



# The MCA Newsletter

## Editorial – Summer 2017 and MCA Projects

The Newsletter is finally returning to your inbox and screens after the brief summer hiatus, jam-packed with new information about what the MCA has been up to and articles on a variety of topics of Classical interest.

Over the summer, the Malta Classics Association worked on a number of initiatives and projects. Some, like the INSET course, have already come to fruition, while others are in the process of being put into effect.

In July, the MCA held its first-ever INSET conference for primary and secondary school teachers of any subject at Villa Bologna. The conference, which was spread over three days, focused on ways in which teachers can weave in elements of classical interest into their lesson plans without distracting their students or losing precious time which could otherwise be used to check elements from students' extensive curricula. The main thing to take away from this conference is that introducing elements of classical culture and history, if not language, into a history or social studies lesson will not detract from the value of the lesson but will rather serve as a breath of fresh air for the students who, approached with something new and exotic, will be reengaged and will find it indeed easier to focus on the lesson at hand.

This, in fact the principle guiding yet another of the MCA's projects. At the start of this October, the MCA launched the second of its mega-projects for this year: the *Literacy through Latin Project*, which has already received extensive coverage by established local newspapers and news networks. In short, this project aims at using elements of Latin grammar and syntax to help Year 5 students develop their literacy skills. This is done by means of short translations of interesting mythological stories and activities centred around Latin words that are at the etymological root of many modern words in a number of modern languages.

These lessons have been warmly received by students and teachers alike. More regular updates on this project can be found on the Project's dedicated Facebook page.

The MCA has also been working with a number of other NGOs on a variety of projects. This past September, the MCA was present at the *Festival tal-Jum Ewropew tal-Lingwi* in Sliema, where members of the executive got to meet and discuss classics with many interested individuals.

*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).

## Chapter 4

# Rise of the Olympians

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### The Birth of Zeus

Like his father before him, Cronus imprisoned the Cyclopes and the *Hecatoncheires* in Tartarus and set the she-dragon Campe (Gr. *Kampe*) to watch over them. From the *Theogony*, we learn that the day arrived when Rhea, Cronus' consort, announced that she was with child. A prophesy stating that a son of his would usurp his throne as he had done himself came to his mind and when his child was born and Rhea presented their daughter to Cronus, he, to her horror, swallowed the child.



Saturn Eating his Son, by *Francisco de Goya*  
*Painted between 1819 and 1823, this is an impression  
based on Peter Paul Rubens' baroque work of the same name  
Now at the Museo del Prado, Madrid*

Time passed and the next child suffered the same fate. One after the other, every child was swallowed until the youngest, Zeus, was born. Hesiod says that Rhea sought the counsel of Uranus and Gaia so as to save her unborn child. When Rhea gave birth to her child, she hid her son in a cave on Mount Dicte (*Gr. Dikte*) on Crete and, instead of a new-born baby, she gave her husband a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes.

However, hiding the young god was not enough to keep him safe. It was vital that his father never learnt of his existence. According to Apollodorus (1.1.7) Rhea's priests, the Curetes (*Gr. Kouretes*), kept up a cacophony of sounds by performing a kind of war dance to stop Zeus' cries reaching Cronus' ears.

Zeus was placed in the care of Adrasteia and Ida, the daughters of the leader of the Curetes, King Melisseus. Adrasteia gave Zeus a blue and golden ball which when thrown, flew through the air in a blaze of light. Zeus was fed with honey from Melissa, the bee, and by a nymph called Amaltheia with the milk of her goat, and ambrosia and nectar which flowed from the goat's horns. The grateful Zeus gave one of the horns to the nymphs that forever after produced a continuous and abundant supply of whatever fruit or drink they desired. The horn was known as the *Cornucopiae* meaning Horn of Plenty – a symbol of plenty and peace.



*Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Breughel's Five Senses, painted between 1617 and 1618*

*depicts a group of nymphs huddled about a cornucopia, a horn of plenty.*

*Now at the Prado Museum, Madrid.*

In *Astronomia* 2.13 of Hyginus, we are told that Zeus had the goat's skin made into his 'aegis' (*aigis*) or protective shield and after his victory against the Titans, he placed the goat in the heavens as Capella, the 'little she-goat'. The word 'aegis' is nowadays used to signify an authority affording protection.

