AUTUMN 2025

classics

The newsletter of the University of Cambridge Faculty of Classics

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From the Chair of the Faculty Board

Summer travels are behind us now. But this newsletter will take you on journeys through an ancient world whose scenery is always shifting, where the unfamiliar can seem strangely familiar, and the ordinary extraordinary.

Archivist Rebecca Naylor, alongside keen students and alumni, deciphers the journal of a Napoleonic-age traveller who sailed the Mediterranean in “a crazy little boat”, picnicking and sleeping among the ruins of Greece and Turkey against a backdrop of war, espionage and cultural piracy. A lucky Part II student shares the excitement of joining Nigel Spivey’s Easter trip to Rome, where she got close to the artworks she first knew from lectures, thanks to generous support from the Brian Leech Fund. Cover star Shushma Malik reports back from her vital place in the “nuance window” of fast-moving radio shows and history podcasts, which often underplay the complexity of characters like Nero and Cleopatra.

New research continues to flourish. Josephine Quinn offers an expert’s guide to the stunning Roman monuments of North Africa, while Alessandro Launaro, director of excavations at Interamna Lirenas for the last 15 years, reveals what makes this “average” Italian town so special. Serafina Cuomo presents a taster of her new course on ancient medicine. We interview Helen Morales, who introduced us in this year’s brilliant Gray lectures to a new generation of artists blending elements of African myth with the motifs of classical art.

There is one less happy development to report: a cliff-edge reduction in our postgraduate funding. Postgraduates are our lifeblood, a vital source of energy and new thinking, and we are keen to secure their future in the Faculty. In the coming months we will be working hard to ensure that MPhil and PhD studies in Classics remain a possibility for our students, regardless of their personal backgrounds. Meanwhile, I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter, thank you for your generous support, and I look forward to seeing many of you back in Cambridge.

Professor Emily Gowers,
Chair of Faculty Board, Faculty of Classics

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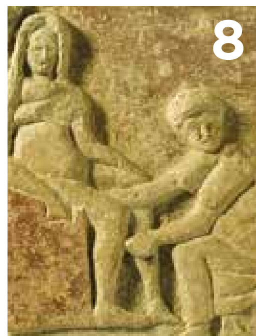

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LEECH FUND ROME TRIP

Undergraduates explore narrative art in the Eternal City

Madeline Taylor, Emmanuel College 2021

In March 2025 a group of students were led by Nigel Spivey to Rome, funded by the Leech Fund. The trip was themed around the Part II Visual Narratives course, which aimed to provide students with a narratological understanding of Ancient Greek and Roman art. The trip provided many frames through which to view Ancient Greek and Roman artwork in narrative terms; from standing face to face with the enigmatic expression of the Terme Boxer in the Palazzo Massimo, to browsing temple sculpture in a decommissioned power plant in Museo Centrale Montemartini, to viewing Trajan's long-standing Column in the hectic heart of the city. Other highlights of the trip included the Ara Pacis Museum, built to house Augustus' 'altar of peace' monument, as well as the Villa Giulia Museum, which housed an incredible collection of Etruscan artefacts, including the Lovers' Sarcophagus and an entire tomb excavated at Tarquinia. The Laocoon group in the Vatican was especially striking to see in person, calling to mind Virgil's poetic telling of the episode whilst simultaneously providing a different perspective. The tension between the narrative demands of the subject and the 'limitations' of the medium is both apparent and reductive when viewing the sculpture in real life, which is striking and arresting in its emotive power.

These experiences furthermore provided valuable insight into how ancient narratives are reconstructed and reconfigured visually in order to create new narratives. The trip also provided the opportunity to practise various methods of approaching ancient visual narratives without the aid of texts to identify scenes and characters, especially where mythological sarcophagi (frequently) appeared.

As a result of Nigel Spivey's expert guidance, the countless images we encountered on this trip greatly enriched our understanding of narrative art and provided a satisfying conclusion to our undergraduate study of Ancient Greek and Roman art and archaeology, by allowing us to view familiar (as well as unfamiliar) artworks in person. It was a thoroughly enjoyable trip all round, with lively discussion both in front of artworks and across the table at mealtimes, and we are incredibly grateful to the Leech Fund for providing this amazing opportunity and to Nigel Spivey and Michael Squire for organising it.

