



# The MCA Newsletter

## Editorial – The Malta Classics Association

Although January seems to have sometimes been referred to as the first month of the year even in as far back as 153 BC, it was not until the dictatorship of Julius Caesar and the institution of the Julian Calendar in 45 BC that the month of January was officially and definitively instituted as the first year of the year, a tradition that the western world has kept to till the very day. The month was aptly dedicated to the Roman god Janus, the god of beginnings and end, often depicted as two-faced, one seemingly looking towards the past and one to the future.

In January, the Malta Classics Association celebrates its new year as well. This month is for the MCA Executive Committee, the last one in office before it hands over its duties and obligations to the new committee appointed during the association's annual general meeting later this month.

It is therefore even here a chance for the members of the Malta Classics Association to reflect on the **progress** that has been made so far - Janus' first

face - while looking towards our future – Janus' second face. Yet even as Janus' two faces are parts of one and the same head and body, so must our thoughts be unitary: our view of the association's past and our view of the future must remain connected, with one seen and believed to be a continuation of the other in one seamless journey towards our objectives.

This issue brings another instalment of our mythology series, another competition and another interview. It moreover introduces a new segment which is considered with items that one does not generally make reference to in a conventional classroom setting which, to a critical mind, will immediately betray their more educational side. In this issue we will be concerned with a book series set in the first century BC and a PC game set in Classical Greece.

We hope that you may enjoy this feature, with features both new and old.

*Samuel Azzopardi*

## Contact Us

If you'd like to become a member of the Malta Classics Association, please visit the MCA website at <http://www.classicsmalta.org/>. There you will find even more information about the MCA and its work.

Alternatively, if you'd like more information about the MCA and what it does to promote the Classics in Malta or even why it seeks to do this, email us on [classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com](mailto:classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com) or look us up on our Facebook page.

For information on upcoming courses in Latin, Greek, Sanskrit or Classical Culture please email the Education Sub-Committee on [classicsmaltasoc.educ@gmail.com](mailto:classicsmaltasoc.educ@gmail.com).

## *Learning Outside the Classroom*

Nothing in the world can replace well-planned lessons in the classroom and diligent study at home. At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that other media such as games and historical fiction books can help students interact with and immerse themselves into a historical setting so much different than their own. Perhaps the time has come to recognise this officially and, instead of possibly simply encouraging students to dedicate even more time to study at the expense of recreational pursuits, guide students towards media that can supplement their study. In this issue, we introduce the very well-received *The Empress of Rome* book-series by Kate Quinn and the acclaimed *Hegemony Gold: Wars of Ancient Greece* PC game by Longbow Digital Arts Inc.

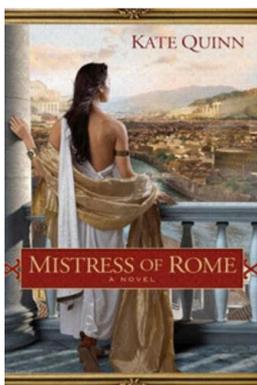
### *Book Series Review*

## *The Empress of Rome Series*

by Kate Quinn

*“But if men are the makers and breakers of empires, then women  
are the makers and breakers of men.”*

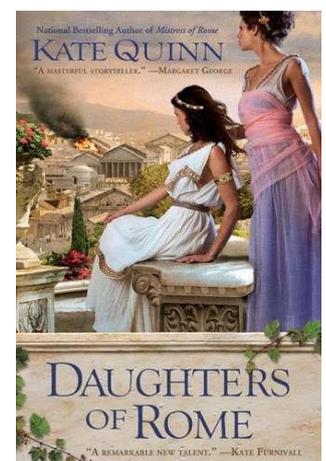
Kate Quinn, Classical Voice graduate from the University of Boston is the author of the separately acclaimed four instalments that make up this series. The first book, *Mistress of Rome*, concerns the fate of the Jewish girl Thea, one of the handful of people who survive the massacre of Masada in 73 C.E. The story follows the protagonists to late 1st century Rome and thence to Domitian’s imperial household.



