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# Citation scores for ancient historians in the United States

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Abstract: This survey of citation scores provides a rough measure of the relative impact of scholarship published by forty-eight leading ancient historians in the United States.

In this survey I collect and analyze bibliometric evidence for the impact of published research in the field of Ancient History.[1] Tables 1-5 are based on citation counts derived from the "Arts and Humanities Citation Index" and the "Social Sciences Citation Index" of "ISI Web of Science" in early 2008.[2] My sample is restricted to ancient historians at academic institutions in the United States whose work has received a minimum of 100 reported citations.[3] For the purposes of this survey, "ancient historians" are defined as academics whose principal area of specialization is the history of the Greco-Roman world including the early Byzantine period.[4] This study focuses on ancient historians on active duty. A small number of particularly prominent living ancient historians who have already retired are included for comparative purposes.

Tables 1 and 3 list total citation scores for forty-four active and four retired scholars at twenty-nine different institutions. More than anything else, this dataset highlights Peter Brown's uniquely powerful impact on the profession. The scores for retired leading ancient historians are somewhat higher than for all but one of their active peers but in each case remain far below Brown's tally.

These gross scores do not provide a straightforward index of academic impact because they fail to control for differences in age and therefore career length. In order to adjust for this variation, Tables 2 and 4 present the average annual number of citations per scholar for the period from the date of that person's relevant final degree to the current year (2008). This adjustment helps us to ascertain impact irrespective of seniority. To some extent, this method favors younger scholars due to the fact that the overall volume of scholarly publishing in this field and thus the opportunities for receiving citations have considerably increased in recent decades. The nature of the citation databases reinforces this effect: the "Arts and Humanities Citation Index" does not include citations prior to 1975, and its coverage has improved over time. For these reasons, Tables 2 and 4 tend to overstate the impact of work published by scholars who are currently in their forties and fifties relative to those in their sixties and seventies.

[1] This paper is the third in a series of studies of trends in academic publishing and employment in the fields of Greco-Roman History in particular and 'Classics' in general: see W. Scheidel, "Continuity and change in classical scholarship: a quantitative survey, 1924 to 1992," *Ancient Society* 28 (1997), 265-289; "Professional historians of classical antiquity in the English-speaking world: a quantitative survey," *Ancient History Bulletin* 13 (1999), 151-156.

[2] http://www.isiknowledge.com (accessed February 2-10, 2008). Readers should note that this database is being continuously updated and citation counts are bound to change accordingly.

[3] This round figure seems to represent a reasonably stringent cut-off point, excluding as it does six full professors specializing in Greco-Roman history at Brown, Chicago, Columbia, and Harvard, and more generally close to nine-tenths of all university-employed Greco-Roman historians in the country (cf. Scheidel, "Professional historians," 153).

[4] Needless to say, there are no clear-cut boundaries between historians of the Greco-Roman world on the one hand and archaeologists, historians of literature, art historians, or historians of philosophy and science who study the same civilizations on the other; nor is it easy to separate the former from historians of the Ancient Near East or the early Middle Ages. More generally, the process of formally demarcating sub-fields strikes me as inherently contrived, constricting, and undesirable. At the same time, any survey of a group of academics requires us to impose artificial boundaries for the sake of limiting sample size. The problem of specious demarcation can and should be addressed by conducting similar surveys for archaeologists, literary historians, etc that would increase coverage and allow broader comparisons.

Even so, the overall picture is fairly clear. Brown's preeminence in the adjusted tabulation is nearly as pronounced as in the gross data. The data also highlight the volatility of aggregate institutional scores (Table 5). Had a comparable survey been undertaken prior to relatively recent retirements (cf. Tables 3 and 4), citation tallies for places such as Harvard or Berkeley would have been considerably higher than they are now whereas some other institutions would have shown a more modest record. While Princeton's current front-runner position in Table 5 critically depends on Peter Brown's presence, Stanford's rank has been boosted by several very recent hires. As a result of the latter process, senior ancient historians at Stanford – viewed as a group – currently enjoy a significantly higher impact per year of output than groups of scholars at other institutions. Moreover, the tabulation suggests that if this trend continues, at some point in the next decade (pending a few upcoming retirements at other institutions), scholarship produced by Stanford-based ancient historians will consistently have had a higher annualized impact than that of any of their peers on active duty.[5] Needless to say, rankings such as these are highly susceptible to sudden and potentially dramatic change induced by retirements and inter-institutional mobility.

