

AUTUMN 2021

classics

The newsletter of the University of Cambridge Faculty of Classics



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Jon Savage

This has been an extraordinary year for the Classics Faculty. Partly predictably, as we negotiated lock-downs and ever-changing regulations to teach in person, whenever we could, and keep the library open when teaching online through Lent term. Heroic efforts from everyone earned Classics the 2nd highest rating in a University student survey on Covid responses.



But extraordinary in other ways too. After 23 years of work, and a vast input of post-retirement labour from James Diggie, *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon* made it to publication and the national press. If the press proved most interested in James's definitions of rude words, the Lexicon's real advance is to order entries with the 'core' meaning, not the historically earliest meaning, first – saving learners of Greek hours of poring through entries. This is a major step forward in making Greek accessible.

Another big step forward for access was the Joyce Reynolds Awards, established by the generosity of Mary Beard, giving financial support to students from minority ethnic groups and low-income homes. This too made national news, and wonderfully attracted additional munificence from Karen and Peter Ventress. With a new Access and Outreach Leader, Molly Willett, bringing fresh initiatives, we continue to look for further benefaction to ensure that we attract students from every educational background.

We have been beneficiaries of other wonderful gifts too. The Swedish Ax:son Johnson Foundation have funded a new Centre for Classical Architecture, including a postdoctoral

Fellowship and PhD studentship in Classical Architecture in Antiquity based in Classics. Trinity College, following the very sad sudden death of my contemporary Neil Hopkinson, have funded half the costs of a University Lectureship in Classics attached to Trinity, bringing one extra academic post, and through the persuasive enterprise of Sarah Carthew, Newnham's Development Director, the Onassis Foundation have completed the fundraising for a second new Classics post, to be known as the Onassis Classics Fellowship at Newnham College.

All that almost squeezes out the reason for a new, improved, Newsletter: Alison Holroyd's appointment as Stewardship Co-ordinator. The webinar series that many of you enjoyed (watch out for the next series, starting in October), the e-newsletter circulated between hard-copy newsletters (if you missed that, contact alumni@classics.cam.ac.uk), and this handsome product are some first-fruits of Alison's sterling work. We hope you will all give her, and us, your continuing support.

Professor Robin Osborne,
Chair of Faculty Board, Faculty of Classics

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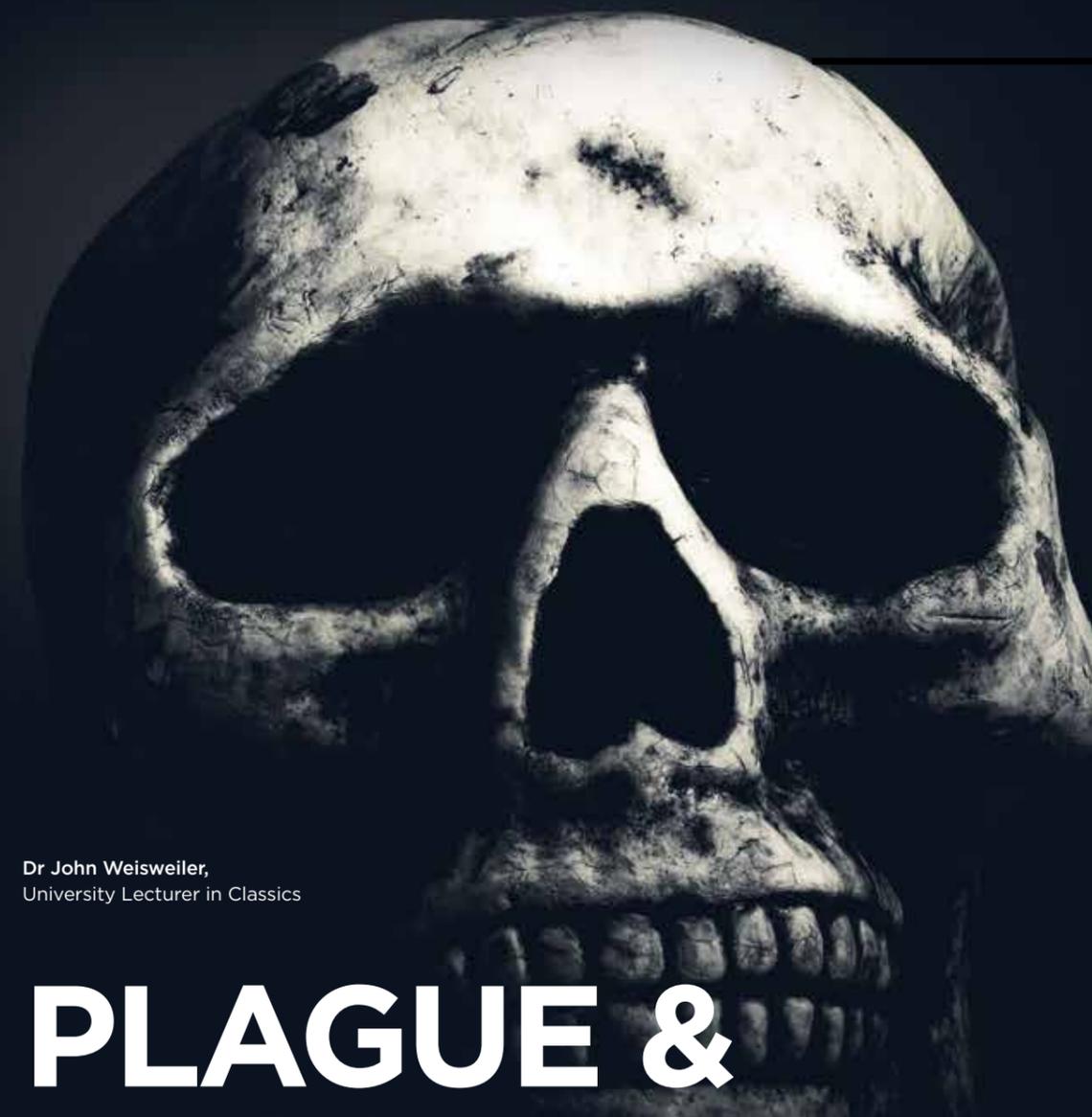
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Dr John Weisweiler,
University Lecturer in Classics