The second instalment, *Daughters of Rome*, takes us a step back in time as it focuses on the lives of four very different women navigating the politically turbulent scene of 69 C.E, otherwise known as ‘The Year of the Four Emperors.’ It is a fascinating book which manages to keep and expertly follow the lives of four equally central protagonists and their character development mitigatingly from beginning to end.

In Quinn’s third book in this series, *Empress of the Seven Hills*, the lives of the young, cunning and ambitious soldier Vix and of Sabina, a patrician heiress and future unwilling empress momentarily converge. Set in the last years of the reign of Emperor Trajan and the first years of the reign of his successor Hadrian, this book is filled with political intrigue, drama, and tragic romance. Finally, the fourth book, *Lady of the Eternal City*, continues Sabina’s story as she continues to navigate the treacherous waters of the Imperial court.

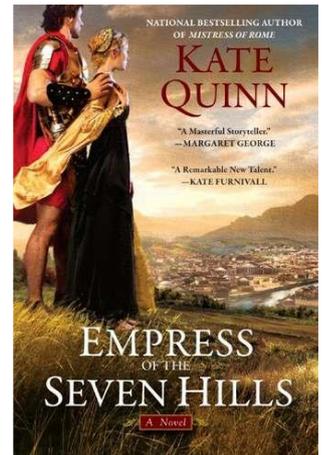
Quinn adopts freely, if not always accurately, from 1st and 2nd century Roman history and, although she at times moves away from historical fact, she acknowledges these “liberties” in her author’s note and clarifies the changes which are after all essential to her story-telling. Quinn is skilful with the description of everyday life in Ancient Rome and brings the story to life by incorporating fine details into her



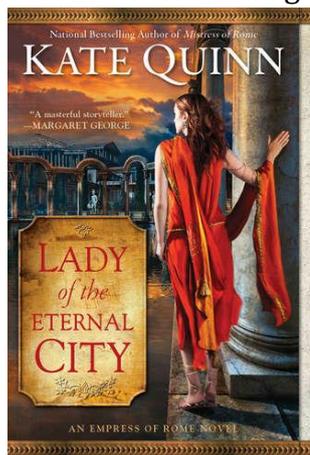
narrative, even detailing what a legionary ate while on the march and how he would have prepared it. It is evident that her knowledge of the period is broad and she thus manages to refrain from the faults many historical-fiction writers make when they exploit the same few references repeatedly for lack of awareness of other valuable details.

Quinn presents a collection of interesting facts, nestled within a compelling narrative, that strengthen and excite any incipient fascination with classical history and life in the period, especially that of its women. Above all, she constructs a world of intrigue, where the women are as blood-thirsty as the men, and are as influential in the building and, eventually, the destruction of the Roman Empire. The story-telling is tenacious and absorbing, and coherently entwines fact and fiction with strong characterisation, captivating ambience, and underlying themes of friendship, duty, love and honour.

This strong characterisation is perhaps the most striking aspect of the whole series. Painstaking attention is devoted to the development of the characters in each instalment and especially of the protagonists who direct the flow of the story: Sabina, Quinn's main protagonist in *Empress of Rome*, is an intriguing character that starts out as an independent patrician heiress but slowly transforms into a secretive empress. All Quinn's characters, historical and invented, are compelling and realistic, and she explores their dark sides and motivations in the circles of power of Imperial Rome. Quinn has a manner of bestowing her principal female characters with the destiny they have struggled very hard to attain, yet at the end condemn them to the discovery of their doubts of ever wanting such lives in the first place. The series also introduces a number of absolutely atrocious characters, who are also determinedly red-blooded to the core, and also an aggregate number of intellectual characters, who aren't always amiable or righteous, but deserve admiration for their wisdom and knowledge. Quinn illustrated intelligence with depth and perception and her writing manages to surprise the reader with unpredicted consequences to these diverse cast of characters.