When Zeus grew up, the Oceanid Metis helped Zeus rescue his siblings by giving Cronus a potion that caused him to disgorge his children. Along with Zeus' brothers and sisters, Cronus also brought up the stone that Rhea had substituted for Zeus. The precious stone or '*omphalos*' was preserved at Delphi where it was anointed daily with oil and adorned with wool during festivals.

We learn from the *Theogony* that as soon as his siblings were freed, Zeus rebelled against Cronus in a battle that lasted a decade. Nearly all the gods took part in the war. The Titans occupied Mount Othrys while Zeus and his allies set up camp on Mount Olympus (*Gr. Olympos*).

The goddess Styx presented her formidable offspring as champions of Zeus – Nike (Victory), Cratos (*Gr. Kratos*), (Power), Bia (Might) and Zelus (*Gr. Zelos*), (Aspiration) formed Zeus' retinue even after the war was over.

Hesiod says that, on Gaia's advice, Zeus released her offspring, the one-eyed Cyclopes and the Hecatoncheires from Tartarus. After their long confinement, the Hecatoncheires soon regained their strength after partaking of the mythical drink and food, nectar and ambrosia.

It was said that Zeus slew the monster gaoler, Campe, and the Cyclopes repaid him for their freedom by fashioning the weapons that only they could produce – the dreaded thunderbolt for Zeus, the trident, a three-pronged spear, for Poseidon and the helmet of darkness, or invisibility, for Hades.

Dismay and fear ran through the ranks of the enemy but the Titans made a valiant attempt to resist the usurpers. The effort was in vain. We are told in the *Theogony* that the Hecatoncheires flung huge boulders at their foes and Zeus' thunderbolt rent the air. On all sides of the Titans surged swirling mists of smoke and leaping tongues of fire and soon they were defeated and flung down into Tartarus where they were kept imprisoned in chains under the watchful eyes of the Hecatoncheires.

In Pindar's *Second Olympian ode*, Cronus is said to have become the ruler of the Isles of the Blest or Elysium (*Gr. Elysion*), where those favoured by the gods were sent after their death. Cronus also became identified with Saturn (*Gr. Saturnus*) in Italy, where his reign ushered in the Golden Age, '*such was the peace and serenity of the people under his rule.*' *Aeneid* Book VIII.

The Kronia, Cronus' festival, was held together with a musical contest. On the day of the festival, the roles of masters and slaves were reversed with slaves being feasted by their masters and allowed to run riot. The Saturnalia, Saturn's festival held annually, was similar to the Kronia in that slaves were permitted the unusual freedom to act as they pleased. Some Greeks associated Cronus with '*chronos*' (time), so that Cronus was portrayed as an old man complete with scythe, 'Old Father Time.' The Stoics identified Cronus with *chronos* 'time' and his role in creation was interpreted to mean that all things were begotten by time. The children of Cronus are the ages, and the story that Cronus devoured them means that 'time consumes the ages'.

The Titans might represent the gods of those whose lands the worshippers of Zeus invaded and integrated in their own pantheon but primarily, the Titanomachy is the battle between creation and annihilation, the conquest of morality over vice, and the victory of stability, righteousness and reason over the harsh violence of ancient fundamental chaos. Today, the word 'titanic' originates from the extraordinary size and strength of the Titans.

And so Uranus' prophecy came to pass. On Cronus' dethronement, lots were drawn whereby Poseidon says in the *Iliad*, Book XV, '*I received the grey sea as my inalienable realm. Hades drew the nether dark, while Zeus was allotted the broad sky and a home among the clouds in the upper air. But the earth was left common to all of us, and high Olympus too.*'

The new gods adopted Mount Olympus as their home and would henceforth be known as the Olympians.

