

CLASSICS WITH YEAR ABROAD

Greek and Latin has always been an international department, both in its staff and in its students, and in a new development from 2003-04 we are introducing a four-year BA in Classics with a Year Abroad, which will give some of our students the option of spending their third year at a university in Italy, Greece, France, Germany, or other countries. Our research strength was underlined in our recent ranking by HEFCE as a double 5*-rated department: we were one of the seven in UCL (three of them in the humanities) who had obtained the highest research assessment ranking in both 1996 and 2001. Our students are taught by internationally recognised experts: we believe strongly that the best teaching is informed by the best research. But our size (about 150 students, undergraduate and graduate) means that we also maintain an informal, friendly environment – at least that is what our students tell us!

Gerard O'Daly, Head of Department

THE STING



Much has happened since Robert Ireland advertised Aristophanes' *Frogs* in our first Newsletter two years ago. *Frogs*, indeed, is said to be the greatest of all our department's annual plays. To judge from the quality of its production team and the programme, it was a most professional affair. And last year, we successfully performed *Agamemnon*.

It is the *Frogs*' impressiveness and *Agamemnon*'s success that the production team and cast strove for in March, when we performed Aristophanes' *Wasps*. From all non-biased accounts, our achievement was near or equal to *Frogs*'. We did indeed have some buzzing audiences! With a significantly bastardised (bear in mind I'm using politer language regarding this than the cast would have used) form of the Penguin translation (e.g. "those flippin' dogs") and a mere month to rehearse, I, at least, feel that it was some accomplishment. Whether it was the self-closing doors using a Greek-type mechanism, the slow-punctured blow-up doll or the madness of the bows on the second-last night, everything worked in the end. Alex Trippier, our most experienced actor, was brilliant as Procleon and alas, we now say goodbye to him and I wish him well in his acting career.

Our audiences loved the *Wasps*. School children who have studied the text went away with a better understanding and more enthusiasm. Classicists and Ancient Historians got the political jokes. And everyone else had a laugh at the apparent shallow vulgarity – we were only conveying the tone of the Greek! Just as the Bank of Ruritania's heraldic device still remains in our common room, so too the wasp stings have assumed their place there. One more play completed. Something missing from our lives now. It was fantastic. I can only hope that we've encouraged one or two pupils to decide to study Classics.

The question then arises of what to do next. How can we possibly equal past performances? Perhaps this should not be our goal – perhaps we should merely seek to enjoy the play and let our hitherto wonderful audiences continue loving the performances. Ideas include another Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, *Plautus* or *Terence*, or Euripides' *Alcestis*. In any case, I can happily assure you all, perhaps having seen our plays and wishing to see another: a production team is already forming for next year!

Sam Rice, Producer of *Wasps*, First-year Classicist

WORK AND PLAY

My interest in the theatre stemmed from an early age. At school I would always involve myself in the latest productions, and by the time I left, I knew for certain that I wanted a career in the theatre.

Following a gap year working at my local repertory theatre, I came to UCL to study Classics. The degree programme I found enjoyable, but for me it was the annual Classics play which held the greater attraction! I became involved with these plays for the three years I was studying at UCL, firstly as sound operator, then as the Assistant Director, and finally (my ultimate goal), the Director. With a fantastic cast and crew, we managed to pull off the most financially successful Classics play at UCL.

To be one of those responsible for developing a production from its bare bones to the final performance is a most satisfying feeling; although, to be honest, there were times when it felt like everything was conspiring against us and the show would never be ready.

This experience is one which I consider extremely important and influential in terms of my future career. The plays I was involved with were always enjoyable and at the same time, I feel, without such experience I would not have gained a place at RADA. Not to have shared in the excitement of producing live theatre and the opportunity of working in the Bloomsbury Theatre with professional technicians is inconceivable to me.

I will always be grateful to the department of Greek and Latin for offering me this opportunity and for confirming my aspirations to become, one day, a theatre director.

Lucy Summers, UCL 1998–2001

THE OTTO SKUTSCH LIBRARY

Thanks to the generosity of his heirs, the department has acquired more than a thousand books and monographs, together with many hundreds of offprints from learned journals, from the library of Otto Skutsch, Professor of Latin from 1951 to 1972. All who remember his awesome but affable presence in the department will be pleased that his kindness, humour and international distinction as a scholar are to be perpetuated by such a munificent gift.