Quinn is an accomplished writer of dialogue and she creates a personal connection between reader and character through their words. For instance, Vix, a physically imposing legionary soldier with an uncontrollable temper, uses precise and burly phrases whereas Hadrian, who at the beginning was considered a fairly amiable man, yet constantly displays a frigid stiffness, uses lengthy and boastful sentences, even during military campaigns with his men. Quinn's use of dialogue has a way of absorbing the reader into the past and, although she uses the modern idiom, this never really comes across as inappropriate.



Perhaps this is because her exploration of Roman society betrays a concern for issues that are still as relevant today as they were back then: contradictory sexual morals, the disruption of family values and other social structures, the popular disdain of "elitist intellectuals", and political cynicism in the face of corruption.

Perhaps this is because her exploration of Roman society betrays a concern for issues that are still as relevant today as they were back then: contradictory sexual morals, the disruption of family values and other social structures, the popular disdain of "elitist intellectuals", and political cynicism in the face of corruption.

Historical-fiction in general is usually the depiction of men and their deeds, by men. This book challenges that trend and surpasses others in its portrayal of women in Ancient Rome, in a world dominated by men. This series is an excellent must-read for those interested in either historical-fiction or ancient history, as well as those who are in search for exceptional story-telling. This is historical-fiction at its prime.

*Blossom Holland*

## *Hegemony Gold: Wars of Ancient Greece*

*Longbow Digital Arts Inc.*

Longbow Digital Arts Inc.'s *Hegemony Gold: Wars of Ancient Greece* sets the player in Late Classical Greece at the dawn of the Peloponnesian War. The game offers its players the option of following one of three historical campaigns, guided by objectives guided by historical events that are explained in-game, of which two take up the Peloponnesian War at its very start (The Archidamian War of 431 to 421 BC) and during the so-called Ionian War (413-403 BC), whereas the third deals with Philip of Macedon's rise to power from assuming the regency of Macedon to becoming Hegemon of Greece. Players might also opt to play a sandbox campaign as one of the game's 26 all-playable factions.

The game has been the object of praise and acclaim by a number of authoritative gaming websites and communities so this review will seek to focus more on its value as an extra-curricular supplement to in-school training for such syllabi as the Maltese CCC O'Level exam.

The object of the game is, of course, to prove itself enjoyable to its many players, few of which would probably be playing with the intent to supplement their actual studies through it. At the same time, however, game developers have evidently shown considerable concern for keeping the game as faithful as possible to history. In readdressing the politically diverse Greek world of the Classical period, Longbow Digital Arts Inc. sagaciously decided to reduce the number of factions to 26 and to drastically restrict the number of on-map cities, which we know to have numbered in their high hundreds, to the more important ones. This both makes the game more playable and makes it far easier for a student to memorise the placement of the major political players in Greek history in a way which is far more engaging than a dull monochrome map.

The geographical division of the map among the 26 factions is also noteworthy. In order to reduce the political players on the campaign map, the game developers chose to group cities together in a number of leagues and communities. Some, like the Spartan control of Lacadaemon and Messenia and the membership of far-flung city-states in the Delian League, referred to in-game by the synonymous Athenian Empire, are absolutely true to history. Where no such significant official grouping was found, use was made of anachronistic leagues or some collections, such as the Balkan Tribes, which are fictitious. Yet at no time do these redivisions bother a historical approach to the game as anyone must concede that all groupings are reflective, at least on some level, of political, ethnic or cultural commonalities.



*A zoomed-out view of the region included in the game campaigns*



*A Macedonian Army composed of Phalangites and Companion Cavalry muster outside Pella. In the distance an ox-cart is seen transporting food from a farm to the city*

The game's main direction is, of course, militaristic and developers paid painstaking detail at recreating a strategic repertoire that evokes the great battles of the period. The placement of Athenian settlements along the coast encourages the exploitation of naval units whereas the larger and better hoplite units of Sparta force the player's focus on a more land-based approach to strategy. In the Philip of Macedon campaign, Macedon sports a unit roster as varied as that of Philip's armies and the campaign-plot sees the development and introduction of the feared ballista which proves to be as significant a game-changer in the pursuit of in-game sieges as it was in real life.