PLAGUE & PROSPERITY

The economic impact of pandemics in the Roman Empire

In London in the late 160s, an eastern Mediterranean immigrant named Demetrios had a protective spell engraved on a tablet. He hoped the magical writing would protect him from infection by a virus. The text begins by invoking four magical words of Hebrew origin: 'Abrai Barbaso Barbasoch Barbasoth ... send away the discordant clatter of raging plague, air-borne ... infiltrating pain, heavy-spiriting, flesh-wasting, melting, from the hollows of the veins. Great Iao, great Sabaoth, protect the bearer.' It concludes with a prayer to the Graeco-Roman god Apollo: 'Phoebus of the unshorn hair, archer, drive away the cloud of plague. Iao, God Abrasax, bring help. Phoebus once ordered mortals to refrain from

kisses. Lord god, watch over Demetrios.' Demetrios was right to be afraid. In 165, a deadly infectious disease, the so-called Antonine Plague, ravaged through the Roman empire. The disease may have been small-pox; according to some modern estimates, it may have killed one-fifth of the imperial population. In the mid-third and mid-sixth centuries, two further pandemics affected the Roman empire. The second, the so-called Justinianic plague, may have killed as much as one-half of its inhabitants.

Many aspects of these events seem reminiscent of our own experience. By pre-modern standards, the Roman empire was a highly interconnected economy.

Continued

Roman streets and shipping routes connected the most remote areas of the Mediterranean World and western Europe with each other. Millions of people such as Demetrius migrated from their home-city to a workplace that might be located thousands of miles away. The ultra-rich owned landholdings that often were dispersed in all major regions of the empire. This exceptional level of interconnectivity made the Roman empire one of the most dynamic economies of the pre-modern period, but it also made it exceptionally vulnerable to the spread of disease.

The experience of the province of Britannia illustrates this particularly well. The remote location of the northwesternmost province of the Roman empire no longer provided protection from the disease. By the time Demetrius' tablet was produced, inhabitants of Britannia followed social distancing measures, which had been advised by the God Apollo in an oracle: 'Phoebus once ordered mortals to refrain from kisses'. Also, in the mid-sixth century, the pandemic travelled along old Roman trade routes all the way to

“ Roman populations were consistently sicker than those of the pre-Roman or medieval periods. This bad health will have further exacerbated the impact of pandemics. ”



© EDIX HILL CEMETERY IMAGE: CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Anglo-Saxon England. DNA samples extracted from persons buried in Edix Hill cemetery in Cambridgeshire show that several of them had died of the Justinianic Plague. By making the Mediterranean and western Europe a unified economy, the Roman empire created an ideal environment for the spread of infectious diseases.

Also in another way, the Roman economic system exacerbated the impact of pandemics. The Roman empire may have been more unequal than any earlier society.

No previous person in human history controlled as large fortunes as the richest landowners in the Roman senate. By contrast, large sections of the population owned hardly anything at all. Worse, as slaves, a considerable proportion of the inhabitants of the Roman empire were somebody else's property. These extreme levels of inequality had serious health consequences. As recent investigations of ancient skeletons have shown, already before the onset of the Antonine or Justinianic plagues, Roman populations were consistently sicker than those of the pre-Roman or medieval periods. This bad health will have further exacerbated the impact of pandemics.

But while in the short term the sick, poor and deprived were hit particularly badly, in the medium-term the Antonine and Justinianic Plagues had more ambiguous effects. At first sight, we might think that in the same way as in the last two years the ultra-rich managed to massively increase the size of their fortunes, so also in antiquity élites were able to

use mass mortality events to shore up their power. However, the opposite was the case. In the wake of ancient pandemics, inequality declined. The death toll of the Antonine and Justinianic Plagues created a manpower shortage which enabled workers to demand higher wages from their employers. In contracts preserved

in the desert sand of Egypt, we see that the average income of day labourers increased in the decades after the pandemic; by contrast, land prices stagnated. The evidence from human skeletons corroborates the impression that the majority of the population was able to improve their living conditions. Strikingly, average body height – a good proxy for human well-being – markedly rose in the wake of the Antonine and Justinianic Plagues. We will see whether our own post-pandemic experience will be equally positive.

