

Réka Forrai
Department of History
Centre for Medieval Literature
Email: forrai@sdu.dk
Phone: 65504619



Teaching Portfolio

My teaching experiences are mostly in classical languages and literatures. I am interested in Latin and Greek texts in their multidimensionality, in their linguistic, literary, cultural and codicological manifestations and beyond, in their cultural and political embeddedness.

I have taught both undergraduates and graduates:

2016 Fall semester – University of Southern Denmark, Hellenistic Literature (together with Christian Høgel)
2016 March-May – University of Southern Denmark, Medieval and Renaissance Latin
2015 October 4-9 – Study week for the doctoral students of SISMELE (Florence) in Budapest: Medieval manuscripts in Hungary (together with Gabor Kiss Farkas and David Falvay)
2014 May 12-15 – Helsinki Spring School: Canonizing Medieval Literatures (together with Lars Boje Mortensen and Kenneth Clarke)
2013 Fall Semester – University of Southern Denmark, Intermediate Ancient Greek reading seminar (Lucian's True Story)
2011 Fall Semester – Obscuritas in the Middle Ages – joint seminar with Alessandro Zironi (Bologna) at Charles University, Prague
2005 Winter Semester - Medieval Studies Department, CEU: The Interplay of Sacred and Profane in Medieval Latin Literature - course offered for MA and PhD students – together with Lucie Dolezalova
1999 – 2000 - Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania: beginner Latin and Greek courses at the Departments of History, Archeology and Theology

I was formally trained in pedagogy as part of my classical philology undergraduate training. This year-long course involved a practical part as well: teaching in high schools under the supervision of trained personnel.

But my experience with teaching started way before that: I am third generation teacher in my family – my grandparents on both sides, parents, sisters all work in elementary school education. Thus in a sense I connected with teaching earlier than I started doing it, and my awareness of the intricacies of it dates from my childhood, from the memory of family discussions about children's capacities, of various methods, of the different problems that arise in a classroom situation.

We have to teach a generation that is little exposed to 'dead' languages in high school. The challenge of teaching classics nowadays thus lies in changing our expectation and our approach and redesigning previous curricula into more 'immersion' style courses, where professors have to quickly introduce students to the basics and at the same time facilitate their deeper reflections, keeping them entertained all the while.

My pedagogy and methodology encourages an interaction between historical and philological inquiries, the integration of many disciplines into one line of enquiry. So far this approach has been particularly gratifying as it has engaged students and given them a thorough grounding of the text, both linguistically and contextually, as well that sense of confidence when studying and researching such texts.

Latin, the first and second language of an entire continent for centuries, can be a difficult language to teach in many respects. The same, in different ways, is also true for Greek, classical and Byzantine alike. The many different texts, economic, administrative, theological, philosophical and literary, require a truly interdisciplinary approach. Language, literature and history are independent fields with their own methodology, and teaching classical and medieval civilizations means one has to engage with all of them. One of the main challenges is to find a balanced and intertwined approach: using literary theories to understand history, using linguistic skills to work on literary texts, using historical knowledge to contextualize the readings, etc.

I find most important that students have a 'direct' access to the past by reading as many texts from the periods concerned as possible. Teaching philology has to give room to a lot of activity from the part of the students. Critical reading can be acquired only by regular practice, rather than through tricks and information imparted by the teacher. The backbone of my methodology therefore is staying close to the texts, whether read in original or translation. Also, I distribute various tasks so that there is a balance between classroom work and homework. While I have a general sense of the course's direction, I am always ready to modify it based on the interests or specialization of the students. The goal is to enable students to be able to engage fruitfully with a text from a different time period, in a different language.

Due to the nature of my subject and my approach, students in my class undergo continuous assessment: learning a

language and practicing it in the classroom week by week means that the improvement of students is gradual and it is easy to monitor. Written assessments at the end usually confirm their progress, giving also a chance for some extra efforts towards improvement.

Teaching classical languages means one can rely on a pedagogy that goes thousands of years back. Teaching medieval or byzantine literature however, means teaching a subject that is a relative newcomer in the university curricula, thus it requires a greater dose of creativity from the part of the teacher. Even if I have had no direct influence so far on curriculum development, I had a taste of it through mostly designing my own courses.

The material is embarrassingly rich: often, the challenge is to fit in one semester the literature of an entire millennium. Textbooks are comparatively scarce. Due to the lack of pre-existing materials I often had to design the entire course: teaching introductory Latin and Greek for example for medieval historians, archaeologists and theologians meant that I couldn't fall back on traditional language courses that mainly use classical texts, but had to design an anthology based on the students' specialisation, reading with them medieval charters, epigraphic materials, etc.

The most exciting part of this is the continuously expanding online toolkit one has access to: texts made accessible, dictionaries, commentaries, exercises and so on. I consider paramount making full use of this possibility. Teaching in teams was a very good experience for me: the internet and the technical support at the university makes it now possible that one can teach courses in tandem with another colleague at another university, be it Edinburgh or Budapest. Along with developing such courses, I plan to propose more courses at the department that concern the medieval period in a way that would be attractive not only to the classics, but also the history students.

Teaching and supervision

Greek reading 1: Lucian

Réka Erzsebet Forrai
01/09/2013 → ...

Hellenistic Literature

Réka Erzsebet Forrai
01/09/2016 → ...

Latin Intensive

Réka Erzsebet Forrai
02/09/2019 → 13/12/2019

Medieval and Neolatin

Réka Erzsebet Forrai
01/03/2016 → ...

Medieval and Neolatin

Réka Erzsebet Forrai
28/09/2019 → 16/11/2019