

# THE MCA NEWSLETTER



Malta  
Classics  
Association

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## LETTER From the Editor

Χαίρετε!

The height of summer is at its end, and the start of the new academic year is racing closer. Thankfully, there's still some time to relax before everyone gets into full-on work or study mode, so we've put together a short but jam-packed newsletter for you.

This issue contains a fantastic Latin composition of the Maltese legend of Saint Dimitri by Dr Carmel Serracino, a humorous look at the fabulous world of Assassin's Creed Odyssey, and an interview with a former MCA student of Sanskrit. We also, of course, have our customary dose of etymology with the Power of the Classical Word.

As always, I've tried to keep it short and sweet. But remember, if ever there is something you would like included in the newsletter, or if you have a project or event that we can share with the Classics community, just send us an email on [info@classicsmalta.org](mailto:info@classicsmalta.org) or contact us on our Facebook page.

Stay safe, and I hope you enjoy the August issue.

*Elizabeth Kemp*

# FABULA GAULITANA DE Sancte Demetrio

A CARMELO SERRACINO LATINE NARRATA

Multae fabulae antiquae Melitensibus sunt, quarum pulcherrima quidem quae de Sancto Demetrio narratur. Hoc Gaulo accedit, quae insula altera minorque est non procul ab insula Melita.

Olim anus vidua, cui parva casa erat, in vico paupere cum filio unico habitabat. Puer erat improbus atque piger qui semper in campis collibusque ludere volebat neque scholam umquam audire. Vidua, quae erat pia, in ecclesiam vetustam Sancto Demetrio dedicatam cottidie ibat ubi, genibus nixa pro magna Sancti pictura, cum lacrimis precabatur dicens: ‘Sancte Demetri, ora pro nobis, et fac ut filius meus probrior sit!’ Semper autem Sanctus fortis et armatus in equo in tabula picta remanebat immobilis, semper filius laetus in vallibus currebat.

Quodam die aestatis, dum filius viduae in campo ex consuetudine sua ludit curritque, piratae Truces in nave sua insulam petiverant, quorum pauci in terra furtim descenderunt ad praedam petendam. Ubi puerum in campo ludentem viderunt, ad eum subito accurrerunt. Post paulum puer captus et funibus bene vinctus ad navem agebatur.

Mater senex filium in casula exspectabat qui autem non rediēbat. Postea, fama ad aures eius advenit navem Tricium solvere visam esse, quare vidua veritatem cognovit: filium tunc Trucium servum esse et se eum numquam visuram esse. Sed, ut poeta Virgilius scribit, ‘una salus victis nullam sperare salutem’: dum fides est, spes est. Postridie, ante solem occasum, mulier ad ecclesiam profecta Sanctum Dimitrium in picturam depictum multas lacrimas plorans deperecata est: ‘Sancte Dimitri, filium meum ad me reduce. Si vivum

sanumque reduces, promitto me candelam in ecclesiam coram imagine tua quoque die usque ad finem vitae portaturam esse.’ Statim, in tenebris, vidua figuram Sancti movere videt. Ecce, et homo armatus et equus suum, nunc caro facti e pictura vivi atque spirantes in terra saluerunt. Qua mirabili visione, mulier ad terram cecidit, stupefacta paeneque exanimata. Sanctus autem, equo suo vectus, ex ecclesiam celeriter fugit.

In fabula autem non narratur quid acciderit in nave Trucium – neque si omnes piratae a Sancto trucidati sint, neque si (ut spero!) ab eo vivi relictii sint. Tamen vero ubi vidua reversa est in se, filium vivum in amplexu suo rursus videt, quem Sanctus Demetrius in equo ad eam reduxerat antequam in pictura ecclesiae redivit. Quod gaudium, quantas lacrimas matris filii! Inde usque ad diem mortis suae vidua candelam ante picturam Sancti Demetrii cottidie ferebat atque lucebat.

Postea, filius eius qui, cum adultus esset, probissimus factus est, novam ecclesiam, maiorem pulchrioremque quam illam antiquam, Sancti Demetrio aedificavit quae hodie adhuc stat.