Our pick of the classical news from the wider world

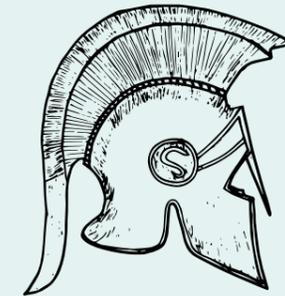
Talthybius



As well as the British Museum's much-trailed exhibition *Nero: the man behind the myth* (on which see Christopher Whitton's comments on p.8), the

Fitzwilliam Museum made generous use of their antiquities collection in an exhibition over the summer about tactility, *The Human Touch*, bit.ly/3jMRkO3. And even closer still, the Museum of Classical Archaeology hosted *A Twist of the Hand*, an exhibition of contemporary art by James Epps. James' wall drawings are informed by the use of pattern and colour in ancient Greece and Rome, museums.cam.ac.uk/story/a-twist-of-the-hand/

In a year starved of much news (other than the obvious), Roman Britain has grabbed a headline or two, as archaeologists continue to rewrite the story of the Empire's most northerly province. A building of unprecedented design was discovered near Scarborough on the site of a new housing development, bit.ly/3wu6Elz. Material is still coming out of the huge project accompanying the A14 widening near Cambridge, including the earliest evidence for the brewing of beer in England (around 400 BCE), woolly mammoth tusks, and – bizarrely – a Roman-era millstone engraved with a giant phallus, [bbc.in/3yuQ0TU](https://bit.ly/3yuQ0TU). In June came a grisly late-Roman find nearby in Rutland: the skeleton of a young male wearing

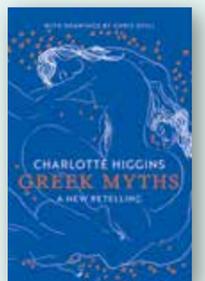


fetters, apparently left in a ditch to die. This was presented in the media as evidence for the brutal mistreatment of slaves; but as Mary Beard observed, bit.ly/2Vc8Vop, other explanations are available.

There hasn't been much theatre to speak of during the pandemic era, but the Pitlochry Festival (in Perthshire) did run David Greig's *Adventures with the Painted People* until early July, a love story about a Roman officer and a Pictish woman, bit.ly/3jMPXin. BBC 4's *Lights Up* season in March/April featured Colm Tóibín's *Pale Sister*, a new version of *Antigone* from the perspective of Ismene (available on iPlayer).



In the world of books, Charlotte Higgins' *Greek Myths: A New Retelling* – mythology with a gendered twist – will appear in September. And we are eagerly awaiting updates on the Hollywood version (announced in 2015) of *The Odyssey*, to be overseen by *Hunger Games* director Francis Lawrence.



Zaynab Ahmed (Newnham College, 2018) graduated from the Faculty earlier this year, and is now the Access, Education and Participation Officer for the Cambridge Student Union.

Q&A

with Zaynab Ahmed

What was your route to studying Classics at Cambridge?

I was lucky, I went to a state grammar school in London with a Classics department. I started sixth form with the intention of studying English at university, but I enjoyed Latin A-level much more than I expected – I loved it and felt good at it. We started with Ovid Amores 1.1, and we were engaging with literature a lot more than at GCSE which was what I liked about English, the analysis of texts. I did a few taster days at Cambridge and the Eton College and Sutton Trust summer schools and felt that Classics was right for me. I wasn't going to apply to Cambridge but was encouraged by my Latin teacher, and my parents, who were incredibly supportive.

All teaching moved online halfway through your degree, due to the Pandemic, and your final year has had a limited amount of in-person teaching. How did the changes affect you and your studies?

It's been hard because I am a student that needs accountability. At school I had homework and the fear of detention keeping me in check, but independent study is the norm at university. Knowing that my lectures would be recorded meant that I attended a lot fewer of them than I should, and it kicked me in the butt when it came to revision time.

You were in Cambridge for Michaelmas – did you come back after Christmas?

No, I was at home for Lent. Mental health-wise being home was better: I was being fed; I had company all the time; I had things to do to unwind; my Mum was there to make me a cup of tea and I didn't have to worry about anything. But it was hard not being able to see my friends. Even if you are just sitting with them in the garden, you are able to say to friends 'this is the essay I am working on, I am really struggling, what do you think?'. Being able to run into someone in the Faculty and talk to them – that element of casual, real-life conversation was very much lost.

My last two supervisions were face-to-face. It was nice to be able to see someone in the flesh. There is something different about going into an academic's office. I like my room, but it is also my relaxation zone. In an academic's office, you have to have your head screwed on a lot more.

You have been involved in the *Get In Cambridge* campaign working with the Access and Outreach team for the University. How did that come about and what have you enjoyed about that work?

I knew that access and outreach was something that I wanted to be involved with at uni. I signed up early on to be a student ambassador at Newnham College. The Student Union (SU) were looking for students to appear in a series of videos to encourage Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Arab (BPA) students to apply. BPA and Black students are the most underrepresented ethnic minorities at Cambridge. The first video I did became part of the *Get In Cambridge* campaign in its early stages.