SO ORDINARY...
and why it matters

Alessandro Launaro, Professor of Roman Archaeology and
Fellow and Director of Studies in Classics, Gonville & Caius College

Alessandro Launaro and the team at Interamna Lirenas.

Think about it – when picturing a Roman town, the first thing that will come to mind is Pompeii. Those who may have had the chance to veer away from the trodden path, may rather think of Ostia (this one has my vote!). Those who visited North Africa may well think of places like Timgad, in Algeria. What these sites have all in common is that, notwithstanding varying degrees of preservation (from remarkable to truly exceptional), they have been extensively excavated, and their plans are, if not entirely, at least broadly known. However, rarely we stop to consider how representative these sites may have been of your *ordinary* Roman town.

Pompeii (60 hectares) was home to maybe 10,000 people, probably five times the estimated population of an average Roman town; exceptionally preserved as a snapshot of that fateful day in AD 79, it cannot tell us anything about later important transformations of the Roman world. Ostia (154 ha), on the other hand, had existed from at least the 4th c. BC (if not earlier) until Late Antiquity: this is the place where to witness the full trajectory of Roman urban living in all its remarkable variety, including the impressive multi-storey apartment blocks of the imperial period. However, to consider what was effectively the main gateway to Rome, with an estimated population in the order of 50,000 inhabitants, to be representative of general urban conditions in the Roman world may be a *little* unwarranted. Interesting for all sorts of reasons (including being the 'poster-town' of the Roman urban grid), Timgad (50 hectares) joined the party at a realtively later stage (around AD 100), being home to a population of maybe 5,000 people, but possibly more. One way or another, all these 'textbook towns' were in fact rather *special*.

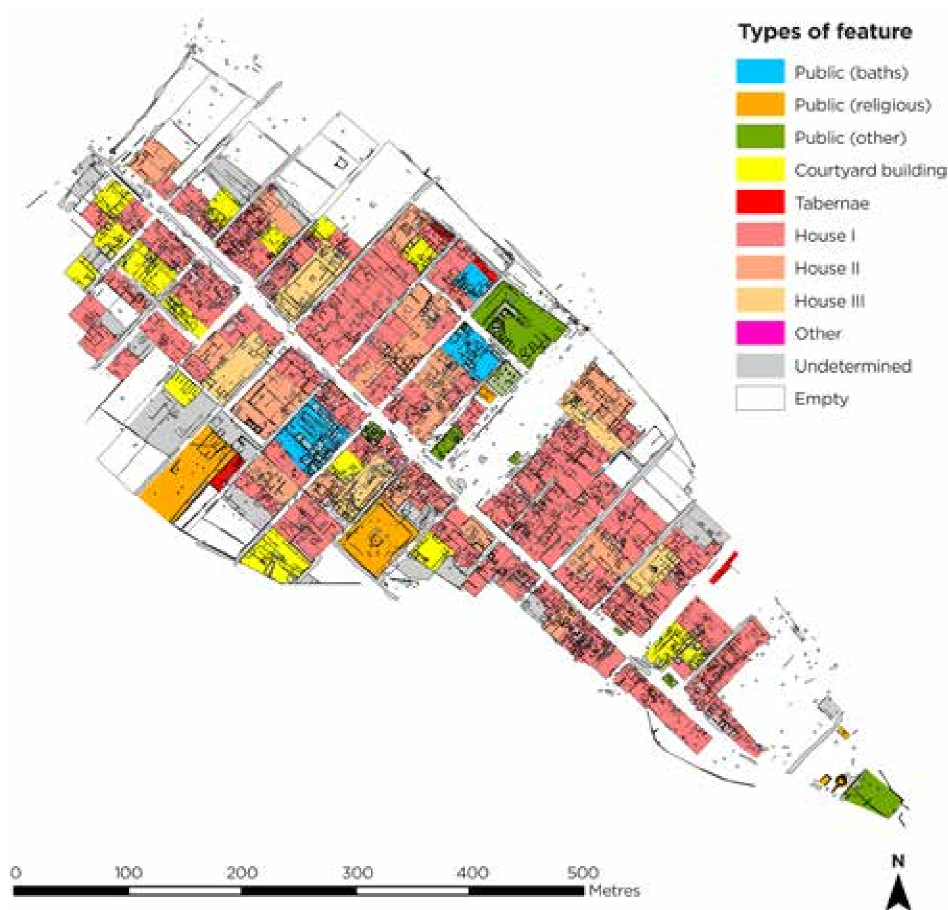
This is precisely why, when people ask me what is it that makes Interamna Lirenas special, I candidly reply that it is precisely the fact that it was *not special at all*. They look at me like I am trying to be witty or clever, because they cannot quite square my response with the fact that we – i.e. staff and generations of students from the Faculty – have been