The books and papers are now housed in the eponymous 'Otto Skutsch Room' and will form an invaluable research collection for future Latin scholarship, especially in the field of early Roman literature which he dominated during his lifetime. Some basic sorting and cataloguing has already been carried out, and the library is now to be put on a proper professional footing by Anne-Marie Eze, a recent graduate of the department and a qualified librarian. Any contributions from alumni towards this project, or towards filling gaps in the collection, will of course be gratefully received. It is good to think that students still to come to UCL will be able to benefit from Otto's tremendous learning (and his sometimes acerbic marginalia), even though he is no longer here to correct their scansion with a scowl followed immediately by an angelic smile.

Alan Griffiths, Senior Lecturer, Greek and Latin

DEMOCRACY RULES, OK

'Democracy may have worked for a little village like Athens, but I am not sure that it works in the complex environment that we are operating in today'.

Sir Derek Roberts, provost of UCL

The Guardian Education, April 1, 2003, p. 12

Let's see.

- The population of Athens at its peak has been variously estimated as somewhere in the range of 150,000-250,000. The UCL website describes us as a 'community of 24,500 staff and students' (though the official figures for 2001/2 add up to 26,193).
- Athens' smallest administrative unit was the deme, of which there were 139. UCL has 72 departments.
- Athens ruled up to 250 restive subject states; UCL boasts 150 external research links.
- The Athenian budget included up to 8.4 million drachmas from imperial tribute alone, which on the basis of a comparison of the average wage of a skilled worker translates into about £840 million. UCL's financial statement for last year gives our total income as £430 million (but we could just about have matched Athens' imperial tribute with Imperial College's contribution if the proposed merger had gone ahead).
- Athens at the height of its prosperity had a surplus of 60 million drachmas, or £6 billion. UCL last year ran a considerable deficit.

Sir Derek may have got his ancient history wrong, or possibly his maths, but he can take comfort in the thought that similar doubts about democracy were expressed by many illustrious Athenian intellectuals and statesmen - every time a democratic decision went against them.

Hans van Wees, Reader, Ancient History

ATHENS OF THE NORTH



The annual conference of the Classical Association was in 2002 held jointly with its senior sibling, the Classical Association of

Scotland, in the University of Edinburgh,

and a five-strong contingent of UCL classicists was in attendance (Susan Beresford, John-Michel Hulls, Anne-Marie Eze, David Leith and myself). As those who had experienced previous CA events expected, the conference was characterised by a pleasant combination of festive sociability and stimulating encounters with new ideas, presented both by established scholars and 'big names' and by graduate students from the UK and elsewhere. The standard of papers seemed to me mostly (but by no means uniformly) extremely high. Again as in previous CA events, the atmosphere was cheerful and unintimidating, and I think that everybody enjoyed the opportunity to meet fellow classicists in a relaxed environment.

For me, highlights among the papers were M.E. Wright (Exeter) on the question of the relationship of Euripides' *Helen* to Stesichorus' putative Helen 'palinode', Roger Rees (Edinburgh) in a spirited paper arguing against the notion of Virgil's 'taciturn' Aeneas, and Marco Fantuzzi on the relationship between Callimachus' 'literary' sepulchral epigrams and 'real' epigraphical sepulchral epigrams (this last despite being buried in the 'graveyard' slot first thing in the morning after the conference dinner). The large number of interesting papers did not prevent us from enjoying some of Edinburgh's many attractions, including an assortment of its fine pubs.

Richard Rawles, PhD Student

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Stop me if this sounds familiar.

APAMEA, 188 BC

The ruler of Iraq, having been defeated in war by a state which has just begun to establish itself as the known world's only real superpower, signs a treaty which forces him to give up all his notorious weapons of mass destruction – his elephants. He is also banned from using all but twelve of his long-range weapons – warships – but is allowed to continue to deploy these in greater number against his own people.

LAODICEA, 163 BC

The superpower, now completely unchallenged, suspecting that its old enemy has been building up forces in breach of the treaty, sends in a team of weapons inspectors

with orders 'first to burn the ships and then to hamstring the elephants'.

We're talking Roman Empire versus the Seleucid Kingdom, of course. For the full story, see the reports from award-winning correspondent Polybius (21.42.12-13; 31.2.9-11) and the feature on the Syrian Wars by Appian (38-39, 46).

What happens next is that the chief weapons inspector, Gnaeus Octavius, goes around hamstringing elephants with such gusto that a certain Leptines 'cannot not bear the sight' of 'these gentle and rare animals being killed', and therefore stabs Octavius to death 'while he is oiling himself in the gymnasium' in Laodicea. Leptines publicly proclaims his actions justified, and is openly backed by a local intellectual, Iocrates, who declares that he should have

killed all the inspectors and put a stop to Roman imperialism. Leptines volunteers to go to Rome to speak in his own defence; Isocrates is put in a collar and chain and forced to go to Rome as well, where he speaks nothing but gibberish and refuses to wash or cut his nails for more than a year. That's intellectuals for you. The Roman Senate decides to take no further action against the Seleucid Kingdom (Appian 47; Polybius 31.32-33).

