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Honorary President's Speech

The following speech was delivered by Professor Joe Friggieri, the MCA's Honorary President for 2018 at the Association's Annual General Meeting earlier this year. The speech is being reproduced in full.

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

I'd like to start by thanking Professor Horatio Vella for inviting me to be your Honorary President, an invitation I have gladly accepted.

My association with the Classics goes back a long way. When I was a student in the course leading to the BA, we were expected to study Greek and Latin, including Latin literature, during the first part of the course, and there were then a few of us who pursued their studies in the subject after graduating.

My interest in the Classics went further. The philosophy Department always gave a great deal of importance to the history of Philosophy, and I have now been teaching

Ancient Greek Philosophy for something like twenty years. The course starts with the Presocratics, and covers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Hellenistic philosophy and the neo-Platonists right down to Augustine. My talks on Greek and Medieval Philosophy on Campus FM, the University radio, formed the basis of the first volume of my history of philosophy in Maltese, *In-Nisġa tal-Ħsieb*.

Apart from that, I have always taken great interest in Greek drama, having directed Sophocles' *Antigone* and my own translations of two comedies by Aritophanes, *Lysistrata* and *Women of Parliament (Ecclesiasuzae)*.

(contd.)

I have also directed my own stage adaptation of Plato's dialogues on the last days of Socrates - the *Apology*, which is an account of Socrates' own defence at his trial, at the end of which he's given the death sentence, the *Crito* and the *Phaedo*, in which Socrates talks to his friends about death and immortality during the month he spends in prison before he's made to drink hemlock. I called the play *L-Għanja taċ-Ċinju*, Swansong, the swan being Socrates of course, and it was published together with a piece for young adults called *Il-Ġnien ta' Esopu*, Aesop's Garden, based on and inspired by the world's greatest writer of moral tales, who was, as we know, a Greek slave living in the sixth century BCE.

More recently I borrowed from the *Odyssey* two of Homer's female characters, Calypso and Nausicaa, and made them recount their story from their own perspective or point of view in my two collections of short stories, *Nismagħhom Jghidu* and *Il-Gżira l-Bajda*, published by Kite Group over the last two years.

I strongly believe that Classical Studies -- by which I mean mainly Classical literature, drama, philosophy and history – should form an integral part of Humanistic studies at the University. I also believe that no person can consider themselves cultured unless they have read at least some of the major works by Greek and Latin writers. Reading and learning to appreciate and enjoy these great works might not be directly related to a student's chances of getting a job at the end of their course at the University, but it will certainly make them a better person and provide them with a better, more rounded education.

Studying the Classics will not have a great impact on the economy either. The idea that education is primarily a tool for economic growth is an idea we must reject. The humanities are there to teach us to be human and what is to be valued in civil society. What is more, the past has vital lessons to teach the present, and courses in Classical literature and philosophy enable students to be good interpreters of the past. The Malta Classics Association can do a lot to promote this vision. It is for this reason, among others, that I have accepted Professor Horatio Vella's invitation to be your honorary president.

Professor Joe Friggieri

The Malta Classics Association once again thanks Professor Friggieri for accepting its invitation to be its Honorary President for 2018.

Textbook Review

With new textbooks being produced every year, it is sometimes hard to keep track of the best ones in one's own field. It may even be especially hard for teachers of Classical languages, the grammar and vocabulary of which is – sometimes quite literally – set in stone, to look beyond our own libraries of textbooks and try out new ones. In this series of articles, Maria Giuliana Fenech, Classics graduate, teacher and part-time lecturer at the University of Malta, will review some of the more recent Latin and Greek language-teaching textbooks for veteran teachers and aspiring students alike.

Learning Latin the Ancient Way

Author: Eleanor Dickey

Publisher: Cambridge University Press

Year of Publication: 2016

Reviewed for the MCA Newsletter by Maria Giuliana Fenech. This is not a paid advert.

