THE ALLEGED CRISIS OF CLASSICS AND THE ENGAGEMENT WITH THEORY IN ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES: A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF L'ANNÉE PHILOLOGIQUE

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ABSTRACT/RÉSUMÉ

In "Who Killed Homer?" Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath identify approaches and theories borrowed from gender and postcolonial studies as the cause of the alleged "crisis" of classics. However, L'Année philologique, the most comprehensive bibliographical database dealing with ancient Mediterranean studies and classics, shows that there are no reasons to speak of a crisis as far as the volume of publications in ancient Mediterranean studies is concerned. It also demonstrates that the relative number of publications in large research areas has remained roughly the same for the last hundred years. Against anecdotal evidence suggesting that gender and postcolonial studies have affected the methods and objectives of ancient Mediterranean studies, a comparison of L'Année philologique with other databases suggests that scholars in the field have one of the lowest rates of engagement with "theory" in the humanities (here represented by concepts and authors typical of gender studies, postcolonial studies, anthropology, sociology, the Frankfurt school, and psychoanalysis).

Selon Victor Davis Hanson et John Heath, les études classiques sont en déclin depuis qu'on a commencé à y importer les approches développées par les études postcoloniales et des études du genre. L'analyse statistique de L'Année philologique, la base de données bibliographique de référence en études classiques, démontre qu'il n'y a pas de raisons de parler d'une crise, du moins en ce qui a trait au volume des publications dans le domaine. Elle démontre également que la proportion du nombre de publications associée à chaque grand domaine de recherche est restée sensiblement la même au cours des cent dernières années. La comparaison de L'Année philologique avec d'autres bases de données montre par ailleurs que les études classiques est l'une des disciplines de sciences humaines où l'on retrouve le moins de références aux approches regroupées sous le terme anglais de "theory" (représenté dans cet article par des concepts et auteurs associés aux études du genre, aux études postcoloniales, à l'anthropologie, à la sociologie, à l'école de Francfort et à la psychanalyse).

C'est, on le sait, une des propriétés très générales des champs que la lutte pour l'enjeu spécifique y dissimule la collusion objective à propos des principes du jeu ; et, plus précisément, que la lutte tend à produire et à reproduire continûment, et d'abord chez ceux qui s'y trouvent engagés, mais pas chez eux seulement, la croyance collective dans l'intérêt du jeu et dans la valeur des enjeux qui définit la reconnaissance de la légitimité. Qu'adviendrait-il en effet si l'on venait à disputer non pas de ce que vaut le style de tel ou tel auteur mais de ce que valent les disputes sur le style? C'en est fini d'un jeu lorsqu'on commence à se demander si le jeu vaut la chandelle. Et de fait, les crises sont toujours, en ces sortes de matières, des crises de confiance, corrélatives de crises des mécanismes chargés d'assurer la perpétuation de la croyance.

Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltansky (1975)

As debates on the "crisis of classics" have recently picked up again, it is worth turning to the digital version of L'Année philologique (APh) to test some claims being made and provide a reliable approximation of the state of research in ancient Mediterranean studies. Participants in the debate present different opinions but all seem to assume that this domain of study will disappear if nothing is done. There is evidence that positions in ancient Mediterranean studies have been disappearing in the last two decades: some Classics programs in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom have already closed or may do so in the next years; between 2005 and 2017, France lost 15 percent of university professors who specialized in ancient languages and literatures.3 But ancient Mediterranean studies are conducted in thousands of higher education institutions around the world. Taken in isolation, statistics on active faculty, enrolment numbers, or job offerings are poor indicators of the health of the field as a whole. To test the notion that ancient Mediterranean studies have entered a global crisis, we can however turn to L'Année philologique, a bibliographical resource dealing with the ancient

¹ For a list of links to online publications concerning a crisis in classics at the time of writing, see Meadows 2021. Further information can be found through the Antiquité Avenir association and the two series of conferences it organized: APLAES-SOPHAU 2015; Antiquité Avenir 2018. The association has also prepared a volume of essays (Bouineau 2018). Such debates are not new: French scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century already spoke of a "crise des études classiques" (d'Eichthal 1899; Allais 1910; Radet 1913). For Jacqueline de Romilly (1988), the late 1980s were also a "temps de crise des études classiques" (38). Many thanks to Nicholas Borek for improving the English syntax and grammar of the manuscript.

² See Classics at Risk Tracker and Actions n.d.; Jewell 2021; Kennedy and Planudes 2021.

³ Brigaudeau 2019.

Mediterranean world and focusing on ancient Greek- and Latin-speaking societies. The APh has offices in six different countries, covers a large portion of annual publications in various fields and languages, and includes detailed classification systems. As any bibliographical database, its coverage could hardly be complete—and this situation will remain as long as publications continue to appear without persistent identifiers, such as the DOI, and interoperable metadata standards enabling the automated importation of bibliographical data. Despite inevitable gaps, the APh is the most thorough bibliographic database for ancient Mediterranean studies.⁴ It provides a representative sample of international publications and is relatively easy to interrogate online. Assuming that its records are representative of the total number and types of publications, it could also help assess fluctuations in the number of active researchers. Despite the common belief that structural pressures have recently forced academics to speed up production, the average number of publications per scholar do not appear to have increased in recent years. Data collected by Walter Scheidel in a previous study of the *APh* show that the average number of APh entries in the field hovered between 2 and a little more than 1.5 per scholar per year between 1924 and 1992.⁵ A 2016 study based on the entire content of Web of Science concluded that the production rate of individual scholars has remained roughly the same for a hundred years. The total number of yearly publications recorded by APh can consequently function as a rough indicator of the fluctuations in the number of researchers.7

⁴ Samples from two of the most important academic publication databases, *Web of Science* and *Scopus*, show that their sections devoted to ancient history and classics contain respectively 6 percent and 14 percent of the *APh* (according to analyses made in 2016 for a previous version of this paper; see also de Callataÿ 2014; Engler 2014). *Dimensions* is larger than *Scopus* and *Web of Science* but it is not precise enough to tell how much ancient Mediterranean studies content it includes. Publications and metadata available on the academic social networking site Academia.edu are unfortunately not easily available for research since the owners forbid automated downloads from their website. The legal restriction on the retrieval of large quantities of metadata is one of several reasons why such academic social networking sites are not open access publication websites or repositories (see Fortney and Gonder 2015).

⁵ Scheidel 1997: 268. It should be noted that these numbers include the full record of a publication and its references, i.e., references to the full record listed in other relevant sections. Scheidel also calculates the ratio of the "number of consecutively numbered individual items to all authors," which appears more stable.

⁶ Fanelli and Larivière 2016.

