THE LANGUAGES OF FLOWERS
Plants, nature and humans in Vergil

LOVE AND THE SOUL: CUPID AND PSYCHE

BEAZLEY 50: FROM POT-PAINTERS TO PESHAWAR

THE RICH MAN AND THE TORTOISE
PHILOSOPHY IN A GREEK TEXT

SICILIAN EPIGRAPHY AT A DIGITAL CROSSROADS

FACULTY NEWS ACCESS & OUTREACH AWARDS
I hope this slightly de- layed newsletter finds you and yours well in these unusual times. When lockdown was imposed a week after Hilary term ended, the majority of our under- graduates had just gone or were going out of residence, and the Faculty had the Easter vacation to shift all teaching and supervision to remote operation, and to make adjustments to examining for finals. Still, many best-laid plans for undergraduate projects had to be revisited, the wait for final confirmation on modes of examining was trying, and for our graduate students the sudden closure of all libraries and the heightened sense of being alone with one’s thesis project posed particular challenges.

Our bridging course, led by Audrey Cahill. I am deeply grateful to the administrative team in the Ioannou Centre (Rosalind Thomas), and to the Outreach team, including the Outreach steering committee (Peter Jackson and Claire Kenward), for a project entitled ‘CHANGE: The development of the monetary economy of ancient Anatolia, c. 630–30 BC, and Jonathan Prag, for his project ‘Crossroads: text, materiality, and multiculturalism at the crossroads of the ancient Mediterranean’, which will offer the first coherent account of the interactions and interplay of linguistic and textual material culture in ancient Sicily over a period of 1,500 years. Sadly, as a consequence of Brexit this was the last time UK-based researchers could compete for ERC grants to be held at UK institutions, and there is no prospect of the scheme being replicated at the national level.

The necessary adaptations were made with efficiency, in a spirit of collegiality, and in a manner which minimised disruption for students was due to an enormous collective effort by the faculty and the sterling support from the administrative team in the Ioannou Centre led by Audrey Cahill. I am deeply grateful to all of these.

Outreach continued online, including remote open days and remotely conducted UNIQ summer schools. Our bridging course, led by Irene Lemos and Antonis Kotsonas, has been completely redesigned for 2020, to dovetail with the new University bridging scheme, Opportunity Oxford. We are most grateful to colleagues and partners who have enabled us to deliver the course in early September which features lectures from academics on a wide range of subjects. At the time of writing, this residential course had to be revisited, the wait for final confirmation on modes of examining was trying, and for our graduate students the sudden closure of all libraries and the heightened sense of being alone with one’s thesis project posed particular challenges.

Professor Sir Fergus Millar
5 July 1915 – 15 July 2019

Professor Sir Fergus Millar, Camden Professor of Ancient History from 1984 to 2002 died on 15 July 2019. Born in Edinburgh in 1915, after attending Edinburgh Academy and Loretto College, and national service (which he mostly spent learning Russian, with great pleasure), he read Literae Humaniores at Trinity College (1935–58). A Prize Fellow at All Souls College enabled him to undertake his doctorate on the historian Cassius Dio. He then became Fellow and tutor at the Queen’s College (1964–76) and Professor at University College London (1976–84) before returning to Oxford to take up the Camden Chair and a fellowship at Brasenose College. He served as president of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies and chairman of the council of the British School at Rome. He was elected Fellow of the British Academy in 1976 and knighted in 2003.

At Queen’s he was an inspiring tutor. His undergraduate pupils were never bludgeoned or hectored — we just had to listen and watch what he did — including those hours of assiduous reading and note-taking in the old Ashmolean Reading Room. During his time at Oxford he took pride and pleasure in creating a real community of postgraduates (in both Roman and Greek history), by organising seminars, hosting coffee sessions and taking a genuine and constructive interest in their diverse subjects of study. Though he did not shy away from intellectual controversy, intellectual differences and disagreements were never obstacles to friendship or collegial relations. His contribution to college life as a Professorial Fellow was manifested in the fact that he served for several years as Tutor for Graduates at Brasenose.

Fergus Millar was a very great historian, an inspiring role-model for all of us, and his work transformed the study of ancient history. For him, Rome’s empire was a vast and complex world, ultimately stretching from Newcastle upon Tyne to the Euphrates, with shifting borders, both defensible and permeable, and a rich tapestry of social and linguistic variety. The seeds of his distinctive multicultural approach to Roman imperial society can be found in an early publication of 1969, which focused on language and culture in Syria, and this theme was to run into another book on the Roman Near East, 31 BC—AD 337, based on lectures delivered in Harvard in 1987. Although this book, like all his publications, was firmly rooted in constant and meticulous reading and research in the libraries, his understanding of the variety and complexity of the late Roman and early Christian landscape in Syria and Jordan had been transformed by a visit to a tour of the major ancient sites such as Palmyra, Petra and Jerash (Gerasa) a few years before the Harvard lectures. He was fortunate to have done this before it became totally impossible. His work on Jewish history was also informed by frequent and close contact with Israeli scholars and visits to archaeological excavations in the field.

