

# Agora

10th Anniversary Edition



Lytham St Annes Classical Association



2014—2024



# LSA CA Speakers and Competition Judges

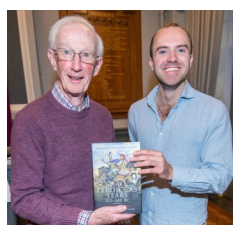
Lindsay Allason-Jones 2014  
 Mary Harlow 2014  
 Fra' John Eidinow 2014  
 Michael Scott 2015  
 Jane Masegla 2015  
 Rosie Wyles 2015  
 Bev Back 2015

Caroline Lawrence 2015  
 Patrick Ottaway 2015  
 Gregory Hutchinson 2015  
 Michael Scott (2) 2016  
 Felix Budelmann 2016  
 Paul Cartledge 2016  
 Edith Hall 2016

David Raeburn 2016  
 Ben Kane 2016  
 Andrew Birley 2016  
 Michael Scott (3) 2017  
 Michael Wood 2017  
 Gail Trimble 2017  
 Natalie Haynes 2017

Caroline Vout 2017  
 Harry Sidebottom 2017  
 Margaret Mountford 2017  
 Michael Scott (4) 2018  
 Lindsey Davis 2018  
 Joann Fletcher 2018  
 Mary-Ann Ochota 2018

Adam Hart-Davis 2018  
 Simon Elliott 2018  
 Peter Stewart 2018  
 Michael Scott (5) 2019  
 Armand D'Angour 2019  
 Manda Scott 2019  
 Tom Holland 2019



Jerry Toner 2019  
 Mary Beard 2019  
 Andrew Wallace-Hadrill 2019  
 Michael Scott (7) 2020  
 Michael Wood (2) 2020  
 Remaining lectures were postponed due to the pandemic

Polly Low (w) 2020  
 Llewelyn Morgan (w) 2020  
 Ben Kane (w) (2) 2020  
 Michael Scott (w) (8) 2021  
 Helen King (w) 2021  
 Peter Liddel (w) 2021

Robin Osborne 2021  
 Douglas Jackson 2021  
 Charlotte Higgins 2021  
 Michael Scott (10) 2022  
 Janina Ramirez (w) 2022  
 Chris Carey 2022  
 Paul Roberts 2022

Tristan Hughes 2022  
 MM McCabe 2022  
 Bronwen Riley 2022  
 Michael Scott (11) 2023  
 Dominic Perring 2023  
 Paul Cartledge (w) (2) 2023  
 Chris Naunton 2023

The 2023-24 Programme is on page 4

## Classics /Ancient Worlds Competition

Katharine Earnshaw 2016  
 Katherine Backler 2017  
 Fiona Hobden 2018  
 Caroline Lawrence (2) 2018  
 Michael Scott (6) 2019  
 Arlene Holmes-Henderson 2020  
 Michael Scott (w) (9) 2021  
 Stephe Harrop 2022  
 Bronwen Riley (2) 2023  
 Michael Scott (13) 2024

# Welcome to our 10th Anniversary edition of *Agora*

DECLAN BOYD

Welcome back to *Agora* and a very special Anniversary Edition to celebrate the tenth year of the Lytham St Annes Classical Association. Since being established in 2014, the LSA CA has welcomed over 1000 people into its classics community, becoming the largest branch of the CA in the UK and sharing its love for the ancient world with members along the Lancashire coast and across the world.

We continue to offer monthly lectures by a wide range of engaging and fascinating speakers, as well as an annual Ancient Worlds Competition, a virtual Classics book club, bursaries to support local students to attend summer schools, and our Classics Ambassador scheme. In 2018, thanks to our founding editor and Classics Ambassador, Alex Melling, *Agora* was born and since then we've published nine editions of our student-produced newsletter, gathering more than 3000 readers thanks to the creativity, research, interview skills and puzzle-mastery of 24 contributors.

It only felt right to commemorate our first decade with an expansive issue of *Agora*, featuring lots of fantastic content from our current Ambassadors and from three first-time contributors. We've got a great range of content for you to enjoy, from articles on subjects as varied as Minoan-era frescoes and the connections between Classics and technology, to interviews with our Chair and President, and a review of Professor Michael Scott's latest book *X Marks the Spot*.

In September 2023, we held our first ever themed Roman day and we have since been enjoying another exciting series of lectures, topped off by our Ancient Worlds Day with Michael Scott this April. It has been a year at the Association like no other; a year full of excitement and celebration of all that we have achieved as a community. Being a part of the LSA CA is a unique, rewarding and in all ways amazing experience that myself and the other contributors couldn't be more grateful for, and on behalf of everyone I'd like to give a huge thank you to the committee for all the hard work and effort they have put in every year to make all this possible for us. And, on behalf of all our contributors, I hope you enjoy this latest edition of *Agora*.

Here's to another terrific ten years to come!

*Declan Boyd, Editor*



Figure 1: Our first photo of the founding LSA CA committee with our President, Michael Scott at his first Presidential Lecture in January 2015.



Figure 2: Our first annual Classics Competition Final (L-R): Zain Islam of AKS Lytham; Mason Forrest of Kirkham Grammar School (now Head of Classics at KGS); judge Dr Katharine Earnshaw, Exeter University; Skye Demar, Blackpool Sixth Form College; Winner Ross Kinnaird, Runshaw College; Katrina Kelly, Chair of LSA CA.



Figure 3: Our intrepid Editor organising the 2023 Roman Detective Treasure Hunt at the LSA CA Roman Day!

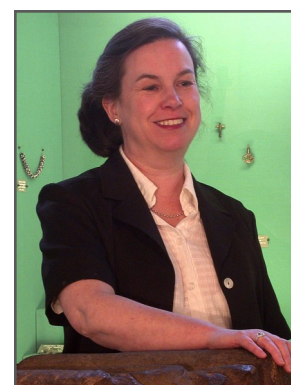


Figure 4: Lindsay Allason-Jones, our very first lecturer on 2nd October 2014 with *The Women of Roman Britain*.



# LYTHAM ST ANNES Classical Association



## Programme 2023-2024

[www.lsaclassics.com](http://www.lsaclassics.com) £12 per year (Students £5)

### An Audience With Daisy Dunn at the ONLINE LSA CA Book Club



#### Daisy Dunn

Best selling author of  
*Catullus' Bedspread*  
*In the Shadow of Vesuvius*

Thursday 7th September 7pm

### ROMAN DAY with gladiatrix, Pompeii lectures, children's activities, stalls and refreshments



#### Caroline Lawrence

Best selling author of  
*The Roman Mysteries*

#### Prof Andrew Wallace-Hadrill

Professor of Roman Studies  
University of Cambridge

Saturday 23rd September 10.30am—4pm

### 'Catullus and Lesbia: A Life In Love'



#### Professor Armand D'Angour

Professor of Classical  
Languages and Literature  
Jesus College, University of Oxford

Thursday 19th October 7pm



Venue: AKS, Clifton Drive South,  
Lytham St Annes, FY8 1DT



Scan to Join Us

All lectures and events are  
FREE to members  
Tickets £5 on the door  
Join us for home-made cakes,  
lecture, raffle and bookstall  
Everyone is Welcome!

**Doors open at 6.15pm for 7pm Lectures**

### An Audience with Professor Joann Fletcher and Dr Stephen Buckley



#### Professor Joann Fletcher Dr Stephen Buckley

Department of Archaeology  
University of York

Thursday 30th November 7pm

### Magna and Vindolanda and the Changing Spaces of a Roman Frontier



#### Dr Andrew Birley

CEO of Vindolanda Trust  
Director of Excavations  
Chair of Research Committee

Thursday 18th January 7pm

### 'How do you solve a problem like writing a biography of Medea?'



#### Professor Edith Hall

Classics Professor, Writer,  
Lecturer, Broadcaster  
University of Durham

Thursday 29th February 7pm

### 'Thebes: Forgotten City of Ancient Greece?'



#### Professor Paul Cartledge

A.G. Leventis Professor of  
Greek Culture Emeritus  
University of Cambridge

Thursday 14th March 7pm

### ANCIENT WORLDS DAY Lectures, Stalls Ancient Greek Drama, Competition Final



#### Professor Michael Scott

Historian, Author, Broadcaster  
Professor of Classics and Ancient  
History, University of Warwick

Saturday 27th April 10.30am—4pm

# Crocus pocus: echoes of an ancient city

ESMÉ GOODSON

A city which has been termed 'the Pompeii of the ancient Aegean', Akrotiri housed a prehistoric civilisation that flourished in the Late Bronze Age on the island of Thera, modern-day Santorini. The island was located above a caldera or super-volcano, the cause of the infamous eruption of Thera which destroyed not only Akrotiri but various other civilisations of the Minoan era. In fact, it has been suggested that this eruption contributed to the fall of Knossos and even the collapse of the Aegean Bronze Age.

