

Fluency in a Dead Language: Speaking Ancient Greek in Greece
Eri Bolton, Class of 2027

The Jasper Jacob Stahl prize allowed me to enroll in *Living Greek in Greece*, a two-week course set in Selianitika, Greece, with the Paideia Institute. I was introduced to a growing pedagogy within my field that teaches ancient languages as living ones, challenging me to think about my Greek education in terms of fluency as well as literacy. Over the course of the program I read the entirety of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, along with excerpts from Hesiod's *Theogony* and Lucian's *Dialogues of the Gods*. Daily classes, which were taught entirely in a combination of Attic and Homeric Ancient Greek, pushed me to both ask and respond to questions about the grammar and content of the *Hymn*.

My research examines Greek and Roman perceptions of Ancient Eastern civilizations, particularly ancient Persia. I found myself reading off of stone columns and tablets at Delphi rather than squinting at a computer screen, experiencing the shift to the Orientalizing period in Greek art as I walked through the National Archeological Museum, and seeing up close examples of Persian dress that I had studied in the weeks prior.

More broadly, I research racism within the Classics, from the first seeds of White Supremacy in the Greco-Persian Wars to the current elitism that weakens my field and renders it inaccessible to the same classes of people that the Greeks and Romans enslaved and oppressed. As such, the daily interactions and friendships I made during the program informed my research just as much as the language skills and cultural context I gained. While I was thrilled to meet new professors and students of color in my field—and had many productive and eye-opening conversations with other participants—there was a clear hierarchy among the faculty; for example, instructors of color who were far more experienced and fluent in Ancient Greek were consistently in subordinate positions to their white counterparts.

The Paideia Institute is well known for its 2019 scandal, which revealed deeply exclusionary values within the program's leadership. Students and professors of color, particularly women, reported disturbing treatment that eventually pressured most universities to disaffiliate with the Institute. Researching the history of the program and experiencing it after the reforms was an important aspect of my research on current systematic racism in the Classics, and has given me the connections and motivation to contact past instructors and participants about their insights on the program. I really value my research experience at the Paideia Institute, which was an education in contemporary politics and injustices as much as in ancient language, history, and culture.

Faculty Mentor: Robert Sobak

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