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One of Jasper Griffin’s pupils has described reading Homer on Life and Death as a teenager and feeling like Keats looking into Chapman’s Homer: suddenly the Iliad spoke to him. Many readers of this book will have had a similar experience: Jasper was a formidable scholar, but also eloquent and humane.

His command of Latin and Greek was phenomenal, but he wore his learning lightly. Although he regarded himself as a Hellenist, his work in Latin was equally important. So much in that Homer book is now taken for granted that younger readers may not appreciate its original impact. It was a novelty to treat the Iliad as the work of a great mind, as one would treat Dante or Milton (he had earlier famously and creatively entitled Homer ‘His Mind and Art’). This book is for everyone: so important that every scholar must read it, so lucid that any undergraduate can enjoy it.

His first article was also a blockbuster: ‘Augustan poetry and the life of luxury’. This argued that much in Augustan poetry that had been regarded as conventional, deriving from Hellenistic literature, was drawn from Roman reality. Even those who thought that he overstated his case acknowledged that he had changed the terms of debate. He collected this and other articles into Latin Poets and Roman Life (1985). One notices the recurrence of ‘life’ in his titles: because it illuminated human experience. He was also a master of popularisation, in the best sense: his little books Homer and Virgil, for the Oxford Past Masters series, are admirable introductions, written without condescension or jollying along. He treated his readers as though they were as cultivated as himself.

Ved Mehta’s Up at Oxford gives a vivid impression of Jasper’s undergraduate years at Balliol. He seemed to have arrived already fully formed, like Athena from the head of Zeus. The striking consistency of his life derives from that early maturity and two events of his early twenties. The first of these was his election to a fellowship at Balliol from his arrival as an undergraduate he spent his whole career there, apart from one graduate year at Harvard. The other was his singularly happy marriage to Minnion.

Jasper was Public Orator for 12 years, his Latin impeccably stylish. The Orator also gives an English speech. Jasper would tease the University’s grandees, sometimes going quite near the edge. He was amused when the German ambassador told him, ambiguously, ‘That is a speech which could not have been given in Germany’. He was genial, but with a touch of grand melancholy; in one of his books he declared that the tragic view of life was the most deeply true. But cheerfulness kept breaking in. Among other things, Jasper was fun. He was a brilliant teacher, loved and admired by generations of his students.

Richard Jankyns

Professor Donald Russell

13 October 1920 – 9 February 2020

When Donald Russell was at kindergarten, one of his reports said ‘Donald is a man of words and not deeds, and so is not good at gymastics’. Whatever the case with his gymnastics – and in his nineties he could still touch his toes – his feeling for words remained through his long life, together with a fascination with the thought that lay behind them.

The language skills were useful during the war, when he was a code-breaker at Bletchley Park concentrating on Japanese despatches. He recalled ‘one chap who was always writing about his expenses: his frequent use of “yer” gave an invaluable starting-point. He was my research assistant at Balliol after the war, and soon after finals he faced a choice: should he accept a permanent post in ancient philosophy at a Scottish university or stay in a time-limited research position in Oxford? The Master of Balliol, Sandy Lindsay, told him it was a choice of Heracles, but unfortunately did not make clear which was virtue and which was vice. He chose Oxford, and that determined his career.

In 1948 he was elected to the Fellowship at St John’s; his term of more than 70 years as a fellow is one of the longest in the college’s history: ‘You’ll all be right at St John’s’, said his tutor Russell Meigs. He was a good deal more than ‘all right’, and his pupils remember his tutorials with affection as well as awe; the St John’s classical society is now ‘the Russell Society’ in his honour.

He also supervised an unusual number of graduate students: including the present writer, and we know how much we owe him.

In 1967 he married Joy Dickinson, History Fellow at St Hugh’s, and as he put it ‘the gates of heaven opened for me’. They were a delight to visit, with joy the chatterbox and Donald smiling in pleasure; after her death in 1993 fresh flowers were always kept in his dining room in her memory.

His commentary on Longinus’ On the Sublime was published in 1964, his Plotinus in 1972, and his Criticism in Antiquity in 1981, there were many more books and articles too, more than half of them after his retirement in 1988 including his five-volume Loeb text of Quintilian (2001). He was busy to the end, teaching prose and verse until well into his nineties, and suggesting textual emendations that were greeted by collaborators with a ‘Bravo!’ or ‘Donald strikes again!’ When asked which books he might take into hospital for what was expected to be a short stay, he chose a few Oxford classical texts.

Christopher Pelling

Professor Jasper Griffin

29 May 1937 – 22 November 2019

The language skills were useful during the war, when he was giving a set of lectures provocatively entitled ‘Homer: His Mind and Art’. Alongside this, the poet’s presence in Latin poetry and here displaces the soft violet and colourful nectarious, a sharp-elbowed reminder of the precarious balance between nature as friend, and nature as foe.