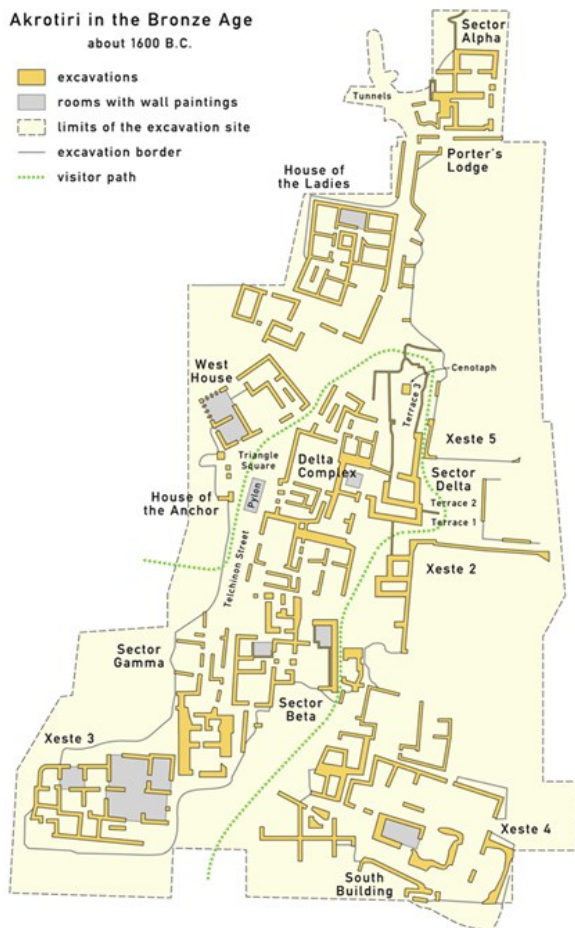


Figure 1: Plan of the excavated site of Akrotiri (Image credit: Maximilian Dörrbecker via [Wikipedia](#))

There is a bright side to this story of doom and gloom: fortunately for us, the eruption (just like at Pompeii) has resulted in the ancient city being excellently preserved. The remains we have been left with range from traces of food to pottery to buildings. Perhaps one of the most impressive

preservations is the city's beautiful and detailed wall paintings, depicting a range of things, from flowers and animals to people and ships.



Figure 2: The crocus gatherers fresco from Xeste 3 (Image credit: Andrew Dalby via [Wikimedia Commons](#))

One particularly interesting wall painting is that of the crocus gatherers, found in Xeste 3 in the south-west of the current excavation site. Figure 2 shows a section of this fresco: a pair of women are gathering crocuses and placing their finds in baskets. In modern Akrotiri, Archangelos Hill is famous for its crocuses, and it is here that the women of modern Akrotiri pick them, just as the women did long ago in the Bronze Age. The women today chat with each other as they pick the flowers, and so we may imagine that the ancient picking of crocuses was an equally communal and sociable activity. However, there are also key differences between how this activity is pursued today and how it was perceived in antiquity: for example, while modern-day women pick the flowers to keep for themselves, ancient women collected them for the community.

It is worth noting that crocuses can be made into saffron, which may have served a number of purposes, such as being used in cooking or dyeing cloth. If this was the case, it indicates that women in Akrotiri played an important role in gathering resources for the city's livelihood and economy.



Figure 3: Woman from the House of the Ladies fresco  
(Image credit: Mark Cartwright via [World History Encyclopaedia](#))

But saffron has another possible use. This spice had a number of health benefits, including relieving menstrual pains. This has led some to suggest that the women picking the crocuses were taking part in a coming-of-age ritual.

This idea gains further support from a closer look at the women's hair. This is mostly shaved, apart from one longer lock — a hairstyle typically worn by children in Minoan culture. As a child aged, their lock of hair would be allowed to grow longer, and upon reaching adulthood they could grow their hair long, as depicted in the fresco from the House of the Ladies (Figure 3). The hairstyle of the female figures on the Crocus Gatherers Fresco therefore suggests that they are in fact girls or young women at the point in their lives when they would be likely to undergo a coming-of-age ritual.

Whatever the ritual may have been, the location of the fresco suggests that it may also have possessed a religious element. The room in Xeste 3 where the fresco was found has previously been described as a 'lustral basin', a small square room whose floor was lower than that of the surrounding rooms and where it is thought lustration and purification rituals took place. However, there is reason to doubt that the room in Xeste 3 is one of these. There is no drain in any of these apparent 'lustral basins' either in Akrotiri or on Crete, and the room in Akrotiri does not even have a waterproof floor as we would expect to find in a basin.

An alternative interpretation of the structure is that it may have been an adyton, a sacred space into which priests would descend to make offerings to the gods. The religious nature of the room in which it was found suggests that the act of gathering crocuses depicted on the fresco may have been somewhat religious in nature.

More evidence for this idea may be found on other parts of the fresco. Figure 4 depicts one of the young women depositing her crocus flowers into a basket. A large blue monkey is offering these crocuses to a seated woman who is not only larger in proportion than the young flower-picking women and the monkey but is also seated on a higher level than them, elevating her within the composition of the fresco. This height is one way in which her superior status is marked, along with her elaborate jewellery and dress and the fact that she is flanked on both sides by animals, all of which suggests that this figure is a goddess.

We may therefore find it interesting that on the goddess' cheeks there are lines which appear similar to crocus stigmas. It is plausible that the flowers are being gathered as an offering to this goddess. The identity of the goddess is unknown, but it is possible, given her connection to the crocuses and by extension the ritual, that she was associated with young women's coming of age, which would explain her presence in such a ritual.

If this is the case, then this fresco reveals how



Figure 4: Woman and monkey offering crocuses to a goddess figure from the crocus gatherers fresco (Image credit: Esmé Goodson)

Since these monkeys were not native, in order to be aware of what monkeys looked like, the people of Akrotiri must have had connections with areas beyond Greece. Either they were well travelled, or they were linked with other peoples who were. Perhaps they even employed artists from societies overseas. Whatever the case, the presence of monkeys shows that Akrotiri was a civilisation with clear foreign connections.

religious practices were intertwined with everyday aspects of life such as growing up. It reflects the importance of religion in Bronze Age Akrotiri, in much the same way that it was central in the Classical period.

There are many other frescoes at Akrotiri which can be interpreted as having a religious function, reinforcing the notion that religious iconography was highly significant in the visual culture of Akrotiri. In Complex Beta, there is a fresco depicting several blue monkeys (Figure 5), echoing the monkey in the Crocus Gatherers Fresco. Since the monkey in the latter is the one offering the crocus flowers to the goddess and is thus performing a religious role, we might extrapolate from here and assume that the blue monkeys carried a religious association for the people of Akrotiri. Again, we see that religion surrounded the everyday lives of the people of Akrotiri in their visual environment.

It is also worth noting that monkeys were not animals native to Akrotiri or the ancient Greek world. Perhaps the depiction of a foreign animal would have reinforced the otherworldly nature of the goddess in the fresco, heightening the sense of the goddess' superhuman status. But the presence of a foreign animal provides us with another insight into life on Akrotiri.

While exploring these interpretations, several assumptions have been made, and it is not possible for us to know much for certain, but they still provide some insight into a way of understanding life in this fascinating ancient city. They reveal how, by closely analysing the art and archaeology of the ancient world, we can gain an insight into ancient life and come one step closer to understanding the cultures of the distant past.



Figure 5: Blue monkeys fresco from Complex Beta (Image credit: Ad Meskens via [Wikimedia Commons](#))

For further details on the wall paintings of Akrotiri, particularly with regard to their religious significance, Nanno Marinatos' *Art and Religion in Thera* makes for a fascinating read.

# Medea: how not to be a Stoic

SOPHIE BASSANO

Stoicism may not be the first word evoked when you hear the name Medea. Indeed, one would not be mistaken in thinking that the tenets of Stoicism are at odds with Medea's characterisations across ancient literature. She is a worshipper of Hecate and a murderer who not only surrenders herself to her desire for revenge in the form of double infanticide, but even revels in it. This is true of her representation by Seneca in his tragedy *Medea*, written around the middle of the first century CE, whereas Euripides' heroine is more in touch with her human side and could even be interpreted as a proto-feminist when she reflects on the injustices to which the classical Greek patriarchy subjected women.

Seneca, however, detaches his heroine somewhat from this aspect of her Euripidean character and uses her instead to demonstrate the dangers of her passions — specifically her desire — in a manner very much in line with Stoic views regarding the passions. Although H. M. Hine has argued against reading Seneca's tragedy in a Stoic light, the heroine's final monologue undoubtedly reveals Stoic views on anger and its costly effects on the agent (such as guilt), on the soul and mind, and on nature.