This article is the first in a new series where we review Latin and Greek textbooks. Some may be old familiars, while others may expound new ways of teaching Latin and Greek. For our first review we will be dealing with *Learning Latin the Ancient Way*. This is not a textbook per se. In the Preface, the author of the book Eleanor Dickey, a Professor of Classics at the University of Reading explains that this book is designed to complement a textbook or to be used by those who have already mastered the basics. However, this book is an appropriate introduction to our series as it offers a glimpse into the life of students in the time of the Roman Empire when Latin learning was in its infancy.

Latin learning has been around for millennia. We are not the first to memorise declensions or to have to get to grips with the differences between gerunds and

gerundives (any book which explains that clearly is a champion in my list). Greek speakers in the Roman empire needed Latin-learning materials which contained authentic enjoyable vignettes about daily life in the ancient world. For the average Greek speaker, at least at the beginning, the minutiae of grammar were not so important. What they needed to do was go to the baths, conduct business and have fights, sometimes, even, all three activities at the same time! The more advanced and diligent learners also had access to special beginners' versions of Virgil and Cicero, dictionaries, grammars and text in Greek transliteration.

Greek speakers often struggled with the Latin alphabet; however they had no problems with grammar. Being familiar with Greek grammar, makes Latin grammar a piece of cake. Therefore, these ancient textbooks rarely provided as much detail as modern ones when it came to grammar. For the beginner Latin learner, the first textbooks would have been the *Colloquia*. These would be bilingual dialogues and narratives. The Latin would be on one side and the Greek on the other. These "role-

plays” are quite similar to those one may find in a travel guide book which tell the reader how to order a coffee or book a taxi. For the modern learner these Colloquia are useful for two reasons. Firstly, vocabulary building. Many a novice Latin learner knows a dozen different ways to translate verbs which have to do with war but finds himself stumped with something as basic as describing a daily routine. Secondly, for those who are interested in spoken Latin, the Colloquia provide easy examples of everyday speech; although I doubt anyone today will ever need to say “unxi caput meum” (I anointed my head). The Latin of the Colloquia is not as pure and perfect as that we come across in Cicero, however Eleanor Dickey helpfully points out any inconsistencies. This reinforces, that this textbook, albeit very interesting is not for the modern novice Latin learner. However, a good student, especially a younger one, with a year of Latin learning under his belt would definitely find Colloquia such as “A child gets up in the morning” and “The children argue” quite interesting and a teacher can use these dialogues to supplement other beginner Latin texts. Learning Latin the Ancient Way also provides a section of insults, and as any language learner knows, insults are usually the most interesting part of any language!

Having mastered these Colloquia the ancient Latin learner could move on to longer texts. Aesop’s Fables and Stories about the Trojan War were popular subjects for children and adults alike. The learner, would most probably already be familiar with the subject matter. Therefore, reading these texts would be easier. Dickey again points out differences between the Latin

used in these texts and the more Standard Latin we are familiar with. For those familiar with both Greek and Latin it is interesting to note how Latin vocabulary was sometimes given a Greek slant. For example, in these stories, autem like δέ generally means both “and” and “but”.

Learning Latin the Ancient Way includes a section of declensions and conjugations. To the modern reader, this section is interesting if not entirely useful. It seems that Greek speakers used to struggle with the lack of article in Latin and so used to add hic in its various forms to the nouns. This served as an indicator of case, albeit rather ambiguous as the declension of hic contains less variations than the Greek definite article.

The Glossary of Homonyms is useful to ancient and modern learner alike. Although a dictionary is obviously essential, a list of the more common homonyms is indispensable. Latin might not have as many homonyms with entirely different meanings as English. However, it is worth remembering that ungula can be a “hoof”, a “trotter” or a “cloven hoof”!

Learning Latin the Ancient Way is a welcome addition to both the teacher’s and the student’s library. It is appropriate for all ages. An independent student would require knowledge of Greek in order to fully appreciate the book. However other students, if guided by their teacher, only need a year or so of Latin learning. The book can be enjoyed on various levels as it is a welcome tool which aids Latin learning and moreover, is very interesting from a historical point of view.

