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Outside the Box and onto a Dusty Trail

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Cover Page Footnote

Richard Leo Enos is Professor and Lillian B. Radford Chair of Rhetoric and Composition at Texas Christian University. A historian of classical rhetoric, much of his work deals with thought and expression in Antiquity. In 2006, he received the George E. Yoos Distinguished Service Award by the Rhetoric Society of America. He currently serves on the Managing Committee of The American School of Classical Studies at Athens. He received a 2007 "Deans' Research and Creative Activity Award" from Texas Christian University, the 2008 "Chancellor's Award for Distinguished Achievement as a Creative Teacher and Scholar," and is the 2009 Piper Professor for the State of Texas. r.enos@tcu.edu

OUT OF THE BOX

Outside the Box and Onto a Dusty Trail

Richard Leo Enos

I never realized that doing fieldwork in Greece at remote archaeological sites would include dealing with overly protective sheep dogs guarding their flocks, swatting away aggressive bees, and explaining to village leaders why examining their ancient inscriptions—housed in open sheds and covered with pigeon droppings—is important to the study of classical rhetoric! All such extra-curricular activities may be “out of the box” as normal research procedures, but they have become standard practice for discovering new evidence about ancient rhetoric at remote sites.¹⁹

For reasons that I do not fully understand, let alone hope to explain to others, I have always loved to study languages and antiquity, and to be a teacher. Further, I thrilled at the idea of traveling to, and discovering new evidence at, remote archaeological sites. As I tell my students, follow your passion, even if that passion falls outside of the box. Following one’s passion as a career may not be novel advice, nor does it seem to be out of the box, but I feel that following one’s own path is the best road to take . . . even if that path is a dusty trail on a remote island that leads to a little-studied archaeological site.

Doing research in classical rhetoric was far different when I began in the early 1970’s. Research and teaching in classical rhetoric traditionally meant following well established nineteenth-century procedures equating (and perpetuating) Victorian methods of textual analysis as the “proper” method for classical studies. From that perspective, research meant little more than close readings of already published and edited classical texts; in short, one could do the research in the comfort of an office and never have to travel farther than a trip to the library or (now) a keyboard cruise through the internet. I have always felt that one of our responsibilities was to discover new primary source material, evidence that was not limited to textual artifacts, and to complement traditional methods of philological analysis with other methodologies,



Enos displays Greek artifact.

¹⁹ Permission to use photograph granted by Carolyn Cruz, photographer.

ones sensitive to the object of study, such as those that are used in archaeology and epigraphy. I also believed that it was critical to leave the office and library and go to Greece, Italy, and Turkey for on-site work and study.

The value of thinking outside the box became dramatically clear to me in the summer of 1974 when I was a student at The American School of Classical Studies at Athens. On one of our field trips, we stopped briefly at a remote archaeological site, the Amphiareion of Oropos, a small sanctuary about 30 miles northwest of Athens in Boeotia. My professor, Fordyce Mitchell, pointed out an inscription that he thought I would be interested in seeing because it listed victors of literary and rhetorical contests. Previously, our study of Greek rhetoric had been limited essentially to Athens to such an extent that we were tempted to equate Greek rhetoric with Athenian rhetoric. While Athenians were clearly present among the list of victors, this stele also listed victors who came from several other Greek cities.

At that moment, I realized that a treasure of new evidence, such as this one inscription, could well be available for study and that Greek rhetoric had manifestations other than Athenian rhetoric. Such non-traditional evidence and methods of analysis can enrich and complement what we have come to know about classical rhetoric through traditional methods, if only we are willing to leave armchair-research, think out of the box, and travel the dusty trails to archaeological sites.