Arguably, a cornerstone of Stoic philosophy was understanding 'the passions'. These were four emotions—pleasure, appetite or desire, distress and fear — that the Stoics felt should be avoided at all costs and replaced by their good counterparts, the *eupatheiai* (for example, joy instead of pleasure, caution in place of fear, etc.). In doing this, a person would be virtuous and become a *sapiens* (a wise person) living the good life: this was the aim of Stoicism.

The passions were considered undesirable due to their effect on a person's true happiness and virtue. For instance, pleasure is distinguished from joy or happiness because the things which bring about pleasure, such as eating too much cake, will (unfortunately) affect true happiness, in this case by negatively impacting one's health.



Figure 1: Bust of Seneca, CE 200-250 (Image credit: Matas Petrikas via [World History Encyclopedia](#))

This thought process can be seen in the final monologue of Seneca's play. At several points, Medea reveals the pleasure she gains from her evil doings. As she describes her anguish to undertake a crime of unprecedented cruelty, she repeatedly uses the verb *iuvat* ('I am glad') when speaking of her previous crimes: killing her brother Absyrtus, deserting her father Aetes, and tricking the daughters of Pelias into killing their father.

She also speaks of seeking to satisfy her anger, saying *amas adhuc, furiose, si satis est tibi caelebs lason* ('you are still in love, mad spirit, if you are content now that Jason is unmarried'). She thus tells her anger to seek a punishment, as though it is a conscious decision of hers to appease her own wrath. Yet the danger of this is that it soon consumes her, and she is left unable to withstand it: 'My anger seethes... the ancient Fury again demands my reluctant hand: anger, where you lead, I follow.'



Indeed, later in the speech Seneca reveals that her anger is insatiable, as Medea says before she kills her second son that 'the number is still too small for [her] pain': she needs to kill more if her anger is to be satiated. Seneca thereby demonstrates the danger of submitting oneself to passions, as one can be quickly consumed by them. Perhaps, then, he warns against feeling any kind of 'bad' emotion, whether in a moderate or extreme dosage, as Medea's speech demonstrates such emotion's ability to grow out of control.

A further element of Stoicism can be found in the play's final speeches: the idea of the unity of the soul, or psychological monism. This is the idea that the mind does not comprise separate parts, in contrast to, for example, Plato's teaching that the soul is composed of the appetitive, the rational and the emotional. Stoic psychological monism posits that the rational is the only component of the mind, meaning that any action a person or agent commits stems from a rational decision, even if that action is immoral or negatively impacts the agent. What can cause such a decision, say the Stoics, is not irrationality, but a false belief or judgement regarding the value of something.

Whether Medea does in fact embody the model of the unity of the soul is debatable. For example, when she is in the process of developing her revenge after killing Jason's new wife Creusa, she speaks as though a spectator of her own actions (*nuptias specto novas*, 'I am watching a new type of wedding'), detached from herself. Furthermore, at several points throughout her monologue, she oscillates between, on the one hand, her desire to punish Jason through killing her children and, on the other, her maternal love, which insists that she let them live. This could be interpreted as a division of her psyche, a disunity in her soul. Seneca exemplifies this through the line 'the wife in me is driven out, the mother reinstated'. However, it might be argued that Seneca is defending the monism model of the soul by showing Medea's horror, both in her outward actions and inwardly through her psychological torment; this torment occurs from the breakdown of the mind, a result of her submission to — or even pursuit of — the passions.



Figure 2: Amphora depicting Medea killing one of her children, c. 330 BCE (Image credit: Bibi Saint-Pol via [Wikimedia Commons](#))

One of the more interesting points Seneca could have made in Medea's final speeches is that destruction ensues once one goes against nature. Stoics generally believed that the good life was one lived in accordance with nature. But what did 'nature' mean to them? In terms of anthropological nature, the Stoics believed in *oikeiosis*, the notion that an agent developed rationality as they aged which overcame their innate impulse of self-preservation; this in turn led them to develop moral circles and to view other people as naturally important to the agent.

This belief, central to Stoic ethics, may stem from the observation of the family unit, both in animals and in humans (the very term *oikeiosis* derives from the Greek *oikos*, meaning 'house' or 'household'). Indeed, Cicero tells us that the Stoics believed that 'Nature herself drives us to love the children we have borne' and that they saw this as the ultimate source of human community.

Hence Medea's infanticide goes directly against Stoic views on natural impulses and on rationality and virtue. And yet, we may observe several moments in her final speech where Medea is submerged in maternal love. For example, her claim that her mother-aspect has overcome her wife-aspect is made at the moment when she decides (albeit briefly) to banish any thought of murdering her sons. She likewise tells her anger and pain to surrender to her parental love (*cede pietati, dolor*).

However, Medea's natural attachment to her children yields to her thirst to punish Jason for his betrayal, and also to her self-deceptive reasoning and attempt to distance herself from her children. For instance, she tells herself 'if they are not mine, let them die', hinting that she would not hesitate to kill the children if they were Creusa's rather than hers. Her denial of her motherhood continues and develops after she kills the children: she explains that her 'virginity is restored', hinting at her total removal of her children from existence and memory, an act contrary to nature. Not only does she reverse the conception of her children, but she says that 'if any pledge remains hidden in me as mother, I shall examine my organs with a sword and rip it out with the iron': in other words, if she is pregnant, she will kill the foetus.

This starkly unnatural impulse highlights the extent of her anger towards Jason and her extreme desire to punish him. It seems, however, that Medea's logic borders on sophistry and is used to expel any intrinsic impulse she has to preserve her children, in order that she might exact revenge.

And yet, if Medea's behaviour is an expression of all the bad resulting from her anti-Stoic attitudes, why does Seneca ostensibly make evil prevail in his play? By its end, four people are dead and the city of Corinth is in turmoil. Medea not only survives after committing her crimes but is in a state of ecstasy and assumes her majesty among the gods on her golden chariot. If evil comes out on top, surely this would undercut any advocacy of Stoic morality in the pursuit of the good life and of becoming a *sapiens*.

But it may be an oversimplification to claim that Medea wins. As Dagmar Kiesel has stated, Medea's victory is an empty one. She has suffered significant inner turmoil to enact her revenge and is now childless. Furthermore, if we are to take the presence of the Furies and Absyrtus' phantom as manifestations, either tangible or hallucinogenic, of her guilt for her past crimes, this suggests that she will eventually be forced to deal also with the guilt resulting from her infanticide. Any pleasure she has gained from her transgressions will not only be short-lived and unsatisfactory — a thought leaving the spectator to recognise that desire and passions are not wholly worth pursuing — but will also have to be atoned for.

This atonement could either be through personal internal suffering or through the infliction of divine punishment, depending on whether we interpret the Furies as real or as psychological representations of Medea's conscience. As Medea flees on her chariot, Jason, now widowed and childless, exclaims to his ex-wife 'bear witness that there are no gods where you go'. This line further emphasises the unnaturalness of Medea's actions by implying that the presence of such evil drives away the gods, the very beings who oversee the world and its workings. Seneca thus presents yielding to the passions as something utterly immoral, something that will merit punishment. Therefore, if the spectator reflects on exactly what has happened, perhaps this tragedy does not in fact end with the victory of evil.

In conclusion, a Stoic reading of Seneca's *Medea* seems more than possible. Medea's monologue is a testament to the resulting internal distress caused by unbridled emotion, the danger of going against our natural impulses and the hollowness of any gain we think may have resulted from a given passion. Kiesel may be correct in claiming that Seneca's tragedies aim to highlight the drawbacks of living an unphilosophical life and to draw his spectators towards Stoicism. Seneca does not by any means explain in the *Medea* how to live the good life; but he certainly reveals how not to be a Stoic.

# An interview with Katrina Kelly

DECLAN BOYD

To celebrate a hugely successful first ten years of the Lytham St Annes Classical Association, *Agora* Editor Declan Boyd spoke to the branch's founder and Chair, Katrina.

**How was your interest in the ancient world first sparked?**

When I was eight, I started reading Caroline Lawrence's *The Roman Mysteries* and I absolutely devoured them, falling in love not only with the stories but with the complex, colourful and intriguing world they evoked. I cycled the streets of Lytham, having renamed my bike *Lupus* after one of the characters, pretending to explore the necropolis, the markets and the gardens of Ostia. I always loved history, but the ancient world seemed just that bit more elusive and alluring. I'm so delighted that Caroline returned for our anniversary programme in September, and it is brilliant, if crazy to my eight-year-old self, to now be able to call her a friend!