I also took part in films organised by CU Bangla Society for UK-based Bengali channels; we filmed in a London based studio. It was fun and I enjoyed giving back to my own community and encouraging applications from other Bangladeshi students who might feel they don't have a place at Cambridge.

You were elected as an Academic Rep for the Faculty. What has that involved?

My role as an Academic Rep comes under the remit of the SU. At the start of the year all the subject reps were worried about returning to the difficulties of remote learning and how our exams might be affected. There was a big push by the SU to ensure that students felt supported by the University, which was successful, and various measures were put in place.

I feel that my opinion was important to the Faculty. Frisbee Sheffield, Chair of the Access and Outreach Committee, has been great to work with and always willing to listen to us as we have done a lot of access work. The Faculty's focus has shifted to working with schools and I feel that a lot of that is due to our insight.

You have been elected as the Access, Education and Participation Officer for the Student Union and start your role after you graduate in July. What made you stand for election?

As well as Academic Rep for the Faculty, I became the Bangla Soc Access and Welfare officer. Both fall under the remit of the role at the SU. The current officer approached me and said, 'you would be perfect'. It had been a flitting thought, and a bit like applying for Oxbridge, someone had faith in me and encouraged me to run. I had the most amazing campaign team, my friends got involved. I won in a landslide and was shocked!

BPA access is something that I continue to be interested in. I am going to be working with the people I have worked with already, not as a student consultant anymore, but in a professional capacity, which is really exciting!

What are your aspirations for the future?

I want to feel fulfilled in the work that I do, my heart is pulling me towards teaching. I had a lot of pastoral support and encouragement from teachers at school who were willing to take the time to help us. A good teacher can make such a difference to a child's life.

I love Classics and I could quite easily see myself teaching and continuing to engage with it. Classics is dying out in schools and that is just heart-breaking, not because it is a bad subject, but it is underfunded.

The Joyce Reynolds Awards have been funded by Mary Beard as part of the Faculty's efforts to encourage more diversity among those studying Classics at Cambridge. Read more at bit.ly/3ys0wM2



2021 seems to be the Year of the Bad Emperors, at least in one sense: a major exhibition on *Nero: the man behind the myth* opened at the British Museum this summer, with another on *Emperor Domitian: God on earth* to come at the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (National Museum of Antiquities) in Leiden.

The two are billed in strikingly similar terms. First: here's an emperor we all call bad, but whose reign had its spectacular side too (Nero's popularity in his lifetime; Domitian's architectural legacy). Second, that tantalising question: 'What was Nero/Domitian really like?' Which is to say: revisionism is still in vogue; and museums still sell tickets by pinpointing that human itch to find 'the man himself' (all too often a man, of course), and promising to scratch it.

This pairing of Nero and Domitian is serendipitous, but not inept, or new. Both were young: Nero took the throne at 16 and committed suicide aged 30; Domitian was only 29 when he succeeded his brother and was murdered at 44. Both inflicted reigns of terror on the elite, with a grim succession of senators exiled and killed under Nero, and a shorter, sharper bloodbath late in Domitian's principate. Both suffered the *damnatio memoriae* that made them literally infamous, their statue heads replaced, their scratched-out names eloquently absent from inscriptions. Both tinkered with that dangerous art, poetry (but Domitian grew out of it). And both earned the undying hostility of Christians, Nero as the Anti-Christ who, amongst other wickednesses, had Christians crucified, ripped apart and

Nero & Domitian

how (not) to end a dynasty

Christopher Whitton, Professor of Latin Literature

burned alive after the Fire of Rome (Tacitus *Annals* 15.44), Domitian as a lesser but still evil enemy: Tertullian, for instance (*Apology* 5.3-4), names Nero as 'the first to savage this sect with the imperial sword', then adds Domitian, 'a match for Nero in cruelty', but not quite so bad in practice.

The parallel had already been drawn by Juvenal, whose fourth Satire (the one about the fish) calls Domitian *calvus Nero*, 'the bald Nero' – pointing up the superficial difference between Nero's luxurious locks and Domitian's bare pate (not that you can tell from his surviving busts), but also implying an essential similarity. It is even stated by serious scholars that Domitian was 'sympathetic to Nero's memory' (E. J. Courtney), on the ground that he ordered the execution of Epaphroditus, the freedman who had helped Nero commit suicide. That seems improbable. The point of the execution, as Suetonius reasonably suggests, was presumably that even piety is no excuse for killing your patron – not that this lesson helped much when Domitian's own murder came round. It's hard to imagine Martial (*Epigrams* 7.21) and Statius (*Silvae* 5.2.33) calling Nero 'cruel' and 'savage', if he had been a *persona grata* under Domitian. And, among other things, Domitian took a very different line on performance arts: far from strutting his stuff like Nero, he threw a quaestor out of the senate for 'miming and dancing'. More likely, then, that his association with Nero was neither self-cultivated nor complimentary: it branded him as an unwelcome repeat of the tyrant.

