

Aviva Pollack

“Visualizing Antigone’s World: The Greek Conception of Mythology, Ritual, and Status of the Dead.

As part of the class Professor Venit of the Art History and Archaeology Department conducted on Greek Art and Archaeology in the spring of 2013, I completed a term project focusing in-depth on one aspect of the course. I choose the option of creating a museum exhibit proposal incorporating 30-50 objects in order to showcase some aspect of ancient Greek culture or society, but not the development of art itself. Burial rituals and artifacts particularly interest me, so my preliminary proposal simply stated that I intended to research ancient Greek funerary objects. I soon found that the amount of research and artifacts relating to Greek burial is overwhelming, and that in order to create a compelling proposal for a new exhibit, I would need a more tapered thesis.

Professor Venit opened her office to me regularly to discuss my research with me and quell my anxiety. She showed me an example of a premed student who created a proposal pertaining to ancient relics and representations of medicinal practices. With this in mind, I thought what my academic interests were at the time and how they could relate to ancient Greek culture. Previously I had seen my background in classical languages and literatures as a disadvantage for this class as I had never before conducted research with art as the primary medium; however, I overcame the initial intimidation I felt and used my classical background advantageously.

Although I have read numerous Greek plays and myths, Sophocles’ Antigone has held new meaning for me each time I have read it. Always yearning to understand the motivations of the characters and the rationale behind the funerary practices, I saw my way into the world of Greek burial through the eyes of Antigone. The final goal of my proposal was to illuminate the religious, mythological, societal, and personal motivations of the ancient feminist character, Antigone, through ancient art and burial artifacts. My final proposal was entitled “Visualizing Antigone’s World: The Greek Conception of Mythology, Ritual, and Status of the Dead.”

I began my research by looking through the books that Professor Venit had on reserve for our course. Although these would not necessarily be the books I would use for the final research project, they helped me develop my initial arguments. There were two research components to the project: Research for the wall and case texts as well as object labels for the hypothetical exhibit had to come from printed sources. Pictures of each object could come from books, articles, web catalogues, etc., and required citations including the museum in which they are housed and the object number. This meant that it was not enough to scour the library for books, for even though many folios contained relevant artifacts, few listed the museums in which they could be found, and even fewer referenced the object call number.

As I had previously never searched for visual information using any search engine aside from Google Image, I turned to the assignment webpage on which Professor Venit listed Project Dyabola as a useful resource, which could be accessed

through the University of Maryland Libraries' Research Port. I found Dyabola to be confusing and convoluted, but the Research Port proved to be invaluable. Professor Venit recommended using the online catalogues and collection databases of museums, but in order to sort through all of these, Research Port lead me to ARTstor. Through the Research Port, I searched for databases by category, finding fourteen databases listed as "most useful" under the heading of Art History and Archaeology. Each database was listed with succeeding identifiers, so that I was aware of the general scope of the contents and limitations of each database before needlessly exploring ones that were limited to 20th century art and the like.

ARTstor was an extremely useful tool, of which I had previously been unaware despite frequenting Jstor for articles. I searched using keywords and time periods and was usually greeted with a plethora of objects, each one archived with descriptions of the subject matter, object size, date, country of origin, housing museum, number, and other useful information. Although ARTstor become my prime search engine for research objects, initially I would first read information in books with pictures illustrating the history; however, finding the dates and locations of the objects picture proved to be difficult and time consuming. The Beazley Archive was particularly useful these times as I could search for the objects in the database by artist, inscription, collection, shape, etc. A fellow student directed my to reverse picture search engines such as Tineye.com; however, these were not reliable. Although I would ask library staff for aid locating certain objects that I was desperate to find, there was a deadline for the project and eventually I resolved to find other artifacts to illustrate my arguments.

In terms of finding print sources, Professor Venit, the library staff, and the online databases were very useful. Once my thesis became clearer, I was able to ask Professor Venit and the McKeldin and Art Libraries' staff for suggestions of authors publishing in the field of ancient Greek funerary practices. One of the best suggestions I received was to look at the bibliographies of the sources I had already found. Even if I only found one source to be very useful, that source also had sources and the bibliography would lead me to them. Eventually, I acquired stacks of my own books and folios, which I would carry from my room to study facilities daily. Only if I could set aside large amounts of time for research would do research using the books so that I would not have to carry them back and forth as often. At other times, I read through articles I had found on Jstor and ordered more books from Interlibrary Loan and WorldCat online.

The research I conducted and the discussion with Professor Venit and knowledgeable library staff members inspired my project and my future career ambitions. Each time I found new sources or wanted to tweak the focus of my project, Professor Venit's door was open and the librarians were eager to discuss my findings. I wish that I had spent more time in dialogue with experts in the field and less time searching for citations for objects. Additionally, if only I had asked someone at the library, I probably could have worked out a way to leave the books I had taken out in a segregated area, so that I would waste time and energy carrying them back and forth. However, when I think back on this project, I am newly inspired to pursue a research role in archaeology, or a curatorial career. I am

excited to continue my education in both an academic setting and out in the field, and I am eager to for new research opportunities and to utilize new databases.