

The Perseus Digital Library and Primary Sources in Classics

Learning Outcomes:

- Recognize ancient primary sources (in original and translated languages)
- Describe the Perseus Digital Library as a tool to discover ancient primary sources
- Search digitized primary sources by author, subject/keyword, or date
- Demonstrate citation methods for ancient primary sources

Primary Sources - What are they?

*In Classics, primary sources are **recorded texts** or **archaeological artefacts** contemporary to a particular historical era in the Ancient world (E.g., Hellenistic Period, ~323 BCE-31 BCE)*

Ancient recorded texts can be used in your research in either the *original language* or a *modern translation*. These texts cover many different fields of study, including philosophy, geography, history, literature, and more.

Archaeological artefacts can be used in your research by referencing a description of an artefact in a text or a museum holding. This type of primary source includes art, architecture, and objects of mystery (both extant* and lost).

*Extant = still existing

As the study of antiquity spans millennia across a wide geographic area, what constitutes an ancient primary source is in some ways subjective to a research topic. Do you consider a 4th century BCE Athenian sculpture contemporary to a 2nd century BCE Athenian text? Why or why not?

Perseus Digital Library - What is it? How can I use it to find primary sources?

Created and maintained by Tufts University, the [Perseus Digital Library](#) is an **open library of translated primary and secondary sources** to support research in Classics by **keyword searching the contents of ancient texts**, as well as complementary archaeological sources.

Perseus Collection
Greek and Roman Materials

Search for documents in English

Search only in *Greek and Roman Materials*
[All Search Options](#) [\[view abbreviations\]](#)

Home Collections/Texts Perseus Catalog Research Grants Open Source About Help
Greek and Roman Arabic Germanic 19th-Century American Renaissance Richmond Times Italian Poetry

Documents:

- Frank Frost Abbott. *Commentary on Selected Letters of Cicero*. (English) [search this work](#)
 - [Commentary on Selected Letters of Cicero](#)
 - [Commentary on Selected Letters of Cicero](#)
- Achilles Tattius. *Leucippe et Clitophon*. Rudolf Hercher. (Greek) [Ach. Tat.] [search this work](#)
- J. Adam, A. M. Adam. *Commentary on Plato, Protagoras*. J. Adam & A. M. Adam. (English) [search this work](#)
- James Adam. *The Republic of Plato*. (English) [search this work](#)
- ▶ Aelian.
- Aeneas Tacticus. *Poliortetica*. William Abbott Oldfather. (Greek) [Aen. Tact.] [search this work](#)
- ▶ Aeschines.
- ▶ Aeschylus.

Word Counts by Language

English	(44,462,693 words)
French	(2,002 words)
German	(424,832 words)
Greek	(13,507,448 words)
Italian	(178 words)
Latin	(10,525,338 words)
Old English	(1 word)
Other	(3,479 words)

Searching tools:

- **Simple Search by Keywords**
- **Browse by collection, author, or text**
- **Advanced Search by keyword, collection, source, and apply limiters (language, material type)**

How to search within primary sources – using the Perseus Digital Library tool

Search Example: **Aphrodite of Knidos** (lost sculpture)

As inspiration for the infamous Roman “Venus de Milo” (pictured), the original nude sculpture of the goddess Aphrodite attributed to the Athenian sculptor Praxiteles (4th century BCE) was very popular. Now a controversial sculpture, much of the secondary literature stems from conservative Victorian interpretations. It has been recreated all over the Hellenistic and Roman worlds and many copies still survive.



The original sculpture has been lost to time. What can we learn about it from ancient sources?

Use keywords ONLY - i.e. no connecting words, like “of” or “the”

Consider (and include) alternative spellings - “Knidos” is used in English secondary sources, but the translated primary sources more often use “Cnidus”

Include other identifiers – the original sculpture was created by a sculptor named “Praxiteles” (the copies were not)

Search results:

Showing 1 – 10 of 19 document results in English.

1 2 ▶▶

Apollodorus, *Library* (ed. Sir James George Frazer)
(English) (Greek, ed. Sir James George Frazer)

text Library, book 3, chapter 6: ... 5ff., with Abbildungen, taf. i. ; K. Friederichs, **Praxiteles** und die Niobegruppe (Leipzig, 1855) , pp. 123ff. ... that Erymanthus, son of Apollo, was blinded because he saw **Aphrodite** bathing. See Ptolemy Hephaest., Nov. Hist. i. in Westermann

Pausanias, *Description of Greece*
(English) (Greek)