working there for the past 15 years… and keep returning there twice every year now. Nobody of sound mind would invest so much of their life in this site had it not promised some special reward, right? Precisely.

It is already quite remarkable that we revealed the entire plan of this town in Central Italy basically without digging (Fig. 1), courtesy of geophysical survey. But what makes this plan especially notable is the fact that Interamna Lirenas was of average size (23 hectares, about 2,000 inhabitants), occupied a middling position in the settlement hierarchy and had a long (and relatively uneventful) life spanning nine centuries (late 4th c. BC to late 6th c. AD). Potentially, Interamna is therefore *representative* of most other towns in the Roman world in a way that sites like Pompeii, Ostia and Timgad simply cannot. This, by itself, makes it an ideal vantage point from where to (re)trace the impact of the great transformations of the Roman world on the life of its more ordinary inhabitants. If anything, what makes Interamna unique with respect to those ordinary sites is that its archaeology and history have been revealed to an unusual degree, through a combination of geophysical prospection (magnetometry and ground-penetrating radar), field survey, excavation and a timely and thorough study of all classes of finds, commonware pottery specifically.

What we revealed is a town which lived, thrived and died with the development of the Roman world, reflecting the specific conditions that its expansion brought about. If, reading this, you immediately started to dream about Roman legions, standards and empires without end, well… dream again! What made Interamna is the fact that it acted like a node of a network, placed as it was along a road and a waterway (a river in this case) – a rather common occurrence for a Roman town, right? In this regard, it performed as a gateway to the significantly larger neighbouring towns of Aquinum and Casinum, connecting them by river with the crucial port of Minturnae and from there with the larger Mediterranean. All of a sudden Interamna resembles Ostia, not so much in size, but in the way it operated (and Interamna had even some multi-storey apartment blocks too). The difference is that whereas there was only one Rome (at least for a while…) and therefore only one Ostia, there were many more Interamna Lirenas, Aquinum, Casinum and Minturnae, and we have now begun to get to know them much better.

Those wishing to know more about *how special* Interamna Lirenas was (not) can read all about it in A. Launaro (2023), Interamna Lirenas: how special? In A. Launaro (ed.), *Roman Urbanism in Italy: Recent Discoveries and New Directions*. Oxford. 172-189.



Acknowledgements
The Interamna Lirenas Project is run by the Faculty of Classics in close collaboration with the *Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le Province di Frosinone e Latina* and the *Comune di Pignataro Interamna*, in partnership with the British School at Rome. Fieldwork is made possible by the generous support of the Faculty of Classics and the Brian Leech Memorial Fund.

'Castle at Tenedos', 1799, by G. Koehler, watercolour on paper, GBR/3437/KHLR/1/2/6.

From the Archives
A Journey of Two Halves

Dr Rebecca Naylor, Faculty Archivist

We encountered Colonel William M. Leake in this magazine last summer, sailing up the Levantine coast in Lord Elgin's brig, the Mentor. Since then, ten intrepid Classics alumni have transcribed Leake's notebook *Cerigo to England 1802*. What have we discovered in this unpublished travel journal written by an English soldier-spy at the outset of the Napoleonic Wars?