⁷ In contrast with statistics on the number of faculty and adjuncts, *APh* records account for research work accomplished by all participants in the field. This indicator of activity could become particularly useful if the number of unemployed researchers is increasing. This could be the case if the number of newly produced doctors remains stable while annual job offerings disappear. Ehrlich (2020) shows that after 2008, the number of tenure-track job openings in Classics in the US and Canada fell

The purpose of this paper is to assess the claim made by Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath that the introduction of theory has undermined ancient Mediterranean studies.⁸ As irrelevant as this claim might seem to some, testing it also helps to assess the impact that "theory"—or what I also call here "alternative approaches"—has had on ancient Mediterranean studies. The inquiry follows three steps. Part 1 proposes an estimate of the total number of *APh* records for each year to test whether research output declined in recent years. Part 2 looks at the number of occurrences of research themes in *APh* records to see whether the proportion of publications of each discipline has changed and if we could speak of a crisis in terms of a change in the focus of researchers. Part 3 looks at the occurrence of keywords normally used to describe alternative approaches to assess their impact on ancient Mediterranean studies.

The inquiry is limited to the online version of *APh* and is consequently liable to the database's shortcomings. The obvious advantage of searching online is that one can theoretically query the entire database in a matter of seconds. Unfortunately, the search engine was not built for the purpose of statistical inquiry or for complex searches. It was consequently necessary to develop different search strategies to avoid running into problems (see details in Appendix 1 and 2). The following section clarifies how data was acquired.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on three data sets:

- 1. Data used to estimate the annual counts of publications in *APh* and other databases.
- 2. The number of records including one of thirteen thematic labels as well as those including no label. These counts theoretically cover the entire *APh* and are used as indicator of the relative importance of different research fields (e.g., history of classics), specialities (archaeology) or groups of specialities (e.g., papyrology, epigraphy, numismatics and sigillography).

approximately 40–50 percent from its peak. The COVID pandemic led to a 60 percent decline from the post-2008 level.

⁸ In a book and an article both entitled "Who Killed Homer?", the two scholars blame theory in general, "multiculturalists," "social constructionists," and feminist scholars for destroying interest in the field; see also Hanson and Heath 1997; 1998; Hanson 2021. Hanson and Heath are unlikely to be convinced by the following study since their accusation is based on the notion that classicists publish too much work of little value; e.g., "If we are writing so much, why are all others reading so little of it? In our identity-obsessed age, why haven't we Westerners been led by our very busy professors and scholars back to the beauty and the wisdom—and the power—of our own culture?" (Hanson and Heath 1997: 112).

A Statistical Analysis of L'Année philologique

3. The number of records including keywords denoting certain alternative approaches (e.g., postcolonialism and gender studies). These counts are used as indicator of the number of publications that significantly engage with alternative approaches (comparative data was also extracted from other databases).

Accurate counts of annual records cannot be retrieved online. The reason is that many records are assigned to date ranges instead of single years. Consequently, queries returning the total number of publications for each year would include duplicates (meaning also that queries with longer date spans return fewer duplicates). A more accurate estimation of annual counts of records was calculated from data provided in late September 2021 by Chris VandenBorre, who is publishing manager at Brepols. On the reason of the records was calculated from data provided in late September 2021 by Chris VandenBorre, who is publishing manager at Brepols.

The relative importance of thematic categories was estimated by counting the number of times a record was labelled with one or more major APh thematic categories (see Appendix 1). As a result, records assigned to several categories were counted multiple times. It is important to note that these counts do not reflect the number records but the number of times an APh indexer judged that certain thematic category labels should be assigned to a publication. In other words, the value of these indicators depends on the knowledge and judgement of APh indexers as well as the consistency with which they assign labels. Since the categories selected map onto well-delimited speciality (e.g., archaeology) or topics (e.g., history of classics), it is unlikely that misclassifications skewed results. Counts were established by searching for the full title of thematic categories in the three classification systems of the "All index terms" search field. Records without thematic labels were counted as "Ancient Authors and Texts." These records represent publications listed in the "auteurs et textes" section of printed APh volumes that are not referenced in other *APh* sections. The vast majority are editions and/or translations. Together with the indications of thematic categories, they represent the complete range of topics indexed in APh. Shares of indications of each category were calculated on the total number of indications of thematic categories and of "Ancient Authors and Texts" records. Groups of thematic categories were created to represent research fields, i.e.,

⁹ This problem cannot be solved by looking up counts of entries in printed *APh* volumes. These counts only started to be printed in Volume 47 (for the 1976 publication year) and they include reviews. Moreover, printed volumes include publications made in years previous to the year to which it is dedicated.

¹⁰ I would like to thank Chris VandenBorre for his help. Record numbers from this data set were normalized to account for the fact that certain records are assigned to ranges of years rather than single dates. The number of records assigned to date ranges were split equally between the years covered by the range. Records without dates were weighed according to the number of annual records and divided between the years between 1924 and 2020.

areas of specializations where scholars are most likely to share interests and teaching positions. The "Philology" group, for instance, combines "Ancient Authors and Texts," "Literature," "Linguistics" and "Textual Transmission" (see Appendix 1 for details on the methodology and the list of categories). These data sets were acquired online from *APh* in May 2019 and late August 2021.

References to approaches were retrieved by searching for relevant keywords in the full text of records (the "All fields" search field). Ratios for approaches were calculated on the total number of records (see Appendix 2). These data sets were acquired online in May 2019 and late August 2021. The *APh* as well as several other Humanities databases were interrogated with the same keywords in March 2022 for comparison purposes.

In all three data sets, searches distinguishing between languages were limited to the four languages with the largest *APh* footprint. As of March 2022, these are English (with 241,337 records), German (181,416), Italian (158,406), and French (156,800). The fifth most important language group includes languages and dialects from Spain (with 25,451 records). In terms of size, this fifth language group sits between the four languages with the most records and all other languages but represents only 16 percent of either French or Italian records (the average being 17,567 records per language with 71 percent of languages including less than 1000 records). Simply considering the relative population of Spain to France (72%) or Italy (77%) as of 2018, this is a surprisingly low figure. It suggests that *APh* records are not representative of Spanish-language publications in ancient Mediterranean studies (the same could be said of publications in Dutch).

TOTAL NUMBERS

As of late September 2021, the total annual number of publications reported in *APh* reached an all-time peak in 2007 (Figure 1). Three curves are shown on the graph. One shows totals established by normalizing data provided by C. VandenBorre. The two other curves show annual totals as found on the *APh* website in May 2019 and late August 2021. In these two last cases, annual numbers are higher since duplicates were not normalized. These two figures give the misleading impression that the number of annual publication numbers started to plummet in 2008. Comparing the number of records found online in May 2019 with those from late August 2021 shows that the *APh* team added around thirty thousand new records from 1998 to 2018 between 2019 and 2021. The reason for the recent decline must be that publications for 2020 and 2021 have not yet been indexed or are not yet available online. The future addition of publications from 2008 to 2021 will probably soften the curve's decline.

Yet, if we assume that the annual totals from six years ago or older are not bound to change substantially, we must conclude that annual totals between 2008 and 2015 are actually declining. To measure this trend more precisely, we can analyse records from periods before and after the 2007 peak while

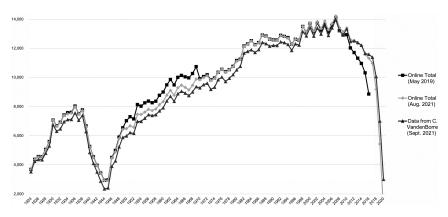


Figure 1. Number of records by year since 1975 (as of May 2019 and August 2021) Source: *APh* online database and Chris VandenBorre. Figure by author.