Vergil was not a nature writer in the senses we might mean that nowadays, neither a Gilbert White nor a Robert Macfarlane, but his poetry encapsulates many of the concerns of ecologically engaged literature: of real and symbolic plants intertwine, how humans shape nature and how nature shapes us, how the plant world is at once sacred and profane, how nature is the seat of both primal fear and primal comfort. Vergil, in saying a lot about plants, also says a lot about humans.

Left: Fresco from Pompeii, House of the Orchard.
Right: Fresco from Pompeii, House of the Golden Bracelet, Garden Room.

There’s room for the language of flowers...

Rebecca Armstrong, Associate Professor in Classical Languages and Literature, Faculty of Classics, Mary Bennett Tutorial Fellow in Classics, St Hilda’s College

THE LANGUAGES OF FLOWERS

‘There’s room for the language of flowers...’

Professor Donald Russell

13 October 1920 – 9 February 2020

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Christopher Pelling
Consequently, with the help of a John Fell Fund grant from the University, from 2012 onwards I began an ambitious project to transform the private database into a full digital corpus using EpiDoc and published openly on the web – Sicily (http://sicily.classics.ox.ac.uk/ and https://sicily.org/). This provided the opportunity to begin restyling the inscriptions in Sicily. The process of publishing the inscriptions freely online in fact made this task easier: through the construction of a database of the museums and archaeological collections on the island (http://sicily.classics.ox.ac.uk/museums) the corpus could be made to generate up-to-date, free catalogues of the epigraphic collections of individual museums. The possibility of accessing such a resource in turn made collaboration extremely attractive to the museums themselves. Nonetheless, the scale of the undertaking (auto-parsing and encoding of several thousand inscriptions) was daunting, and new types of collaboration were needed.

The number of collaborators on the project (museums, students, colleagues, etc) keeps increasing, but the most successful collaboration to date was made possible by colleagues in Catania, together with the support of a Knowledge Exchange Fellowship from TORCH in 2016/17 (https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/ exploring-sicilian-epigraphy-in-sicilian-museums-with-sicilian-students). Students at the Liceo Artistico Statale M.M. Lazzaro, Catania, worked with Sicily, the Catania civic museum, and the Institute for Cognitive Sciences and Technologies (ISTC) at Catania to catalogue the collection of c.500 stone inscriptions in the museum and to prepare both the files for digital display and a permanent three-room exhibition at the museum, which opened in 2017 (see back page students of the Liceo Lazzaro at work in the basement of Catania museum). The school won the Italian Ministry of Education’s prize for the best work-experience project in Sicily, and the project was the basis for my being awarded the Vice Chancellor’s Innovation Award (Building Capacity) earlier this year. (https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/vice-chancellors-innovation-awards)

All of this has led to the foundations for a successful ERC application. The Crossreads project will build upon the Sicily corpus: a team of post-doctoral researchers will first work with me to complete the cataloguing of all types of inscription from across the island, including stamps and graffiti, and then a trio of post-docs, specialising in historical linguistics, palaeography and papyrologists will work to extend the data and the analysis in their respective areas using some of the latest digital tools.

The data is already being published freely on Zenodo (https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2556743) and the files are worked on openly in GitHub (https://github.com/JonPrag/Sicily). The data underlying the two charts in figures 2 and 3 is now available from ORAData (https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:a022c6c7-a5ad-4157-92ea-d302bf0a6e9e). At the end of the next five years we hope both that Sicilian epigraphic data will be accessible in ways I might never have imagined when I embarked on the doctorate 21 years ago; and that we will have been able to write a wholly new and novel cultural history of the island in antiquity.

Left: Fig. 1: Bilingual inscription (Greek/Latin), advertising production of inscriptions, marble, first century CE, Palermo, Museo Archeologico Regionale Antimomo Salinas, inv. 1374.

Stone inscriptions on Sicily, by language over time

Fig. 2: Distribution over time of inscriptions on stone from ancient Sicily across the three main languages (data as of 2016).

Non-funerary inscriptions (Latin)

Fig. 3: Distribution of non-funerary inscriptions in Latin on stone (data as of 2016).

In the years that followed, I was able to exploit this private database to great effect: the lack of any comparable resource gave me something of a monopoly on this aspect of Sicilian studies and enabled me to contribute to a number of larger projects on epigraphy and the Roman empire. Over time, however, two things have changed, and with them my own approach. The first is the development in the last two decades of an increasingly standardised international format for the digital encoding of inscriptions (in other words, the possibility of systematically encoding epigraphic texts in a way which a computer can easily be programmed to read and analyse) – the EpiDoc schema, based upon the XML format of the Text Encoding Initiative (https://sourceforge.net/p/epidoc/wiki/Home/). In my original database I left out the texts themselves, partly due to a lack of time, and partly because of the difficulty of putting fragmentary texts in multiple languages into a database. EpiDoc offers a powerful method of including the text, as well as all the data about the text, at a level comparable to a full epigraphic edition but in a way that a computer can process, making the edition publishable in digital format and simultaneously enabling all the sorts of analysis for which one might use a database. The second is the rapidly increasing recognition in the last decade of the importance of open access to data (often referred to as ‘open science’ or ‘open scholarship’). The latter point highlights a major problem posed by the creation and maintenance of a personal database of the sort described above: the data upon which my various published studies are based is not actually available to, or checkable by, anyone, and there is a very high chance that that data (and all the work that went into it) will in the end be lost. The approach is of course typical of the lone humanities scholar, but that does not make it a good thing, and indeed the more one thinks about it, the worse it seems.