The diary records one east Mediterranean sojourn in two stages. Initially, Leake leaves Egypt (Alexandria) by sea on April 5th, 1802, with his companions Lt. John Squire and William R. Hamilton; they loop inland from Tripoli to Damascus and thence through Syria to the limestone massif north of Aleppo. Here, on June 3rd, he evocatively describes arriving at "some old Cistern near the remains of an ancient Village where we sleep belle etoile" (p. vi r.): sleeping under the stars amidst the 'dead cities' of Late Antiquity. They sail from Iskenderun, arriving on 30th June in Athens, the group then heading north on horseback to sites such as Delphi. Leake writes headily of the ancient sanctuary, "All its magnif burst at once on the procession already filled with divine aura". They continue to the Corycian Cave "on a zigzag and abominable road", although he concedes at the summit, "it is a most romantic scene" (p. xiii r.).

They explore Classical landmarks in Attika and Boeotia, including "the grotto of Pan" adjacent to the Plain of Marathon (p. xvi v.) and the river Asopos. Alongside

'A brigantine', 1800, by G. Koehler, pencil on paper, GBR/3437/KHLR/2/5.

'Ottoman figures', 1800, by G. Koehler, pencil on paper, GBR/3437/KHLR/2/9.

intellectual endeavour is evident delight, "the summits of Parnassus in sight around, Springs of water as cold as ice – delightful freshness of air", the "mulberries, Bread, Cheese, Honey, all unusually good" (p. xiii v.). After the monuments of Athens (p. xvii v.) the text skips from Piraeus to Mycenae. Leake sketches measured drawings of the Treasury of Atreus, the construction of which clearly fascinated him as an engineer. Thus concludes the first, earliest half of the notebook which is then inverted. He starts anew writing in late September 1802 in Cerigo (Kithira), documenting his homeward journey as far as the northernmost Adriatic ports.

What is missing from both halves of the diary, the Levantine/Greek and Ionian/Italian portions, is any mention of Lord Elgin's ongoing antiquities acquisitions that summer of 1802 or of the shipwreck of the earl's brig the *Mentor* on 17th September at Avlemonas in Cerigo. Both Elgin's Marbles and Leake's manuscripts sank, although Leake does not here make mention of either catastrophe.

Leake chronicles only his onward progress. Aged twenty-seven, he is first a Captain in the Royal Artillery, and second an antiquarian. His descriptions of Cerigo are military intelligence-gathering, on population size, cannon emplacements and potential garrison provisions. He documents that Cerigo is known for its onions, red and white wines, bread, oil, game such as hares, quails, turtle doves, and honey. He concludes, "The produce is sufficient for the inhabitants, but the fasts that occupy about 150 days in the year assist greatly. Beef they hardly ever eat the oxen being kept for the plough" (p. 4r.). The political situation is complex, the Ionian Islands then being the Septinsular Republic (1800-1807) under Russian oversight. Diplomatic skirmishes between the emissaries of the Great Powers, and evidence of espionage, are frequently described – a Russian officer in Corfu is "disguised as an Italian priest" (p.15v.).

Tacking along Ionian coastlines "in the crazy little Boat we have hired" (p. 6r.), Leake carries Venetian charts which he checks and corrects. He has a keen eye for fortifications, fresh water sources and anchorages, describing the Bay of Navarino as "sheltered on all sides by the long barren island that lies before it to the Westward (Sphacteria)" (p. 7v.). Twenty-two centuries previously, in 425 BCE, it had witnessed a major battle during the Peloponnesian Wars. In 1827 CE, it would be the site of a British-led allied naval victory over the Ottomans in the Greek War of Independence. (Now, the fortress of Niokastro in Pylos exhibits excavated artefacts from the *Mentor* wreck, including Leake's theodolite.)

Leake concludes the journal on 25th October 1802, having arrived in the Gulf of Trieste. He was to return to Greece in 1804, continuing to author field notebooks every subsequent expedition. All but two were published by him during his long and scholarly retirement (1815–1860). It is hoped that this diary will feature in digital format, with accompanying maps and links to all the geographical and Classical points of interest Leake observes, on the 250th anniversary of his birth in 2027.

The Archivist thanks the following alumni for transcribing this volume: Helen Chapman, Saskia Bennett, Alison Deveson, Nicholas Langford, Andrew Makower, Sue Palmer, David Pashley, Joseph Spooner, George Watson, Richard Woff.