So what have we learned, apart from the fact that history never quite repeats itself, and that we should be grateful that Hans Blix is not given to oiling himself in the gym? That the Roman Empire was actually less aggressive than the USA and Britain, apparently.

Hans van Wees, Reader, Ancient History

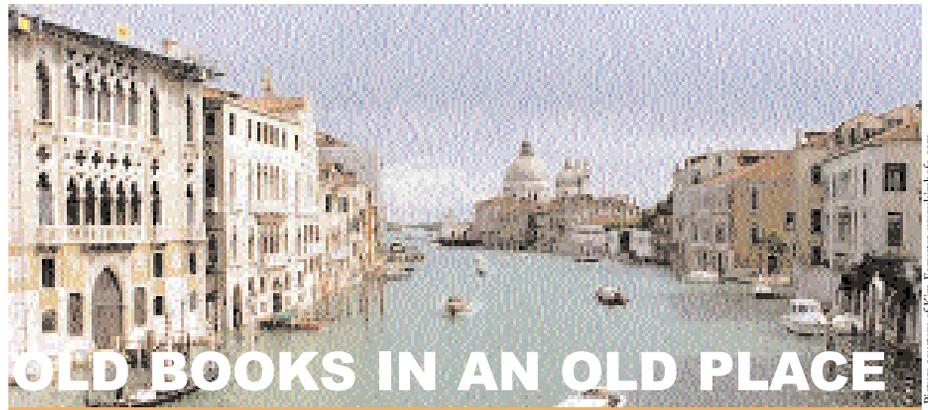
LOCUSTS

Things are never quite what they are – as I found out when I ran out of time half way through delivering my paper ('When is a locust just a locust?') at a lunch-time seminar, though the lively discussion afterwards reassured me that more than enough had been said, and some of it had even been understood. Locusts certainly were never just locusts, and most certainly not in ancient literature and in the minds of its ancient interpreters. Should we be surprised? Hardly, living ourselves in a time that gives pet names to hurricanes, volcanoes and less innocent objects like tanks and fighter planes. Locusts wreaked terrible havoc in the ancient world. Yet their impact was not seen as quite as severe as that of foreign invaders. Thus when the Old Testament prophet Joel wrote about four types of locust devastating Palestine, later commentators thought he must have really referred to enemy invasions. But which? There had since been more than four, plus a lot more locust plagues. Some interpreters therefore applied an even subtler understanding. Joel, they argued, might have referred to the four basic human emotions, hope, joy, fear and pain. Further discussion ensued. Were these the correct 'four emotions', or were there others? And which locust stood for which emotion?



There was further aggravation by the fact that the interpreters were uncertain about the meaning of many words denoting locusts. Did they mean different species, or locusts in different regions, or in different stages of their development? To some extent, this ignorance had driven the exegetes in the first place to resort to allegory. Again, we can hardly blame them, if we imagine that one of the questions troubling the 'scientists' of their time was if the locusts procreated 'normally' or if they came from evaporations of the soil. Maybe a decent dictionary might have been of help to them. But then, many expressions for locusts are still not yet precisely known. So it seems that even today a locust is never just a locust. (And I keep talking...)

Joseph Lössl, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow



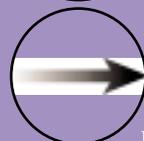
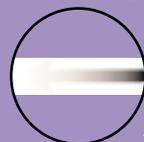
A single parchment manuscript written in the late ninth century A.D., now in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice, is the sole source that has preserved for us most of the minor works (as opposed to commentaries on Aristotle) of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who wrote in about 200 A.D. His work has been the focus of much of my research for the past 30 years, and in the academic year 2001-2 I was able, thanks to a Research Leave grant from the Arts and Humanities research Board matched by the College, to complete a new edition of one collection of texts. The highlight of the year was undoubtedly the time I was able to spend in the Biblioteca Marciana, thanks to the Dean's Travel Fund and the Department of Philosophy and the University of Venice (who organised accommodation and met part of the cost of it, as I also gave a seminar on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* there). And the highlight of that visit was undoubtedly the moment when I was first able to handle and read the ninth-century MS itself.

