The Library of Antiquity

Tips and Tricks for the Study of the Ancient Mediterranean

Further Trends in Classics: What's hot, what's not

○ OCTOBER 25, 2015JANUARY 18, 2016 🕹 J. PLEAVE A COMMENT

What is the one thing that unites the discipline of Classics? The one thing that (evidently) none of us can live without? The one idea that has come to dominate every corner of our field, and grown explosively over the last decade? If you don't already know, click through to see it writ large (literally). In addition to that question, we'll be looking into what's hot in Classics overall, and in each of the four broad sub-disciplines that make up our field: history, literature/philology, archaeology and philosophy.

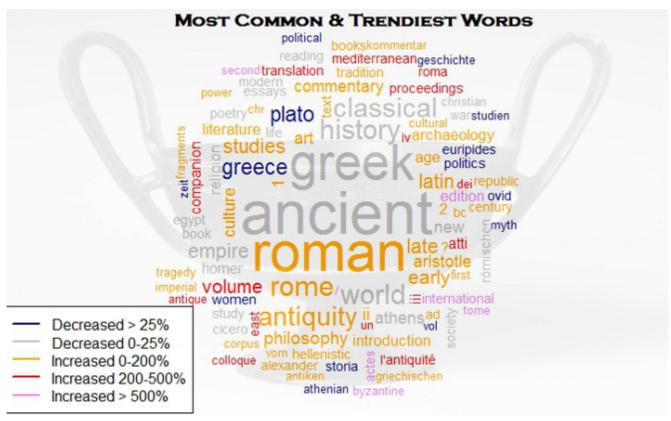


(https://libraryofantiquity.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/coloncloud.jpeg)
That's right: the colon.

We can't live without our colons. What you are looking at above, and what you'll see in several places below, is a word cloud. It is made up of the words (and punctuation marks) included in the titles of books sent to the BMCR (http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/archive.html) for review between 1999 and

September 2015. For obvious reasons, this excludes <u>stopwords</u> (http://www.ranks.nl/stopwords) (or stop words) like 'the', 'and', 'for', etc. (in English, French, German, and Italian). In the word cloud below, the colon has been added to the list of stopwords; it swamps the rest of the words(1) to such a degree that there really exist only two categories: colon and other. Of the roughly 13,000 (12,955) submitted to the BMCR for review, more than 6300 had a colon in the title—and that number is probably **radically** low. Some presses use a '.' in titles where the <u>WorldCat (https://www.worldcat.org/)</u> entry (for instance) uses a colon. More normalized punctuation is probably the best way to account for the radical upsurge in the number of colons being used. From 1999 through 2003, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 25% of titles had a colon, but in the years 2011 through 2015, that shot up to over 70% — and remember, that's *under*estimating. (Some day, I'll have to find time to go back and explore those holdouts. I wonder how many are only one word long?)

The word cloud below has a little more information encoded into it than usual. These are the 150 most commonly used words in the titles of books sent to the BMCR. Their size maps to the raw number of times that they were used, and their colour indicates whether the proportion of titles in which they appear is decreasing, increasing, or holding steady.(2)



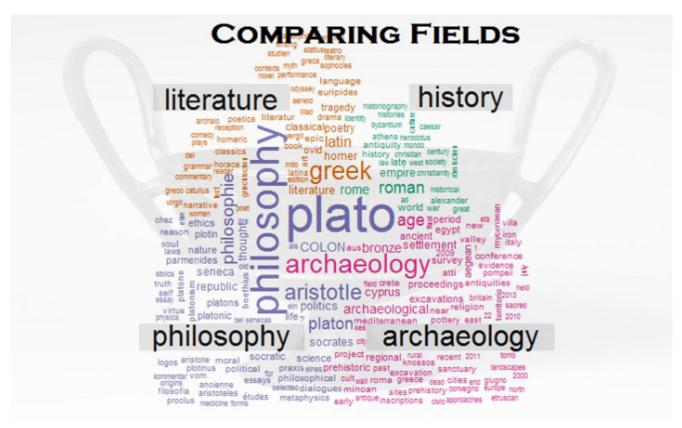
(https://libraryofantiquity.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/heatcloud.jpeg)

