Haley Tilt and Philip Stallworth

Reed College, Classics and Math class ‘16

Haley Tilt is a Senior Classics Major at Reed College. Currently she is working on her graduating thesis, “Dying Young? The Literary and Mortuary Evidence of Child Development in *Africa Proconsularis,”* which includes strong statistical and archeological components. In the past Haley has explored computing in another digital humanities project that consisted of building her own database-backed mapping platform. In the future she hopes to study the use of technology in K-12 education.

Philip Stallworth is a Senior Mathematics/Statistics Major at Reed College. He is currently working on his graduating thesis “A Cluster Model for K-Tree Samplings of a Spatial Point Process.” In the future he hopes to use his computational and statistics background to study the efficacy of domestic public policy.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Classical scholarship and archeology in North Africa served as a vehicle for colonial legitimacy. Encountering the ruins of the Roman Empire in Algeria and Tunisia, the French cast themselves as new Romans, the Italians in Libya likewise. In the last thirty years, scholars have made considerable inroads on this tradition of imperialist historiography and destructive archeology. Systematic archeological studies have begun to expose the rich diversity of Roman North Africa and to develop more complex perspectives on the role that the Roman Empire played in the development of great cities like Leptis Magna and Carthage and influenced the everyday patterns of life in the country. Still, relative to its Classical counterparts in Italy and Greece, the region is marked by a paucity of scholarship. Part of this neglect is due to the Classical discipline’s focus on literary texts, and the predominance of Classical expertise in philology and textual analysis. Far fewer texts have survived from North Africa than from Rome, and these are still too often considered peripheral to the Classical canon.

Fortunately, an enormous number of epigraphs have survived, and have been systematically catalogued and entered into the Epigraphic Database Heidelberg. Our study draws from the funerary inscriptions available in the database, using the age at death as reported in the epitaphs to study the relation in Africa Proconsularis between numerical age and age as it is experienced, constructed in a variety of social settings. Working in collaboration over the last month we have composed a full dataset containing over one thousand epitaphs from the region.

In the coming months we plan to use this data to explore the relationships between numerical age and other features of the epitaphs that would indicate the dedicatee’s perceived or “social” age. Preliminary tests have already exposed interesting correlations between these factors, suggesting that certain honorific, endearment, and developmental terms were age-specific. Gendered age terms, such as “virgo” (virgin) gain especial illumination from a study that cross-compares factors like age, gender, and keywords. Running clustering analyses on our dataset, we hope to expose additional terms that may not previously have been perceived as age-correlated.

In addition to studying age-related terms, we also plan to explore other factors such as the abbreviation or the expansiveness (and thus expensiveness) of an inscription and its correlation with age. These analyses have the potential to lend credence to or debunk a long-standing claim about the ancient world in general, that parents became inured and desensitized to early childhood mortality because of its prevalence, and that they dedicated less concern to children who died young. In the past, attempts to argue against this claim point to a few long and loving inscriptions to young people, an approach that fails to take advantage of the massive body of evidence available for Africa Proconsularis. We hope that our approach can fill this gap, as well as numerous other gaps still pertinent in Classical scholarship, such as study of the provinces, study of children and childhood, and study of the lower socio-economic echelons of society. In addition to offering a window to studying regions that have often been consigned to the periphery, epigraphy also offers an opportunity to study a new portion of the population—those who could afford to dedicate an inscription in stone but remain silent in other textual records. Above all, we hope that by publishing and publicizing this research we can contribute to the vibrancy of scholarship and interest in Africa Proconsularis as a center of ancient culture. In the past, a perceived lack of information about the region has contributed to neglect in its study and a mischaracterization of the region as peripheral and subsidiary to Rome. By using the wealth of information actually available to address a specific question relevant to the ancient Mediterranean, we hope to make a small contribution to the shifting identity of North Africa in the modern world.