These data also invite observations about gender, age, and geographical provenance. Seven of the forty-four active scholars in Tables 1 and 2 are women, or 16% of the total. In 1999, I found that women accounted for 11.3% of all full professors and for 25.1% of all associate professors specializing in Greco-Roman history at US academic institutions.[6] This shows that the share of women in the current sample of high-impact scholars is broadly in line with their overall representation in the profession. At the same time, the citation counts also reveal disproportionate gender imbalances: six of the seven women in Table 1 and five of the seven women in Table 2 are ranked in the lower third of each group. Demographic differences are unlikely to be responsible for this situation: mean career length is 27.3 years for the seven women, 6.2 years less than the average of 33.5 years for all thirty-seven men and only 5.2 years less than the average of 32.5 years for the fourteen men in the top third of the annualized rankings in Table 2. Given the relatively small number of women in the field overall, their position in the rankings is necessarily particularly susceptible to random fluctuations: as a matter of fact, the present imbalance owes much to the fairly recent retirement of two female ancient historians with very high citations scores.[7]

Gross citation scores are only weakly correlated with age: the difference between the mean career length of 35.5 years for the top fifteen scholars in Table 1 and that of 30.9 years for the other twenty-nine amounts to a mere 4.6 years, a gap that cannot in any way account for the dramatic difference between mean citation scores of 681 for the former group and of 193 for the latter. Even more strikingly, annualized impact is not

[5] This prediction receives further support from a more focused comparison. The "visibility" of publications by scholars who received their PhD after the mid-1970s is unlikely to be heavily affected by the changes in citation count coverage mentioned above. Twenty-one scholars in Tables 1 and 2 received their final degrees between 1977 and 1993: the average annualized citation score for the four Stanford-based ancient historians in this group is 21.8 (for an average postdoctoral career length of 23.8 years) – or 20.3 citations per year for an average career length of 24.6 years if Victor Hanson is included –, compared to 7.5 for the other sixteen (with a similar mean career duration of 26.1 years). This means that the average annualized Stanford score is almost three times as high as that of the composite group.

[6] Scheidel, "Professional Historians," 152.

[7] Sarah Pomeroy (CUNY) with 749 citations and Susan Treggiari (Stanford) with 445 citations.

positively correlated with age. The mean career length of 32.6 years for the top fifteen scholars in Table 2 is identical to the average of 32.5 years for the entire group. This means that these scores are in fact *inversely* correlated with career length, a relationship that is well brought out by Figures 1 and 2. A number of factors may be responsible for this effect, from changes in the scope of coverage of the citation indices (as mentioned above) to changes in the overall volume of academic publishing or thematic orientation.

Ancient historians who grew up and received their final degrees outside the United States occupy a prominent position in Tables 1 and 2. Eighteen of these forty-four persons (or 41%) belong in this category. They account for fifteen of the twenty-two scholars (or 68%) ranked in the upper half of Table 1 and for fourteen (64%) of those in the upper half of Table 2 but make up only 14 to 18% of the lower halves.[8] This concentration in the upper reaches of the rankings cannot properly be explained by the recruitment of well-established overseas scholars by American universities: this explanation applies to no more than six of the fourteen immigrant scholars (or 43%) in the upper half of Table 2.

This is not the place to consider the underlying causes of these various patterns. The main purpose of this pilot study is to present standardized evidence for the relative impact of published scholarship and to provide food for thought. It is true that the databases that were used for this survey are heavily biased towards the Sciences and Anglophone publications. They also omit citations in books, which have traditionally been a much more important medium in the Humanities than in other clusters of disciplines.[9] Nevertheless, these limitations do not invalidate my findings: US-based historians publish primarily or exclusively in English and are therefore most likely to be cited in Anglophone publications, and there is no obvious reason why relative citation rates in books should differ significantly from those in journal articles. Hence, while Tables 1 and 3 undoubtedly underestimate actual citation frequencies by what is potentially a very considerable margin,[10] the relative rankings in Tables 2 and 4 are unlikely to be strongly affected by the omission of citations in books and inadequate coverage of foreign-language periodicals.

Surveys of cumulative and mean per capita citations scores for entire programs or departments that deal with the ancient world would be the natural next step. As in other academic fields, they would provide a basis for direct comparisons between institutions and assist decision-making concerning formal rankings, the institutional allocation of resources by academic administrators, and the selection of graduate programs by students.

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[8] Moreover, only two of the sixteen highest-ranked individuals in Table 2 did not receive their final degrees outside the United States.

[9] For a recent discussion of these issues and their implications, see C. Kosmopoulos and D. Pumain, "Citation, citation, citation: bibliometrics, the web and the Social Sciences and Humanities," *Cybergeo* "Science et Toile," Article 411, December 17, 2007, revised January 18, 2008, accessed February 6, 2008 (http://www.cybergeo.eu/index15463.html).