**What was the most exciting/challenging aspect of establishing and running your own CA branch?**

Starting the branch without a university Classics department nearby felt like a risk at the time, but as soon as we opened the email and bank account for the branch and the LSA CA was born, it was so exciting to feel, at 17 years old, both the responsibility and the opportunity of turning a vision and a concept into a reality and a community.

My initial fear was not knowing if anyone would join us or come along to an event, coupled with persuading speakers to travel to a brand-new society on the Fylde Coast, and it was such a relief — and a surprise — when we reached 100 members in our first year thanks to lots of support from friends and local groups, leaflet drops, and our kind and trusting first speakers.



Professor Michael Wood has delivered lectures twice to the branch and there may be a hat-trick on the horizon...

Ten years on, I still get stressed that people might not turn up! But we make sure that our speakers get the large, friendly audiences they deserve and even when there are (still!) unexpected hiccups at an event, I've learned to stay calm and enjoy the ride!

It has been a huge investment of time and energy to help run the branch for ten years, with lots of work and organisation behind the scenes from the committee and volunteers, but it has been a pleasure and privilege too, and the LSA CA feels like a family; we're there for each other.



Some of the wonderful LSA CA volunteers, without whom there wouldn't be any lectures and event!

What have been some of your most memorable moments from ten years of the LSA CA?

There have been so many highlights! So many brilliant talks — a favourite was seeing the much-missed octogenarian David Raeburn burst into choral song as he performed part of Euripides' *Bacchae* to a wowed audience; so many special occasions — interviewing Lindsey Davis on stage on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday or welcoming Mary Beard to the branch in 2019 for her Classical Association Presidential Address which she delivered twice to a sell-out crowd of over 750 people.



A very memorable moment has to be when Ben Kane stepped out of the lift in the Clifton Arms Hotel dressed in a full Roman soldier outfit, but my ultimate highlight was when Michael Scott agreed to be our President — and every celebration we've shared with him since — like our 5th birthday below!



David Raeburn's inspirational visit to the branch in 2016

And finally, what's your favourite type of cake from the LSA CA cake stall?!

You've saved the hardest question until last, Declan! I think all of our star bakers have made my favourite cake — Victoria Sponge — at some point, and I'd give a special shout-out to Yvonne's Lancashire Courting Cake which she made a few years back. Jane's chocolate brownies became the stuff of legend when they were delivered, personalised and hand-wrapped



to our speakers in lockdown, and I can't thank her enough for sending me a special package each month too in 2020–21!



# The Eternal City: Mussolini's attempt to revive Ancient Rome

BIANCA PACCIANI

Thousands of years after Tibullus coined the term 'Eternal City' (*urbs aeterna*) for Rome in the first century BCE, Benito Mussolini would try to reinstate a similar sense of Ancient Rome's everlasting spirit to consolidate his own power. He approached this through his policy of *romanità*. Historians often examine Mussolini's problematic justification of ruthless colonisation under the guise of a new Roman Empire; however, the legacy of *romanità* on the city of Rome and our wider understanding of antiquity has received far less attention.

Once Mussolini gained official authoritative power in Italy, he sought a way to strengthen his rule. Invoking the authority of the Roman Empire, he placed himself into a narrative which began in antiquity: fascism was presented as a continuation of the Roman Empire. *Romanità*, which translates literally to 'Roman-ness', was the term given to a new propagandistic ideology which influenced both domestic and foreign policy for pre-war Italy as well as Italian archaeology, architecture and education.

All changes were justified in the name of reinvigorating the power of Ancient Rome, but ultimately to shower glory upon Mussolini's government — even when (especially in the case of domestic and foreign policy) such praise was far from deserved.

Mussolini's 1922 speech for the anniversary of Rome exemplifies how he appropriated the memory of Ancient Rome for personal purposes. He declared: 'Rome is our point of departure and reference; it is our symbol or, if you wish, our myth. We dream of a Roman Italy that is wise and strong, disciplined and imperial.'

Much of what was the immortal spirit of Rome resurges in Fascism: 'Rome is the lictor, Roman is our organisation of combat, Roman is our pride and courage.'

Mussolini thus conflates 'myth' with history and history with the present, deliberately blurring the boundary between ancient and modern for the sake of consolidating his power.



Figure 1: Fasces sculpted into the side of the ancient Teatro di Marcello (Image credit: Anthony Majanlahti via [Flickr](#))

Such an ideology was employed, of course, to legitimise Mussolini's aggressive foreign policy. He could channel the disappointment arising after the Treaty of Versailles into the imperial hope of *mare nostrum* ('our sea'), the domination of the Mediterranean basin, and ultimately beyond it.

For instance, the invasion of Abyssinia in the mid-1930s was ideologically fuelled in this way, serving to distract the Italian public from the Great Depression by presenting them with the illusion of a growing empire. In reality, the invasion did not reap the promised economic benefits, but by exploiting the precedent of the Roman Empire, Mussolini was able to present violence on a mass scale as the fulfilment of a national mission.

*Romanità* also had a profound influence on domestic politics. The symbol of the *fasces*, which became the emblem of the Fascist government, has its origins in Ancient Rome.

The *fasces* were a bundle of rods with an axe coming out of its side. Lictors (bodyguards to magistrates who held *imperium*) would carry the *fasces* as a warning to civilians against injuring those magistrates and, in doing so, imperilling the authority of the *res publica*. Furthermore, the axe was emblematic of capital punishment. In December 1926, the *fasces* were declared the symbol of the Italian state, having been carved into the stone of most governmental buildings — and, in the case of the Teatro di Marcello (Theatre of Marcellus), onto ancient ruins.



Figure 2: Reconstruction model of the Caesareum at Cyrene, from the Mostra Augustea della *Romanità* (Image credit: Dan Diffendale via [Flickr](#))

The inscription 'A VII E F' indicates that it was erected seven years after the March on Rome, the foundation of Fascism in Rome. Even Mussolini's new calendar (just as Numa and Caesar also altered the ancient calendar) is reminiscent of the Roman calendar, which measured the years from its foundation; Mussolini's re-foundation of Rome was presented as a brand-new beginning, but along the same lines as his classical predecessors. By claiming that 'Rome is the lictor', Mussolini deliberately invested his terror policy with ancient symbols of power, furthering the sense of the legitimacy of his authoritarian dictatorship by associating such violence with his strength of leadership.

Such appropriation and even alteration of ancient sites is what makes *romanità* problematic for the preservation and understanding of Italian antiquity. However, Mussolini is also responsible for the excavation of numerous archaeological sites, even landmarks such as the Colosseum. The Colosseum had been used for a range of purposes since its original ancient function as a venue for spectacle: in the Middle Ages, it had even become a den for bandits; after an earthquake damaged its structure in 1349, much of its stone was used to build palaces, churches and other buildings around the city. While various popes began restoration projects, the arena was only fully excavated in the 1930s, under Mussolini, who aimed to reinstate the landmark as a symbol of the city and, more importantly, of Italian ingenuity and prowess.

Mussolini also saw to the creation of the Mostra Augustea della *Romanità*, a public exhibition of the origins and conquests of Rome, the life of Augustus and other Roman traditions. In the closing ceremony of this exhibition, Mussolini was even handed a live eagle, a symbol synonymous with the reign of Augustus and the emperor's divinity, due to its close association with Jupiter. Mussolini wanted to be seen as a parallel to Augustus himself and therefore contributed to the restoration of ancient art and architecture, at the cost of the ancient world being viewed by the Italian people through a Fascist lens.



Figure 3: The EUR neighbourhood in Rome: an example of Fascist neoclassical architecture (Image credit: 'Blackcat' via [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Not only do Fascist symbols and architecture remain undemolished since Italy's Fascist era — which, in the case of the EUR (Esposizione Universale Roma or Universal Exposition Rome) would require demolishing an entire neighbourhood — but the impact of *romanità* on the national curriculum also remains unchanged. When an Italian student leaves middle school, they are required to choose a *liceo*, a secondary school tailored around a specific subject area. Even today, the most respected of these is the classical *liceo*, where education in Latin and Greek is compulsory, alongside other core subjects like maths and Italian. Whilst the study of Latin and Greek existed before Fascism, education reforms in 1923 made the *liceo classico* the only pathway which would lead to university. This ended in 1969, but Mussolini's overt promotion of a classical education made it the subject of the elite.

Mussolini's policy of *romanità* may have made Italy more classically literate, but it did so forcibly and problematically. However, such reforms in education have their legacy in the fact that the study of ancient language and literature is still valued highly, with the *liceo classico* possessing equal (if not more) prestige to that of the *liceo scientifico*.