ANCIENT MEDICINE, NEW QUESTIONS

Serafina Cuomo, AG Leventis Professor of Greek Culture and Fellow, Darwin College

If I had to summarise my teaching philosophy, developed over years of being the 'ancient' person in a History of Science department, and later the 'science' person in a Classics department, it would be: making the familiar unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar familiar.

The object in figure 1, and others like it, are going to help me do just that. They will play a starring role in a course on ancient medicine for Part IB undergraduates which is launching in Lent Term 2026.

We do not know the exact circumstances of Tyche's condition and of her (one assumes successful) healing, but we do have evidence, both textual and material, that many people like her turned to the gods for help. From at least the classical period (it is mentioned in Aristophanes' *Wealth*) to the second century CE and beyond, with the orator Aelius Aristides writing about his wellness journey, guided by the god himself, in the excess of detail that the young today label TMI, Asklepian medicine would have been considered 'mainstream' by a majority of people. The main feature of the god's shrines around the Mediterranean, and there were many, was incubation: patients would travel to the temple complex, sleep within the precinct, and wait for the god or his manifestations (mostly snakes) to come to them in a dream, and either cure them directly or tell them what to do. Incubation was derided by some even in antiquity, and it seems quaintly absurd, if not downright superstitious, today. And yet, its ambiguous nature is what makes it good to teach with - what made Tyche consider herself cured? Why offer a body part (albeit not a real one) as votive gift? Was Asklepian medicine more accessible to women, the enslaved, the poor, than other healing practices?

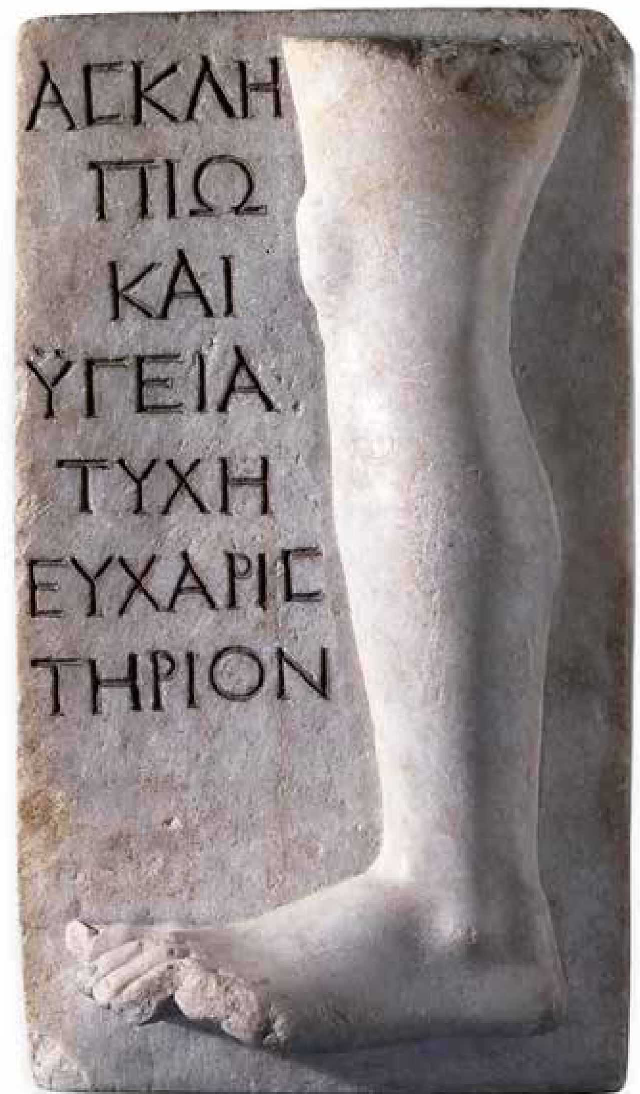


Fig. 1. Anatomical votive of a leg, dedicated by Tyche to Asklepios and the goddess of health Hygeia. Found at the shrine of Asklepios at Melos/Milo, an island in the Aegean better known for the eponymous statue of Venus, it has been dated to the first or second century CE.[1]