Despite the emphasis on war, or perhaps because of it, the game also has an economic aspect that is worthy of a few words. The main currency in the game is gold, which is gained through taxation of controlled cities, exploitation of mines, and levies on trade. The gold is in

turn used to pay for the running upkeep of armies and for infrastructural improvement. The other significant in-game resource is food which can be gained through the seasonally-fluctuating production of controlled farms and the culling of sheep-herds. The placement of farms and spawning points for sheep-herds are also reminiscent of Greece's true geography.

Underfed occupied cities will rebel whereas underfed or underpaid soldiers will receive a considerable morale penalty which makes them inefficient on the battlefield. Food resources can be moved around one's empire via road networks and sea routes. The sea routes are, true to historical reality, inactive during the winter months (the Classical Greek word for winter was also the word used for a storm). Proper management of logistics becomes an increasingly important aspect of the game, not unlike the considerations of classical Greek generals. Let us not forget that Athens' main concern throughout the Peloponnesian war was maintaining the trade routes to her grain suppliers open, making her allies around the Bosphorus the Peloponnesians' major target.

*Hegemony Gold: Wars of Ancient Greece* has much to commend it. Whether you're simply looking for something challenging to while away the time, or are looking for a way to engage with what you love in a new and refreshing way, this game is the game for you.

*Samuel Azzopardi*

## Chapter 2

### Before the Gods: The Children of Gaia and Uranus – Part 1

---

#### Giants and Titans

Gaia lay with her consort, Uranus, whom she herself had brought forth. Amongst their children were the Hecatoncheires (Gr. Hekatoncheires) each with fifty heads and a hundred hands. They were called Cottus (Gr. Kottus), Briareos, and Gyges, *'boundless and powerful was the strength that lay in their mighty forms'* (Theogony). According to the Theogony, there were three Cyclopes<sup>1</sup> (Gr. Kyklopes) or 'Round-eyed' - so called because they sported one enormous eye in the middle of their foreheads, called Brontes (Thunderer) Steropes (Lightner) and Arges (Vivid).

Finally, a race of powerful gods known as the Titans were born – six brothers named Coeus (Gr. Koios) Crius (Gr. Kreios) Iapetus (Gr. Iapetos) Hyperion, Cronus (Gr. Kronos) and Oceanus, and six sisters called Mnemosyne, Phoebe (Gr. Phoibe) Rhea, Theia, Tethys and Themis. Their offspring were also called Titans except for Zeus and his siblings, children of Cronus and Rhea, who came to be known as the Olympians.

