



A Body of Knowledge

Dr. Orly Lewis is a time traveler, immersing herself in texts that take her back to Classical antiquity. So much has changed in the few thousand years since they were written: the decline of the Greco-Roman world, the rise of the modern nation state, scientific discoveries, the industrial revolution.

One thing has decidedly not changed at all: the human body. And yet, Dr. Lewis was struck by how differently the human body – its anatomy, physiology, functions, illness – is described in ancient texts, compared to modern scientific textbooks.

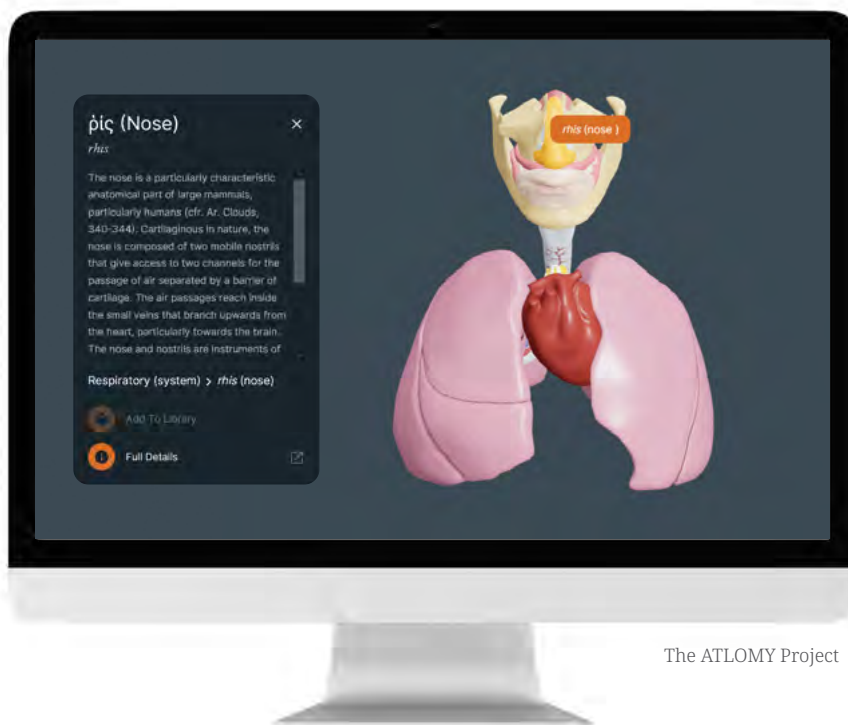
Dr. Lewis began to wonder: why do different cultures associate different body parts with different ideas? Or even to the same idea? How did new ideas about the human body emerge? How did the ancients evaluate measurements

of the body – in health, sickness, and death?

Dr. Lewis realized that texts alone couldn't provide answers. The authors had chosen specific words to represent what *they* saw and, more importantly, how *they* understood it. Fast-forward many centuries. Can the modern reader “see” through the words what the ancients saw? Even if we understand the individual words, are we necessarily referring to – and understanding – the same thing?

What was needed were better reference tools. Dr. Lewis began meeting with modern medical practitioners and participating in dissections – consulting the ancient medical descriptions every step along the way. She perused the texts and collected instances that referred to particular body parts. She increasingly found that space and time could not easily be abridged into two-dimensional, printed articles. Something else was needed.

Dr. Lewis dreamed up the ATLOMY Project (atlas + anatomy) and received a prestigious ERC grant to make it a reality. It is an online, interdisciplinary, and interactive atlas that bridges anatomical ideas and research from ancient Greece and Rome through texts and images. Users can click on an organ, or a specific word within a text, and see other uses across multiple sources. “As a scholar of the humanities, I never thought I'd be hiring programmers and a product manager,” Orly



The ATLOMY Project

“Words can be elusive – things get lost between languages. Visuals, on the other hand, must commit. The ATLOMY Project is a multi-dimensional comparison of ancient texts, which gets us closer to grasping what the ancients meant, and how they understood what they saw.”

remarks. “This platform invites users to explore and compare how the ancients referred to, and understood, the human body – using the technology of today.”

Looking ahead, Dr. Lewis sees the immense potential of opening this platform to additional disciplines and languages.

HEAR MORE
FROM
DR. LEWIS!