The *Ancient Medicine* course will not be about what the ancient medical practitioners got right or wrong in relation to modern medicine, but rather, how their own ideas about health, sickness, and the body were both innovative, and a product of their times, how they related to patients and viceversa, what the journey to health involved. The intersections of medicine and politics, and medicine and gender will be explored, but also how the relationship between doctor and patient was socially inflected, and how notions of health and sickness mutated over time. Through not just medical texts, but also tragedy and historical narratives, we will try to capture whether there were notions of mental illness, as distinct from illness of the body, and whether it carried the same stigma and moral undertones as it still does today. The aim is not to produce a teleological account, but to encourage the students to think about medical practice in a context where authority needed to be continually established, and where many alternative approaches were available and equally legitimate.

The heart of the course will be direct engagement with the primary sources, whether in translation, or, for those students with languages, in the original for what might well be their first taste of 'technical' specialised prose. We will also analyse some archaeological and visual evidence. Roman sites have turned up a good number of surgical instruments, for instance: the embodied and profoundly sensory dimension of healing will be thus highlighted. Archaeological evidence will also allow us to expand the range of possible answers to the question: who was a doctor? which will open and close the course.

The woman looking straight at the viewer in figure 2 is one possible answer to that question. Scribonia Attice was a midwife, married to someone who was probably a surgeon. In the world of third-century CE Ostia, she may have made the difference between life and death for many women and babies. The fact that she chose an image of her profession to greet visitors to her tomb speaks to her pride in her job, and to how medical practice was an important part of her sense of self.

Through ancient medicine then, questions can be asked beyond 'how close was it to our medicine', to include *their* notions of health, sickness, what theories the doctor's practices were grounded in, and, beyond that, questions about identity and lived experience. Hopefully, the students' curiosity will be tickled enough that they will ask even more questions than what I have thought of. Hopefully, a window into ancient medicine will both enhance their knowledge of the ancient world, and give them food for thought in reflecting on our own.

1. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1867-0508-117 [accessed 27June2025].
2. https://www.ostia-antica.org/museum-ostia/inv-5203.htm [accessed 27June2025].

Fig. 2. A clay plaque depicting a birthing scene, found at the entrance of a small tomb complex in Ostia, dated to the third century CE. The inscription found next to this relief explains that the deceased was Scribonia Attice, usually identified with the midwife in the image.[2]

Ancient Rome in the Public Eye

Shushma Malik, Assistant Professor of Classics and Onassis Classics Fellow, Newnham College

In June 2024, an email arrived in my inbox from the National Theatre in London asking if I'd like to contribute an article to the programme for their production of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, directed by Lyndsey Turner (September – November 2024, but still available to watch on 'National Theatre at Home'). It was the first time a theatre had asked me to contribute to a programme, and I was delighted but also nervous.

I had written for magazines before (for *History Today* on Nero, for *BBC History Magazine* on Nero, Marcus Aurelius, and the Roman Republic), but this piece meant engaging with a play that had stark political relevance, given its probing of issues of political representation, statehood, and statelessness – issues many countries still grapple with today. But that also made it one of the most rewarding pieces I've written for a public audience so far, and I'd recommend Turner's version of the play unreservedly.

More often, my public-facing work has relevance in a different kind of way – a new film set in Ancient Rome has been released, or a new work of historical fiction has been published. In the summer of 2024, I was very lucky to contribute to a couple of documentaries on the Colosseum (for Channel 5 and National Geographic), which anticipated the release of *Gladiator II* in November. While this work is very enjoyable (for both documentaries I was flown out to Italy to film), the 'talking head' role involves contributing short bits of content, such as when a monument was built, some relevant dates or events, and/or brief descriptions of what the sources make of a particular person. Understandably, given the format, it's not a venue for historians to make long-form arguments. For that, I've found radio shows and podcasts more satisfying.