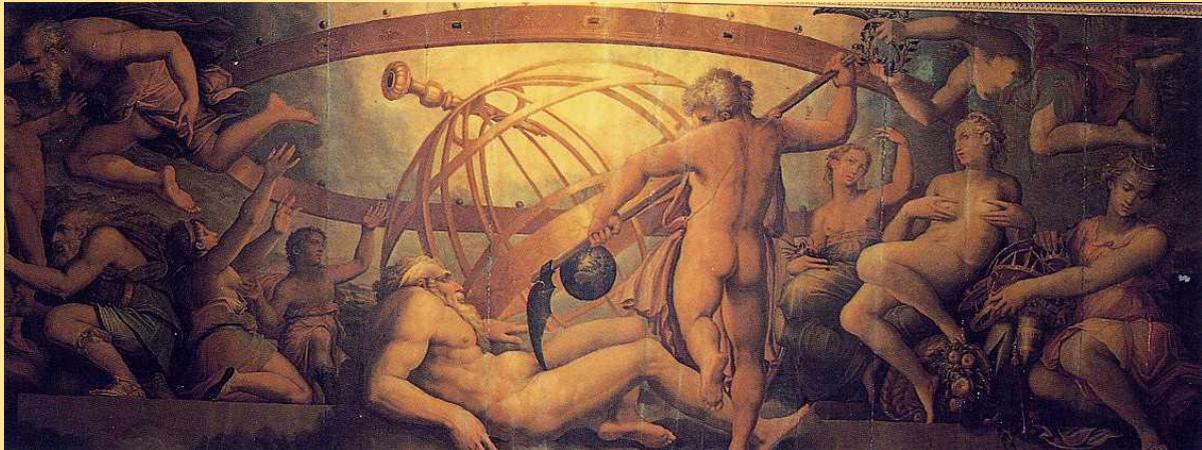
#### Rise of the Titans

Uranus regarded his offspring with horror. As soon as they were born, he would force them back down again into the earth, *'where they suffered anguish'* (Theogony). Gaia suffered terrible pain but then a deep anger set in and seething with fury, she swore revenge upon her husband. She brought forth a sickle of adamant, a mythical metal of impenetrable hardness, and then she approached her children for help. They all shrank back in fear except for one. The youngest, Cronus, willingly agreed to free his brothers and sisters. When nighttime arrived, he lay in hiding and waited. At the opportune moment, as Uranus attempted to mate with Gaia, Cronus emerged from his hiding-place and *'holding...the enormous sickle with its long blade edged like teeth, he swung it sharply, and lopped the members of his own father, and threw them behind him to fall where they would...all the bloody drops that went splashing from them were taken in by Gaia, the earth'* (Theogony). But Gaia prophesied that one day a son of Cronus would overthrow him and usurp his throne just as Cronus had dealt with his own father.

#### Division of the Earth

After deposing his father, Cronus assumed the throne and made his sister Rhea consort. Rhea appears to have been regarded as mother of the gods, that is, of the first generation of Olympian gods. Cronus retained sovereignty over the heavens. His brother Oceanus ruled over the great river encircling the earth and his three thousand sons by Tethys, who were all the rivers. Their daughters, the Oceanids (Gr. Okeanid) also numbered three thousand and of them Hesiod says in the Theogony that *'they are scattered far and wide and everywhere alike they haunt the earth and the depths of the water'*.

To another brother, Hyperion, a sun god, *'he who goes above'*<sup>iii</sup> and his sister, Theia, were born Eos (the Dawn) Helios (the Sun) and Selene (the Moon). Often, the name Hyperion is used as another name for Helios.



'The Mutilation of Uranus by Saturn', Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574). Cronus (Saturn) castrates his father Uranus, the Greek sky god. Mural, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

## Helios

Helios was *'the sun, never weary, handsome as any immortal. His gleaming rays flash out; by ruddy forehead and temples is framed the light of his face'* (Homeric Hymn to Helios). Each morning he left his palace which was on the eastern bank of Oceanus to drive his chariot of light across the sky towards the west where at the day's end he arrived at his point of departure in a golden barque, sailing all night along the river Oceanus out of which rose the stars, only to sink back in again the following morning.

Helios had a mortal son as well called Phaeton and his story is told in *Metamorphoses* Book I by Ovid (Roman poet 70 – 19 B.C.) who relates that on one occasion, Phaeton quarrelled with a friend who had cast doubts on Phaeton's divine parentage. Seeking assurance, he confronted his mother Clymene (Gr. Klymene), who advised him to go in search of his father whose palace lay in the east.

When Phaeton finally arrived at his father's palace, a lofty edifice that glittered and gleamed and had a roof of ivory, he approached the throne amidst a blazing light of sun-rays which Helios set aside to take his son into his arms and as proof of his heritage, Helios swore that, to put an end to all doubts, he would grant Phaeton anything he wished.

Without hesitation, Phaeton begged to be allowed to drive his father's chariot for one day. At once Helios realized his folly and tried to persuade Phaeton to choose some other gift but Phaeton was adamant. The horses were yoked to the chariot and Phaeton climbed in. The animals snorted and stamped their feet impatiently, raring to go. The Horae (Gr. Horai), goddesses of the Seasons, guarded the gates of heaven,

*'whose task it is to close the entrance or to roll away the heavy cloud.'* (Iliad Book VIII). They now threw open the doors and off dashed the steeds.