Summer Courses

Every year, the Malta Classics Association teams up with the University of Malta's DegreePlus program to offer the University's students and the general public the opportunity of pursuing short courses that allow them to glimpse into the wonderful world of Classics and experience for themselves the many joys and little pleasures it can offer. This summer, the MCA is co-ordinating the organisation of a record number of seven courses: *Lingua Latina ab Initio I*, *Lingua Latina ab Initio II*, *Introduction to Greek and Roman Mythology*, *Introduction to Sanskrit*, *An Overview of Greek and Roman History*, *Introduction to Ancient Greek*, and *Introduction to Modern Greek*. In the next few pages, you will be able to read more about the first four of these courses. For more information on the other three, look out for the MCA Newsletter's special June edition.

This summer, the MCA will also be independently organising a crash course for students wishing to sit for the MATSEC Intermediate Level Exam in Classical Studies this September. For more information on this particular course, look out for the MCA Newsletter's special June edition or follow the MCA's Facebook page or website for more regular updates.

Lingua Latina ab Initio I

Taught by Mrs Maria Giuliana Fenech

What got you interested in studying and then teaching Latin?

For me studying and teaching Latin go hand in hand. I wanted to study Latin because I love languages and I want to teach Latin because I want to share my love for languages.

What is going to be covered in this introductory course?

The course will only cover basic grammar and vocabulary. The aim of the course is not for the students to really learn the language per se – that is to say they will not be able to write or speak in Latin or even to read the more complex texts unaided – but to acquire the tools which would allow them to understand the gist of a passage written in Latin.

What approach are you taking to the language in this course?

The approach that I will be taking to teaching the language in this course will be via guided reading of texts in Latin. Initially, these will be short and easy sentences but eventually, we should also be looking at full paragraphs.

Who would you recommend should take up this course?

I would really recommend this course to anyone who is up for a challenge and who has a genuine love for languages.

Lingua Latina Ab Initio II

A NEW course taught by Mrs Maria Zammit

What, would you say, is this course all about?

It is about elegance and style in language, about fine attention and razor-sharp precision in selection of words, about poetic beauty and grace in romantic verse, about raucous wit and mordant sound-bites, about luscious sensuality and passionate abandon, about heroic quality and profound emotion. All of this may be enjoyed in *Lingua Latina II* provided the student is open and free of prejudice.

For whom is this course intended?

For those who, like me and my former teachers, have fallen in love with the Classical world and have been so captivated by the allure of ancient Rome that they are prepared to listen with both ears (or at least one and a half) to the words of the best of the Roman authors – with a little bit of help from a recent convert to Classics (my original choice of subject had been Economics). An ear for music really helps. I have discovered, like Cicero, that language is all about music.

What approach are you taking to the subject and to teaching it?

The only approach that works with a so-called ‘dead’ language is to make the language your own – that is to understand a text – no matter how simple – by drawing very close to the thought and emotions of its author. This is very possible, with a little knowledge of grammar and a large dose of patience. A text is then experienced, as it were, from the inside, from the point of view of the writer, rather than as a passive and largely unsympathetic observer. It is an exciting exercise for both tutor and students because it enables new and fresh reactions

to occur each time a Classical text is presented to a new group of students.

Will there be any revision for returning students?

Revision will emerge naturally from the need to understand the Latin text. If the language appears obscure or mysterious, of course we shall go over the declension or verb or rule of grammar which needs to be mastered. The need for revision will, no doubt, rear its head from day one of the course.

Why should students who have done *Lingua Latina ab Initio I* or another course in basic Latin follow up their study of the Latin language?

Lingua Latina ab Initio I is, in my opinion, an excellent investment of anybody’s time and energy as it provides (not without some pain) a fascinating insight into how language works and into the common ties that link many European languages. It is common knowledge that the Romance languages (Spanish, Italian, Romanian, French and Portuguese) are all derived from Latin but it is much less well-known that Latin can count both English and Maltese among its adoptive children because of the historical influence of both French and Italian on these two languages.