A quick glance at some of the words that saw the biggest jumps calls to mind the last instalment of this series (https://libraryofantiquity.wordpress.com/2015/10/09/trends-in-classics-1990-2015/), in which we saw that much of the explosion of books in classics over the course of this decade was driven by books in French, German and Italian. All three languages are represented in the 'hot' words. More significantly, among the hottest words of all—those that saw more than a fivefold increase in usage—we find 'international', 'conference' and 'actes,' suggesting that some of that growth was from an uptick in published conference proceedings.(3) Could it be that the increase in publication was actually due to more senior faculty being pressured to show that they were productive? (I'm thinking of recent pushes (http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_shape_of_things_to_come_-higher_education_global_trends_and_emerging_opportunities_to_2020.pdf) towards increasing

international (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/540370 /IPOL_STU(2015)540370 EN.pdf) profiles (http://www.recherche.umontreal.ca/en/research-at-udem /international/).) Organizing and publishing conference proceedings is not *usually* done by people on the job market.

Before we move on, I want to offer one warning and point out one amusing thing—luckily, they are one in the same. It is easy to read too much into these colours. A fourfold increase sounds huge, but in absolute terms, it is often quite small. Among the 'coldest' words was '*Greece*', which saw a 40% decline—but in raw terms, it slipped from appearing in 2.6% of titles to 1.5%. Whereas 'volume', which increased by 400%, went from appearing 0.6% of titles to 2.4%—i.e., **more than Greece.** Sequels are now more common than books about Greece!

The word cloud below is a little different. Here, the size of the words does not map directly to thenumber of times that they appear, but rather to how much more often one field uses the word than the others do. By way of warning, the titles were divided into these categories by linking these books to their WorldCat entries and then using WorldCat's "topic" lists. The process is fast, but imperfect. Only ca. 9,000 of the 13,000 titles could be matched, and there is overlap between categories. A book about Lucretius, for example, would quite rightly list both 'poetry' and 'philosophy' among its topics, and as such would be included in both the 'literature' and 'philosophy' categories below.

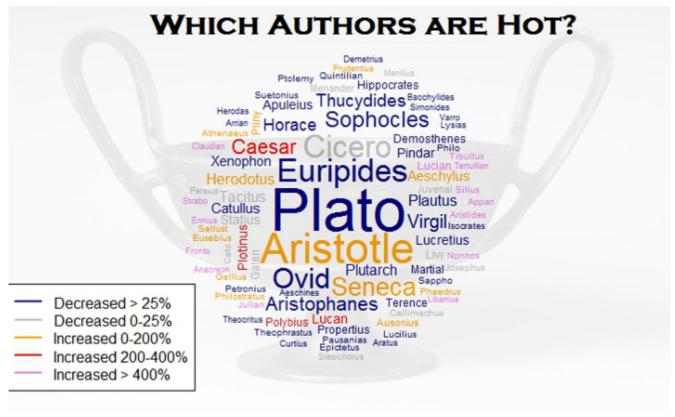


(https://libraryofantiquity.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/compcloud.jpeg)

If you look just below the very large 'Plato', you can see that apparently philosophers are the engine of our increased reliance on the colon. Their rate of colon usage surpasses other disciplines by a larger degree than their use of 'moral', 'ethics', 'politics' or 'Socrates'? Also, philosophers really like Plato (4). Or maybe it's just that absolutely no one else does. 'History' looks a little empty, but in a way that is unsurprising. As perhaps the broadest of these fields, they are less likely to be using any one word substantially more than the other. One other surprising (to me, at least) find is the lowermost word in the 'literature' quadrant. Apparently philologues are most likely to write books about women (though

perhaps not by much). I would have guessed history.

We could go through an almost infinite number of these without ever really exhausting the possibilities. In deference to the name of this site, we'll finish with a look at which authors are most popular. I'll have some more to say about that later. In the meantime, if there are other topics you'd like to see explored, leave a note in the comments!



(https://libraryofantiquity.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/authorcloud.jpeg)
Sleep with one eye open, Plato. Aristotle is coming for you.

Notes:

- (1) So obviously we aren't talking about words, exactly. They're actually 'tokens' in NLP-speak— they include words, symbols and other things. I'd explain more, but the odds are high that if you care, you already know.
- (2) Based on difference between usage rates in two five-year periods: 1999-2003 and 2011-2015.
- (3) Or possibly a move to start sending more of them out to be reviewed—using the BMCR is convenient, but <u>convenience samples (https://hrdag.org/2013/04/05/convenience-samples-what-they-are/)</u> aren't known for being reliable.
- (4) I realize that there are multiple spellings of authors' names (e.g., Plato/Platon). The stem software I was using wasn't made for classics, and I have deadlines.

Posted by J., written by Anon.

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