Phaeton was ecstatic – but the sense of euphoria only lasted a few brief moments. The proximity to the Zodiac signs alarmed him and the horses, we are told by Ovid, sensing that it was not their master at the reins, veered out of control and the chariot lurched madly as the horses pressed headlong, unrestrained and erratically until suddenly they changed direction and plunged downwards. Within moments, Phaeton felt an unbearable heat enveloping him and through the dense, suffocating smoke he dimly beheld the world on fire – which is how the Ethiopians (Gr. Aithiopes) 'Burnt Faces',<sup>iii</sup> became black and North Africa became a desert, or so the ancients believed. It was also said that the Milky Way was the trail left by Phaeton as he blazed his way across the skies. Earth cried out to Zeus to intervene and Zeus, quick to react, hurled a thunderbolt at Phaeton and down he plummeted, a bright star falling down to Earth,<sup>iv</sup> into the River Eridanus (Gr. Eridanos).



Detail from 'The fall of Phaeton', Joseph Heintz (1596), oil on wood. Zeus strikes Phaeton from his father's chariot. Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig

In Fabulae 152A, Hyginus (a learned freedman of Augustus who became the librarian of the Palatine Library) says that his sisters, the Heliades, wept so much that the gods, out of compassion, transformed them into poplar trees and their amber tears flowed from the trees into the Eridanus.

Hyginus also says that Phaeton's intimate friend and some say his lover, Cyncus (Gr. Kyknos) mourned him deeply. Singing of his loss, Cyncus kept on haunting the river-bank where Phaeton had fallen to his death until, we are told in the Aeneid, *'he put on soft white plumage and rose from the earth, singing as he flew towards the stars.'* (Book X). The gods, out of pity, had him changed into a swan. It was said that, when Cyncus died he became the constellation Cygnus. As he kept on singing to the very end, legend has it that swans have always ever since sung 'swan-songs' just before dying. The swan-song is also a figure of speech used to refer to the last or dying work, especially of a poet.

### Selene

After her brother's journey ends, we are told in the Homeric Hymn to Selene, Helios' sister, Selene, goddess of the moon, rode her chariot across the sky, and *'the dark air grows bright from her golden crown, and her rays fill the sky'*.

Selene is famously known as the lover of Endymion, a king of Elis by whom we are told by Pausanias she had fifty sons or fifty daughters. In 199, we learn from Sappho<sup>vi</sup>, the poetess, that one night Selene looked down and observed Endymion sleeping in a cave on Mount Latmos. Descending from the heavens she stayed beside him, watching over him and kissing and caressing him to satisfy her yearning. According to 1.7.6 of Apollodorus (c. 180-120 B.C., whose name is conventionally given to the later – 1st or 2nd century A.D. handbook of Greek mythology known as the Library (Bibliotheca) at Selene's exhortation and Endymion's request, Zeus bestowed upon him perpetual sleep which would keep him eternally young - a life spent more in dreams than in reality. And night after night Selene visited him, bending over him to enjoy his presence to her heart's desire.

---

<sup>i</sup> Many monumental works were attributed by the ancients to the Cyclopes (giving us the adjective 'Cyclopean' including the Lion Gate at Mycenae. Cassell's Dictionary of Classical Mythology

<sup>ii</sup> Hyperion: Greek Titan god of light ; mythology: <http://www.theoi.com/Titan/TitanHyperion.html>

<sup>iii</sup> The sperm of Ethiopians, Aristotle insisted, is not black, as some Greeks presumed, a fact which makes us wonder how he himself had established it. – The Classical World