And that takes us to two crucial points in common between Nero and Domitian. Each had the dubious honour of ending a dynasty – so lacking a successor to make him a god (it was always the *Diui filius* who had most to gain from an emperor's apotheosis), or at least guard his reputation. And each fell out with the part of society best placed to police memory: 'common folk' tended Nero's grave, we're told, and the army rank-and-file proclaimed Domitian deified; but it was the senate that inflicted *damnatio memoriae*, and elite authors who pursued condemnation on the page, starting soon after their deaths – in Nero's case with the *Octavia*, encoding him as a textbook stage tyrant; in Domitian's with Tacitus' *Agricola* and Pliny's *Panegyricus*, united in their portrayal of a cruel and paranoid despot. Literary representations like these have steered their reputations ever since, despite the varied lights that material culture can shed. On the most sceptical, revisionist view, it's all just invective: perhaps Nero was really (to quote a rather feeble line from the BM exhibition blurb) 'a young, inexperienced ruler trying his best in a divided society'. On a more moderate account, such attacks elaborate more than they fabricate. Either way, one thing is sure: we'll never know what Nero or Domitian was really like. But that's the way – and the fascination – of ancient history.

Nero, the man behind the myth continues at the British Museum until **24 October 2021**.

Emperor Domitian: God on earth will open at the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden from **17 December 2021**.

Twelve Caesars: Images of Power from the Ancient World to the Modern by Mary Beard is published in **September 2021**.



The bruised and beaten Terme Boxer: the only plaster cast to have been acquired since 2007.

Minding the gap in The Museum of Classical Archaeology

Caroline Vout, Director of the
Museum of Classical Archaeology
and Professor of Classics

www.classics.cam.ac.uk/museum

[@classarch](https://twitter.com/classarch)

The Museum of Classical Archaeology's collection of plaster casts gives students and visitors access to a wealth of Greek and Roman statues that they would otherwise have to travel the world to see.

What they lose in not seeing them in their original material, they gain in being able to compare and contrast examples from different museums; still they fall silent at the shape, the scale, the shadows. In Rome, or the New Acropolis Museum in Athens, the viewing experience is no less contrived, each of the statues similarly stripped of its pigment, its original function and context, sanitised, labelled and spot-lit.

It is what museums don't give us that interests me here. No collection is random, but a product of its time – and ours, largely, of the nineteenth century. It was then that our earliest casts were donated to the University, more than thirty of them (the Venus de Milo, Apollo Belvedere, and Farnese Hercules included) from a private house in Battersea, where they signalled the good taste and virtue that the classical canon brought with it. They had been displayed there with a Sleeping Hermaphroditus that the University refused: what had been admired since at least the seventeenth century was now too hot to handle. *O tempora, o mores* – or perhaps the change of circumstances and audiences that came of their new home in the Fitzwilliam Museum. In the 1870s and 80s, the first Director of the Fitzwilliam, Sidney Colvin, bought cast after cast to illustrate his lectures, most of these from Greece, not Rome, some of them, like the Nike of Paionios, shipped within a year of the statue being excavated at Olympia.

When the Museum of Classical Archaeology first split from the Fitzwilliam in 1884, the buying of casts continued, but, from the 1920s onwards, at a much slower pace. Even after the Museum's move to the Sidgwick Site, space was at a premium. Although a gift from the estate of former Director, Robert Cook, enabled us to buy the odd example (a not very special version of the Prima Porta statue of Augustus, a colossal Samian Kouros that wasn't discovered until 1980, and the porphyry Tetrarchs), the die was cast: we are what we have always been; have – despite our breeze-block walls – that *fin-de-siècle* look.

The Tetrarchs are our only cast of a sculpture made of coloured stone; the Prima Porta our only other statue of an emperor among our rogues-gallery of imperial portrait busts. More depressingly, we have no casts of

sculptures from Rome's northern provinces, and only one piece from war-torn Palmyra, no aged Hellenistic-style statues like the Old Market Woman or Old Fisherman in the Metropolitan Museum, no Roman Egyptianising examples, no black African subjects, and so on and so on. And still no Hermaphroditus. Our tastes risk seeming old-fashioned, *dis-tasteful* even. I am about to rescue a cast of the Albani Hunchback from our crowded store, but he is an exception that proves the rule of a collection shaped by its inheritance to the detriment of both ancient art and the ancient world's diversity.

Putting forgotten casts on display and buying new ones is but one way of completing the picture. Building on a super-successful LGBTQ+ trail that cut across the collection to bring out more personal stories than those of collection-history, excavation, and canon-formation, our Museum and Collections Assistant, Sade Ojelade, is leading a new project to highlight the effects of the loss of paint from statues (both serendipitously over time, and from pretty early on in the reception of the antique until into the twentieth century, in cleaning processes in the restorer's studio). Scholarship has long known that some Greek and Roman bronzes and marbles were painted, yet still our text books, and our gallery, suggest that polychromy was not the norm; traditionally, casts have contributed to an antiquity that is as pale as it is interesting. It is no coincidence that Battersea's glitterati saw themselves in these statues' image.

This was inevitably to the exclusion of others. In the 18th century, when Dutch anatomist Pieter Camper developed his formula for ideal beauty, the Apollo Belvedere was at the top of the tree, its facial angles plotted against those of humans and animals. Next best was European man, followed by Africans and Asians. By the mid 19th century, these bogus theories were perpetuating slavery and white supremacy.

