ANCIENT CURSES

Website: AncientCurses.com
Developer: Sarah L. Veale
Platform: Wordpress with independent hosting (MH Magazine Lite theme)
Launch Date: September 29, 2014

BACKGROUND

This website was created to fulfil a course requirement as well as to serve as a web portal on cursing for the scholarly community. According to the syllabus, the website is intended to "be used as a support for a course such as this one" and can include a variety of materials, such as an annotated bibliography and links to external websites.

The site is hosted on its own server and is accessed with the URL AncientCurses.com. This URL was chosen for its simplicity and topical relevance. To create the website, I installed the Wordpress database on my webserver and customized a Wordpress theme to suit my design aesthetic. The site utilizes a "responsive" theme which means that it adapts seamlessly to different devices (such as computers, cell phones, tablets, etc.). This latter aspect is important as the use of mobile devices to access the internet has been steadily increasing over the past couple of years.

The header image was created using the Corel graphics suite (Draw, Photo Paint, and Paintshop Pro). It is comprised of two fonts: a "clean" sans-serif called BebasNeue, and a distressed font called Downcome. This logo is the result of multiple attempts to create a header image that reflected the scholarly nature of the content, the modern context of the project (being an online resource), as well as the off-beat nature of the topic. I feel that the discordant font combination of the two words captures this without resorting to hackneyed images or clichés.

THE WEBSITE

The site is divided into seven main pages (Home, About, Blog, Bibliographies, Curses, Online Resources, and Contact) with the "Curses" page disambiguating into four sub-pages (Apotropaic Remedies, Curses in Biblical Literature, Curses in Classical Literature, and Curses in Near Eastern Literature). The website also hosts a regularly updated blog which discusses topics relevant to cursing or ideas discussed within the course. These blog posts are cross-posted to my personal blog Invocatio (invocatio.wordpress.com) and publicized on social media in order to generate traffic at Ancient Curses.

Home Page

The "Home" page contains a succinct definition of cursing, the relevance of cursing to historians, and a description of the project. The image which accompanies the content on this page is a sketch of a Roman curse tablet housed in the British Museum. Finding images for use on a website such as this is especially difficult for two reasons. One, the amount of images available online pertinent to a niche area of study is small. Second, many images are subject to copyright provisions, and thus ineligible to be used. Luckily, the British Museum offers free images of their inventory for selective purposes, and I was able to retain permission to use this image by registering with their image service.

About Page

The "About" page is a standard about page which contains information about the project and biographical information about myself.

Blog Page

The "Blog" page provides a list of all the blog posts made on the site. Each individual post differs from the main website pages in that it offers a way to subscribe to the bog and an archive of previous posts. To date, there have been seven blog posts posted on the website,

which is an average of 1.75 posts per month. These posts have received immediate engagement from readers, and several posts have been commented on or shared on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as well as independent websites. To date, the highest trafficked post is "Defining the Magical Practitioner in Antiquity" which currently has 433 views.

The blog posts mostly centre on topics and issues related to the course. Many of the posts have addressed methodological issues or terminology, and attempt to break down assumptions about cursing by interrogating how we understand key concepts (for example, what is a magic? What do curse words really mean?). I have also attempted to show the contemporary relevance of this study by relating ancient practices to modern ones. For example, a blog post on ancient sports curses was brought into relief by a follow-up post that looked at modern sports curses. I consider this is a fruitful endeavour not just to appeal to reader interests, but also on a scholarly level since modern analogies can be useful for challenging constructs which surround magic, such as the "primitive mind" or "ancient irrationality."

My intention with the blog is to continue posting on relevant topics, with a goal of one post per month. I hope that, with regular updates, the site will gain a readership size comparable to my current blog (an average of 75 views per day).

Bibliographies Page

As my annotated bibliography is due after the website, I opted instead to provide a working bibliography of resources that might be useful to myself and those who wish to learn more about curses. The current list has seventeen items, comprised of materials I have read independently, materials from this course, and books and articles which I have not yet read but appear useful and are on my so-called wish list. It should be noted that this list does not necessarily reflect the bibliography that I will be using for my major research paper, though there is overlap in some areas.

Curse Page(s)

The four sub-pages listed underneath the "Curses" banner provide primary examples of curses found in a variety of contexts. Some of these curses have been collected from our course readings, while others I have come upon in my own study. Each item provides a description of the curse, its source, and its wording in its original language, if it should fit my abilities. These sections are not intended to be an exhaustive repository, but rather the goal here is to reflect through primary sources the variety of materials and contexts in which curses are found.

Online Resources Page

The "Online Resources" page includes links to external websites which deal with the topic of cursing. There are ten sites listed, and this includes external databases as well as other research projects. All of the sites are of a scholarly nature—I have purposely excluded popular sources in order to focus on sites which can be used as resources (rather than entertainment). Where possible I have included sites from the course syllabus, though the links provided were not always up-to-date, which resulted in some sites not being included. This section of the website has generated early feedback, with one reader suggesting a valuable resource, a database of amulets put together by several scholars of these materials.

Contact Page

This is a basic contact page with information about email and social media links.

Extras

Each page includes a Random Curse Generator in the upper-right hand corner which shows a different curse each time a page loads. There are currently ten curses in rotation, sourced from Near Eastern, Biblical and classical sources. I created this feature by modifying a Random

text widget and inputting various curses to be displayed. My goal with this was to add a dose of levity to an otherwise serious site.

MOVING FORWARD & AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

While this site was created to fulfil a course requirement, my intention from the start was to create something that will last beyond the school year. As such, I often describe the site as a "work in progress." Each page was created with the knowledge that it will grow over time as I become more knowledgeable about cursing and the resources available. In my view, the site would be greatly improved by incorporating more visual materials, especially since many curses contain words, shapes, and figures which are impossible to capture by written description. Though these sorts of inclusions may be hampered by availability and copyright issues, the site would greatly benefit from their inclusion in the event that it is possible to procure some examples. Nevertheless, I have taken some steps to include more visuals, by referring to appropriate online content where possible. For example, the Near Eastern Curses page contains links to stele, such as the Code of Hammurabi at the Louvre.

Going forward, my hope is that with a combination of personal initiative, reader input, and help from the wider scholarly community, AncientCurses.com will grow into a significant resource for the study of cursing in antiquity.