Overall, Mussolini's policy of *romanità* reveals how ancient history can be appropriated for a specific purpose — something particularly problematic when that purpose is to consolidate an authoritarian regime to the detriment of a great many people's lives. However, it also provides a fascinating starting point for the study of classical reception and the legacy of the ancient world in modern societies. Rome is often described as a palimpsest, a culture rubbed away and written over time and time again, from the Renaissance to Mussolini. Perhaps that is what makes it an Eternal City: the constant refiguring and rebuilding of the same historic centre, creating a city of enduringly rich culture.

For more on Mussolini's transformation of Rome, Borden Painter's *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City* offers an excellent guide.

## Artefact of the Issue: The Praeneste Fibula



Image credit: Marie- Lan Nguyen via  
Wikimedia Commons

*Fibulae* were pins used by the ancients to hold their clothing together, just like a modern-day safety pin. This particular gold pin, discovered at the site of Praeneste in Latium, is one of countless *fibulae* which have survived, but it is notable for its inscription, which reads (from right to left) *Manios med fhefhaked Numasioi* ('Manius made me for Numerius'). What makes this remarkable is that it is the oldest extant specimen of writing in Latin.

The Latin used is an archaic form of the language from the early seventh century BCE, predating the more familiar classical Latin by as much as Chaucer's Middle English predates us. (In classical Latin, the inscription would read *Manius me fecit Numerio*.) But just because this version of the language is older, it does not mean that we should view it as less developed: we would not claim, for instance, that classical Latin is merely a 'less developed' version of modern Romance languages.

Viewing the archaic period merely as a stepping-stone to the later classical period restricts our view of the fascinating stories that can be told about this earlier period in the history of ancient Italy, at a time when its people knew nothing of the extent of Roman power which would one day spread across the Mediterranean and beyond.

The Praeneste *fibula* is also a reminder that any object can become an object of enormous significance to those studying the ancient world. In archaic Latium, this would have been just another clothes pin; but around 2,800 years later it has become an object of great value for exploring historical linguistics.

# Achilles in Rome: ancient receptions of a Homeric hero

DECLAN BOYD

*CW: mentions of sexual assault and military violence.*

When we hear the name of Achilles, our minds probably jump to the *Iliad*, the epic poem which in its first line declares this hero's wrath as its subject. The story of the *Iliad*, universally one of the most familiar ancient tales, marks the birth of Achilles into the surviving literary tradition; but while he is described multiple times in the epic as 'short-lived', his life as a literary figure is anything but, and writers continued (and continue) to explore his story for many centuries after the composition of the Homeric epics. Here I shall briefly explore a selection of representations of Achilles by Roman poets of the first centuries BCE and CE, between 700 and 800 years after modern scholarship typically dates the composition of the *Iliad* as it survives today. We shall see that Achilles never ceased to be a hero in whom writers took a keen interest and who inspired a range of nuanced and thought-provoking perspectives on his life.

Achilles was always something of a controversial hero. While possessing exceptional skill in fighting, he is also a source of immense destruction, even to his fellow Greeks. This problematic side to Achilles was picked up on by Catullus in the longest of his *carmina*, Poem 64. The context is the wedding feast of Achilles' parents, the hero Peleus and the sea goddess Thetis; present at the celebrations are the Fates, who prophesy the deeds of the couple's future child. One quality they ascribe to Achilles is the possession of 'great virtues' (*magnae virtutes*). In typical Roman thinking, *virtus* was the ultimate positive quality that a Roman could possess, the accumulation of great and praiseworthy deeds which would merit renown. And yet, Catullus does not present Achilles' *virtus* as wholly commendable, for he chooses to lay emphasis on the horrors of war that arise from it. The Fates, as they describe Achilles rampaging across the battlefield, frequently repeat forms of the verb *caedo* ('I slaughter'), its cognate noun *caedes* ('slaughter') and *corpus* ('body' or 'corpse'), casting the emphasis onto the



Figure 1: The Sacrifice of Polyxena, Giovanni Battista Pittoni, 1735 (Image credit: downloaded from [Picryl](#))

ubiquitous brutal killing and suffering that arises from apparently glorious martial prowess.

One of the few episodes in the Achilles story which the Fates single out is the death of Polyxena, a Trojan princess whose life Achilles' ghost demanded in sacrifice to himself after the sack of Troy. For the Greeks and the Romans, human sacrifice was a morally repugnant act, and the death of Polyxena is a catalyst for her mother Hecuba's immense grief in two of Euripides' tragic dramas, *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*. Catullus decides that Achilles' life should not be exemplified by his praise-winning heroics in service of the quest to retrieve Helen, but by his initiation of a tragedy. He emphasises the horror of the sacrifice through his focus on Polyxena's 'snowy-white limbs': her association with the whiteness of snow identifies her with a sense of untarnished



purity, a purity which is stained by her death, and blood flows down these very limbs. The actions and demands of Achilles, nominally a figure of *virtus*, are therefore shown to corrupt the world, and Catullus uses his deeds as a parallel to the vices of his contemporary Rome which he catalogues at the end of the poem. For this poet, the figure of Achilles demonstrates how even one who exercises the greatest of Roman virtues can be a problematic figure; the possession of noble qualities therefore does not mean that one is morally infallible.

So much for Achilles on the battlefield and beyond the grave. Elsewhere in Latin literature we find the military aspect of Achilles rejected in favour of other aspects of his personality which offer grounds for exploration by poets. In the fourth poem of the second book of his *Odes*, Horace is trying to convince his friend Xanthias, who has fallen in love with the slave-girl Phyllis, that there is nothing shameful about his situation. To justify this, he invokes (among other examples) Achilles' love for Briseis, whose status in the *Iliad* is also that of a slave-girl. Achilles is viewed here not in his capacity as a soldier, but as an archetypal lover of high status whose affection and attention was held by a woman at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

It may initially seem an odd choice to invoke the warrior Achilles as a model for lovers, but on further consideration it makes a great deal of sense. The wrath of Achilles in the *Iliad* falls into two parts: that towards Agamemnon and that towards Hector. The former is initiated by the seizure of Briseis, who acts as Achilles' *geras*, a prize of war; to take another warrior's *geras* was to greatly dishonour them. But there is a suggestion that Briseis meant more to Achilles than merely representing his past military triumphs: in Book 9, he refers to her as his *alochos thumarea*, his wife and the darling of his heart. Such words suggest that he did in fact feel a close personal connection to Briseis. A similar argument can be made for his wrath towards Hector after the latter kills Patroclus. Certain classical Greek authors, such as Aeschylus in the fragments of his lost play *Myrmidons* and Plato in his *Symposium*, interpreted the companionship of Achilles and Patroclus as homoerotic love; in this case, his anger towards Hector is also fuelled by a lost love. When interpreted in this way, therefore, it makes perfect

sense for Achilles to be understood as a character motivated primarily by his strong romantic and erotic connections.

Ovid too makes use of Achilles as an exemplary lover. His three-book *Ars Amatoria* serves as a Roman guide to finding a romantic or sexual partner, with the first two books offering advice to men and the third to women. Anyone who has read any of Ovid's works will be familiar with their crude and unsavoury aspects, in which the *Ars Amatoria* is not lacking. At one point, Ovid makes the claim that 'any woman who is violated by the sudden onslaught of love is delighted, and she considers depravity a gift'. To support his claim, he invokes the myth of Achilles and Deidamia, which goes as follows. Achilles' mother Thetis, fearful about him losing his life if he was made to fight at Troy, took him as a child to be raised on the island of Scyros, where he was disguised as a girl in the king's palace; Achilles grew close to the king's daughter Deidamia and was overcome by a passion for her, which led to him raping her and impregnating her with a son, Neoptolemos (who would one day go on to kill the Trojan king Priam).

Of course, by modern standards this story is horrific, and the term 'lover' is not one that we should apply to Achilles here. But this far more unappealing story further illustrates how Achilles was later understood as a figure driven repeatedly by his strong sexual desires.

Our final Latin poet for exploration is Statius, who at the end of the first century CE began work on his *Achilleid*, an epic poem which (purportedly) aimed to tell the entire story of Achilles' life. The poem as it stands ends after the 167<sup>th</sup> line of its second book (scholars debate whether or not it was left intentionally unfinished) and covers Achilles' time on Scyros until he is tricked by Ulysses into removing his disguise and sets out to Troy. Given the poem's focus on Achilles, it is difficult to do justice in a few words to all the nuances of his representation, so I shall focus on the central themes of Achilles' education as a hero and the impact that the sojourn on Scyros has on his character.

