

THE MCA NEWSLETTER



Malta
Classics
Association

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LETTER From the Editor

Salvete omnes!

Welcome to the latest issue of the MCA Newsletter! In this issue, we begin by meeting Samuel Azzopardi, the organiser of the *MCA Conference of Contemporary Research in Classics (CCRC) 2021*, who tells us everything about his idea behind organising the Conference to his future aspirations for it.

Jane Mason follows with an insightful investigation into the etymology of the name 'Ethiopia' accompanied by some references to the uses of the word in Greek literature. Then, we also meet another artist, Yasmin Vassallo, who shares some Classics-inspired verses with us, aptly followed by the much-awaited taste of six new Classical words.

The MCA is always very excited to hear whatever you'd like to tell us about the Classics! If you have an article, poem, story, illustration, project, event or anything else that you would like to contribute, we would love to hear about it. Drop us an e-mail on info@classicsmalta.org or contact us on our Facebook page.

Take care and ἔρωσο!

Andrew Debono Cauchi

The Malta Classics Association

CONFERENCE OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH IN CLASSICS 2021

SAMUEL AZZOPARDI

Last month, the Malta Classics Association hosted an online conference entitled the *Conference of Contemporary Research in Classics* (CCRC). Held on Thursday 8th and Friday 9th April 2021, this two-day conference is the first of what we hope will become an annual event and a fixture in the MCA's calendar of events in the future.

The primary aim of the CCRC is to provide postgraduate students and early career scholars actively involved in Classics as a field of study or in its pedagogy. The conference also provides a space through which to share work with peers, to receive feedback, and to encourage a culture of networking and open communication between researchers at different institutions around the world.

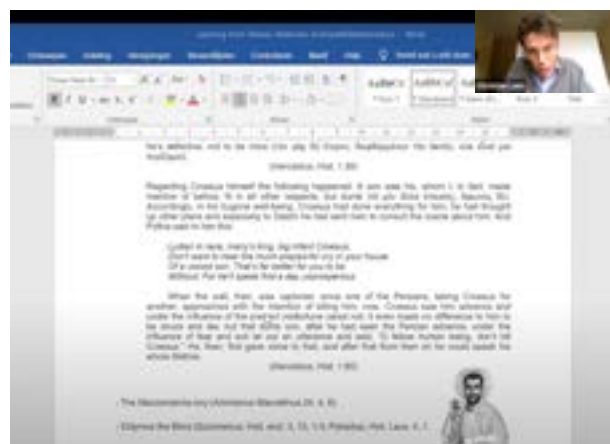
The choice of a virtual setting for the Conference was partly influenced by the ongoing pandemic and related restrictions on travelling, but it was also informed by a desire to ensure that the conference could and would bring together scholars from throughout the world. In this respect, this first Conference was an encouraging success – 27 speakers called in from over 20 different institutions and from over 15 countries ranging from Brazil to China, and Canada to Australia. The participation of so many different contributors whose approach and interest in the Classics is characterised by different perspectives and experienced made the Conference a truly international celebration of the study of Classics.

The diversity and beauty of Classics was reflected not only in the speakers themselves but also in the subject matter treated. The keynote speech by Professor Christian Laes concerning disability and its representation in the ancient world set the tone for a conference that represented the many faces of contemporary

research in Classics. Other contributions dealt with relationships of power in the ancient world, the hidden meaning of words and imagery in Greek and Latin literature, the body and soul in the medical and philosophical works of the Classical period, the relationship between the individual and the power structures – be they political, legal or otherwise – and the reception of Classics in modernity, whether in graffiti art or television and cinema.

A significant number of the conference contributors have generously given their permission for the Malta Classics Association to share recordings of their presentations online, which may be accessed through the MCA's website through [this link](#). A number of contributions will also be published as academic articles in the MCA's annual academic journal *Melita Classica* later this year.

The coming-together of so many passionate minds, and the interest shown in this conference during and since have encouraged us to look forward to a Second Annual Conference of Contemporary Research in Classics, to be hosted once more online by the Malta Classics Association, early next year.



Professor Christian Laes, the keynote speaker of the MCA CCRC 2021, delivering his address

ETHIOPIA

An Investigation into the Meaning of the Name

JANE MASON

One of the set texts which I am currently teaching is a fascinating passage from Herodotus about the King of Persia's failed attempt to invade Ethiopia. Thus, I desired to find out more about the name 'Ethiopia', which is of Greek origin. It turned out to be a fascinating enquiry, which showed the importance of going back to the etymology of words.