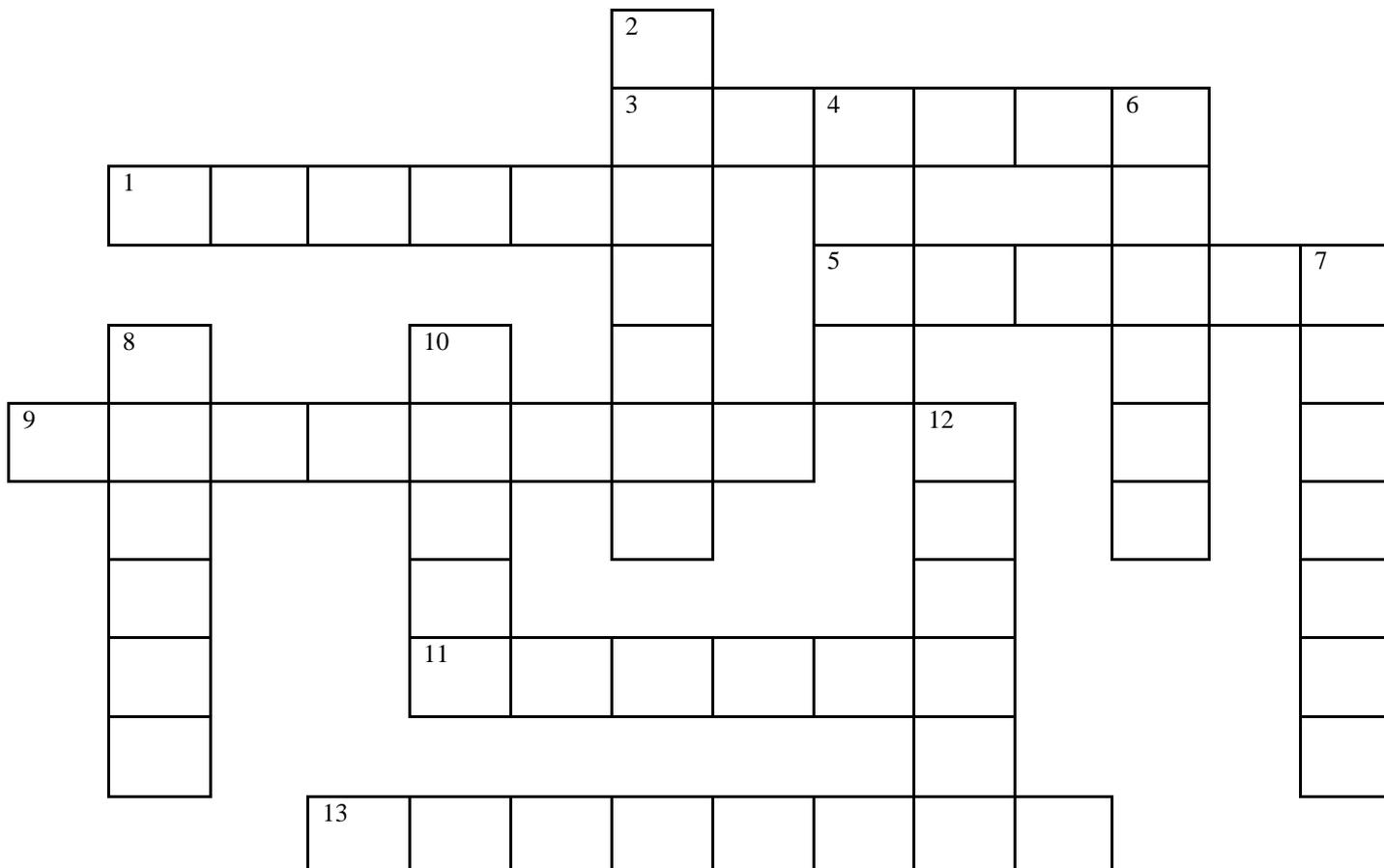
<sup>iv</sup> According to Max Muller (1823-1900), the leading Sanskrit scholar of his day and a German-born Oxford don, and his followers, the story of Phaeton describes how excessive heat (Phaeton's ride) causes drought that is finally broken by a thunderstorm (the bolt hurled by Zeus to kill Phaeton). Classical myth

<sup>v</sup> The Eleians claimed that his grave was located in their own territory at Olympia, near the starting-point for the foot-race in the Olympic Games. The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology

<sup>vi</sup> In the early 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. the most remarkable east Greek voice was Sappho's. Sappho is the unique early Greek witness to love and desire between women, the namesake of modern lesbians (she lived on the island of Lesbos). The Classical World

## Mythology Crossword

With every issue, the MCA will be organising a small competition for the readers of the newsletter. The winner, who will be notified by email, will receive a small book related to the Classics. This issue's competition is a Mythology crossword puzzle. To participate, simply print this page and scan the completed crossword on [newsletter.classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com](mailto:newsletter.classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com) or send it by post to *The Editor, 9, Gorg Zammit Street, Attard, ATD 2355* by Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> March. The winner will be drawn by lot from among those who solve the whole puzzle correctly.