Crossreads has had a very long gestation – its origins lie in a chapter of my PhD, lying at the crossroads of the ancient Mediterranean, coloured by both Phoenicians and Greeks, and repeatedly invaded by outsiders. The island offers a particularly interesting case study for cultural interactions (to use Caramani’s term) and questions of identity. Or, as the Prince of Salina famously put it in L’Agguato (Il Gattopardo), there is a very high chance that that data (and all the work that went into it) will in the end be lost. The approach is of course typical of the lone humanities scholar; but the more one thinks about it, the worse it seems. Indeed the more one thinks about it, the worse it seems.

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Crossreads has had a very long gestation – its origins lie in a chapter of my PhD, which started life as a poster at the Roman Archaeology Conference in Glasgow in April 2001. The significance of this lies in the lessons to be learned in tracing the evolution of the project from a crude poster, based upon ten years of data taken from the print editions of Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum and L’Année Epigraphique, to a major European-funded digital corpus project. At the same time, the project offers an excellent example of the value of internal pump-priming, since the key advance in the project’s development came from a John Fell Fund grant from the University in 2012.

As a doctoral student, interested in questions of local and regional identity in the face of Roman imperial expansion, focused upon the case of Sicily, it seemed like a worthwhile exercise to undertake a survey of the epigraphic culture of ancient Sicily. Lying at the crossroads of the ancient Mediterranean, coloured by both Phoenicians and Greeks, and repeatedly invaded by outsiders. The island offers a particularly interesting case study for cultural interactions (to use a falsely neutral term) and questions of identity. Or, as the Prince of Salina famously put it in L’Agguato (Il Gattopardo), many of the epigraphic culture of ancient Sicily, lying at the crossroads of the ancient Mediterranean, coloured by both Phoenicians and Greeks, and repeatedly invaded by outsiders.

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Over the last few years I have been working on a study of the reception of the long two-book love story of Cupid (Amor or ‘Love’ in Latin) and Psyche (‘Soul’ in Greek) in European literature since the time of Shakespeare. Cupid and Psyche (C&P henceforward) forms the centrepiece of the Latin novel Metamorphoses or The Golden Ass (c. 160 BC) by the Roman writer Apuleius, on whom I have written two previous volumes, one a general account of the author and another which looks at the literary texture of the Metamorphoses. This current research is aimed at a third book to complete the series with a reception study, a joint enterprise with another Apuleian scholar, Regine Mayer, Associate Professor at the University of Leeds (an Oxford DPhil).

Apuleius’ tale narrates how the beautiful princess Psyche gains the enmity of Venus but the love of Venus’ son Cupid, and how after a series of tribulations and adventures (involving jealous sisters, a husband of mysterious identity, a dramatic revelation scene, cursed speaking objects and animals, and an epic-style journey to the Underworld) Cupid and Psyche are united in happy marriage and Psyche becomes a goddess. The story enjoyed an extraordinarily rich reception through the five centuries from the rediscovery of Apuleius’ novel in the Renaissance to the present day. Our project ranges across the literary genres in English, French, Italian, German and Dutch, encompassing poetry and drama as well as prose fiction, with occasional glances at opera, film and the visual arts.

This is the first full scholarly study which takes up the key question of the story’s relationship to the development of the modern fairy-tale, which it obviously resembles in its fantastic elements and happy ending. Illustrations of C&P in the period since Shakespeare are also legion, as they had been in the Renaissance. The story of Cupid and Psyche in La Fontaine’s version became the subject of a celebrated series of high-art Empire wallpapers by Dufour (Paris) in 1816, while William Morris’ extensive poetic treatment in the quasi-Chaucerian The Earthly Paradise (1868–70) led to a considerable number of artworks by Edward Burne-Jones; the two projected an illustrated edition for the beautiful Kelmscott Press which never emerged, but some of the illustrations survive alongside a number of important Burne-Jones paintings of the Psyche story, many now in UK and US public galleries.

C&P was also an object of fascination to the Decadent writers at the end of the nineteenth century, who saw Apuleius as late and mannered like themselves; Monus The Epicurean, the 1883 historical novel by Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde’s Oxford tutor, contains a famous version of the story narrated by Apuleius as a fictional character, a version which had an impact on Wilde’s early fairy stories. More recent receptions include a 1944 radio play by Louis MacNeice, a 1956 fantasy novel by C.S. Lewis (The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe) and elements in A.S. Byatt’s 1990 Booker-winning novel Possession.