The standard Liddell & Scott Greek dictionary translates the word Ἀιθίοψ [Aithiops] as 'burnt-face' and links it to the adjective αἶθωψ [aithops] meaning 'sun-burnt'. However, this dictionary was compiled in the nineteenth century and other references in the entry were racist by today's standards, so I decided to explore further by looking especially at the earliest uses of the word.



Menelaus

Source: Wikimedia Commons under CC 3.0
from Zafky (author's username)

The word is made up of two syllables - αἶθ- [aith-] meaning 'shining', 'blazing' and ὄψ [ops] meaning 'appearance', 'eye', 'face'. 'Aith-ēr' was used in Greek to describe a clear sky or the upper, purer air, which was considered to be the realm of the gods. The English words 'Ether' and 'ethereal' come from it. This realm was believed to be hot as well as bright and therefore the prefix 'aith' also means 'blazing or fiery'.

In Greek mythology, fire was a prized possession of the gods, stolen by Prometheus and given to humankind. Fire then, was originally viewed as something divine. A mundane view of fire leads naturally to the use of the prefix aith- to mean 'burnt' and 'sooty', but this use seems to have come later.

The oldest and main uses of the adjective aithops are in Homer. The first describes Odysseus going into battle to avenge the death of a friend:

βῆ δὲ διὰ προμάχων κεκορυθμένος αἶθωπι
χαλκῶ,
(*Il.* 4. 495)

and he strode out among the champions, helmed in **bright** bronze [trans. Lattimore]

The second use comes after Menelaus has been wounded and Agamemnon responds to this crisis by going amongst the army, appealing to each hero in turn and rousing their warlike resolve:

Ἴδομενεῦ περὶ μὲν σε τίω Δαναῶν ταχυπόλων
ἡμὲν ἐνὶ πτολέμῳ ἠδ' ἄλλοίω ἐπὶ ἔργῳ
ἠδ' ἐν δαίθ', ὅτε πέρ τε γερούσιον αἶθωπα
οἶνον

Ἀργείων οἱ ἄριστοι ἐνὶ κρητῆρι κέρωνται.
(*Il.* 4. 257-260)

I honour you, Idomeneus, beyond the fast-mounted Danaans,
whether in battle or in any action whatever,
whether it be at the feast when the great men of the Argives
blend in the mixing bowl the **gleaming** wine of the princes. [trans. Lattimore]

The final use in Homer is when Odysseus lands on the island of Circe and realises it is inhabited:

ἐπεὶ ἴδον **αἴθοπα** καπνόν. (*Od.* 10.152)

‘since I saw the **fiery** smoke’ [trans. Lattimore]

In the *Iliad* the word is used in two contexts which praise the qualities of courage and honour that were important to Homeric heroes as they make them seem more than human. They are divine qualities, which are emphasised by the use of the adjective aithops. In the first passage it tells us that Odysseus’ armour is of outstanding quality, as befits a hero. In the second passage it tells us that the feasts of heroes are akin to the feasts of the gods.

The use of the word in the *Odyssey* seems at first to be a straightforward physical description. However, in Books 9 and 10 there is the theme of Odysseus landing in new places, investigating smoke and finding monsters – first the Cyclops, then the Laestrygonians. By the time he gets to Circe he is desperate to find ‘some trace of people’, but all he gets is more smoke. However, this time the smoke is aithopa. Perhaps this is a clue that the house belongs to a goddess?

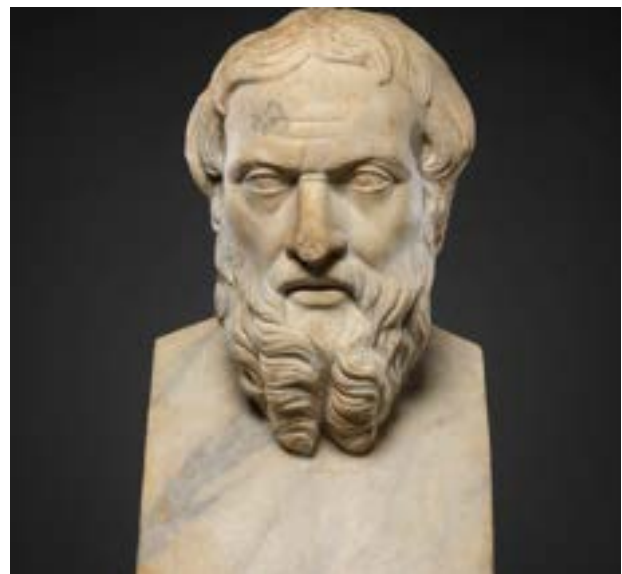
Returning to the adaptation of this adjective to become the name ