

THE MCA NEWSLETTER



Malta
Classics
Association

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LETTER From the MCA President

Over forty-one years ago, in March, I emigrated to Rhodesia with prospects of starting a new career in Classics. Against the advice of certain individuals, I entered a country which had been torn by civil war over many years. The 'enemy' were shooting down the planes landing in Salisbury, so that I really wondered whether I would arrive safely at my destination or not. In fact, the plane I was on made an emergency landing, a sharp spiral descent with the engines almost completely switched off and in total darkness.

The following day I called at the Department of Classics, but I was suffering from a virus which I had picked up from the plane or from some airport. Walking from my flat to the Department made me very uncomfortable indeed. I imagined that every passer-by could turn on me and attack me... but this never happened. This experience of my first day at work remains fixed in my mind to this day.

When I was a student at the University of Malta, I had proclaimed publicly that I was ready to go to Africa to teach, so long as I taught Classics. At times, I ask myself - where had this enthusiasm come from? Or was it just that I had no other option except to emigrate?

Reading the Classics is a motivating experience. You learn about the typical Greek character, forever in love with controversy, and about the typical Roman character, ever stubborn and adamant in his pursuits . . . here I was probing into centuries of success and cross-cultural influences: the Greeks influencing the Romans, and vice-versa, and the Greco-Roman world leaving its mark on the rest of the world. Yet, all this success was achieved at a price, the price of extensive travelling, often on foot by soldiers, founding new colonies and facing new obstacles, including health hazards.

One of the health hazards I experienced in Africa was 'bilharzia': It was forbidden to dip my feet into a river or lake because an

insect, which had travelled down to Zimbabwe from Egypt, had infested all lakes and rivers. When this insect bites you, it enters your skin and travels up to your internal organs, attacking your bladder, and causing you to urinate blood. And so, while following a course in Greece, I started urinating blood. I told the doctors at the hospital of Thessaloniki that I was suffering from bilharzia. They spent hours looking into their books to trace the name of the disease, but did not find it... it eventually transpired that my condition, after all, was caused by a kidney stone.

A further health hazard was caused by a fly which liked to lay its eggs on linen sheets, and when my late wife slept on our sheets, her back was attacked by insects which found their way into her skin. No doctor was found to cure her from her great pain: I found a remedy myself, by applying the hydrogen solution she used for dying her hair, and then squeezing out the crawling insects one by one. I must say that my wife did not die as a result of this infestation.

Yet another health hazard was malaria. If you contract malaria from a mosquito-bite, you risk dying, or remaining sick all your life. We were spared from this disease because we lived at a very high altitude, but had to take pills when we camped in the wild by the Zambezi river... there we ran greater risks from lions and crocodiles than from mosquitoes.

Travelling was commonplace for the Greeks and the Romans, but we must understand that this entailed crossing large tracts of infected marshland. I am not an expert on the viruses which plagued them from time to time, but we can all read Thucydides' account of the plague of Athens. Horace, my namesake Roman poet, suffered from eye-disease when he travelled south-west to Brundisium with his boon-companion, Vergil. No doubt much has been written by modern scholars on the health hazards of the Greco-Roman world.

Travelling and health hazards were my experience when I went to a Classics convention in Croatia last August. There, I could so easily imagine the Romans marching along the road through which I was driving, to enter Pannonia – modern Hungary. It was quite an experience smelling (albeit with a mask covering my nose) the air inside the Mausoleum of Diocletian and

inside his palace, many parts of it still intact.

And yet, back in Malta, we are being asked to teach Classics with a mask on and to keep our distance from the nearest student. But my message to students is this: never give up: *tempora mutantur et nos cum illis*. We shall continue to travel, both in reality and in our imagination, thanks to the precautions we are taking and thanks to our reading about the Greeks and the Romans. A balance of reality and imagination is also the method we will be using for this year's teaching: both real and virtual. We shall imagine our students, following our courses online, to be close to us: in reality, they might be filled with an urge to exchange a hand-shake with their fellow-students or lecturers!

We look forward to post-coronavirus times.

Prof. Horatio Caesar Roger Vella
President
Malta Classics Association

FABULA MELITENSIS DE MIRACULO 'VALLE SPEI'

A CARMELO SERRACINO LATINE NARRATA
FOR INTERMEDIATE LATIN STUDENTS

Alia antiqua fabula a Melitensibus narratur in qua iuvenis quidam a mirabili miraculo servatus est.

Olim puella pauper circa quindecim annos nata cum parentibus sororibusque duabus in vico parvo habitabat. Quae, formosa sed clauda, ea puella mane oves ad campos ducebat, quas custodiebat dum duae sorores minores non procul ab ea ludunt. Ad vesperum una cum sororibus oves ad casam reducebat. Puella laeta erat, sed interdum tristis quia ob pedem suum claudicantem currere cum sororibus non poterat.

Die quodam aestuoso, puella in campo oves - ut cotidie - custodiebat, atque sorores iuxta ludentes aspiciebat. Statim procul tres piratas accedentes aspexit qui crudeles esse videbantur, atque in manibus enses tenebant. Puella perterrita magna voce iussit sorores domum celerrime currere; quae, hoc audito, statim

effugerunt. Sed illa currere tam celeriter quam sorores non poterat. Primum arborem ascendere in animo habuit, quod quidem difficillimum erat. Aegre igitur claudicabat quam potissime; tamen domum cursum, qui longus erat, non tetendit, sed in vallem ubi arboribus operiebatur. Sperabat piratas eam non vidisse; errabat autem quod duo piratae eam in vallem sequebantur. Puella speluncam parvam media in valle vidit in quam intravit atque se in intimum recondidit. Sanctam Mariam Matrem Dei precabatur: 'Dulcis mater, succurre mihi! Si salva fuerim, ecclesiam aedificatam tibi dedicabo'. Magno cum timore tacuit, adhuc sperans dum spes eius defecit. Sed, mirabile dictu visuque: puella bestiam minimam, quae in spelunca araneam celerrime texere incipiebat, vidit. Haec aranea mox totum speluncae ostium operuit, quod multum a puella miratum est. Ea piratas in speluncae ostium iam ingressos inter se loquentes audire potuit.

Pirata primus: Ubi iit?

Pirata alter: Nescio! Puella extincta videtur esse!

Pirata primus: Fortasse in hanc speluncam iniit.

Pirata alter: Sciebam te stultum esse, sed nesciebam te multo stultiorem esse.

Pirata primus: Cur hoc dicis, furcifer?

Pirata alter: Nonne illam araneam vides quae speluncae ostium claudit?

Pirata primus: Certe, caecus non sum! Num puta me ab araneis terri, ignave?

Pirata alter: Tu es omnium stultissimus! Quomodo puella in speluncam intrare et araneam magnam non scindere potuit...?

Sed antequam haec sententia tota elocuta est, primus pirata iratissime exclamat et in alterum impetum fecit. Puella in spelunca celata audire potuit duos piratas extra speluncam pugnantes; denique, alterum magno cum dolore ululare cadereque mortuum, alterum ex loco effugere. Puella salva erat, in genua cadit et vix lacrimas tenere potens, Matri Dei gratias multas egit. Puella et familia multum gaudebant, et pecunia collecta, ecclesiam Matri Dei dedicatam in eodem valle sitam quo miraculum acciderat, aedificaverunt.

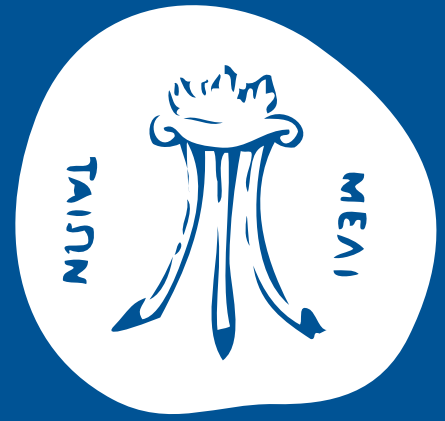
Quod templum adhuc nunc stat quo Christiani fideles ad Matrem Dei oratum atque hanc fabulam recordatum adeunt. Et ecclesia et vallis appellantur 'Spes'!



Ecclesia in Valle Spei sita, infra quam, spelunca adhuc videri potest.

PHOTO: BENJAMIN ZAMMIT

the power of the **CLASSICAL** **WORD**



idea

noun //

A possible course of action to follow, a notion thought as a solution to some problem.

From the Classical Greek ἰδεῖν (*idein*) meaning 'to see' or 'to look'.

justice

noun //

A principle by which an individual receives merit or is condemned for actions carried out.

From the Latin *iustitia* meaning 'justice' or 'equity'.

impromptu

adjective //

Used to describe an unplanned and spontaneous event or occurrence.

From the Latin *in* meaning 'in' or 'into' and *promptus* meaning 'ready' or 'prompt'.

anthropology

noun //

The humanistic study of mankind in terms of cultural, historical, linguistic, and social theories.

From the Classical Greek ἄνθρωπος (*anthropos*) meaning 'man' and λόγος (*logos*) meaning 'study'.

ontology

noun //

The branch of Philosophy which deliberates the nature and properties of being and existence.

From the Classical Greek ὄντος (*ontos*) meaning 'while being' and λόγος (*logos*) meaning 'reason' or 'word'.

divine

adjective //

Used to describe an entity being of or like God or some other deity/deities.

From the Latin *divinus* meaning 'divine', 'blessed' or 'prophetic'.

Q&A

with Isaac Degaetano

DEGREE PLUS/MCA STUDENT, SANSKRIT, 2018

What is your profession and what are your interests?

I am a 27 year old Economics graduate from the University of Malta and have been working in Banking Advisory for the past 5 years. My interests range from physical activities, such as kayaking and cycling, to activities of the mind and spirit, through the study of philosophy, Ayurveda, and more recently, the Sanskrit language.

What attracted you to studying Sanskrit in the first place?

I had been exposed to the Classical Sanskrit language from a very young age owing to my parents' studies, interests and tutoring of philosophy. Therefore, the desire to gain a deeper understanding was planted a long time ago; however, it was only very recently that the opportunity presented itself (in the form of a Degree Plus summer course) and I could finally begin to give attention to this Classical language.

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?

The two-hour long lectures, delivered so inspiringly by the lecturer, felt like a couple of minutes long and would leave me mesmerised and full of burning questions by the end of each class! Through the lecturer's dedication to the subject, the deepest meanings of the language were conveyed in a simple, clear and precise manner, and the class was engaged to participate, study and live the language!

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

Merely sounding the alphabet of the Sanskrit language necessarily begins to affect you in ways which may not at first be apparent. For me, the most enduring effect was that I gained a deep awareness of the need for measure in speech; so that even outside the study of the language, I began to observe the measure of my speech, thoughts and actions. The language causes you to bring more discipline into your life and to question the nature of life itself.

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

Judging by my own experience, there is no question that I would recommend the study of Sanskrit to everyone! To start with, I believe we could all do with more measure in our speech. I dare say that the decision to study Sanskrit may actually transform your life, if you allowed it to!