This gives only a small taste of the rich material available. There is far too much for a single volume, Regine and I have just co-edited a multi-author conference book which contains more than 20 essays as part of the project (Cupid and Psyche: The Reception of Apuleius’ Love Story since 1600, De Gruyter, 2020), and our joint monograph covers only some highlights, points to a fascinating feature shown in her excellent selection. We hope to finish it in the next year or two. This should be easier for me as in October I am stepping down as an Oxford tutor after more than three decades, as in October I am stepping down as an Oxford tutor after more than three decades, with Emma Watson.

Opposite page: Cupid meets Psyche – Herbert Grasseille Fell, 1926.

Top: The sea listens to the tale of Cupid and Psyche. Detail from a plate by the ‘Master of the Die’, published 1545.

Bottom: Cupid and Psyche, Edward Burne-Jones, c. 1870.
Early in 1965 the University completed the purchase of the archive intended to secure Oxford’s position as a world centre for the study of ancient Greek painted pottery. The photographs and papers of Professor Sir John Beazley, who was then 80 years old, would remain in his possession during his lifetime but came into the care of the Classics Faculty when he died in 1970. Beazley was the foremost expert on Greek vase-painting. Over a 60-year career he devoted himself almost single-mindedly to the effort of attributing vases to (usually anonymous) potters and painters through close observation of their stylistic traits. It was a distinctive method of connoisseurship which transformed the discipline. Today Beazley’s attributions remain the underpinning of this subject, even for sceptics, and what may often appear as a rather dry exercise in classification retains its immense potential for the understanding of Greek art in its social and economic contexts. It offers something unique in the history of ancient art: the opportunity to look at a 300-year art tradition at the level of individuals, interacting with each other and responding to their markets.

When Beazley died 50 years ago, his archive was moved into the basement of the Ashmolean Museum and was expanded and organised under the care of Donna Kurtz. Beazley’s work was first complemented and then absorbed by an electronic database in 1979. Professor Kurtz’s work was a pioneering project within digital humanities, and in 1998 the World Wide Web provided the perfect virtual environment for the Beazley Archive to flourish. The physical archive continues to be visited by researchers from all over the world – with more than 100,000 mounted photographs it is the world’s biggest image-archive of Greek ceramics – but its digital extension online allows it to reach a huge audience of all kinds across the world. Moreover, the Beazley Archive Pottery Database (BAPD) is a powerful tool for analysing ancient pottery, particularly the vast body of visual evidence provided by the pots painted in Athens between the sixth and fourth centuries BC. With 120,000 records, the majority illustrated by high-resolution photographs, the BAPD is the single most important resource anywhere for the study of Greek vases (and we are delighted that it has continued to serve this role unhindered by lockdown).

But Beazley’s legacy was not limited to pottery. He himself had wide art-historical interests. His small, personal collection of antiquities, now in the Ashmolean Museum, included Gandharan Buddhist heads and mummy-portraits from Roman Egypt, and his archives included tens of thousands of casts and replicas of ancient and neoclassical engraved gems (perhaps the most important ‘minor’ art form of classical antiquity). The archive, which has gradually grown to include papers of other archaeologists, contains often surprising treasures: from documentation of Chinese antiquities to Byzantine archaology, from Greek sculpture to the lives of the 20th-century writers and artists in Sir John and Lady Beazley’s circle (including her son-in-law, the poet Louis MacNeice).

With the construction of the Ioannou Centre as a new base for Oxford Classics in 2007, the Beazley Archive moved into a specially designed suite of rooms on the top floor. It was given a new, overarching name – the Classical Art Research Centre (CARC) – to describe its expanding range of activity, including research projects on ancient gems, new digital projects and resources for the study of ancient art. Beazley’s archive remains at the heart of CARC’s work but, boosted by £650,000 in grants from the Monument Trust between 2010 and 2015, we have evolved into a more proactive centre for carrying out, supporting and stimulating fresh research on many different aspects of the ancient world of art. CARC’s operations are truly international. Our website receives nearly six million ‘page views’ from 150,000 users each year (www.carc.ox.ac.uk).

A particular emphasis is placed on galvanising research in strategically important or neglected fields, even beyond Oxford. For example, an annual workshop on ancient world art: from Gandhara Connections to Ancient Art Connections. This will present Greek and Roman art in their complex global contexts, not as isolated Mediterranean cultures. We will expand the BAPD and our other online databases, embracing the highest technical standards in linked open data, so that the information generated by CARC’s research becomes as accessible and dynamic as possible. We will relaunch our refreshed website and build upon our past work on ancient gems and gem-collecting. And we will increase our activities to help researchers across the world cooperate in looking at classical art in fresh ways. All of this depends on the generosity of our philanthropic donors, and we very much appreciate the help and advice of the Oxford classical community as we expand our network of supporters.