## The Colossus of Rhodes

In his *Seventh Olympian Ode*, Pindar relates that when the gods were apportioning the earth among themselves, Helios, who despite being a Titan had sided with the gods in the Titanomachy, did not receive land of his own because at the time he was away on his daily journey across the sky. Although Zeus offered to redivide the earth, Helios pronounced himself satisfied with an island that had risen from the sea - the island of Rhodes, said to have taken its name from Rhode, 'Rose', the name of one of the daughters of Amphitrite and Poseidon. Helios married Rhode who gave him seven sons.

After having claimed the island for his own, thereafter, the islanders sacrificed four white horses each year to the deity of the sun, thus replacing the exhausted steeds that had been bringing light to the world every day for the whole year.

The Colossus of Rhodes, a representation of Helios, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.



*Salvador Dalí's 1954 The Colossus of Rhodes is the artist's surrealist take on the long-lost wonder of the ancient world. Now forming part of a private collection.*

## Mount Olympus

Mount Olympus, between Thessaly and Macedonia, nearly 10,000 feet high, was held to be the home of the gods. This idea eventually gave way to the belief that Olympus was a realm situated farther up, remote and unapproachable, beyond even the highest mountains.

It was the duty of the Horae to open the gate of clouds to admit the gods. From their separate mansions they travelled the Milky Way, so called by the Greeks on account of its appearance as a spurt of milk across the heavens. In *Metamorphoses* Book I, Ovid saw it as the highway of the gods leading to Zeus' palace.



*The Origin of the Milky Way, by Jacopo Tintoretto,*

*Painted between 1575-1580 in oil on canvas, it depicts Hera pushing away the infant Herakles, the milk spurting from her breast turning into the Milky Way.*

*Now at the National Gallery, London*

Iris, the messenger of the gods, in particular of Zeus, was the personification of the rainbow, the bridge between heaven and earth, *'spreading all her colours over the sky opposite the sun.'* Aeneid Book IV. With saffron wings, dressed in a short tunic and holding a herald's staff, she ushered the gods on their arrival, *'acting as their cupbearer, served them with nectar, and they drank each other's health from tankards of gold.'* Iliad Book IV, as they savoured the aroma of the burnt sacrifices offered by the mortals on their altars below.

Iris also waited on Hera. She is depicted by Callimachus in Hymn 4 (Hellenistic poet and scholar c. 305-240 B.C.) as adopting the posture of a dog, crouched beneath Hera's throne, ever-ready to carry out the goddess's bidding.

However, it was Themis, representing law and order, who, with Zeus, presided over the ceremonies on Olympus.

On Olympus the gods passed their time participating in merry feasts, much as normal families would, discoursing upon heavenly matters and mankind's affairs, at times disagreeing harshly when they took sides in mortal disputes...and they listened to 'the sound of the lyre so skilfully plucked by Apollo, to accompany the notes of the Muses' clear-ringing treble.' Iliad Book I.

*Are you as excited about mythology as we are?*

Tell us all about it. Send us your own retelling of your favourite classical myth, including also why this is your favourite myth. Send your submissions by email to [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 November 25<sup>th</sup>. There is no minimum or maximum word count required. The winner will be chosen by the newsletter's editorial team, and will receive a copy of Fagels' translation of Homer's *Odyssey*.



*Ulysses and the Sirens* (1909) by Herbert James Draper  
Now at the Ferens Art Gallery, Kingston upon Hull

## *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 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, Classics undergraduate student Steve de Marco explores the Classical elements represented in the award-winning and well-known book and film series, Harry Potter.

*This article was originally published in the BOOKMark October 2017 newsletter*

### *Series Review*

## *Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the First Publication of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

Harry Potter is undoubtedly one of the best-selling books in the world and, like many people my age, I grew up reading these books. Till today, whenever I look at my shelf and see those seven books I feel myself filling with warm nostalgia and it is not uncommon for me to re-read the series especially when I'm stressed. It is safe to say that Harry Potter has a magic surrounding it that makes the novels timeless. But what is it that makes the books timeless? When I first read the books, I didn't read past the words on the page. In my mind, the only intention of J.K Rowling was to tell a wonderful story of wizards and witches, dark lords and chosen ones. Yet the reality of it soon became apparent, Rowling had included all sorts of undertones throughout the books and it is these undertones which gave the novels this element of timelessness. It might be difficult to conceive that a children's book would have deep and meaningful undertones, but it wouldn't be the first time and Harry Potter is packed full of them. But one specific undertone interests me the most, and that is J.K Rowling's use of classical references. Her use of classical culture and language is extensive yet incredibly interesting, and the more deeply one looks into the novels, the more one finds just how extensive these references are, and just how brilliantly she used them.