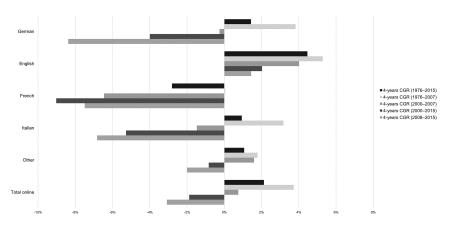


Figure 2. Compound growth rate (CGR) of records of different linguistic categories according to different time ranges

Source: APh online database. Figure by author.

avoiding recent record counts which are more likely to change. Fixing the end limit to 2015 gives a window of six years, which I assume is enough to clear backlogs and retrieve missed publications. Figure 2 compares compound growth rates (CGR)¹¹ based on the count of records of four-year periods across five language spheres and over four time ranges. The first time-range is subdivided in two: a phase of deceleration (2000–2007) and one of decline

[&]quot; $CGR = ((ending value/beginning value)^{1/nb. of periods}) - 1$. It represents the annual growth/decline rate that would have been necessary to account for the compounded accrual or decline of the initial value over the period.

(2008–2015). The figure also shows a larger period of growth, going from 1976 (a time at which the effect of the Second World War on scholarly output had most certainly disappeared) to 2007, the all-time peak. As of August 2021, the global CGR from 1976 to 2007 was of 3.7 percent while that from 2000 to 2007 was of 0.7 percent. A deceleration of the rhythm of publication can already be perceived before the post-2007 decline. If we sample the number of records on both sides of the 2007 peak, we find that the global CGR between 2000 and 2015 was negative (-1.9%) and that the decline accelerated between 2008 and 2015 (-3.1%). This slight decline follows a trend observed in sixteen other humanities databases. These databases show a collective negative compound annual growth rate of -0.6 percent between 2000 and 2015. As with APh records, the average decline of these databases accelerated between 2008 and 2015 (-2.7%). There is consequently nothing surprising in the decline in the annual counts of APh records.

Whether these numbers are representative of a slow decline in academic production in humanities disciplines remains to be demonstrated with further studies. As for ascertaining the causes of the decline in *APh* records, we can note that it is unequally distributed among different language-spheres. Throughout the period, the number of records in English grew while those in most other languages declined. In fact, the growth rate of records in

¹² Note that the number of records in each language between 1991 and 1994 is erratic (this discrepancy might be related to the switch in classification systems). Starting language data series in 2000 avoids distorting data.

¹³ Data was extracted in late August–early September 2021 from the following indices: America: History and Life (EBSCO), ATLA Religion database with ATLASerials (EBSCO), Bibliography of Asian Studies (EBSCO), Bibliography of British and Irish History (Brepolis), Érudit (Consortium Érudit), Historical Abstracts (EBSCO), Index Islamicus (ProQuest), Index Religiosus (Brepolis), International Bibliography of Art (ProQuest), International Medieval Bibliography + International Bibliography of Humanism and the Renaissance (Brepolis), Iter (J.P. Robarts Research Library), JSTOR—Area Studies, Arts, History, and Humanities (Constellate Beta), JSTOR—Classical Studies (Constellate Beta), Literature Online (ProQuest), MLA International Bibliography (EBSCO), New Testament Abstracts + Old Testament Abstracts (EBSCO) and Philosopher's Index (ProQuest). See Appendix 3.

¹⁴ *APh* staff do not appear to be responsible for the recent drop in the number of records. As can be seen on the front matter pages of each printed *APh* volume, the size of *APh* personnel started to increase two years before the total number of annual records initiated its decline in 2008. I was informed by Pedro Pablo Fuentes González, editorial director of the *APh* since 2014, that administrative and technical issues could explain the drop in the production of records for the 2012–2013 period. Estimates of the annual count of indexed journals created from samples taken from the list of periodicals in printed *APh* volumes does show a drop in the number of journals indexed between 2011 and 2014. These issues are not necessarily related to the decline in the number of annual records since the decline appears to have already set in before 2011.

English remained positive in the twenty-first century just as the annual global output started to drop (Figure 2). Assuming that changes in the number of APh records are mainly connected with changes in the academic world, the continual growth of publications in English could be explained by the growth of research personnel in English-speaking countries and the relatively mild repercussion of the global financial crisis of 2008 on Englishlanguage publishers. Anglophone publications from 2008 have dropped by 20 percent in comparison with 2007 but annual totals rapidly grew back to the level of 2007 and continued to grow on average. By contrast, all other languages show negative CGR throughout the twenty-first century (Figure 2). As a result, the share of English-language publications increased by 5 percent between 2000 and 2015. Biographical information from the *APh* could show whether this increase reflects the fact that researchers from regions where English is not the dominant language are stagnating or decreasing in numbers, that they are turning to English as the preferred language of publication, or that both phenomena are occurring at the same time.

While it is too soon to tell if scholarship in ancient Mediterranean studies is actually slowing down, can the *APh* show if scholars nonetheless changed the way they do research as Hanson and Heath suggest?

TOPICS

It should not come as a surprise if solutions proposed for the perceived "crisis of classics" are also attempts at recentering ancient Mediterranean studies around certain topics and practices. ¹⁵ But what is the center of ancient Mediterranean studies, and could we say that it shifted? If scholars changed their object of research, we should be able to see traces of this transformation in *L'Année philologique*. The best place to start answering this question is the main conclusion to Walter Scheidel's bibliometric study of *APh* records from 1924 to 1994:

Time and again, the results of this survey have revealed the intrinsically conservative character of scholarship in Classics. The relative representation of the major fields of enquiry—the study of ancient authors, of literature and language, of archaeology, and of historical issues—has remained virtually unchanged for seventy years. Shifts within these fields are rare and, if they occur, slow and limited in scope, such as the gradual gain of social history against religious history. In most cases, such as in the study of individual ancient authors or regarding relative preference for Roman over Greek history, significant changes are completely absent. This large-scale stability is rendered even more impressive by the apparent lack of impact of changes in the languages of publication. Thus, the decline of German and the concomitant rise of English and, more recently,

¹⁵ See Bourdieu 1976: 91-92.

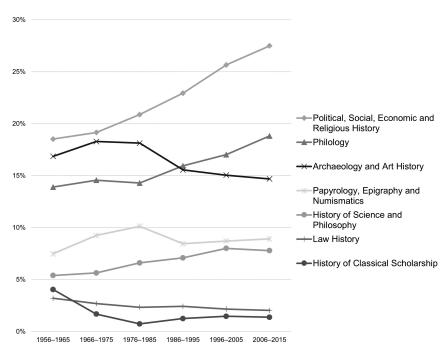


Figure 3. Share of mentions (or records for part of "Philology") of disciplinary groups, 1996–2015

Source: *APh* online database. Figure by author.