In the fifteenth century this MS belonged to Cardinal Bessarion, whose personal library was given by him to the Venetian Republic and formed the core of the Marciana library. It was already over five hundred years old by then; in fact the periods of time between Alexander himself and the writing of the MS, between the time of its writing and that of Bessarion, and between Bessarion and the present day are all roughly equal. Not surprisingly, Bessarion had a working copy made for himself of what must already have seemed an ancient and valuable MS; and he made extensive annotations and suggestions for emending the text in both the old and the new MS. The new MS is also in the Biblioteca Marciana; the previous editor of Alexander's minor works, Ivo Bruns, disregarded it for the texts he published in 1887, on the grounds that it was only a copy, but subsequently in 1892 declared that the annotations in it were important and valuable. That is equally true for the texts in his 1887 volume, which included the ones I was working on; so I found at least as much to interest me in the later MS as in the earlier, well-studied one. What rapidly became clear (not that it was a surprise) was the superiority of looking at the actual MS as compared with the microfilm and prints that I had previously been using; in the case of the older MS I had sometimes suspected the presence of annotations where there was nothing more than cracks in the 1400-year-old parchment, and in the case of the later one the suggested emendations were sometimes so faint that, when they were inserted in the text itself above the line of writing, it was easy to miss them in a print.

The Biblioteca Marciana is in the centre of Venice directly opposite the Doge's Palace; the windows of the reading room for manuscripts face towards the Grand Canal, and the sound of street musicians playing for the crowds of tourists was an accompaniment to my reading. Best of all perhaps was walking from where I was staying (near the Accademia bridge) to the library at 8.30 in the morning, before the crowds had gathered; as a form of commuting it is certainly a great improvement on the Metropolitan Line. And for four-and-a-half days I neither saw nor heard a single car ...

Bob Sharples, Professor of Classics

'YOU CANNOT STEP IN THE SAME RIVER TWICE'



We have said goodbye to a number of people over the last couple of years: Walter Cockle, Robert Ireland, Richard Janko, and Elisabeth Rieken. And we have welcomed Chris Carey, Josef Lössl and Matthew Robinson. Chris holds the Chair of Greek and specialises in archaic Greek poetry, oratory and drama; Josef (who takes up a post at the University of Wales, Cardiff, later this year) has held an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Fellowship and his interests lie in Patristic and late Latin literature; Matthew's field is Augustan poetry, especially Ovid. Alison Angel has also joined us, from Laws Faculty, as Departmental Assistant.

CODE-CRACKING

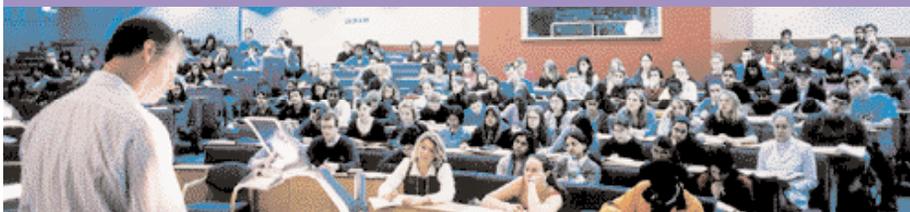
If you think of how many books are available to be read by book-lovers, you will realise that not even a life-time is enough to complete the feat. As excruciatingly frustrating as this might appear, it can get worse, and this happens when one tries to read something that is written in a system that is not instantly recognisable. This involves the enterprise of deciphering, by which a key is discovered that can crack a code. The key leads to the identification of the language hidden by a system of writing and the subsequent classification of that language into a category which is (hopefully) known, in order ultimately to find what a given text means in a language understandable to the reader (the last step is what we know as 'translation'). Code-breakers have existed ever since the Tower of Babel. Everybody is, to a certain extent, a code-breaker because if one does not recognise a mode of communication instantly, he or she will have to de-codify it, by individuating signs, applying to them a meaning, and making sense of that meaning.

Michael Ventris deciphered Linear B in 1952, and interpreted the underlying language of the script as the earliest form of Greek known to us (1450-1200 B.C.). The Aegean in the second millennium B.C. pullulated with newly invented systems of writing, most of which are still unreadable. The Phaistos Disk and Linear A are the most famous types, the former having achieved popularity for reasons that still escape me. As a result many a would-be decipherer has attempted to read its little signs, often coming up with the most imaginative (and ludicrous) interpretations. A cogent decipherment requires a scientific approach, painstaking hours of amanuensis analysis of each sign and its variations, and a leap of faith. What I am trying to do is to decipher some tablets from Cyprus and the coast of modern Syria called Cypro-Minoan. Indirectly they look like Linear B, and they have the same internal structure, i.e. they use a syllabary. If successful, a decipherment of Cypro-Minoan would disclose the earliest (1550 B.C.) literary documents in Europe.