Opposite page top: The young John Beazley.
Below: CARC’s online audience in 2019–20 (Source: Google Analytics).
This page left to right from top: Sir John Beazley studying Greek pottery in Ferrara, 1936. Photo: N Aliferis.
An Oxford student studying an ancient Athenian wine-cup in CARC’s study-room. Photo: E Soffe.
Drawings of a Greek vase in one of John Beazley’s earliest notebooks, dated 1897. CARC’s Beazley Notebooks Project digitised the whole collection for online consultation.
Dr Claudia Wagner leads a workshop on gem research skills at CARC.
CARC’s study-room on the top floor of the Ioannou Centre in Oxford. The blue boxes house part of the Beazley Archive.
An extraordinary late fifth-century BC gem with the image of a grapple-thrower or cricket, now in the Paul Getty Museum. It was first published within the Sangiorgi Collection by CARC’s gem researchers, Professor Sir John Boardman and Dr Claudia Wagner.
A vase record from the Beazley Archive Pottery Database (BAPD).
THE RICH MAN AND THE TORTOISE: SOME PHILOSOPHY IN A GREEK GRAMMATICAL TEXT

The topic appears to be the disadvantages of wealth; the source might well be a philosophical text of some sort. The transcribed text runs something like this:

For why (πρός τι) does one who is said to be fortunate console himself for life by looking at his wealth? But this man is oppressed by the two most difficult things, impuity and bad judgement, inasmuch as . . . always spending time with the worst sort of people. When . . . (nonsensical string of letters δηψυχηψοφησικα) . . . becomes to his friends. . . who duck inside concealing their need/poverty/use.

We debated various questions: the worst sort of people, the same group as the 'friends'? How does the tortoise come in? Who ducks inside what? What is being concealed? How should the text be emended, and what lies behind δηψυχηψοφησικα? The late Donald Russell had shown us how the whole paragraph might conceivably be emended to make sense, with the rich man getting damaged by spending time with the worst sort of people. Whenever there is the slightest disturbance (δαιμον θυμησι) he retreats like a tortoise under its shell, concealing his ability to help his friends. This was tempting the tortoise as the stereotype of unsociability appears in one of Aesop's fables, in which Zeus invites all the animals to his wedding and the tortoise fails to arrive. But Niels had a tempting emendation too, making the rich man a shelter to his friends like the tortoise's shell to the tortoise. And he kept wanting δηψυχηψοφησικα to contain the word ψοφή 'soul': was the rich man's soul weighed down by worldly things, like a tortoise by its shell?

'Could we go and find out?' said Jikke.

'What do you mean?' I said.

'If you go into your Teams calendar, you can scroll backwards and go into meetings which have already happened!'

Bob's face lit up. 'Let's go!' he said. Niels and I exchanged baffled looks. But soon we were scrolling back through our calendars, past the comments, emojis, and assorted droppings from last week’s and last month’s meetings. Before long, a kaleidoscope of half-remembered objects flew past – a cassette player, a ghost note, an easy reader from primary school. The electricity went off and cut me out of the call, then came back on; a man with a hula hoop whirled past.

'How are we going to find the answer to our question?' I asked. 'We don’t know who wrote our treatise. We just know that it comes from somewhere in the Byzantine world, no later than the ninth century AD. Finding the author will be like finding a needle in a haystack. Or worse.'

'Shall we start with John Philoponus?' said Jikke. There was a chance that our treatise was ultimately based on a lost work by this philosopher and grammarian.

'Sixth-century Alexandrian' said Bob. 'Archaeologists have found a whole complex of lecture rooms there.'

'Can we get to Alexandria?' I asked. 'Once we’re in the sixth-century?' Jikke explained how to go into Settings and change our

locations. Soon we were standing in front of the impressive complex.

A doorkeeper waved to us, and I attempted to ask if he knew John Philoponus. But there was no hope of making myself understood. Niels tried next, drawing on his command of modern Greek. Soon the normally mild-mannered Niels appeared to be in a furious argument, and then the doorkeeper disappeared inside.

What was that about? I asked.

He says John is inside and Bob and I may enter,' explained Niels, 'and that the womenfolk might like to explore the gardens. I said you and Jikke were our colleagues, not “womenfolk”, and that you were coming in with us. He says he has to check with his boss.'

I wondered if Niels had done the right thing in insisting on principles here. After centuries of travel it would be such a pity if none of us got to meet John.

'There’s no point painting the past', said Bob as if he could read my thoughts, ‘unless you do your bit to make it a better place in the event that you actually get there.'

Before I’d had time to think about this, the doorkeeper reappeared with a smile. ‘We treat everyone who wants to learn the same,’ he said. ‘Do come inside.’

We were shown into a packed lecture room. John himself was on the imposing teacher’s chair, and there was a student on a little podium – the hot seat – apparently being put through his paces.

Captivated, we observed proceedings until John motioned to us: would one of us like a turn in the hot seat? Niels explained that it was our first day at the school and we were not really ready to perform. But we would welcome a chance to talk to the teacher for the lesson.

Graciously, John agreed. We showed him the treatise we were working on, and asked if it reminded him of any work of his.