Italian has failed to alter established patterns of thematic preference. Generational and, where applicable, socio-economic change has been equally inconsequential. Needless to say, these basic continuities have not forestalled continual evolution in the choice of questions, methods and approaches.¹⁶

To verify if Scheidel's statement still holds, the number of records found in each of the main *APh* thematic categories were extracted and combined to form four thematic groups split into ten-year periods (the remaining categories are history of science and philosophy, law history, and history of classical scholarship). Figure 3 shows that philology has increased since 1956 but has never been dominant. From 1956 to 1986, it was less popular than archaeology and art history combined. Political, social, economic, and religious history remained the most important category of records over the period. It is also one of the fastest growing.

More changes come into view as we zoom in to look at individual categories (Figure 4). Individual growth over the period shows that seven

¹⁶ Scheidel 1997: 287–288.

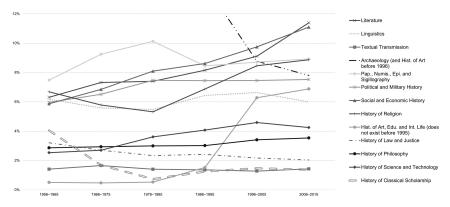


Figure 4. Share of categories (except for Ancient Authors and Texts) Source: *APh* online database. Figure by author.

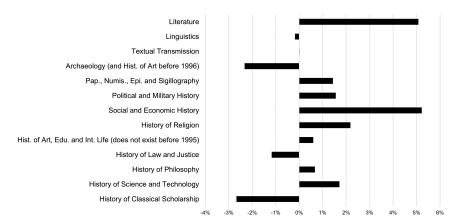


Figure 5. Difference in the share of mentions (or records for Ancient Authors and Texts) in each category between 1996 and 2015

Source: *APh* online database. Figure by author.

categories decreased or stagnated (0.9% or less) while six increased (Figure 5).¹⁷ Literature and social and economic history are the only two

¹⁷ Decreasing categories are identified in Figure 4 with lines with data point markers and increasing categories with simple line patterns. The rapidity at which history of art, education, and intellectual life increased and that archaeology and art history (not shown at its full amplitude) decreased on Figure 4 is an effect of the separation of art history from archaeology as indexation categories occurring in 1996. From 1996 on, the archaeology and art history category in Figure 4 represents publications in archaeology only. Art history then becomes entirely represented by the history of art, education, and intellectual life category. Time ranges used to calculate growth

groups that have significantly increased their share of mentions. The thematic groups of political, social, economic and religious history increased in large part due to gains in social and economic history.

Calculating the number of mentions of ancient authors shows that most classical authors have increased in importance since 1956. Representative of the group of ancient classical authors were selected by combining the "Ancient Greek canon" recreated by Reviel Netz (with the addition of Aristotle and the Aristotelian corpus) with a selection of well-known authors from Quintilian's lists (Inst. 10.2.85–131). This list was supplemented by three of the most referenced Latin authors, Petronius, Tacitus, and Augustine. The full list includes twenty authors of ancient Greek literature and twenty of ancient Latin literature.¹⁸ From 1956 to 2015, classical authors from this list have increased their presence in records (Figure 6, right panel). As can be seen on the left panel of Figure 6, the share of mentions of the top twelve classical authors has been more important than that of the twenty-eight others from 1956 to 2015. During the same period, the top twelve accumulated 68 percent of all mentions of classical authors, and the top four—Plato, Aristotle and the Aristotelian corpus, Homer, and Virgil—received a third of all references concerning authors from the list.

The enduring appeal of the most popular classical authors is further emphasized by the relative share of editions and translations their work received. Even as the number of editions and translations of the forty classical authors decreased between 1956 and 2015, the share and absolute numbers of editions and translations of the top twelve authors increased (Figure 7, left panel). The share of editions and translations of the top twelve authors on the total number of books also decreased at a slower rate than that of the rest of classical authors (Figure 7, right panel). Looking more closely at the

on Figure 5 has been restricted in both cases. The figure for archaeology and art history shows growth from 1956 to 1995 only. Growth for history of art, education, and intellectual life is shown for 1996 to 2015. There is a real decrease in the share of the archaeology label of 1 percent between 1996 and 2015. This suggests but does not prove a decrease in the share of publications in archaeology.

¹⁸ Greek: Aeschines, Aeschylus, Apollonius Rhodius, Aratus, Aristophanes, Aristotle, Callimachus, Demosthenes, Euripides, Herodotus, Hesiod, Homer, Isocrates, Menander, Pindar, Plato, Sophocles, Theocritus, Thucydides, Xenophon; Latin: Caesar, Catullus, Cicero, Ennius, Horace, Livy, Lucan, Lucretius, Ovid, Persius, Plautus, Propertius, Sallust, Seneca the Younger, Terence, Tibullus, Virgil, Petronius, Tacitus, Augustine. The "Ancient Greek canon" is taken from Netz 2020: 93–94. As another indicator of their importance, Petronius and Tacitus also appear on the philology reading list for Ph.D. examinations at Harvard's Department of the Classics (see Department of the Classics, Harvard 2021). Augustine is the fifth most referenced author of the *APh*.

¹⁹ This rate is slightly superior to those concerning literature, linguistics and textual transmission, which has the second fastest growth rate (see Figure 5).

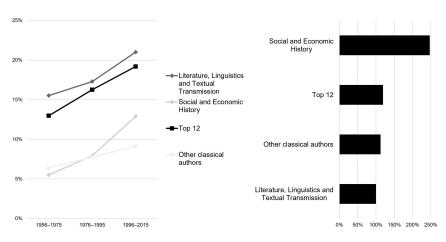


Figure 6. Left panel: share of mentions; Right panel: growth rates of share of mentions, 1956–2015

Source: APh online database. Figure by author.

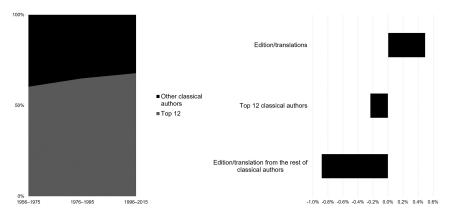


Figure 7. Left panel: share of editions/translations of top twelve and remaining classical authors over the total number of editions/translations of classical authors; Right panel:

growth in the share of book records

Source: 4Ph online database. Figure by author

Source: *APh* online database. Figure by author.

data, we can see that not all of these twelve authors are responsible for the growth (Virgil, Horace, and Cicero have not contributed to this increase).²⁰ Except for archaeology and art history, the five main fields of ancient Mediterranean studies have retained the same relative importance in the

²⁰ Aristotle and the Aristotleian corpus (19% CAGR for 1976–2015), Plato (24%), Augustine (7%), Cicero (0%), Euripides (6%), Homer (16%), Ovid (9%), Virgil (-8%), Seneca (7%), Sophocles (3%), Aristophanes (5%), Horace (-12%).

last twenty-five years. Historical disciplines and philology have increased at a similar rate and have increased their share of *APh* references since 1956 (Figure 3). Several factors unconnected with the work of scholars could explain the decrease in the number of *APh* records of certain categories: economic crises affecting the output of publishers more seriously than that of scholars, changes in publishing practices (notably in the use of new online venues) or flukes in publication patterns. It is important to point out that statistics in this paper are meant as indicators of publication patterns. They provide a ballpark figure rather than an accurate map of scholarly work. Whichever cause can reasonably explain the decrease in the number of records in certain categories, what Walter Scheidel (1997) saw in the *APh* twenty-five years ago remains true today. For a hundred years, scholars in ancient Mediterranean studies worked with the same intensity on the same four large fields of research.