[10] The probability of substantial omissions further underscores the scale of Peter Brown's accomplishments. According to a recent estimate, "a very highly cited social scientist … might have a lifetime citation score of around 3,000-4,000 whereas a top molecular biologist could have a score of over 15,000-20,000:" A. Goodall, "The place of citation in today's academy," http://www.amandagoodall.com/IHEcitationsJan06.pdf (accessed February 6, 2008). By comparison, Moses Finley's work has received 3,193 reported citations in journals since 1956.

Table 1 Gross impact: Citation scores of ancient historians on active duty

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Peter Brown | Princeton | 2,778 |
| William Harris | Columbia | 758 |
| Roger Bagnall | NYU | 742 |
| Christopher Jones | Harvard | 673 |
| Josiah Ober | Stanford | 647 |
| Ian Morris | Stanford | 623 |
| Richard Saller | Stanford | 531 |
| Kurt Raaflaub | Brown | 486 |
| John Matthews | Yale | 476 |
| Brent Shaw | Princeton | 474 |
| Sabine MacCormack | Notre Dame | 449 |
| Victor Hanson | Hoover (Stanford) | 422 |
| Michael Gagarin | Texas | 405 |
| Michael Speidel | Hawaii | 375 |
| David Cohen | UC Berkeley | 372 |
| Keith Bradley | Notre Dame | 361 |
| Robert Garland | Colgate | 337 |
| Donald Kagan | Yale | 326 |
| Bruce Frier | Michigan | 313 |
| John Haldon | Princeton | 279 |
| Walter Scheidel | Stanford | 272 |
| Richard Talbert | North Carolina | 266 |
| Edward Champlin | Princeton | 229 |
| Kevin Clinton | Cornell | 219 |
| Raymond Van Dam | Michigan | 213 |
| Michael McCormick | Harvard | 201 |
| Thomas Figueira | Rutgers | 186 |
| Donald Engels | Arkansas | 185 |
| Heinrich von Staden | IAS | 184 |
| Arthur Eckstein | Maryland | 171 |
| Barry Strauss | Cornell | 162 |
| Peter Krentz | Davidson | 157 |
| Cynthia Patterson | Emory | 145 |
| Vincent Rosivach | Fairfield | 145 |
| David Potter | Michigan | 141 |
| Michele Salzman | UC Riverside | 134 |
| Susan Cole | SUNY Buffalo | 132 |
| Harriet Flower | Princeton | 131 |
| Walter Kaegi | Chicago | 125 |
| Jonathan Hall | Chicago | 121 |
| Ronald Mellor | UCLA | 120 |
| Robert Wallace | Northwestern | 117 |
| Mary Boatwright | Duke | 115 |
| Susanna Elm | UC Berkeley | 100 |

Table 2 Impact adjusted for career length: Mean annual citation scores since final degree for ancient historians on active duty

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Peter Brown | Princeton | 53.4* |
| Ian Morris | Stanford | 28.3 |
| Josiah Ober | Stanford | 23.1 |
| Roger Bagnall | NYU | 20.6 |
| William Harris | Columbia | 19.0 |
| Walter Scheidel | Stanford | 18.1 |
| Richard Saller | Stanford | 17.7 |
| Brent Shaw | Princeton | 15.8 |
| Christopher Jones | Harvard | 15.7 |
| Victor Hanson | Hoover (Stanford) | 15.1 |
| David Cohen | UC Berkeley | 13.8 |
| Sabine MacCormack | Notre Dame | 13.2 |
| Kurt Raaflaub | Brown | 12.8 |
| Robert Garland | Colgate | 12.5 |
| John Matthews | Yale | 12.2 |
| Keith Bradley | Notre Dame | 10.9* |
| Michael Gagarin | Texas | 10.1 |
| Harriet Flower | Princeton | 8.7 |
| John Haldon | Princeton | 8.5 |
| Bruce Frier | Michigan | 8.2 |
| Michael Speidel | Hawaii | 8.2 |
| Jonathan Hall | Chicago | 8.1 |
| Richard Talbert | North Carolina | 7.4 |
| Edward Champlin | Princeton | 7.2 |
| Michael McCormick | Harvard | 6.9 |
| Raymond Van Dam | Michigan | 6.8 |
| Donald Kagan | Yale | 6.5 |
| Thomas Figueira | Rutgers | 6.0 |
| David Potter | Michigan | 5.9 |
| Donald Engels | Arkansas | 5.8 |
| Arthur Eckstein | Maryland | 5.7 |
| Kevin Clinton | Cornell | 5.6 |
| Peter Krentz | Davidson | 5.6 |
| Barry Strauss | Cornell | 5.6 |
| Michele Salzman | UC Riverside | 5.0 |
| Robert Wallace | Northwestern | 4.9 |
| Heinrich von Staden | IAS | 4.6 |
| Susanna Elm | UC Berkeley | 4.5 |
| Cynthia Patterson | Emory | 4.5 |
| Mary Boatwright | Duke | 4.1 |
| Susan Cole | SUNY Buffalo | 4.0 |
| Vincent Rosivach | Fairfield | 3.5 |
| Ronald Mellor | UCLA | 3.0 |
| Walter Kaegi | Chicago | 2.9 |