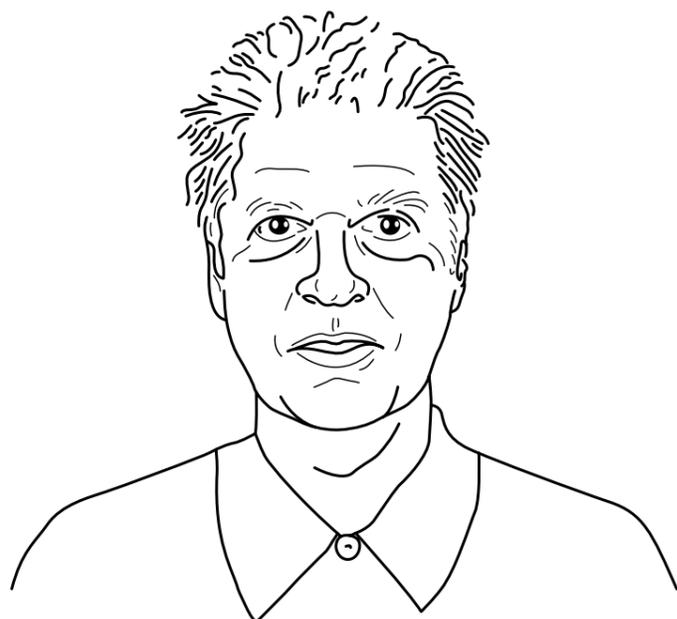
'Minding the gap' means more than completing the picture of ancient Greece and Rome; it means acknowledging more recent and ongoing fault-lines. Turns out that our collection is not set in stone after all. Rather, casts are particularly well placed to do this work: watch this space for new initiatives.



Mary Beard meets Jon Savage

‘Classics is a mountain range discipline.’

Jon Savage (Magdalene 1972) is a writer, broadcaster and music journalist, the author of *England’s Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* and *Teenage: The Creation of Youth, 1875–1945*.



M: Jon, we overlapped reading Classics in the 1970s, but we only met a few months ago. I wondered what your memories are of the subject at Cambridge and before?

J: Well, I started Latin when I was seven in 1960, Greek in 1962 and I was good at them. The result was that I got a scholarship to Rugby when I was 12. I took my A-levels when I was 16, fucked them up, took them again when I was 17, got enough to get into Cambridge and went up to Magdalene in 1972. I just looked at some of my old schoolwork. Even then, I see, I liked Aristophanes. It was funny, cheeky and more importantly, it said something about society at the time. And that was the germ of the idea, which has always interested me: how art or theatre or performance or music relates to the wider society. It isn’t created in isolation. That’s a principle I’ve always used in my work.

More than that Classics is such a mountain range discipline. You’ve got to know the languages, the alphabet, the history of the art, the literature. It teaches you almost everything except the scientific side of things.

M: As you explain all that, you sound like an extremely hardworking student. But I’m not sure that’s correct.

J: I wasn’t. The problem was that I’d been academically pumped from the word go. My parents were incredibly proud of me, and I thought: well, I’ve done my bit of the deal now. I’m afraid I spent the first two years at Cambridge in a blizzard of drugs. I was reckless and stupid and I was lucky – but I was shedding the skin of those public school years. I was incredibly diligent when I was at school because there’s nothing else to do, but as soon as there were other attractions like sex and drugs and socialising and art, academic work took second place – until my final year when I was taught by Pat Easterling, and she stimulated me to take more interest. But by then my bad habits were ingrained, so – you can castigate me Mary – I ended up with a 2:2.

M: We have to thank Pat that it wasn’t worse. She taught me too, but I was more of a swot, even if I did some of the stuff that you did, too!

J: There was also the fact that I was gay and that was a big deal – and that I was obsessed with pop music. My parents basically said to me, right, we sent you to Cambridge, you’ve got to be a lawyer or accountant. But I started planning my get out, I knew something was going to happen in 1975, early 1976, I was angry and pissed off enough that what actually happened – punk rock – really suited me. I thought, right, I’m going to start writing about this. I quit the law once I passed my exams and went to work for Granada TV and also went into writing. I worked for Sounds and then Melody Maker, but since 1984 I’ve been freelance making films, doing journalism and then writing books. The way Classics teaches you literally to break down language was incredibly useful for a freelance journalist. It meant that I could adapt myself to each magazine.

M: So all those proses that you did in the style of Cicero, or whoever, helped you to adapt your rhetorical registers to different outlets.

J: Yeah, I really believe that. I realize how deep Classics goes.

M: And you’ve got a series of books about popular music and popular culture. You’re writing one now.

J: It’s about the gay influence on pop culture and youth culture in the widest terms. My sense is that if it’s going to be ‘liberation’ it has to be liberation

for everybody. I’m taking five years: 1955, 1961, 1967, 1973, 1978. I’m on 67 right now, nearly halfway through, which is great. I’ve taken too long on this chapter, so I need to just nail it. You know what the feeling is like.

M: Yes! But are there other things you have got directly from Classics?