I love to surprise the unwary with the information that the Maltese word *nassa* (snare) is actually a Latin word, deliciously described by Lewis and Short as ‘a wicker basket with a narrow neck for catching fish’ or that the English *pupa* (an insect in its immature form) though pronounced differently, is identical to the Maltese word *pupa* (a term of endearment) and both are the Latin word for ‘doll’. While English

took the word directly from Latin and used it in a metaphorical sense, Maltese inherited it intact through Italian.

In short, whether you wish to improve your English or raise your love of French poetry to new heights or understand the roots of Mediterranean culture, or simply find out what the fuss is all about (Latin has for thousands of years been considered the cornerstone of an elite education) - all you have to do is find a reason that works for you.

It is not the length or complexity of the text that matters. I have known just one sentence of Cicero or Horace, for example, to be so laden with significance as to provoke a lively discussion of forty minutes or so.

Consider, for example the relevance of this: *Iudex damnatur ubi nocens absolvitur* (When the criminal is acquitted, it is the judge who is condemned).



Would you like to know more?

Would you like to sign up for any of these courses? Registration for these courses are not out yet, nor can we give you the exact dates of the lectures and courses. However, if you would like to register your provisional interest in any of these courses or if you would simply like to ask for more information about these courses, other courses and opportunities for coming into direct contact with the Classics, to just to know more about the Malta Classics Association and what it can offer, please do not hesitate to contact the Association perhaps you simply want to learn more about the subjects, the Malta Classics Association at classicmaltasoc@gmail.com for general queries or classicmaltasoc.educ@gmail.com for matters related to courses or tuition. Alternatively, you may follow our Facebook page and website for updates.

Introduction to Sanskrit

Taught by Mrs Maria Zammit. The following is a brief introduction to what might be an unfamiliar subject to many of this Newsletter's readers.

On a memorable day In July 1945, as Robert Oppenheimer, the 'father' of the atomic bomb, watched the first nuclear explosion, a verse from a Sanskrit text famously arose in his mind :

Now I am become Death, the destroyer of the worlds (B.G. 11.32)

The text in question is the *Bhagavād Gītā*, a 700-verse text which focusses on a charged dialogue between Arjuna and his charioteer Kṛṣṇa, on the verge of a mighty battle.

I have to confess that I stumbled upon Sanskrit at the age of 20, before I had even met Latin and Greek, at the most unlikely point of having graduated in Economics, Honours, from the University of Malta. Amongst my subsequent business colleagues and fellow economists, the mention of Sanskrit was met with nothing more than a raised eyebrow. What did a Classical language, 2000 years old, have to contribute to the wealth and well-being of the world? What immediate economic problems did it solve?

All this was to undergo a dramatic change when I found myself reading a degree in Classics, a few years later, at the University...then, surrounded by philologists and lovers of language, I started to detect, following the initial shock, a glimmer of respect – curiosity even – for the mystery of Sanskrit. Was not Sanskrit an Indo-European language, just like Greek and Latin, with a common ancestor – but much older? Was it not reputed to have been preserved intact and free of distortion, unlike what happened to other Classical languages? Were not our Greek dictionaries and our Latin grammar books (some of them) full of cross-references to Sanskrit roots, beyond the comprehension of most Classicists? Was Sanskrit not unique in its concept of mantra – special sounds which carry creative force, and which, if pronounced correctly, lead to subtle areas of mind and emotions?

And, by the way, I thought, as my studies in Classics proceeded, what happened to the cases in Greek and Latin? Sanskrit has seven cases – so have the other Classical languages lost something on the way? And where is the Benedictive Mood? Has it also fallen by the wayside? And why is there not the freedom in Greek and Latin to form *samasas* (compound words) at will, as we do in Sanskrit? Consider this compound word as an example : *tarukoṭarāvasthitakṛṣṇasarpah* meaning 'a cobra abiding in the hollow of a tree'! These were some of the questions I pondered as a student in the Department of Classics.