APPROACHES

If the relative importance of research fields does not appear to have changed in any major way in the last seventy years, should we assume that scholars in the field changed the kind of questions they asked and the approaches they took? For Victor Hanson and John Heath, approaches inspired by theoretical work done in other humanities disciplines radically changed classics. Enthralled by various theories, classicists would have forgotten their true purpose, which (according to Hanson and Heath) is to teach the classics and help Homer remind "us of who we are." While they positioned themselves against the field, the two scholars voice a more widespread concern with the role of classical scholarship and the humanities in general as guardians of knowledge. According to Eric Adler, the problem with literary classics would rather be with the "dominance of the scientific outlook in higher education." His position is similar to that of Nietzsche in the second "Untimely Meditation", Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben.²² For Adler, the Humanities differs from science in that it does not seek to make new discoveries; it rather "foregrounds the wisdom of the past as the means to shape a student's character."23 While it is difficult to assess if Adler is right in assuming that the humanities are increasingly mimicking the sciences on a global scale, APh records makes it possible to test the notion that alternative approaches pervade the work of classicists and, broadly speaking, of all those who publish in ancient Mediterranean studies.

The presence of certain keywords in *APh* records can provide an indicator of significant engagement with alternative approaches. A first necessary

Hanson and Heath 1997: 111; see also Hanson 2021.

²² Cf. Most 2002.

²³ Adler 2020b. See also Adler 2020a, where it is suggested that world classics represent "a central core of human wisdom" that could "guide us as we grapple with the best ways to live" (222).

assumption behind this observation is that the content of a bibliographical record, that is, the title of a publication, its abstract, and its classification tags, are sufficient to gauge whether an author has made a significant use of approaches. The second assumption is that references to alternative approaches found in the body of publications do not imply that approaches were discussed, adapted, and/or applied in a systematic way. It is not rare to find that researchers refer to a theory simply to illustrate or support their claim. The conciseness of titles and abstracts can be worked to our advantage since references serving an illustrative function would rarely figure in these indexing fields. Except in rare cases where we should probably speak of name-dropping, I assume that references appearing in a title or an abstract indicate significant engagement with an approach.

I have limited the concept to approaches and theories that had or still have an important impact on ancient Mediterranean studies: postcolonial theory, poststructuralism (the term is used here to refer to semiotics, narratology, literary criticism, and "postmodernism"), gender studies, historical materialism and sociology, structuralism and cultural anthropology, critical theory and psychoanalytical theory.²⁴

Results show that approaches were found on 0.5 percent of the total number of records of publications dated to the 1950s and on 2.2 percent of those dated between 2011 and 2020 (Figure 8).²⁵ The growth was particularly rapid in the 1970s but has slowed down since. In the period between 2001 and 2010, records concerning approaches grew at a slower pace than fast-growing groups of publications (those mentioning socio-economic topics or classical authors; see Figure 9).²⁶

Selected approaches can be divided in two groups, those that are either stagnating or decreasing and those that are increasing (Figure 10). Historical materialism and sociology peaked in the 1970s and has decreased since then. Originally the most popular approach, structuralism and historical anthropology peaked in the 1980s and is now on the decline. Critical theory peaked in the 1990s and has also been declining since then. The group of growing approaches includes gender studies, postcolonial theory and post-structuralism. Gender studies is now the most common approach (35% of

²⁴ See Appendix 2 for the list of keywords.

²⁵ Mentions are compared to the number of records. The percentage does not represent the share of all mentions but the share of records that include the keyword group.

²⁶ The social and economic history group was created by calculating the number of records included in the sub-categories of history and history and civilization. These are, in the Subject tree classification: Attitudes and everyday life, Economy and society, Ethnography, Prosopography, Public life and institutions, Sociology; in the "Discipline after vol. 67" classification: Public life, Institutions, Economy and society, Attitudes and everyday life; in the "Discipline prior to vol. 67" classification: Social, economic, and administrative history.

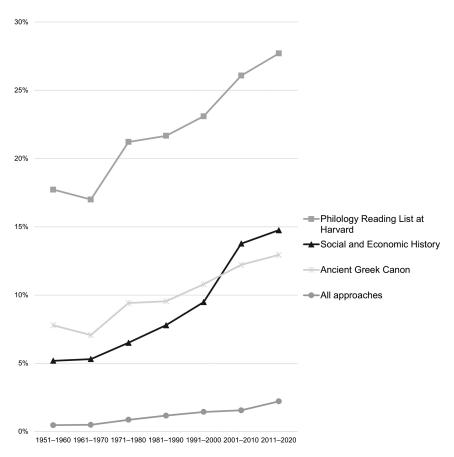


Figure 8. Share of approaches and other groups of records on the total number of records Source: *APh* online database. Figure by author.

all mentions), followed by poststructuralism (23%) and structuralism and historical anthropology (20%). The late appearance of postcolonial theory explains why it is still relatively uncommon (8%) despite its rapid growth.

Approaches are attested differently according to languages. The three main increasing approaches are found predominantly in records of English-language publications (Figure 11). This finding is not entirely surprising considering that English-language records comprise almost half (41%) of all mentions of approaches. Yet, mentions of other approaches concentrates in certain language spheres. Over the period, historical materialism and sociology was found in German-language publications more than those of any other language. The popularity and decline of structuralism and historical anthropology appears to be tied to the history of French classical scholarship, which includes half of all records mentioning this group of approaches. This can be explained by the fact that they have been introduced in ancient

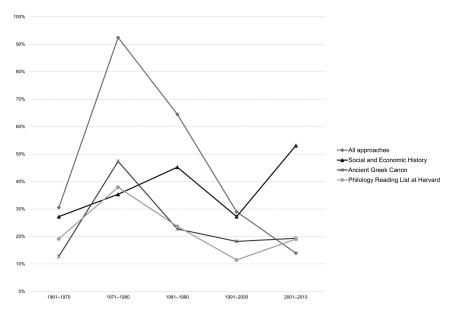


Figure 9. Growth rate of approaches and other record categories Source: *APh* online database. Figure by author.

Mediterranean studies and in social sciences in general through the work of francophone scholars (Ferdinand de Saussure, Émile Benvéniste, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and the "École de Paris" around Jean-Pierre Vernant). Critical theory figures predominantly in Italian publications.

