Tufts Scholar Researches Classics Across Universities and Continents
*Master’s student Julia Lenzi uses modern methods to study ancient cultures and texts*

Master’s student Julia Lenzi has studied ancient Latin and Greek languages, Roman epigraphy, classical literature, and even some encoding standards. Now an advanced scholar in the Department of Classics, her passion and excitement come through clearly when discussing the field she so loves.

Having taught Latin full-time at the high school level for three years between her undergraduate and graduate career, Julia approaches classics through the lens of language. She explains, “My focus in classics is in philology [the structure, historical development, and relationships of language], so my primary objective is to examine texts—whether oral, paper, or carved in stone—to try to uncover more about ancient societies.” Although her area of focus is ancient language, she points out that at its core, the discipline is home to many different perspectives that serve to deepen the overall understanding of the sociocultural context.

Julia is a vocal proponent of the growing field of digital humanities, which provides “new commentaries on texts in interactive ways where one can engage with the text.” Many of her projects use this new avenue of scholarly dissemination; she regularly engages in scholarship and research through the creation of databases and performs analysis in interactive digital platforms.

One such project is the creation of treebank analyses, which are visual representations of the morphological and syntactic structures of sentences that indicate dependency relationships among words. Her largest project focuses on the Roman text *Bellum Jugurthinum* by Sallust. She explains that the creation of treebank analyses “allows us to hold these large complex sentences in our minds and understand it as a Roman would... it opens our eyes to how the Romans would have used their own language.” Once digitally published, her analyses will help identify linguistic trends and patterns through searchable and trackable data.
As an added benefit, treebank analysis has great potential as a pedagogical tool in language learning; Julia says she wishes she had this tool when teaching, because she thinks her high-school students would have loved it. “A traditional commentary is excellent and is a useful tool,” Julia explains, but treebank analyses and other new digital platforms for language commentary allow scholars to “build on a traditional learning method in a tactile and more engaging way.”

Julia is also a visiting research fellow at Brown University this semester, studying Greek and Roman epigraphy. She is working to catalog, transcribe, translate, and digitize nine epigraphs housed at Johns Hopkins University, which will be published to the U.S. Epigraphy Project. While some of the epigraphs are on display to the public, others have been in storage for many years. “There is a lot of research to be done,” she says, “especially given that some of these materials have not been studied in years.” She will continue her epigraphy studies this summer in a three-week epigraphy workshop in Greece (traversing Athens, Delos, and Thasos), as part of the Visible Words Project, “Research and Training in Digital Contextual Epigraphy,” which focuses on digitizing epigraphic collections through XML coding.

At the end of the day, each project comes back to philology. She explains, “I find that you can realize what people really felt when you examine their choices and the way they use language. If you look at language closely, you can see the true message of ancient authors.” Through her work making morphological analyses and epigraphs more tangibly engaging, she hopes to enhance scholarly understanding of linguistic trends throughout antiquity.

Rounding out her philological pursuits, Julia will be presenting at the 2015 annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South on the use of language in Homer’s *Iliad*, specifically on the characters Helen and Andromache and how their female agency is expressed by the manipulation of domestic items to communicate their displeasure with the Trojan War. “The Ancient Greeks were a primarily oral culture,” she argues, “so I think they would have noticed the verbal cues in Homer’s *Iliad*, which would have allowed them to make these connections.”

Identifying linguistic trends and deconstructing the very fabric of ancient language is the thread that runs throughout Julia’s work. And while her work is firmly set in antiquity, she is passionate about contributing to modern research technology: “I think it’s a particular strength of the Tufts classics department that they’re engaging in many projects with digital formats and creating digital publications for future scholarship.” Whether at Tufts, a conference, or in Greece, Julia will surely be working to bring ancient languages alive for future learners and scholars.