However, my Sanskrit studies also moved forward, and I was delighted to learn about the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* – arguably the most important piece of writing in Vedānta which summarizes in 12 cryptic verses the quintessence of the teaching which lays down the path to freedom. *Māṇḍūkya* means 'frog' because the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* describes in Sanskrit verse the three leaps of a frog – from waking to dreaming, from dream to deep sleep, from deep sleep to freedom. How much more poetic than this could one get?

I have made it a point to commit the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* to memory – and thus carry it with me, wherever I go, like a very precious gem.

Of course, a beginners' course in Sanskrit can only offer a taste of all this. But eight lectures are enough for students to acquire the tools to read the language, translate simple passages of Classical Sanskrit, chant the invocations and mantras which will be presented – from Classical Sanskrit texts – and enjoy the numerous derivations of English words from Sanskrit seeds – and generally discover the most astonishing connections of words and meanings between Sanskrit and all the languages we speak.

Introduction to Greek and Roman Mythology

What is the Mythology course about?

The DegreePlus course in Ancient Greek Mythology is meant to be an introduction to the world as envisioned and represented by the ancient Greeks through their myths. Starting off from the Ancient Greek myth of the creation of the universe (or lack thereof) we shall journey alongside the Greek mythological narrative right down to the Trojan War and heroes that we might be more familiar with such as Achilles. Along the way, we'll come across horrible monsters, the troublesome family of the Olympian gods and, of course, their misfortunate demi-god children. Towards the end of the course, the focus will shift from narrative of mythology to the way mythology intertwines with other subjects such as ancient Greek tragedy and philosophy and we shall also look at representation of Greek mythology in the contemporary world.

What approach are you taking to the subject?

This will be the third time that the course is being held and, so far, every time that the course has been held, I have tried to take a different approach to the subject. I feel that in this way the course will remain new and exciting. For example, the last time the course was held I decided to highlight the role of women in ancient Greece, something

that comes through even in the mythology of the Greeks. This summer we shall be looking more at the actual ancient texts, in translation, and what they tell us about mythology, narrative and otherwise.

What got you interested in teaching the course?

Like many people, I was always interested in ancient Greek mythology, yet it was not until I began my undergraduate course in Classics that I realised how much these myths had to offer us. While before I had viewed the myths as 'just stories', I soon realised that they as stories created by people, these 'stories' had the ability to offer us an insight, however small, into the mind of the Ancient Greeks.

What is your own personal favourite element of the subject?

This is an easy question to answer. Out of the eight lectures of the course, the last lecture, 'Mythology in the contemporary world', is my favourite lecture, which is not to say that I do not love the lectures on the famous heroes. During this lecture, we take a look at a number of modern books, short stories and even films that keep the myths of the ancient Greeks alive. Take Harry Potter, for example, all seven books are packed with mythological references which not only add to the story and enhance it but

also preserve the memory of the Greek myths.

Who would you recommend this course to and why?

One thing that I have realised while teaching this course is that it has something to offer to anyone and everyone, as is the case with all subjects relating to the Classics. The course would be of particular benefit to students of History of Art, English and of course Classics, but anyone with any sort of background will find the course interesting. I don't think that there is anyone in this world who would not enjoy the myth of Heracles and the Hydra or Theseus and the Minotaur.

What has been some of the feedback you've received from students in the past which has encouraged you to return to the course?

Although the course has only be held twice so far I have received quite a lot of positive feedback, but I think the most memorable sort of "feedback" was when I went into class and saw one of my students reading the Iliad. Throughout the course, I encourage students to broaden their reading into the realm of Classics and I try to spark their interest by encouraging them to read two of the greatest pieces of literature from western civilisation, Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. It was encouraging to see one of the students taking them up and I knew then that I wanted to continue teaching this mythology course.



How many Greek gods and goddess can you identify in this reproduction of Peter Paul Ruben's 1622-1624 Council of the Gods, now at the Louvre Museum in Paris? Let us know by sending us an email at newsletter.classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com.