wischenbart and Fleischhacker, "The Digital Consumer Book Barometer 2021."
[17] See Kalantzis-Cope, "Introduction: Publishing as a Social Practice."

Hence the discussions surrounding open access as just one of the many sorely needed alternative avenues for aspiring authors to publish their work, and indeed for their colleagues to read it. One might go so far as to say that in this regard the field is approaching a tipping point, the end of an era that has seen it drastically weathered away as a feasible career opportunity for a new and desperate generation. But open access faces, as Morris notes, a "great challenge" in the Humanities, stemming "from the ability of institutions to sustain these types of projects," a financial burden that many libraries and institutions alike have been unable to bear. One crucial element of this struggle lies in how funding is received and maintained for open access projects: these projects, like the library's cataloguing efforts, are often created with infusions of soft money such as grants, ensuring that they begin on fundamentally shaky ground. Simply put, if the money stops, then those working on the project simply cannot afford to keep it going. It is for this reason that open access projects in the future will perhaps be funded either by the state (highly unlikely in the United States but plausible abroad) or by multi-institutional groups.[18] One project that shows a great deal of promise is that of Open Greek and Latin, an international collaborative initiative dedicated to providing a collection of accessible classical texts, which is partnered with a number of prominent organizations ranging from the Perseus Digital Library to Harvard University's Center for Hellenic Studies.

Journals too have led the field in terms of online and open access publication, as well as by taking the crucial step of expanding the traditional view of what scholarship in the field should be.[19] Some, such as *Histos* (founded 1996), an online journal of ancient historiography, have been successful in open access publication for decades. Meanwhile, flagship journals like TAPA (formerly *Transactions of the American Philological Association*), the official research publication of the Society for Classical Studies (SCS), have opened up to more innovative forms of scholarship, and many small online journals have been dedicated to comparative studies, feminist or queer theory, and classical reception. These are important, welcome steps.

[18] Practices in digital publishing, themselves important steps in terms of accessibility, may also find support through joint endeavors by houses seeking to adapt to a changing environment and the creation of new supply chains. See Karakatsouli, "Could the Digital Option Work for a Book Market under Stress?," 8; and Lloyd, "A Book Publisher's Manifesto for the Twenty-first Century."

[19] For broader context, see Tickell, "Open access to research publications," 31.

On the side of monographs, however, open access has had to deal with perhaps its largest challenge: publishing houses themselves. In an environment that has allowed (and indeed incentivized) sky-high book prices, open access threatens to pressure publishers to curtail them. As open access initiatives grow in popularity (and, more slowly, in viability), we are already seeing some of this pressure, but how great an impact it will have in years and decades to come remains uncertain. It is through this, however, that the profit-driven motivations of the publishing industry are laid bare. Private houses necessarily answer to shareholders or hedge-fund owners, and the interests of these groups stretch far beyond the field. Even the tools and resources that many classicists use in their research are provided by a long line of large corporations: for example, the *Patrologia Latina*, a massive collection of Latin ecclesiastical writings, is owned by the information provider ProQuest, whose parent, the Cambridge Information Group, was largely owned from 2013 to 2019 by the multinational financial services company Goldman Sachs, which now holds a remnant share.

The fight for a broader, more inclusive, and more financially sustainable field may hinge on the future of initiatives like open access, but for this change to occur, we as members of the field will be required to address the obstacles it faces in attaining mainstream support and credibility. Most of all, it must be made into a feasible alternative avenue of publication: the financial and professional barriers that have thus far discouraged both the maintenance of online platforms and their use by faculty seeking tenure will have to be broken down. The former may potentially be addressed via further institutional backing or the rise of more and greater collaborative projects from within the burgeoning community of classical scholars. The latter will perhaps be challenged only by a cultural revolution within the field, one that rejects the traditional stigmas and seeks to build a space that welcomes and supports of people and communities it has long excluded. Perhaps this revolution will also open the borders that have so often separated the Classics from other fields dedicated to the literatures, cultures, and linguistics of the past, and herald the formation of a broader, more interconnected discipline. And perhaps it will also coincide with a change in the practices of the publishing sector, which may at least recognize the profit to be gained in marketing to broader demographics and wider fields.[20] If nothing else, though, it

[20] See for example Riley, " 'Alternative, Autonomous, and Viable': Feminist Publishing and the Mainstream," 59; and Tanner, "An analysis of the Arts and Humanities submitted research outputs to the REF2014 with a focus on academic books," 39.

seems likely that Classics will continue slowly but surely toward publishing online and open access, while libraries, their print collections, and the students, faculties, and scholars who engage with them will adapt accordingly.

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