J: Well Catullus in particular. He can be very direct: ‘Odi et Amo.’ I remember thinking, ‘oh, two thousand years ago, people felt the same as we do now.’ That was a real moment. It’s the vividness of that experience, the fact that art can translate through time and the fact that you also have this incredible time reference. It teaches you to see through time.

Continued

More than that Classics is such a mountain range discipline. You've got to know the languages, the alphabet, the history of the art, the literature. It teaches you almost everything except the scientific side of things.

M: Bizarrely, then, the Classics that you found very boring when you were at Cambridge plugs into what you do now.

J: It has to, you know. I studied Classics through my period of development. How can it not plug in? There are general influences too, as well as specific ones – such as classical myths and myth systems. Pop culture also trades in myths and archetypes. And I just find that fascinating. It's extraordinary how robust a lot of those myths are and how they still work. They work for me. In many ways a lot in the classical syllabus is quite antithetical to our current values. It can be quite subversive because it teaches you that our values are not eternal. There are other ways to look at the world that might be just as relevant as ours.

M: That's really important because there's a very strong feeling of embarrassment now about the way Classics has been associated with authoritarian regimes, which it certainly has. For me that is always balanced by the way Classics has destabilised the current order, offering you different perspectives. The ancient world makes us think differently about ourselves.

J: I agree. The more I think about it the more important Classics has been to me. I am shocked about how important it is, and yet how little I remember in detail. I blame my youthful indulgences, and I am cross with myself because of course I don't take anything now. I want to be sober and I want to be on point.

M: One last question. Our students are always hoping to make links between the classical world and modern popular culture. Do you have any great example for them up your sleeve – like how some band was really influenced by a particular bit of Classics.

J: The first thing that comes into my mind is The Doors and their wonderful song called 'The End'. One of the lyrics goes

'lost in the Roman wilderness of pain'. Jim Morrison doesn't explain what he was talking about and then he goes into a section where he enacts the Oedipus myth and it's pretentious bollocks of course, but it's good pretentious bollocks. There's nothing wrong with being pretentious because that means you are reaching for something beyond yourself. There's that, but there's a lot of other references. I'd just urge students to think of their favourite myths or their favourite characters and just Google them.

M: They do come up, don't they?

J: Yes. As I said before, pop culture is a sort of fascinating world because it is a world, or used to be, outside the norm. You are talking about performance, music, words and looks, you are talking about something that is a complete art form that works in an instinctive and often a non-overtly rational way. I stand in awe of the way that music impacts on bodies, ears, minds and emotions, and there's an enormous amount of myth in there. Just think of the myth of 'live fast, die young'. It goes back to Thomas Chatterton and then on through Rudolf Valentino, James Dean, Kurt Cobain etc.

M: Dionysiac too! Classical again!

J: Or perhaps even better Alcibiades.

M: For me it's comforting and challenging to see how your classical trajectory comes back to hit you later in slightly different ways even if your time at Cambridge was not largely spent in the Library.

J: In a way it is reprehensible, but it is something that I had to do and it hasn't done me any harm in life. I haven't had people saying you can't do this because you got a 2:2. But I am sure it is different now. So it is not an example I would recommend anyone to follow.

1 Hull & East Riding Museum

Hull is perhaps not where you'd first think of going for a visit to Roman Britain, but its archaeological collections are extraordinarily good (not just because they incorporate material from my own excavations). Its display of mosaics is second to none. They include the well-known Venus pavement from Rudston Roman villa as well as the charioteer from the same site and the great Orpheus mosaic from Horkstow and others. bit.ly/3hjJIB5

2 The Bartlow Hills

South east of Cambridge is one of the least visited but most impressive sites in lowland Britain. Four surviving burial mounds stand up to 15m high and 50m in diameter – the tombs of indigenous aristocrats from around the time of the Roman invasion in the 1st century, perhaps inspired by the mausoleum of Augustus in Rome. Grave goods from early 19th-century excavations are in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge. bit.ly/3ixair0

3 Bewcastle Roman fort

North of the fort at Birdoswald on Hadrian's Wall lies one of the outpost forts of the Roman frontier, probably designed to give early warning of attack. In a beautiful location, the fort is irregular in shape – basically hexagonal. Its name – Fanum Cocidi – shows that there was also a sanctuary here too. Beside the church that is situated in its centre is one of the best surviving Anglo-Saxon crosses the decoration of which shows classical inspiration. bit.ly/3CyQF9Y

Roman Britain

If you are avoiding foreign travel, Martin Millett, Laurence Professor of Classical Archaeology, suggests some of the lesser visited sites and collections to visit whilst travelling in Britain this autumn.