Looking at the share of each approach in language spheres over the period provides a better view of particular interests. Poststructuralism and gender studies are the two favourite approaches in all languages except for French, where structuralism and historical anthropology dominates (Figure 12). This finding, however, could simply reflect the historical importance of structuralism and historical anthropology in French-language publications. Still, the global impact of structuralism and historical anthropology is clear. It is the first or third most important approach in publications in all languages except for those in English and in German (where it is more or less equivalent to interest in psychoanalytical theory). Approaches in the Italian language sphere are more even-rounded but a preference for gender studies is also perceptible.

Some language spheres are more likely to engage with approaches than others. When comparing the number of references to approaches over the number of records in each language, we see that records of French- and English-language publications referred to approaches about twice as more often than publications from other language spheres (Figure 13).

The total number of mentions suggests that approaches were addressed significantly in little more than 1 percent of all *APh* publications pub-

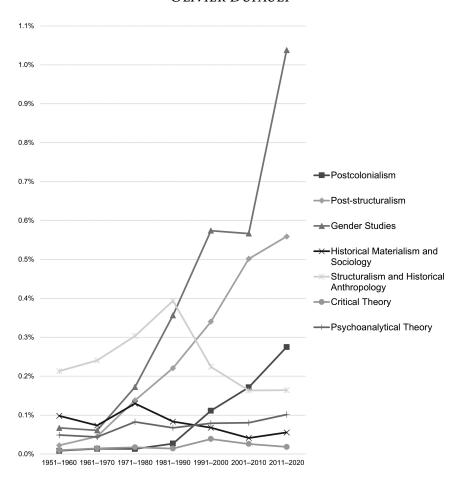


Figure 10. Share of mentions of approaches on the total number of records Source: *APh* online database. Figure by author.

lished between 1951 and 2020. To assess whether this is a low or a high figure, the same keyword queries were made in the "Title," "Abstract," and "Subjects" fields of six other bibliographical databases in the humanities.²⁷

²⁷ America: History and Life (Am Hist & Life), *APh*, ATLA Religion Database (ATLA), Érudit, Index Islamicus, International Medieval Bibliography and International Bibliography of Humanism and the Renaissance (IMB & IBHR), Gender Studies Database (Gender Studies), Historical Abstracts (Hist Abst), MLA International Bibliography (MLA). The search engine for the International Medieval Bibliography (IMB) and International Bibliography of Humanism and the Renaissance (IBHR) do not provide fields for abstracts and subject categories. For these databases, searches were made in the "Search anywhere" field, which is similar to the "All fields" fields of *APh*.

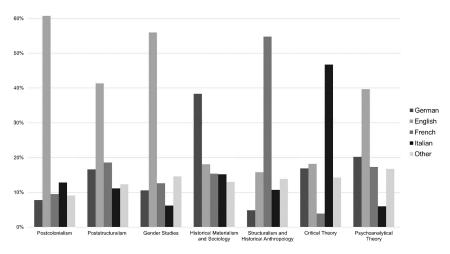


Figure 11. Share of mentions of an approach across all languages, 1951–2020 Source: *APh* online database. Figure by author.

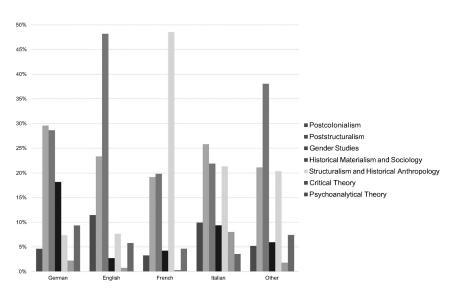


Figure 12. Share of mentions of approaches in languages, 1951–2020 Source: *APh* online database. Figure by author.

L'Année philologique shows the lowest rate of engagement with alternative approaches (Figure 14). They might have increased their presence since the 1960s but—contrary to the arguments of Hanson and Heath—they do not appear to have made a significant impact on ancient Mediterranean studies.

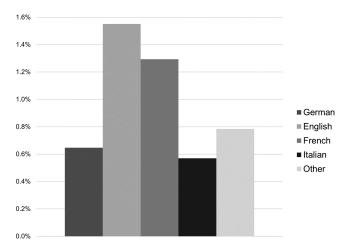


Figure 13. Share of all approaches in relation to the sum of records in each language Source: *APh* online database. Figure by author.

Conclusion

Scheidel's conclusions can be extended to the period between 1996 and 2015 with some exceptions. The ranking of thematic groups remained similar but the annual count of records concerning archaeology, history of classical scholarship (in the mid-1960s and 1970s) and legal history decreased. Most of the growth occurred in literature and in social and economic history. Whether this reflects increases or decreases in the popularity of these fields cannot be ascertained with the data at hand.

Alternative approaches have been growing in influence the last eighty years but have not made a large impact overall. There is consequently no reason to fear that "theory" has weakened interest for ancient Mediterranean studies. Their influence on research rather appears to be overestimated. For instance, the increased interest in alternative approaches has not stopped researchers from editing and translating classics. On average, one edition/translation of Sophocles' plays and about five from the Homeric corpus have been published every year since 1924. The timid "theory turn" in ancient Mediterranean studies has not prevented its researchers from acting as guardians of the classical tradition. On the contrary, edition and translation efforts appear to shift toward the most classical of literature (Figure 7, left panel).

To hazard an assessment of Adler's suggestion that humanities might be adopting a more "scientific outlook," it could be observed that socioeconomic history, which might be the fastest growing field in ancient Mediterranean studies, is also the one that is closest to social sciences. One could also point to the increase in the annual share of articles since 1941 (Figure 15) and observe that the article is a form of scholarly communication

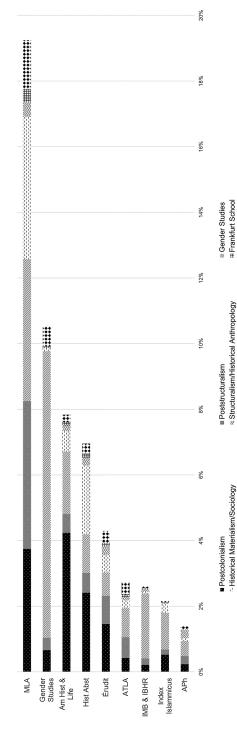


Figure 14. Total share of records containing theory keywords in bibliographical databases in the humanities Source: See databases listed note 27. Figure by author.