Achilles is naturally elevated above regular human characters by virtue of his divine mother and descent on his father's side from Jupiter (who was Peleus' grandfather). But this does not mean that he can be a



Figure 2: Achilles Among the Daughters of Lycomedes, Erasmus Quellinus II, 1643 (Image credit: Hugo Maertens via [Art in Flanders](#))

Before forcing himself on Deidamia, he even proclaims that in doing so he is proving himself to be a man — paradoxically, this involves his disguise as a girl and his infiltration of a female-exclusive festival. Nevertheless, he feels shame regarding the new 'womanish' skills he has learned, and he is easily tricked out of hiding when he becomes excited at the sight of the weapons presented to him by Ulysses and Diomedes.

successful hero without rigorous training, and in Book 2 he details to Ulysses the kinds of challenges which his centaur trainer Chiron had him undergo as a child: he was made to stand firm against the icy current of the river Spercheios, to feed on the entrails of lions and the bowels of she-wolves, to master a range of weapons, and so on. The aim is for Achilles to become the ideal 'manly' hero, but this seems to face a setback on Scyros. There, in his disguise, he learns to weave and joins in the all-women's rites of Bacchus, and when Thetis first instructs him to dress as a girl, he is described as 'willing to be forced' (*cogique volentem*). He becomes not only a passive figure, giving into his mother's wishes and neglecting his heroic training, but also one who is not averse to being coerced into a passive role — a kind of submission which would not be expected of a Greco-Roman warrior. Adolescent boys were often viewed by the Romans as effeminate, so Statius here is exploring the implications of the fact that the 'best of the Achaeans' must once have been of such an age and so was removed from the image of the manly warrior we typically think of him as being.

But Statius' Achilles is 'willing' to submit to Thetis only because he has been struck by Deidamia's beauty upon seeing her; his actions are again driven by the strength of his sexual urges.

When Achilles leaves Scyros and sets out to Troy, Statius writes that it was as though his stay on the island had never happened. And yet as he sails away Achilles also looks back to Deidamia and to their child, a look which suggests a deep longing for what he leaves behind. Although his manly heroic side and his urge to fight prevail, there is always a sense that to see him purely in this light is to ignore the important and life-changing episode on Scyros; Statius wants us to reflect on what this episode from Achilles' past reveals about the character of one who exemplifies the 'manly' hero on the battlefield, but who spent a significant period of his life playing a 'womanish' role. Achilles becomes a figure who reveals that gender-roles are not always as clear-cut as they might seem.

This very brief overview of some of Achilles' appearances in classical Latin literature illustrates how the hero of our earliest surviving work of Western literature remained a figure of perpetual interest, a man whose story was repeatedly cast into different lights and from whom authors tried to draw a range of different messages. Ancient myths and their characters are never unchanging, but rather they remain sites for exploration of a range of themes and ideas that refuse to ever fade into irrelevance.

# An interview with Professor Michael Scott

LORNA LEE

Following the release of his latest book, *X Marks the Spot*, our President, Professor Michael Scott, spoke to Classics Ambassador Lorna Lee about his experiences of writing it and about his time working with the LSA CA.

[How did you narrow down the eight stories of discovery in \*X Marks the Spot\* and why did you feel these stories were important to tell?](#)

Some it felt like I had to tell — really high-profile and well-known discoveries that have pierced the public imagination (the Rosetta Stone, Machu Picchu, the Terracotta Warriors). But I also wanted to spin around the globe with the book so was keen to find discoveries to focus on in different parts of the world that were less well known, but also fascinating stories of discovery. Then I also wanted to tell the story of the development of archaeology across the last 200 years, so I was looking for stories that spaced out across the timeline to be able to exemplify key turning points!

[Which story are you most excited for readers to discover and why?](#)

The less well-known ones — the Uluburun shipwreck, the story of the Princess of Altai and of course most recently the excavations on Keros. But I hope that readers find something new and unexpected in even the most well-known stories!

[Were there any discoveries that you did not include in the final book but wish you could have?](#)

Lots — but perhaps we'll keep them for Volume 2!

[Was the process of researching \*X Marks the Spot\* different from your previous books, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?](#)

Yes — both because of Covid (I wanted to visit all of the locations/objects in the book but in the end this was not possible) and because lots of discoveries were from periods/areas of history I have not studied before in great depth. So the research was a learning



Professor Michael Scott, Academic, Author, Broadcaster and President of the LSA CA

journey of discovery for me, which I have enjoyed as much as I hope the reader does!

[Do you have a favourite fact or anecdote that you discovered whilst researching your book?](#)

Yes: for every fifty feet of water you dive down, the effect of the pressure on the air you breathe/how your body reacts is the equivalent of drinking a gin martini!

[Do you have a favourite story or moment from your own adventures?](#)

I loved having the chance to excavate at Vindolanda and finding a Roman soldier's simple leather tent canvas... It was folded up and still pliable from the wet mud, and even had a repair patch on it!

[If you could give one piece of advice to someone wanting to study or write a book about the ancient world, what would it be?](#)

The important thing is the 'why'—why did something happen (not what or when)? The 'why' is the key to everything—look for it and when you find it, make that the centre of your story!

What are your highlights from ten years of the Lytham St Annes Classical Association?

Every year has been a delight, but I think the moment in 2017 when we became the biggest CA branch in terms of membership. We were both the youngest and the biggest — an amazing testament to the work of the whole LSA CA team!

**QUICKFIRE ROUND:**

Athens or Delphi?

Delphi.



Delos or Olympia?

Delos.

Favourite ancient festival?

Dionysia.



Favourite ancient temple?

Temple of Zeus at Agrigento — it's the size of a football field!

Above-ground or underwater archaeology?

Underwater!



Which historical site would you love to return to?

Syracuse when it was being attacked by the Romans and defended by Archimedes (like Indiana Jones did in the recent film!).

What would be your must-pack item for an adventure?

Good trousers with lots of pockets—and a linen shirt.

Which lost ancient object or text would you love to be discovered?

All of Aristotle's 150 or so treatises on the constitutions of different ancient *poleis*.

What recent archaeological discovery interests you the most?

Still the Mithraeum under the Bloomberg building in London.

If you could leave behind one item for future archaeologists to find, what would it be?

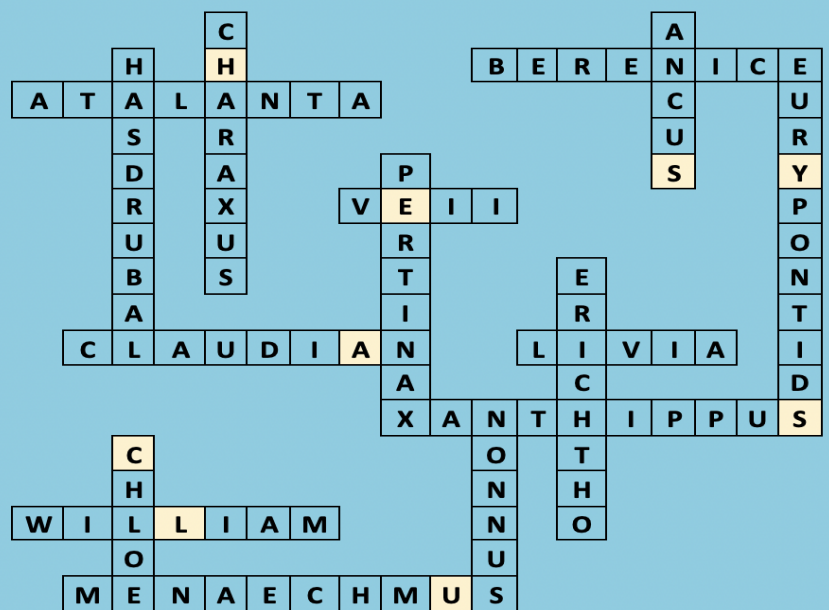
My car/house key chain—filled with personal symbolism and I wonder what future archaeologists would be able to make of it!

Read Michael's blogs and news on [michaelscottweb.com](http://michaelscottweb.com)

Meet Michael at the Ancient Worlds Day at AKS Lytham on 27th April 2024!



**Agora 9 Crossword Answers**

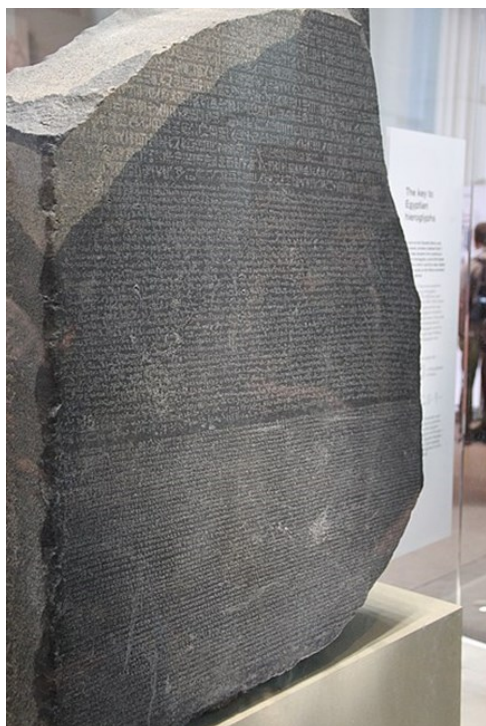


And the hidden word was... **AESCHYLUS!!!**

# Review: *X Marks the Spot* by Michael Scott

LORNA LEE

Did you know that the inscriptions on the Rosetta Stone are not exact translations of one another? Or that the divers who excavated the Uluburun shipwreck were semi-intoxicated due to the narcotic effects of breathing air at those depths?