# Assassin's Creed Odyssey

## FROM A CLASSICIST'S PERSPECTIVE

James Farrugia

Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* video game franchise has been around since 2007. Yet, it was only in 2018 that we classicists (and gamers) were blessed with a full-blown classical game in the series. Before purchasing it, my expectations were very high — indeed, they were so high that I had already assumed that the game would feel like an overall let-down. After 124 hours of gameplay and 97.74% overall game completion I can — without shame — say that I was very much mistaken. Set in mainland Greece and the Aegean during the Peloponnesian War, *Odyssey* is a classicist's paradise for the mere price of €59.99 (excluding the very tempting extra content). Okay, it is on the pricey side for a video game, but it is worth it. Here are some highly subjective opinions about the game, purely from a classicist-gamer's point of view.

Let me first address the elephant in the room: the Greek pronunciation throughout the game is Modern Greek pronunciation. “Oh, what's the big deal? It's just slightly different pronunciation, right?”, some might say. Well sure, but for those like us who are trained in the ancient Greek language, it is not something we get used to quickly. Island of *Evia*? Never heard of that... oh, wait, it's Euboea. *Zefs* is Zeus, *Varnavas* is Barnabas and why, *μὰ τὸν Ἄϊδη*, are rho and upsilon not aspirated at the beginning of a word? I am also quite certain

that *malaka* being spewed at the most minor of inconveniences is a modern occurrence. For the average gamer, pronunciation does not matter; it's all Greek to them anyways! The overabundance of *malaka* probably even gives the conversations a Greek feel. For me, though, the pronunciation was hard to get used to and *malaka* is nothing compared to the highly decorated insult-vocabulary I have encountered (I'm looking at you, Aristophanes). Overall, the conversations in *Odyssey* just felt too modern and with 431 BC Greece. Now that that is out of the way, I can move onto the game elements that made my inner classicist sing like Calliope... erm... *almost* like Calliope (lest I be turned into a magpie).

As we know, the sea was of great importance to the Greeks. Within an hour of gameplay, you find yourself commander of the *Adrestia*, a Greek trireme, and minutes after that you find yourself in the first of many naval battles. Picture this: you are in the Aegean navigating a trireme, ordering the crew to shoot arrows and javelins, and cleaving ships in half by ramming into them. Then you run into Spartan and Athenian ships battling each other and you linger and watch the spectacle (or join in). Does it get more 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Greece than that?

Then, of course, there are the characters you encounter: Socrates with his never-ending



questions; Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes arguing about theatre; Herodotus with his many fascinations; Pericles with his hetaira Aspasia; and the ever-scheming and raunchy Alcibiades with an ogling goat. Yes, a goat, and no, I cannot give any more details, at least not in the MCA newsletter. What is so spectacular about meeting these people and doing a bunch of favours for them is that they are transformed from people I had read about, studied and whose texts I had translated, to characters I see laugh, grieve and, in some cases, die; they become alive and human. Socrates is no longer just a brilliant philosopher I could only dream of interacting with, but a guest at Pericles' home asking me questions during a symposium. I get to see Pericles in a bed dying from the plague. And, of course, the ever-charming Alcibiades cannot help but invite me to "celebrate Aphrodite" with him every time I run into him.



Finally, and this was my favourite feature of *Odyssey*, are the cities, islands, and sanctuaries. You start the game in Kephallonia, right next to Ithaca. One of the first quests leads you to the ruins of Odysseus' palace on Ithaca to find Penelope's shroud. From there you travel by sea to Megaris to help the Spartan camp take over the region from Athens and its allies. Soon after, you travel to Phokis to visit the Pythia at the sanctuary of Delphi. It was in Delphi that I recognised the value of this game. As I walk through the sanctuary, past the treasures, temples, the tholos, and massive bronze and marble sculptures, the sanctuary ruins I saw in 2017 during my visit to Greece are reconstructed into their former glory; as I walk through crowds of pilgrims hoping for an audience with the Oracle or to offer sacrifice at one of the altars, the fascinations I have had



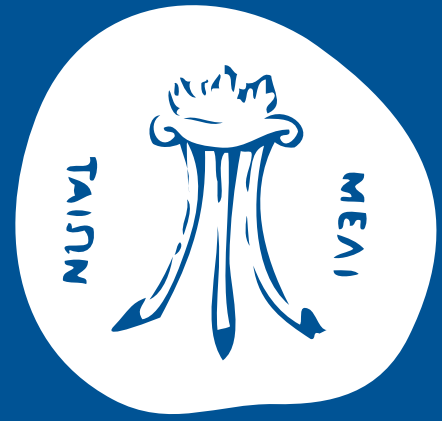
about the Greeks for as long as I can remember come to life. On the Acropolis in Athens, I can see Phidias' massive bronze statue of Athena Promachos glistening in the sun, and in the Parthenon is the chryselephantine statue of Athena Parthenos; both statues are lost to us today. Among many other cities and islands you can visit are Sparta, Argos, Corinth, Delos, Crete, Lesbos and areas of Macedonia.