‘That’s rather a sore subject,’ said John. ‘I prefer to be known for my philosophy, but I teach grammar to make ends meet.’

Did the passage about the tortoise ring any bells?

‘Not really,’ he said. ‘But you might have put the wrong accent on the second word.’

‘Tell us more,’ I said, starting to pick up a passable pronunciation. ‘I thought interrogative έτοι always has an acute?’

‘So it does. But are you sure you’ve got interrogative έτοι? You take πρός έτοι to mean “Why?”; and that’s possible. But πρός έτοι would mean “relative to something”, “relatively speaking”’. Philosophers like to discuss how some things are true only in relative terms. For example, elephants are big πρός τι me – big relative to horses, but small relative to mountains. Your author might be saying that relatively speaking, rich people do alright. But only relatively speaking, because there are disadvantages too. I don’t know if that’s right, but it’s worth being aware of words that differ in accentuation.’

‘You read your treatise on that?’ I said.

‘Please don’t mention my grammatical works,’ he said.

‘What might the disadvantages of wealth be?’ asked Jikke, also picking up a passable pronunciation.

‘I’m afraid I wouldn’t know,’ said John. ‘That’s why I’ve got to teach accents and so on.’

‘So’, said Jonathan Prag,chairing, ‘I think that’s passed nem con, and that brings us to the end of today’s meeting.’
The Access and Outreach Programme has had an exciting year evolving and adapting to the challenges faced in the wake of the pandemic. Our projects and events have been transformed into online offerings which have been well received by our target audience. We are particularly proud of our team for their efforts in creating exciting and accessible digital options.

OxLat – a speedy response keeps Latin alive

OxLat – our scheme offering Latin GCSE provision to state school students – continues to thrive thanks to the generosity of the Stonehouse Foundation. This scheme offers free tuition on Saturday mornings for 30 students from state schools in Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire who would not otherwise have the opportunity to study Latin. Our current cohort are halfway through the course and expect to take the GCSE exam in summer 2021.

This year we were delighted to welcome two new Latin instructors, Charlotte Causer and Elena Vacca, who together with scheme coordinator, Emma Searle, made an exceptionally swift response to lockdown: every lesson since 14 March has been conducted online. The students enjoyed engaging with the course in this way and were happy to have a little bit of their usual weekend routine continue through lockdown. Read more about this transition to remote teaching at www.humanities.ox.ac.uk/article/state-schools-latin.

Elena Vacca teaching OxLat during the lockdown.

FIRST ONLINE OPEN DAYS

Welcoming and informing potential undergraduates

More than 1,500 potential applicants, parents, and teachers from all over the world joined us for our first Virtual Open Days in July. Our team of tutors and student ambassadors answered hundreds of questions in live Q&A including: Is it better to go to a college with a big Classics cohort or a smaller one? Is there a year abroad? What differentiates Classics at Oxford from Classics at Cambridge? And many more!

Virtual visitors also engaged with talks on admissions, interviews and Classical Reception, and a taster lecture challenging the idolisation of white marble: ‘The Colour of White: When did Greek Statues Become White?’

The success of the event was down to our student ambassadors – Clementine, Alice, Harry, Fathya, Rachel and AJ – and our speakers – Llewelyn Morgan, Maria Stamatopoulou, Khannan Ash, Arlene Holmes-Henderson, Melena Meili and Claire Barnes.

Running a Virtual Open Day from our homes.

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Elena Vacca teaching OxLat during the lockdown.

APPLICATION PREPARATION DAY

In collaboration with Worcester College, the faculty is supporting a Classics Application Preparation Day for state school students who intend to apply to Oxford this autumn. This one-day digital event takes Year 13 students through each stage of the application process, offering advice, support and the chance to practice various aspects of the admissions tests and interviews.

Course directors Barnaby Taylor, Dominic Dalglish and Marchella Ward were instrumental in the design and delivery of these exciting programmes. Themes included: Death, Burial and Memory; Identity in Greek Tragedy; and Social Mobility in the Late Republic; as well as taster sessions in Greek and Latin.

We encourage Year 11s who are studying at state schools to consider applying for UNIQ next year. Future applicants can apply between December and January for the 2022 course.

uniq.ox.ac.uk

UNIQ

Classical Archaeology, Rome and Greece go virtual

UNIQ is Oxford’s summer school series for state school students in Year 12. Usually involving a residential stay, this year’s offering, of course, moved online. The Faculty of Classics ran three courses this year, focusing on Classical Archaeology, Ancient Greece, and Ancient Rome. As well as engaging challenging academic activities, participants had the opportunity to get to know each other, meet student ambassadors, learn how to put together a strong application and above all, feel inspired and confident to apply to Oxford.

Application Preparation Day with Marchella Ward.

Application Preparation Day

In collaboration with Worcester and Corpus Christi Colleges, the faculty supported a free six-part university preparation programme for Year 12 students at state schools in the North West of England, Yorkshire and the Humber. Participants joined Oxford academics in thinking through some of the modern world’s biggest questions – by looking back to the ancient world.