Rosetta Stone in the British Museum (Image credit: Gary Todd via [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Beginning with the unearthing of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 and closing with present-day excavations on the tiny island of Keros, *X Marks the Spot*, a new book from Professor Michael Scott, traces the evolution of modern archaeology through eight incredible stories of discovery. From the jungles of South America to the plains of Tanzania, we follow in the footsteps of the individuals who made these discoveries possible and hold our breath as they (and ensuing generations) unlock the meaning of their finds. The book traverses two hundred years of human fascination and engagement with the remnants of the past and uncovers how closely this endeavour is intertwined with our present, as well as whether X ever really marks the spot. I really enjoyed reading *X Marks the Spot* over the summer, so let's don our fedoras and dive right in!

To read this book is an adventure in itself. These stories have all the thrills of an Indiana Jones tale, from booby-trapped tombs to extraordinary strokes of luck. Professor Scott is a fantastic guide, sweeping us away with his absorbing, always accessible style. We teeter over the treacherous waters of the Urubamba River, plunge into an eerie world of green and blue alongside teams of sponge divers and navigate the frozen highlands of the Altai. I loved the way each chapter unfolded — we are the discoverers as we move through the pages, piecing together mysteries alongside the academics and archaeologists. I also really enjoyed the mix of well-known and lesser-known finds: I had not heard of half of them before reading this book, and even the more familiar stories had surprises in store (Rosetta Stone, I'm looking at you).



Michael Scott's personal hero Indiana Jones! (Image credit: Eva Rinaldi via [Flickr](#))

Professor Scott covers a huge amount of information through these stories, sometimes drawing on his own experiences to give us deeper insights: I especially enjoyed learning more about underwater archaeology and the process of dating archaeological finds.

One of my favourite elements was reading about the collaborations that made these discoveries possible, transcending boundaries of geography, time and even war — from the academics all over Europe who put their heads together to crack Egyptian hieroglyphs, to the archaeologists who pooled their knowledge and experience with Turkish sponge-diving crews to ensure the study and conservation of the Uluburun shipwreck.

The adventure does not end when an item or place is found. The aftermath of many of these discoveries can still be felt in the impact they have had on our view of the past, in the negative consequences they had on those closest to them, and in debates about restitution, conservation, study and display that swirl around them today.

There is also much that some of these finds have not yet revealed, with archaeologists and scientists continually developing new methods and technologies to uncover their secrets. The stories of these discoveries are still being written, and one of the best parts about this book is the way in which it inspires us to think about the questions and challenges they often present to us today.

This is a book about our love affair with the past as much as our engagement with it. All these stories, though separated by time, society and geography, are all connected by this 'quintessentially human itch' to uncover the physical remnants of our history. As Professor Scott notes in the final pages, 'the past speaks to, and belongs to, us all', and I love the way he highlights everyone's part in making these incredible stories what they are. The explorer searching for lost cities; the societies and organisations who fund them, the teams of scholars, archaeologists and diving crews who arduously excavate, catalogue and decode finds; and those who engage with their stories today — all of us are discoverers.



Our special early sneak peek into the book at Michael Scott's 2023 Presidential Lecture!

This book is about so much more than the discoveries themselves. Along the way, we explore the ingredients that go into a discovery and the factors that influence our knowledge of the past, as well as the complicated and often ambiguous figure of the 'discoverer'. I really enjoyed getting a deeper insight into these characters and the contexts in which they were working, especially through some of their personal reflections.

For me, some of the most interesting discussions in this book pivot on the question of what it means to discover something. Sometimes discovery is more about decoding the meaning of the past than finding it; often it is due to the efforts of more than one person or happens by accident; and sometimes, as many readers will remember from Professor Scott's 2023 Presidential Lecture, some things were never lost in the first place.

Lytham St Annes Classical Association presents The 2023 Presidential Lecture

**"X" Marks the Spot: The Discovery and Discoverers of the Past**

With LSA CA President, Historian, Author & Broadcaster

**Professor Michael Scott**

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> January 7pm

Doors open 6.15 pm Tickets £5 [www.lsaclassics.com](http://www.lsaclassics.com)

Venue: AKS, Clifton Drive South, Lytham St Annes, FY8 1DT

# Unveiling the digital vestiges of antiquity: bridging the chasm between classics and technology

MILI THAKRAR

In our age of rapid technological advancement, one might question the relevance of studying ancient languages. After all, why invest time and effort in mastering a 'dead' language when there are programming languages that promise us the future? But what if the worlds of classics and technology are not so distant from each other after all? In this article, we embark on a journey through the hallowed halls of ancient languages, digital coding and the profound intersection where they meet. In doing so, we will also discuss the synergy between humanistic scholarship and technology.

## The ancient technologists: a prelude to programming

To understand this synergy, one must first appreciate just how technologically advanced the ancient world was. From the astronomical precision of the Antikythera mechanism to the marvels of Roman engineering, antiquity was no stranger to innovation. These early technologists might not have written code, but they were the architects of structures and systems that stand as marvels even in our digital age.



Figure 1: The Antikythera device (Image credit: Mark Cartwright via [World History Encyclopedia](#))

For example, the Antikythera mechanism is an exceptional device, discovered in a shipwreck near the island after which it has been named.

While it might not resemble a modern digital computer, this mechanism was essentially an analogue computer designed to predict astronomical positions with astonishing accuracy.

It integrated intricate gear systems to calculate lunar and solar eclipses, track the positions of celestial bodies, and even predict the dates of the Olympic Games. Consider the complexity of this feat: gears, cogs and dials working together in a delicate dance of mathematics and engineering, all without the benefit of a digital screen or lines of code.

In civil engineering, the Romans stand as giants whose accomplishments continue to inspire awe. Roman aqueducts in particular exemplify the precision and innovation of ancient engineering. These colossal structures transported fresh water across vast distances, defying the limitations of gravity and terrain. The arch, a fundamental architectural innovation introduced by the Romans, laid the groundwork for modern bridge and building construction.

## Analytical skills and translation: the common thread

At first glance, Latin and coding may appear worlds apart, separated by centuries and the chasm between spoken and programming languages. However, when we dissect the skills required for both pursuits, striking similarities emerge.

**Attention to detail:** In the world of programming, a single character out of place can render code ineffective or even crash an entire system. Similarly, in Latin a single incorrect word ending or inflection can change the entire meaning of a sentence. Whether it's debugging code or meticulously proof-reading a Latin text, the devil is indeed in the detail.

**Logical thinking:** Both Latin and coding demand a structured and logical approach. Programmers must craft code that follows an algorithm — a precise sequence of operations to achieve a desired outcome

much like a Latin sentence must follow grammatical rules. The ability to break down complex problems into logical steps is a hallmark of both endeavours.

**Precision:** In coding, precision is everything. Every line of code must be exact, with no room for ambiguity. Similarly, in Latin translation, precision is crucial to capture the nuances and subtleties of the original text. A slight deviation can alter the intended meaning.

With these shared analytical skills in mind, we can appreciate the art of translation as a bridge that connects the worlds of classics and modern technology. A translator, whether converting Latin into English or pseudocode into Python, acts as an intermediary, deciphering one language and reinterpreting it in another.



Figure 2: Algorithms, like Ancient Greek and Latin, follow series of complex rules which must be followed precisely in order to maintain the correct meaning (Image credit: Florian Jatón via [TechTalks](#))

In the case of Latin, the translator must not only understand the language's grammar and vocabulary but also grasp the historical and cultural context in which the text was written. Similarly, in coding, the programmer must comprehend the language's syntax and semantics, as well as the broader context of the problem they are solving. Both tasks require a deep understanding of the source material and the ability to communicate it effectively in a new medium.

The art of translation serves as a microcosm of the larger connection between classics and technology. It exemplifies how the analytical skills honed in one domain can seamlessly transfer to the other, blurring the lines that separate ancient and modern, humanistic and technological. Through translation,

we not only preserve the wisdom of the past but also illuminate the path to the future, where classics and tech walk hand-in-hand.

### The digital classicist: skills in demand

In our technology-driven society, there is a growing demand for individuals who can blend the humanities with STEM. While Latin might not have the practical applications of programming, it cultivates skills that are invaluable in every domain. Classicists have a unique ability to decode and synthesise complex information, much like programmers dissect lines of code.