How does one go about the process of decipherment? Once the nature of the system of writing in question (whether pictographic, syllabic or alphabetic) has been established, the next stage is to assess whether the script has any palaeographical similarity to any known script. If the latter is readable, it will provide a useful aid into the phonotactics of the language of the undeciphered one. If not, the torment commences. In order to crack a code, one must have sufficient material. The amount of documents will help in the assessment of the nature of the underlying language. Indo-European languages are inflected (i.e. they have endings attached to the root of words and verbs, and these endings provide different morphological functions); some other languages, like Hurrian or Turkish, are agglutinative (they have small roots to verbs and nouns, plus lots of affixes that shape the function): my script points towards the inflected nature, but not consistently. This confusion could be due to the varied subject-matters of the individual tablets and this is likely to be the case for Cypro-Minoan. Inflection patterns tell us a lot: once clearly individuated (which is the process that is keeping me busy now), they make the feat pure joy. If systematically shown, they help shape up declensions, which in turn lead to the building of grids where phonetic values are attached to each sign, thus making the script readable. The last stage is the interpretation of the language, which is the result of a cogent decipherment. As it happens, a language that can be read is not necessarily a recognisable one, and in such an unfortunate case, the process of decipherment is not wholly successful. Etruscan docet.

Silvia Ferrara, PhD Student

TALKS FOR SCHOOLS



Talks for schools on offer from members of the Department of Greek and Latin include:

Rhiannon Ash on Pliny, Tacitus, and gladiators

Chris Carey on Homer, tragedy and comedy, Athenian society and topography, and Greek religion

Bob Sharples on 'What happened to Aristotle's school?', 'Ancient philosophy and English Romantic poetry', 'Science and culture in ancient Rome', and 'The *Gorgias*: Plato's literary masterpiece?'

Stephen Instone on the gods in the *Iliad*, Aristotle and the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the ancient Olympic Games, and humour in Virgil.

SPORTS ROUND-UP

Stephen Redmond, a first-year ancient historian, has had an uplifting experience. Weighing 108 kg (17 stone), and a second dan in judo, he is well-built. But in the semi-finals of the British Universities Judo Championships in the super-heavyweight division he was drawn against a fourth dan from Teeside weighing in at 138 kg (c. 23 stone). He picked Stephen five feet up into the air and with a shoulder wheel (kataguruma) hurled him back down onto the mat. End of contest. The fourth dan went on to win the division, but Stephen won the semi-final play-off and the bronze medal, and took a silver medal for London University in the team event.

Stephen studies intermediate Greek in the same class as Sally Davies; Sally, a first-year classicist, has been voted president of the UCL Union Lacrosse Club.

THE OLD CONTEMPTIBLES

Even as they drift off gently into the twilight zone, and their thoughts begin to turn to HRT and Viagra, the 1974 Classics graduates still continue to reassemble every fifth year in a valiant attempt to resist the passage of time (*eheu, fugaces*, etc.) and revive fading sepia memories of their youthful vigour. Highly-paid lawyers, 'resting' rag-pickers, Nobel Prize winners, financial derivatives traders, freelance scum-skimmers – social and economic divisions which have grown up over the years melt away as they are reunited in the comradely equality of yore.

The turnout is always phenomenal, with eight out of eleven converging on last year's chosen restaurant from as far away as Guernsey and Slough, and only two out of touch for the moment (Are you there, Des? Roger? We miss you). Good eats, copious refreshment, lots of gossip, screeching, old photos. The pot bellies, whisky-reddened noses and gleaming pates on display (not all of them owned by the members of staff present) were as good for a laugh as always. Even the initially dubious spouses and partners were won over and started asking how they too could become Old Classicists.

If the Class of '74 can do it, why not you? Aren't you curious to find out whether what's-his-name with the impetigo problem ever did get his PhD in the end? And whatever happened to that blonde – well, I say blonde, but we all thought it was out of a bottle – whose sole declared ambition it was to hunt down and lay every male member of the M'toki tribe resident in the East Riding? The department is always happy, subject of course to the restrictions imposed by the Data Protection Act, to put old friends in touch. Go on, don't be shy, get e-mailing! There's somebody out there who would like to hear from you, if only to ask why you still haven't paid back the tenner they lent you in the Union that night in January 1988.

Alan Griffiths, Senior Lecturer, Greek and Latin