### Mythology

Ancient Greek and Roman mythology is an incredibly interesting subject, therefore it is not difficult to see why Rowling would have borrowed from it. The first example which I would like to give to you comes from the first book ('Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone). In this book, Harry Potter and his two companions must face a ferocious, three headed dog named Fluffy. Rowling has lifted this beast straight out of Ancient Greek mythology, although the Greeks gave it a different name, Cerberus. Cerberus was a three headed dog which guarded the Underworld and we come across this beast in several episodes in mythology, but most notably in the myth of Orpheus. This man is a lesser known hero of Ancient Greek mythology, known as one of the greatest musicians in the ancient world. Having lost his wife, Orpheus found his way into the Underworld in the hopes that he might save his wife but his path was blocked by Cerberus. Therefore Orpheus pulled out his lyre (a musical instrument) and began to play and Cerberus was so moved by the beauty of his music that he let Orpheus pass. Therefore, not only has Rowling lifted Cerberus from mythology but also the story of Orpheus. We are told that in order to get past Fluffy music must be played to put him to sleep therefore allowing Harry and his companions to get past the beast safely just as Orpheus plays music to get past Cerberus.



## Character Names

Many characters in the Harry Potter novels bear a name either from mythology or from the later classical period, but in either case, we find that their name reflects the personality of the character. Take, for example, Professor Minerva McGonagall. Professor McGonagall is a very prominent character throughout the series who always leaves a lasting impact. Despite the fact that she can be quite strict with Harry, it was always clear that she was protecting him, even when he was only a baby. But, why am I mentioning this? Professor McGonagall's first name is Minerva, the name of the Roman goddess of wisdom who is identifiable with the Greek goddess Athena. In mythology, Athena/Minerva is known to have taken a liking to certain heroes and go out of her way to help them. One such example can be found in 'The Odyssey' by Homer. In this epic, the hero, Odysseus, is constantly watched over and protected by the goddess Athena who admires him for his wits and cunning. Therefore Rowling re-enforces McGonagall's role as Harry's protector by giving her the first name Minerva.

## Latin

This may be the most obvious classical reference included in the Harry Potter novels. J.K Rowling got her B.A in French and Classics, therefore she would have definitely known Latin and made extensive use of the classical language in her books. The most common inclusion of Latin comes in the form of the spells used in the wizarding world of Harry Potter. For example, a very common spell used is the Accio charm, used to summon near by objects. This word, Accio, comes directly from the Latin verb Accio, which means 'to summon'. Another example would be the spell Expecto Patronum, another very popular spell. This incantation summons a personal defender for the witch or wizard using the spell. In Latin, the verb 'expecto' means 'I await' or 'I have need of' while the second word is a Latin noun meaning 'defender'. Therefore as you see, Rowling uses Latin to not only give a name to all the spells but also a meaning. However, spells are not the only inclusion of Latin in the Harry Potter novels. The motto of Hogwarts, the wizarding school, for example, is 'Draco dormiens nunquam titilanus', which can be translated from Latin as 'Never tickle a sleeping dragon'.

So what? What difference does it make if Rowling borrowed ideas, names and language from ancient civilisations? I would argue that it makes a big difference. As already mentioned, the Harry Potter books have a timelessness that few other novels have achieved. On top of the nostalgic feelings that the books might incur, these references to Ancient Greece and Rome, these allusions to the classics, instantly takes our minds back in time and make us believe that the story of Harry Potter must belong to the classical period. This is the magic of the Harry Potter novels. This, of course, is not to say that the reader must be aware of the classical references to truly enjoy the books. Yet the classical references not only bolster the underlying story of the book but also offer something to the reader as well. Knowledge of the classics is not readily available, or at least it is not approachable, but Rowling has managed to make classical content available to all in her novels, in the guise of a children's story

Steve de Marco