Overall, *Odyssey* is a really good game. For us classicists, or at least, for me, *Odyssey* is a gem. With the many historical characters, land and sea battles, and the huge map with the many locations, inhabitants and cultural practices, Ubisoft created a virtual tour of 5<sup>th</sup> century Greece (including Discovery Mode for this exact purpose) where everything I have studied, read and daydreamed about comes to life. Sure, the modern Greek pronunciation can be a bit off-putting at times, but if you are not engaged in conversation, you quickly get lost in the marvel that is ancient Greece. Well done Ubisoft, you get a δέκα from me. Now we demand (very nicely) for an *Assassin's Creed* set in ancient Rome to satisfy the Latinists.

PS: Who else is super excited to be playing *A Total War Saga: Troy* that came out this August? I wonder if I can cause Aphrodite to come to the rescue of Paris if I injure him enough...

*All images in this article are taken from the Assassin's Creed Odyssey E3 Fan Kit, <https://assassinscreed.ubisoft.com/game/en-us/news-updates/327808/assassins-creed-odyssey-e3-fan-kit>. © Ubisoft Entertainment. Malta Classics Association does not claim ownership of any of the images used.*

# the power of the CLASSICAL WORD



## planet

*noun //*

A celestial object orbiting elliptically and in a clear path around a star within a solar system.

From the Classical Greek *πλανήτης* (planetes) meaning 'wandering' or 'roaming'.

## circle

*noun //*

A two-dimensional geometrical object consisting of a set of points equidistant from a central point.

From the Latin *circulus* meaning 'circular figure' or 'circle'.

## tribute

*noun //*

A deed of respect or homage, may also mean a payment made by a state or nation dependent on a ruler.

From the Latin *tributum* meaning 'tribute', 'contribution' or 'stated payment'.

## demagogue

*noun //*

A political leader and popular rhetorician who appeals to the people and their desires rather than reason.

From the Classical Greek *δῆμος* (demos) meaning 'people' and *ἀγός* (agos) meaning 'leader'.

## democracy

*noun //*

A governing system in which the main principles are those of majority rule and minority rights.

From the Classical Greek *δῆμος* (demos) meaning 'people' and *κράτος* (kratos) meaning 'power'.

## nebula

*noun //*

A celestial, gaseous and dusty cloud of substance, typically illuminated by one or more stars.

From the Latin *nebula* meaning 'mist', 'fog' or 'cloud'.

# Q&A

with Ben Farrugia

DEGREE PLUS/MCA STUDENT, SANSKRIT, 2018

## **What is your profession and what are your interests?**

I am an architect by profession and my interests evolve around the theme of well-being and its application in a simple and practical way. To mention a few, they include philosophy, science, and health.

## **What attracted you to studying Sanskrit in the first place?**

There is a close relationship between the pure sounds of the Sanskrit language and its effect on the brain and human system, termed the Sanskrit effect. Thus, the study of Sanskrit provided the opportunity to learn, practice and experience these pure sounds and meanings for oneself.

## **What was your experience of being in class for a two-hour Sanskrit session for ten weeks, with a variety of students of mixed ages and areas of expertise?**

Being able to listen to the tutor beautifully and authentically articulate phrases and sounds in Sanskrit for us to repeat contrasted very differently to the usual sounds that were heard throughout the working week. This left one feeling light and refreshed.

## **Has your study of the Sanskrit language had any effect on you at all?**

Yes, reflecting on the pure sounds and phrases of the Sanskrit language, both orally and mentally, has helped me clear my mind and left me feeling better afterwards, a practice which I still carry with me till today.

## **Would you recommend studying Sanskrit to others? Would you recommend it to everyone?**

Yes, definitely. There is a link between the Sanskrit language and well-being, and since well-being is for everyone, I would recommend it to everyone.