Yet, a stark skills gap exists between these two fields. The 'coding classicist', as Alec Russell put it, is a rare breed, but they are becoming incredibly essential. The importance of this union is evident in the field of digital humanities, where technology modernises the study of ancient texts and artefacts. Our task is to nurture a generation of classicists who are fluent in both humanistic traditions and digital languages.

### The polyglot renaissance: the relevance of learning new languages

In an era where English has established its dominance as a global *lingua franca* and technology offers instantaneous translation, one might wonder about the necessity of learning new languages. This question leads us to a fundamental exploration of what constitutes a language.

At its heart, a language is a complex system of symbols, sounds and rules that allow individuals to convey thoughts, emotions and ideas to one another. While this definition encompasses both spoken languages and programming languages, there are crucial distinctions that set them apart.

### Programming languages vs. spoken languages: a comparative analysis

**Purpose:** One of the fundamental distinctions lies in their intended purposes. Spoken languages are primarily vehicles for human communication, fostering social interaction and cultural exchange. Programming languages, on the other hand, serve as tools for instructing computers and machines. They are designed for precision and functionality, not human expression.



**Ambiguity:** Spoken languages often thrive on ambiguity and context, allowing for nuance, metaphor and emotion. By contrast, programming languages demand exactness and clarity: a single syntax error can render code useless.

**Evolution:** Spoken languages evolve organically over centuries, shaped by cultural shifts, influences and societal changes. Programming languages, however, undergo controlled evolution driven by technological advancements and practical requirements.

**Expressiveness:** While programming languages possess expressive power in the realm of computation, they lack the rich tapestry of meaning that can be conveyed by spoken human languages. They are limited to executing specific tasks or algorithms and are devoid of the nuances, metaphors and cultural subtleties found in spoken languages.

With these distinctions in mind, we return to the overarching question: why bother learning languages when technology offers instantaneous translation? Well, while it is true that technology has made significant strides in the field of translation, the art of language acquisition holds enduring value.

Languages are more than just strings of words: they encapsulate cultures, histories and unique perspectives. Learning Latin, French or any other is not merely about deciphering words, but about stepping into the shoes of Cicero or Moliere, seeing the world through their eyes and connecting with the nuances of their experiences.

In this regard, programming languages and spoken languages share a common thread. Although both belong in vastly different realms, each has its own unique expressive power. While technology may assist in bridging language barriers, it is through the acquisition of languages that we unlock the depths of human culture, foster cross-cultural understanding and immerse ourselves in the rich tapestry of global diversity. Ultimately, the pursuit of languages, be they coded or spoken, remains an enduring testament to our quest for knowledge, connection and a deeper understanding of the world we inhabit.

## The renaissance of humanities through technology

The digital age has ushered in a renaissance for humanities scholars. Advanced computational tools have revolutionised the way we study and interpret texts. For example, machine learning algorithms, driven by vast datasets and computational power, have become indispensable tools for humanities scholars. In classical literature, these algorithms can perform feats of analysis that were once unfathomable.

**Linguistic evolution:** Machine learning algorithms can trace the evolution of language through centuries of classical texts. They identify subtle shifts in vocabulary, grammar and style, shedding light on how languages like Latin evolved over time. This not only enriches our understanding of linguistic history but also informs our interpretations of ancient texts.

**Authorship attribution:** The age-old question of authorship, long the domain of human scholars, now finds assistance from computational tools. Algorithms can analyse writing styles and linguistic patterns to attribute authorship, resolve debates about the authenticity of ancient works and reveal the hidden hand of scribes and copyists.



Figure 3: Hieroglyphs (Image credit: Pexels, Lady Escabia)

Beyond this, technology offers a form of time travel through augmented reality (AR). AR applications enable us to explore ancient ruins and historical sites from the comfort of our homes or classrooms. Whether it's walking through the streets of ancient Rome or virtually entering the Library of Alexandria, AR bridges the temporal gap, allowing us to witness the past in vivid detail.

This immersive experience not only engages our senses but also deepens our connection to history. It transforms the study of archaeology and art history, allowing scholars and enthusiasts alike to examine ancient artefacts and structures in their original context.

### Conclusion: bridging the chasm — classical languages and the digital age

In our era of technological advancement, the allure of classical languages may seem like a vestige of a bygone era. One might reasonably question the rationale behind investing time and effort in mastering languages like Latin, often considered 'dead' in our contemporary lexicon. Yet it is precisely within this juncture of apparent divergence that a profound revelation unfolds: the worlds of classics and technology are not disparate realms, but rather they converge in a remarkable synthesis of the past and the future.

This convergence of classics and technology transcends the mere acquisition of linguistic skills or coding proficiency. It is a testament to the unifying nature of knowledge itself. When we delve into the intricacies of classical languages, we are not merely deciphering ancient texts but unlocking the wisdom of civilisations that laid the foundations for our contemporary world. We gain insights into the origins of human thought, the birth of governance and philosophy, and the enduring quest for knowledge and understanding.

On the other hand, technology, with its algorithms, data analysis and digital innovations, stands as a testament to our relentless pursuit of progress. It embodies the very essence of human ingenuity, the same spark that drove the thinkers of antiquity to explore the cosmos and engineer astonishing feats of architecture.



Figure 4: An augmented reality headset (Image credit: Kai Kowalewski via [Wikipedia](#))

In recognising the convergence of classics and technology, we embrace a more profound truth: the pursuit of knowledge knows no temporal bounds. It is a continuum, an unbroken thread that weaves its way through the annals of history into the limitless potential of the future. It encourages us to break free from rigid academic boundaries and embrace a holistic approach to learning. In this convergence, we not only preserve ancient wisdom but also chart a path forward, where the past informs the future. It beckons us to transcend limitations, question assumptions, and embark on a journey of exploration, where the boundaries of what's possible expand to encompass the limitless horizon of human potential.

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# Members and Winners Roll Calls

## Agora Contributors from Spring 2018 to 2024

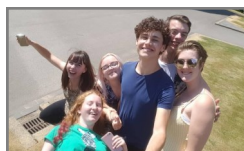
Eleanor Anderton  
 Niamh Banner  
 Sophie Bassano  
 Declan Boyd (Editor 2020 – )  
 Abigail Fraser  
 Ethan Gallant  
 Esmé Goodson  
 Imogen Halliwell  
 Freyja Harrison-Wood  
 Florence Heaton  
 Lauren Heilman  
 Sam Holden  
 Dan Hubbard  
 Katrina Kelly  
 Lorna Lee  
 Emma Lester (Co-editor 2022)  
 Alex Melling (Editor 2018 – 2020)  
 Bill Moulton  
 Bianca Pacciani  
 Leo Riley  
 Liv Sample (Co-editor 2021)  
 Ffion Shute  
 Mili Thakrar

## LSA CA Ancient Worlds Competition Winners

<b>Ross Kinnaird</b>	Runshaw College	2016
<b>Harvey Phythian</b>	Runshaw College	2017
<b>Megan Maguire</b>	Runshaw College	2018
<b>Oliver Hinds</b>	St Mary's, Stonyhurst	2018
<b>Thomas Hewitt</b>	Kirkham Grammar	2019
<b>Connor Irving</b>	Clarendon Sixth Form	2020
<b>Martha Gayer</b>	St John's Marlborough	2021
<b>Emma Lester</b>	The Judd School	2022
<b>Imogen Reid</b>	Abbey Gate College	2023



Roman Day Sentries!



Student Bursary Winners



Natasha Chilima from Kamuzu Academy, Malawi; an international winner in our 2023 Ancient Worlds Competition



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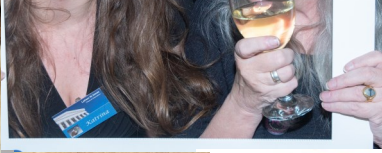
## Founder Members 2014–15 who are members today, in the order in which they joined

Katrina Kelly  
 Jayne Kelly  
 Michael Kettle  
 Elizabeth Bickerstaffe  
 Hugh Ellwood  
 Maureen Thompson  
 Tony Depledge  
 Gerry Corless  
 Pat Corless  
 Carole Pitman  
 Catherine Smith  
 Jean Bannister  
 Dee Gallagher  
 Derek Goulding  
 Kathryn Goulding  
 Nigel King  
 John Delamore  
 Caroline Bowker  
 William Bowker  
 James Curran  
 Christine Cockburn  
 Julia Lipman  
 Michael Pitman  
 Barbara Hayes  
 Sandra Garrett  
 Dawn Ward  
 Sue Long  
 Susan Openshaw  
 Clive Openshaw  
 Chris Kitchener  
 Diane Nield  
 Joe Couch  
 Kunie Couch  
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 Dorothy Coles  
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