### Across

1. Goddess of wisdom, strategy and crafts (6)
3. The Sun itself, titan (6)
5. Muse of comedy (6)
9. The river into which Phaeton fell (8)
11. Title of the priestess at the oracle at Cumae (6)
13. God of the sea, brother of Zeus (8)

### Down

2. Son of Helios, rode the chariot too close to the Earth (7)
4. Mother of the Delian twins (4)
6. The Moon, sister of Helios (6)
7. Goddess of the Hunt, sister of Apollo (7)
8. Time, father of Zeus, Poseidon and Hades (6)
10. Two-faced Roman god (5)
12. God of prophecy, archery and overseer of the Muses (6)

---

## Student Interview

*For this instalment, the Newsletter team interviewed Mr Steve Demarco, a B.A. Classics (Hons) at the University of Malta and Assistant Chairperson of the MCA's Student Subcommittee.*

### **For how long have you been studying the Classics?**

I have been studying Classics for around a year and a half at the University of Malta where I'm currently in my second year, but I have been interested in the subject for much longer than that.

### **What got you interested in studying the Classics at University?**

I'm not quite sure but I would have to guess it's all the Greek myths that I used to listen to as a child. Then I started to find out more and more about Greek and Roman history and I simply needed to find out more. Suddenly, I find myself doing a B.A. in the subject.

### **Now that you have a deeper understanding of Classical culture, how do you think it has affected subsequent and even contemporary society?**

We can see the imprint of Classical culture in all aspects of society, whether that be in its literature or architecture or in whatever else. Perhaps it is sometimes easier to see a direct link between older western cultures and they're Greek and Roman predecessors than in our own times. Today it might seem like we're leaning away from our roots in search of "modernity" but what we don't seem to realise is that even in this attempt all we are doing is developing from our roots rather than away. In this sense it's encouraging to see that Classics in its own right is making something of a significant comeback locally and also abroad.

### **Why should someone choose to study Classics?**

Studying classics certainly changes the way you view the world, the way you think. I realise that I have become more of a 'logical thinker'. Classics encourages and fosters critical thinking in a person, something which is always needed.

### **What made you join the MCA and how does the MCA help Classics students?**

The MCA is aimed at helping to spread the Classics to all people, which is something I want to be part of. I also wanted to give something back to the Association which has given colour to my Classics experience so far with public lectures and the like.

### **As Assistant Chairperson of the MCA's Student Subcommittee, can you tell us about some of your more exciting projects?**

The Students Subcommittee is currently working on several projects of interest, some aimed at the general public, others at University of Malta students, and some at other students studying at lower levels.

One of our major projects is a revamping of the MCA Facebook page. We hope to be able to use Facebook and our website as a platform to bring interesting pieces of information to the general public. The themes and information should be varied so there's something of interest for everyone. We're hoping to include references to classical references in contemporary culture and media, interesting quotes, short articles on interesting historical events and mythological episodes.... It's certainly something to look out for so I encourage everyone to like our page or follow our website.

Another exciting project is what we called *Classics on Campus*. We're basically hoping to be able to set up a series of film and documentary viewings in order to expose University students reading other subjects to Classics either in modern cinema or through interesting documentaries.

However, the most exciting thing we're involved in must be the introduction of the Iris project in Malta, a huge project which certainly merits its own article in the future.

*For more information about the Classics courses offered in Malta by the MCA and other educational institutions, check out our Courses page on the Malta Classics Association Pages. If you have any questions you would like to ask our contemporary Classics students and teachers, email them to [newsletter.classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com](mailto:newsletter.classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com). We'd love to bring you the information you want and need!*