Greenhead College in Huddersfield, where the programme took place, has been inspired to add Classics A-level to their curriculum, and the programme is set to welcome another 60 students in the forthcoming academic year.

WORKING COLLABORATIVELY WITH MODERN LANGUAGES

In July 2020, Arlene Holmes-Henderson participated in a national initiative to boost the teaching of (Modern) languages in schools. Funded by the British Academy, it provides specialist training to early-career researchers enabling them to share their research in an accessible way for school students, and connects them with teachers, national providers and policy bodies to share best practice for research-based engagement. Arlene provided insight from the many classics education outreach projects which she has led, and will work together with colleagues in modern languages to explore how classics and modern linguists might work more closely on outreach and engagement in future.

mloewe.wordpress.com

ANCIENT WORLDS PROGRAMME / BEING HUMAN: ANCIENT AND MODERN PERSPECTIVES ON HUMANITY

Inspiring young classicists in the North West

In collaboration with Worcester and Corpus Christi Colleges, the faculty supported a free six-part university preparation programme for Year 12 students at state schools in the North West of England, Yorkshire and the Humber. Participants joined Oxford academics in thinking through some of the modern world’s biggest questions – by looking back to the ancient world.

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WORLKDAYS ACROSS THE GLOBE

Mobility in the Late Republic; as well as Social Mobility in the Late Republic; as well as Social Mobility in the Late Republic.

OPPORTUNITY OXFORD AND THE CLASSICS BRIDGING PROGRAMME

Getting settled in Oxford

Our bridging course, which enabled 25 state-educated offer holders to have a head start to their course, by arriving at Oxford in week -1 of Michaelmas Term continued in 2019. This year the faculty is expanding its bridging course and is also participating in Opportunity Oxford, a University-wide bridging programme, specifically for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/increasing-access/opportunity-oxford

APGRD RESEARCHERS LAUNCH E-BOOKS WHICH SUPPORT CLASSICS IN SCHOOLS

The Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD) has released two interactive iBooks on the performance histories of Medea and the Agamemnon. Freely accessible as iBooks, they support the learning and teaching of Classical Greek and Classical Civilisation in schools and sixth-form colleges.

The iBooks draw on a unique collection of archival material and research at the APGRD and beyond. They use images, film, bespoke interviews with creative practitioners and academics, and digital objects to tell the story of plays that have inspired countless interpretations onstage and onscreen, in dance, drama, and opera across the globe, from antiquity to the present day.

apgrd.ox.ac.uk/ebooks

THE OUTREACH TEAM

Outreach Committee:

Develops and implements the outreach programme.

Maria Stamatopoulou, Tobias Reinhardt, Llewelyn Morgan, Khannan Ash, Arlene Holmes-Henderson, Audrey CahiL

School Liaison Officer

Maria Stamatopoulou manages the planning, coordination, and delivery of the faculty’s outreach and access initiatives for schools, colleges, and prospective applicants.

Research Fellow

Arlene Holmes-Henderson provides strategic advice and operational support. Arlene represents the faculty on collaborative Oxford Humanities projects and is a member of the Africa-Oxford Initiative’s steering group.

Outreach Officer

Edith Johnson provides administrative support for the team, rallies student volunteers for events, organises open days and runs our social media. If you want to get involved, please email outreach@classics.ox.ac.uk.

Dominic Dalglish delivers the ‘Being Human’ Course in Manchester.

Classics handling session.

Clare Holmes-Henderson gave a talk on ‘Wisdom’ and ‘Understanding’ in Greek and Roman Drama.

Clare Holmes-Henderson gives a talk on ‘Wisdom’ and ‘Understanding’ in Greek and Roman Drama.
I.SICILY WINS VICE-CHANCELLOR'S INNOVATION AWARD

Jonathan Prag won the Building Capacity category in the Vice-Chancellor’s Innovation Awards 2020 for his work on the I.Sicily project: enabling access to ancient Sicilian inscriptions. He worked with more than 100 school children in Catania to locate, record, and photograph over 500 inscriptions, and to transfer those records into digital format. The children then participated in the selection and conservation of material, and the design and construction of a new permanent exhibition. The open access corpus (I.Sicily) makes the material accessible to the wider public.

CLASSICS IN COMMUNITIES WINS VICE-CHANCELLOR'S EDUCATION AWARD

The Vice-Chancellor’s Education Awards celebrate high-quality education across the University – recognising new and innovative approaches to teaching.

We are proud to announce that the Classics in Communities research project, based in the Faculty of Classics and led by Arlene Holmes-Henderson, is one of only five projects across the University recognised with this award in 2020.

Classics in Communities promotes and encourages the teaching of Latin and Ancient Greek at primary and early secondary level in UK state schools. Bringing together primary, secondary, and HE level teachers, the project helps to create and develop sustainable networks of educators committed to sharing their knowledge and expertise.

classicsincommunities.org

Inset image: Arlene Holmes-Henderson with her book Forward With Classics
https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/forward-with-classics-9781474295956/