More(9)

book 1, chapter 1: ... c. 350 B.C. built a sanctuary of **Aphrodite**, after he had crushed the Lacedaemonian warships off **Cnidus** in the Carian peninsula. 394 B.C. For the Cnidians hold **Aphrodite** in very great honor, and they have sanctuaries of ... Of the Height) , while the newest is to the **Aphrodite** called Cnidian by men generally, but Euploia (Fair ... the waves. There is here an image of the Coliad **Aphrodite**, with the goddesses Genetyllides (Goddesses of Birth) , as

Strabo, *Geography*

More(3)

(English) (Greek) (English, ed. H.C. Hamilton, Esq., W. Falconer, M.A.)

book 8, chapter 6: ... (see S. 2. 2). And the temple of **Aphrodite** was so rich that it owned more than a ... 290 –230 B.C. and Eudoxus Eudoxus of **Cnidus**, the famous mathematician and astronomer, who flourished about 365... all round. Now the summit has a small temple of **Aphrodite**; and below the summit is the spring Peirene, which... is washed on all sides, the sacred hill-city of **Aphrodite**,” Eur. Fr. 1084 (Nauck) one should

Strabo, *Geography* (ed. H.C. Hamilton, Esq., W. Falconer, M.A.)

(English) (Greek)

book 17, chapter 1: ... admirably constructed of white marble, with several stories. Sostratus of **Cnidus**, a friend of the kings, erected it for the ... mariners, as the inscription imports. The words Sostratus of **Cnidus**, son of Dexiphanes, to the gods preservers, are ... and the Mendesian and Leontopolite Nomes, and a city of **Aphrodite** (or Venus) and the Pharbetite Nome. Then follows ... in front of Heliopolis, as there is in front of **Cnidus**, where Eudoxus marked certain motions of the heavenly bodies.

Refine This Search hide

Language: English

Required words: **aphrodite** Expand

Required phrase:

Allowed words: **Praxiteles knidos cnidus** Expand

Excluded words: Expand

Refine search

(This searches within the currently selected documents. To search within all documents, use the form below.)

All Matching Documents (19) show


Matching Artifacts (154) hide


Athens, Temple of Aphrodite [Building]
Epidaurus, Temple of Aphrodite (Temple L) [Building]
BCMA 1914.6.8 [Coin]
Boston 61.1058 [Coin]
Boston 63.423 [Coin]
Dewing 1728 [Coin]
Dewing 1778 [Coin]
Dewing 1783 [Coin]
Dewing 1808 [Coin]
Dewing 1809 [Coin]

Building (2) Coin (15) Gem (3) Sculpture (57) Site (1) Vase (76)

View

Matching Images (344) hide

 Image access restricted

 Side A: Aphrodite

In this case, we want to find the oldest or the first mentions of this particular non-extant sculpture.

- The second option: **Pausanias' *Description of Greece***, written in the 2nd century BCE, offers the first mention of the Knidian in **Book 1 Chapter 1** (referring to a 4th century BCE statue in a sanctuary of Aphrodite in Knidos).
- By selecting '**More**' in the upper right-hand corner of the Pausanias result, all other mentions of our search terms in this text will appear (with the book and chapter numbers). The keywords will be highlighted in the preview and the full text.
- **Matching Artifacts and Images** may also be consulted, as we know that the sculpture has been recreated and copied many times over.

Evaluate these results!

- Are you reading the original language or a translation? A translation will always include the translator's interpretation within their context.
- Beware of the publication date! 19th century English translations are easy to find online, but keep in mind the Victorian men writing and translating these works were notoriously conservative in their interpretations.
- Problematize the ancient sources. Some sources will be fictional, some will be based in folklore, others will consist of ancient gossip. Ask yourself: Why was the text written? For whom was it created? For what purpose? On whose authority?
- Remember these results will not be comprehensive. The Perseus Digital Library collections are *extensive, not exhaustive*. This is an excellent resource to *start* your research.

Citing ancient sources

Because the study of Classics can focus on various subfields of study (e.g. philosophy, archaeology, history, etc.), there are many different preferred citation styles. **Your professor will specify which style to use** – if you're not sure, it's best to ask them directly.

Most common citation style is [Chicago \(Author-Date\)](#)

Ancient texts have been copied and translated many, many times over the years. It is best to cite the Book and Section numbers (not the page numbers of the translation).

Text Example [In-text]	Pausanias, <i>Description of Greece</i> 1.1.3.
Text Example [Bibliography]	Pausanias. <i>Description of Greece</i> . Trans. and eds. W.H.S. Jones, D. Litt, and H.A. Ormerod (Cambridge, 1918).
Artefact Example	<i>Aphrodite and Eros</i> . 200 BC-100 BC. Sardonyx Cameo. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: 27.750 (Gem).

Questions?

Do you have any questions about this guide? You can visit the Concordia Library's [Ask a Librarian](#) page to ask your question by Email, Chat, Phone, or Zoom.