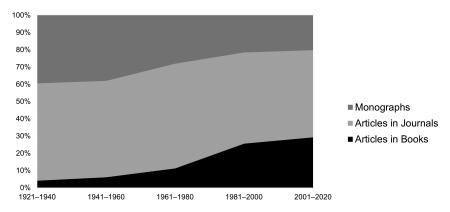


Figure 15. Share of main publication types, 1921–2020 Source: *APh* online database. Figure by author.

that is more conducive to the writing of hypothetico-deductive arguments than the monograph. Another indicator has just been evoked: the growing engagement with alternative approaches since the 1950s. To take the use of theory in the humanities as an indicator of a scientific outlook might surprise some of the advocates of theory as well as their critics. Detractors often associate theory with an overly critical stance toward truth claims or a radical constructivist theory of knowledge. It remains that the act of testing or simply applying a theory—even if it were to claim that we can only think through social constructs—is the beginning of an attempt at understanding reality through some hypothetico-deductive model. A flawed historical model would still be closer to the scientific method than the traditional, epistemologically conservative method in the field, that is, to stick to facts and curtail assumptions and conjectures to the bare minimum. It can be consequently argued with Adler that ancient Mediterranean studies and the humanities in general do not simply appear to be taking a mere "scientific outlook." On the contrary, this survey suggests that, since the 1960s, an increasing number of Humanities scholars have engaged with theories that are often quite bold and which, if approached critically, are likely to bring them to grapple with methods and questions that have been developed by social sciences.

Potential clashes between scientific/theoretical and more traditional approaches are not as disquieting than the apparent decline in the number of annual publications in ancient Mediterranean studies and the humanities. The compound growth rate of APh records between 2008 and 2015 is negative (-3.1%) while the total number of academic publications has been increasing for several decades. ²⁸ Something must be wrong with the scholarly output in

²⁸ Zhu *et al.* 2020.

ancient Mediterranean studies, with the publishing business, with indexing practices in the Humanities, or with all of these elements. Simply managing to increase the indexability of publications in ancient Mediterranean studies through the use of interoperable metadata standards could already solve part of the problem.

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Appendix 1: Queries used for determining the importance of thematic categories

Mentions of thematic categories associated with *APh* categories were obtained online in early October 2021. Mentions of each main categories were retrieved except for "Women's studies" (measured with a different method in the second part of the survey, see Appendix 2) and "Festschriften and collections," which does not concern publications on a certain topic. Records are not systematically associated with all pertinent categories found in the three online classification systems ("Discipline prior to volume 67," "Discipline after volume 67," and a more recent and detailed system called "Subject tree"). To find all records associated with certain research fields in a certain year, one would normally search online for all relevant categories in thematic search fields in the advanced search panel ("Subject tree," "Discipline after vol. 67," and "Discipline prior to vol. 67") and combine these searches with a search for all records in a year span by using the Boolean operator "and." However, searches of this type return the wrong records. Instead of selecting these categories directly it is also possible to search for

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their titles in the "All index terms." This kind of search also make it possible to combine searches in different categories inside a certain date range. The complete search strings for each thematic category are listed below.

The "Ancient Authors and Texts" group created for this study contains records of ancient authors and texts that were only assigned "auteurs et textes" labels and no thematic category label. Searches for records without thematic labels were made by combining the search strings of all thematic categories listed below in the "All index terms" field with OR operators, selecting the NOT operator next to the field and the desired date range in the "Year of publication" field. In theory, this group contains all records that were not retrieved by the searches in the "All index terms" field. Tests made in October 2021 showed that the thousand first records collected in this way contain labels of the "auteurs et textes" section only.

Thematic categories

Literature

Literature OR "Literary history"

Linguistics

Linguistics OR "Linguistic and philology"

Textual Transmission

"Textual transmission" OR "Paleography, codicology, history of books and libraries" OR "Textual criticism, editorial techniques"

Archaeology (combined with History of Art before 1996)

Archaeology OR "Archaeology and History of Art"

Papyrology, Numismatics, Epigraphy, and Sigillography

(Antiquities AND "Numismatics, metrology, sigillography") OR ("non-literary sources" AND (papyrology OR epigraphy OR numismatics))

Political and Military History

("History and civilization" AND ("Byzantine history" OR "Greek history" OR "History of Late Antiquity" OR "History of other peoples" OR "History of the Aegean world" OR "History of the pre-Roman Italy and primitive Rome" OR "Political and military history" OR "Regional history and historical geography" OR "Roman history" OR "General History" OR "National history, ethnography" OR "regional history, topography"))

Social and Economic History

("History and civilization" AND (Anthropology OR "Attitudes and everyday life" OR "Economy and society" OR Ethnography OR Prosopography OR "Public life and institutions" OR "Sociology" OR "Economy and Society" OR "Social, economic and administrative history"))

History of Religion

("History and civilization" AND religion*) OR "religious history"

History of Art, Education, and Intellectual Life (does not exist before 1996)

("History and civilization" AND Culture)

History of Law and Justice

Law OR "Law and justice"

History of Philosophy

"Philosophy and the history of ideas"

History of Science and Technology

"Science and technology" OR "Science, technology, crafts"

History of Classical Scholarship

"The classical tradition" OR "Classical studies"

Thematic groups

Philology

Combines "Ancient Authors and Texts" with "Literature," "Linguistics," and "Textual transmission."

Political, Social, Economic, and Religious History

Combines "Political and Military History," "Social and Economic History," and "History of Religion."

APPENDIX 2: QUERIES USED FOR DETERMINING THE IMPORTANCE OF APPROACHES

The number of mentions of approaches were obtained by searching for the following keywords in the fields indicated. Boolean operators for each field are indicated in parentheses. The *APh* search engine does not always allow the combination of certain fields with certain Boolean operators and limits the number of characters for a single search. It was consequently necessary to limit the list of keywords. A balance was kept between the number of terms in each language, although some languages use more synonymous expressions than others when designating certain approaches ("Gender studies" in German, for instance). Considering the limitation on the number of keywords, the most significant terms were privileged. The lists are consequently short but also more likely to represent significant uses of approaches. I also refrained from using expressions returning false positives. An example is the expression "cultural capital," which, even if popularized by Bourdieu's work, is now common enough to be used without implication of Bourdieu's field theory.

Postcolonialism

All fields (AND): post-colonial* OR postcolonial* OR postkolonial* OR racial* OR racism* OR razzis* OR rassis* OR "Race, concept" OR Ethnizitä* OR ethnicit* OR etnicit* OR Fremdenfeindlichkeit OR Fremdenhass OR xenophobi* OR xenofobia or "Civilization-Barbarism opposition" OR

Ethnozentrismus OR ethnocentrism* OR etnocentrismo OR multikultural* OR Multicultur* OR "> Orientalism" OR "Frantz Fanon" OR "Chakrabarty" OR "Spivak" OR "Bhabha" OR "SAÏD, Edward W." OR "Edward W. Said" OR "Edward Said" OR "E. W. Said" OR "E. Said"

Poststructuralism

All fields (AND): semiot* OR narratol* OR "a Critical approaches" OR "Metanarrative" OR "Metatheatre" OR postmodern* OR post-modern* OR deconstruc* OR poststruct* OR post-struct* OR poststrukt* OR biopower OR biopouvoir OR Bio-macht OR biopolitica OR Derrida OR Lyotard OR Foucault OR Deleuze OR Guattari OR Baudrillard OR Vattimo OR "Fredric Jameson" OR Agamben OR Saussure OR Barthes OR Todorov OR Greimas OR Genette OR Ricoeur OR "Eco, Umberto" OR "Umberto eco" OR "U. Eco"

Author (NOT): "FOUCAULT, Didier" OR "FOUCAULT, J. A., de" OR "FOUCAULT J., de" OR "FOUCAULT J. POULAIN P. DE" OR "FOUCAULT, Jules de" OR "DEMOULE-LYOTARD, L." OR "DELEUZE, Patrick" OR "KAHN-LYOTARD, L."