* Bachelor's or Master's degree as relevant final degree

Table 3 Citation scores of retired leading ancient historians

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ernst Badian | Harvard | 1,229 |
| Ramsay MacMullen | Yale | 1,153 |
| Glen Bowersock | IAS | 1,103 |
| Erich Gruen | Berkeley | 933 |

Table 4 Mean annual citation scores since final degree for retired leading ancient historians

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Glen Bowersock | IAS | 24.0 |
| Ernst Badian | Harvard | 23.6 |
| Ramsay MacMullen | Yale | 22.6 |
| Erich Gruen | Berkeley | 21.2 |

Table 5 Per-institution cumulative citation scores of ancient historians on active duty with 100+ citations each (top six)

| | |
|---|---|
| Princeton | 3,891 |
| Stanford | 2,073 |
| Harvard | 874 |
| Notre Dame | 810 |
| Yale | 802 |
| Michigan | 667 |

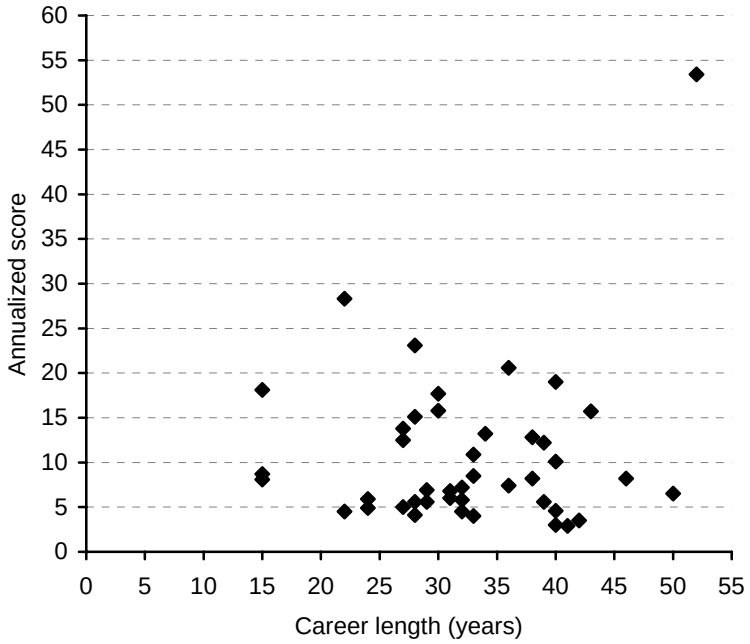


Figure 1 Relationship between mean annualized citation scores and career length
Source: Table 2

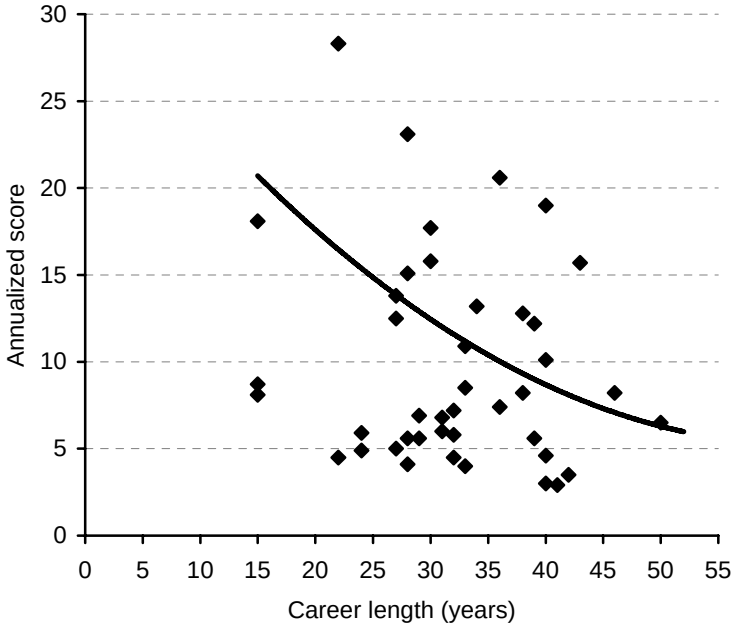


Figure 2 Relationship between mean annualized citation scores and career length excluding Peter Brown, with polynomial trend line
Source: Table 2