Also last year, Conn Iggulden published a historical novel based on the early life of the emperor Nero. For BBC Radio 4's *Great Lives*, hosted by Matthew Parris, Conn chose Nero as his subject, and I was invited to contribute to the show as the historian. This was great fun – Conn had clearly done a great deal of research for his book, and we had a lively conversation as a result. Perhaps the most fun podcast I've participated in, however, is *You're Dead to Me*, hosted by Greg Jenner and broadcast on BBC Radio 4. The format involves a comedian and a historian discussing a particular topic or person – my episodes were on Julius Caesar and Cleopatra. While the historian (thankfully!) has time to prepare, the comedian only finds out the subject on the day of the recording, making their responses truly spontaneous. This is a hard format to pull off, but Greg is an excellent mediator. My favourite feature of the podcast is the section at the end where the historian is allowed to highlight the complexities of their subject – the 'nuance window'. This means the historian doesn't have to interrupt the flow of the comedy in the show, but they can also ensure the listening public knows that history does not always (if ever) comprise straightforward stories.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to receive invitations to bring aspects of my research to the wider public. The formats in which academics can engage with a general audience are varied, but I think it's always worthwhile (for me at least) if we can add something to people's awareness of the subject that challenges their existing preconceptions. This may not be possible every time, but I personally hope to do it more often as my experience grows.

Emily Gowers meets Helen Morales

Emily Gowers asked Helen Morales, now a Professor in Hellenic Studies at UC Santa Barbara and presenter of this year's Gray Lectures, about her time in Cambridge and what inspires her most recent work.

EG: What stands out for you about your time as a student at Cambridge?

HM: The thrill of having my eyes opened to new ways of thinking, the wonderful friendships I made, the fabulousness of my Director of Studies. And the number of times I fell off my bike. (Biking was not for me).

EG: When you returned to the Classics Faculty in 2001 as a lecturer, you and Mary Beard were the only women in university posts (Pat Easterling had just retired). That number has now grown to thirteen, and your own department at UC Santa Barbara is over half women. What difference does it make to have a critical mass of female colleagues?

HM: Well, there's less sexism for a start. And a better balance of work: if university guidelines say that every committee should have at least one woman on it, and there are only two of you, that's an awful lot of committee meetings to attend. But perhaps the most important thing is for students to be able to see people like them doing the job, and this means not just having a critical mass of women, but also women from different backgrounds (and the faculty still has some way to go here).

EG: You've written not just about ancient goddesses but about modern ones too, including Beyoncé and Dolly Parton. What makes a modern goddess?

HM: Above and beyond fabulousness?! Both Beyoncé and Dolly Parton are very knowing about their personae, and both construct their public images partly through ancient women, Beyoncé through the goddesses Oshun and Venus as well as the Virgin Mary, and Dolly through saints (for example, displaying the relics of her country home at Dollywood, much like saints' relics would have been displayed).

> "It's wonderful when students have let me know that *Antigone Rising* has made a difference to them and encouraged some who wouldn't otherwise have done so to study Classics."

EG: Your book *Antigone Rising* (2020) was a huge success, especially among student readers. How do you see your work on race and gender making a difference beyond academia?

HM: It's wonderful when students have let me know that *Antigone Rising* has made a difference to them and encouraged some who wouldn't otherwise have done so to study Classics. Beyond that, I tried to show in the book that Greek myths are used today in ways that uphold misogyny and racism, but they are also used to challenge those prejudices and imagine more liberatory futures, for example myths that chime with trans experiences, and modern adaptations of Antigone that represent collective action rather than martyrdom. The book discusses all sorts of issues, from politics to dieting, that affect all of us today, and explores the often surprising role of ancient myths in those issues.

EG: The Gray lectures you gave to us in the Faculty back in May were on visual art, the paintings of Harmonia Rosales and Firelei Báez. What first fired your interest in these artists?

HM: Some of the most interesting engagements with Greek and Roman antiquity and their relations with other cultural and mythological traditions are to be found in contemporary art. The pandemic shutdown made me miss seeing art in public spaces, so I planned to bring an exhibition of Rosales' art to Santa Barbara. I learned a lot about the connections between Greek and Yoruba mythologies.

EG: What work in our field is inspiring you at the moment?

HM: I'm most excited about the forthcoming publication of new translations of late Greek poetry, commissioned and edited by Tim Whitmarsh. It will make accessible poems written in Greek during the Roman Empire, some of the most fascinating literature that survives from antiquity.

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Exploring ANCIENT NORTH AFRICA

Josephine Crawley Quinn, Professor of Ancient History and Fellow and Director of Studies, St John's College.