Gender Studies

All fields (AND): Frauenforschung OR Gender-Forschung Geschlechterforschung OR Geschlechterstudien OR OR Geschlechterbild* OR Frauenbild* OR Frauengestalt* OR Gender-Inszenierung* OR "gender studies" OR "women's studies" OR "gender relations" OR "étude de genre" OR "études de genre" OR "images de la femme" OR "représentations de la femme" OR "condition féminine" OR "studi di genere" OR "condizione femminile" OR transgender* OR transsexual* OR queer* OR Männlichkeit OR masculinit* OR mascolinit* OR Weiblichkeit OR feminit* OR feminist* OR heterosexual* OR homosexual* OR homoerotic* OR sexuality OR effeminacy OR feminity OR masculinity OR patriarchy OR matriarchy OR Kristeva OR "Butler, Judith" OR "J. Butler" OR "Judith Butler" OR "Irigaray, luce" OR "L. Irigaray" OR "Luce Irigaray" OR "S. de Beauvoir" OR "Beauvoir S. de" OR Cixous

Historical Materialism and Sociology

All fields (AND): "materialisme historique" OR "historical materialism" OR "historischer Materialismus" OR "historischen Materialismus" OR "historischem Materialismus" OR "materialismo storico" OR "dialectical materialism" OR "materialisme dialectique" OR "materialismo dialettico" OR "dialektischer Materialismus" OR "dialektischen Materialismus" OR "dialektischen Materialismus" OR marx* OR Durkheim OR Simmel OR Mauss OR "Max Weber" OR "M. Weber" OR "T. Veblen" OR "Thorstein Veblen" OR "C. Kluckhohn" OR "Clyde Kluckhohn" OR "T. Parsons" OR "Talcott Parsons" OR Luhmann OR Bourdieu

Author (NOT): "MARX, Alfred" OR "MARX B." OR "MARX, Christian" OR "MARX F. A." OR "MARX FR" OR "MARX, Fridericus" OR

"MARX, Friedrich" OR "MARX, Friedrich" OR "MARX, Fridericus" OR "MARX, Jacques" OR "MARX K. H." OR "MARX M. M." OR "MARX O." OR "MARX, Patricia A." OR "MARX R." OR "MARX ROBERT F." OR "MARX, W." OR "MARX W. H." OR "MARX, Werner" OR "MARX, William" OR "MORSTEIN-MARX, Robert" OR "MARX-WOLF, Heidi" OR "MARX-SCHLUNK, B."

Structuralism and Historical Anthropology

All fields (AND): strukturalis* OR structuralism* OR structuralist* OR "analyse structurale" OR "structural analysis" OR "analisi structurale" OR "vergleichende Geschichte" OR "vergleichenden Geschichte" OR "storia comparata" OR "histoire comparative" OR "histoire comparée" OR "comparative history" OR Saussure OR Lévi-Strauss OR "E. de Martino" OR "Ernesto de Martino" OR Braudel OR Vidal-Naquet OR Loraux OR Gernet OR Dumézil OR Benveniste OR Vernant OR Redfield OR Detienne OR "Franz Boas" OR "F. Boas" OR Malinowksi OR "M. Mead" OR "Margaret Mead" OR Geertz OR Sahlins

Author (NOT): "Loraux, Patrice" OR "Gernet, M." OR "Gernet, J." OR "Dumézil, Bruno" OR "Vernant, Denis" OR "Vernant, L." OR "Detienne, Claude" OR "Detienne, E."

Critical Theory

All fields (AND): "kritische Theorie" OR "kritichen Theorie" OR "critical theory" OR "théorie critique" OR "teoria critica" OR "Frankfurt school" OR "école de Francfort" OR "Frankfurt Schule" OR Horkheimer OR Lukacs OR Adorno OR Marcuse OR Habermas

Psychoanalytical Theory

All fields (AND): Jung OR Freud OR Lacan OR Jungian* Freudi* OR Lacani* OR Psychanal* OR Psychoanal* OR psicoanal* OR psychotherap* OR psicotera*

Author (NOT): Freud OR Jung

APPENDIX 3: Total numbers of records of books and articles in indexes (Sept. 2021)

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	2002	7 432	35 583	23 884	11 754		14 928		19 654		17 795	33 496	31251	4 301	3 749	60 368			286 341
	2003	7 650	35 296	25 280	12 483		15 199		20 749		17 962	35 592	30818	4 520	3 078	63 431			294 134
	2004	7 770	35 568	22 919	12 649		15 082		21 696		17 749	48 499	31009	4 281	2 691	63 629			306 173
	2005	8 474	35 662	23 101	13 461		16 034		21 750		609 61	30337	30581	4 240	2 590	62 852			292 344
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	2007	8 534	35 781	25 791	14 954		, 166 91		19 973		19 941	886 62	30270	4 482	4 468	68 286			305 927
	2008	9 029	35 746	24 823	13 615	582	14 476	2 065	19 143	3 694	19 692	22 388	30326	4 320	4 813	908 99		13 587	292 383
_	2009	9 433	37 269	23 514	14 255		14 158		20 775		21 293	21 271	30722	4 252	5 251	62 666			295 649
	2010	10 142	37 818	19 983	13 999		16 814		22 071		22 643	25 265	30214	4 078	5 613	67 965			305 301
	2011	9 531	35 422	18 349	13 996		15 160		23 160		22 130	25 483	31207	3 937	5 553	68 169			302 239
	2012	10 139	34 260	16 490	13 396		15 851		21 575		22 371	23 849	32243	3 900	6 647	67 234			298 638
	2013	10 134	35 692	15 178	13 932		15 665		13 087		22 060	20 501	32903	3 844	6 653	906 59			285 901
	2014	9 828	36 549	14 190	12 643		16 302		12 749		20 719	18 389	31640	3 771	6 514	61 417			274 803
	2015	11 202	37 263	12 272	12 749		18 383		12 083		20 296	15 899	32226	3 612	6 392	60 050			272 230
	2016	11 638	36 709	12 189	11 306		20 366		10 751		17 884	8 447	20146	1 989	6 404	58 646			246 179
	2017	12 274	35 450	8 876	10 104		21 219		9 397		18 319	4 309	19614	1820	6 216	54 616			234 247
	2018	10 150	35 414	7 889	171 6		18 892		266 9		16 561	290	8/69	304	6 084	49 586			197 192
	2019	10 011	33 155	5 557	7 406		18 239		6 084		13 486	201	4810	221	906 5	42 616			174 539
	2020	9 815	27 763	2 074			18 314		3 605		6 131	0	1540	13	5 137	32 220			131 301