4 London Guildhall Roman amphitheatre

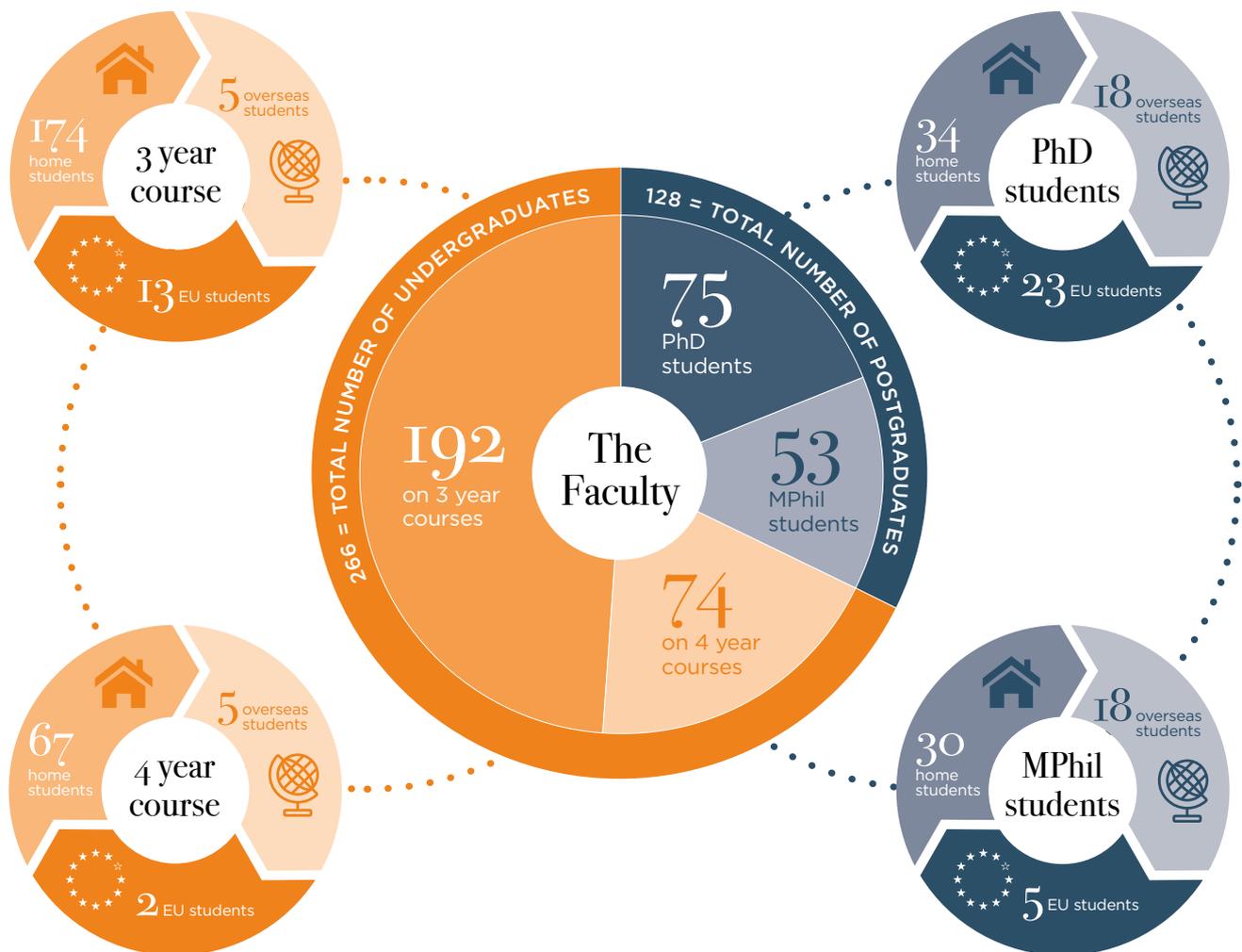
Near the heart of Roman *Londinium* a timber amphitheatre was first constructed around AD 70, to be replaced by a substantial stone-built arena in the early second century. It was probably built to serve the soldiers and officials of the governor's retinue who was quartered nearby. Its site was later used for the construction of the great Medieval Guildhall. The amphitheatre was re-discovered during excavations in its yard in 1998, and its remains are now displayed below ground. bit.ly/3dNlCGf

5 Dolaucothi gold mines

In rural west Wales is the only direct evidence we have for Roman gold mining in Britain. Controlled by the nearby fort at Pumsaint, gold was extracted both through using water brought by aqueducts to wash soil from the slopes (hushing) and through the excavation of adits into the slope to follow the mineral veins. The National Trust provides underground tours and a walking trail that allows you to explore this early industrial landscape. nationaltrust.org.uk/dolaucothi

Martin Millett, jointly with John Creighton at Reading University, has been awarded a major new grant to produce a complete new synthesis of Roman York.

Faculty at a glance



Save the date

Make a note of the following dates and join us for our autumn series of Classics Alumni Webinars.

Socrates and the virtues of dialogue

Tuesday, 19 October, 6pm BST

With Frisbee Sheffield, Assistant Professor of Classics, and James Warren, Professor of Ancient Philosophy.

Linear A and B, new discoveries and decipherments

Wednesday, 3 November, 6pm GMT

With James Clackson, Professor of Comparative Philology; Ester Salgarella, JRF St John's College;

Philippa Steele, Senior Research Fellow Magdalene College; and Torsten Meißner, Lecturer in Philology and Linguistics.

Roman emperors: then and now

Tuesday, 16 November, 6pm GMT

With Mary Beard, Professor of Classics and Christopher Kelly, Professor of Classics and Ancient History.

Further details at www.classics.cam.ac.uk/directory/alumni. If you are not receiving our e-invitations and would like to, please contact us at alumni@classics.cam.ac.uk.

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