The Maghreb attracts more tourists for its beaches than its archaeology, but Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco host some of the most interesting and impressive ancient sites in the Mediterranean. From busy ports to model colonies to monumental quarries, they reflect the rich history and heritage of the region.

It is well-known that Ancient North Africa experienced successive waves of colonial power and migration from overseas: Levantines, Greeks, Romans, and Vandals all made their mark before the arrival of Islam in the seventh century CE. But recent research has shown how much more there is to the picture, from the complexity of Iron Age indigenous communities revealed in excavations directed by Cambridge's Cyprian Broodbank in Morocco to the cosmopolitan nature of port cities like Tunisian Kerkouane, where aDNA evidence now suggests a significant Italian and Sicilian population.

Modern politics makes travel between North African countries difficult, so these are starting points for the exploration of three different modern states that contain much else of interest from all historical periods. Car (or driver) hire is the easiest way to get around Morocco and Tunisia; the latter also has an extensive system of buses, trains, and minivans that can get you to most sites if you aren't in a hurry. Independent travel in Algeria is difficult, and not recommended: the best options there are to join a group tour, or to arrange an escorted visit with a local travel agent who will also be able to help with the necessary visas.

Tunisia

1 Carthage

Just outside modern Tunis and easily reached by local commuter train, Punic Dido's Carthage was the biggest port and richest city in the western Mediterranean for many centuries before it was conquered by Rome in 146 BCE, and then rose to glory again as a Roman colony. A UNESCO project in the 1970s brought together different national missions to conduct their own excavations all over the ancient city, now preserved as bite-sized sites in and around a modern seaside suburb with excellent cafes and restaurants. Look out in particular for the port complex, excavated by Cambridge's Henry Hurst, the atmospheric Tophet sanctuary, the Punic Houses, and the Roman amphitheatre.

DOUGGA

2 Dougga

A remarkably well-preserved Roman city with local roots, ancient Dougga serves up everything from a tower monument from the era of the Numidian kings to a Punic Tophet sanctuary to a Roman forum, temples, and theatre seating 3500 people.

3 Bulla Regia

Beautiful Bulla was a royal city under the Numidians whose population also worshipped Punic gods. It is most famous however for its grand and unique Roman-era houses, built 'upside down' to avoid the sun with a subterranean atrium and reception level covered in mosaics.

4 Chemtou

The Numidian kings quarried their gorgeous pink and yellow marble ('giallo antico') close to Bulla at ancient Simitthu, marking the spot with a spectacular altar monument made from the same material. The town alongside the quarry is one of the oldest known in inland North Africa, with recent German excavations reaching the eighth century BCE, and the whole complex has one of the best museums in Tunisia.

CHEMTOU

Algeria

5 Tipasa

Forty miles west of Algiers, Tipasa is a beautiful ancient harbour town with Roman baths, a theatre, and an amphitheatre, a number of important early Christian buildings, and a stele erected in 1961 in honour of Albert Camus, who described the ruins in autobiographical writings.

TIPASA

6 The 'Tomb of the Christian Woman'

Visible on the horizon from Tipasa and just a few miles drive back along the inland road towards the capital is a magnificent tumulus burial monument associated with the Numidian kings who ruled the region during the early Roman principate. It was later misunderstood as a Christian monument due to the cross-shaped design on its giant false door.

TIMGAD

7 Timgad

One of the most impressive inland sites in Algeria, Timgad is a vast Roman colony nestled in the Aurès mountain range. It was founded by Trajan on a grid plan that has become – somewhat misleadingly – a model for the modern understanding of Roman colonial settlement.

Morocco

8 Lixus

One of the oldest Phoenician-speaking settlements in the Mediterranean, Lixus was occupied into the Islamic era, and provides an introduction to ancient Morocco in all periods. It's a stunning site with complex architecture overlooking a river running into the Atlantic.

9 Volubilis

Further south Volubilis boasts spectacular Roman public buildings – including a temple, a basilica, and a triumphal arch – which compete for attention with ancient houses with spectacular mosaics, as well as indigenous and Islamic monuments.

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Kara Rann
Senior Associate Director of Arts and Humanities
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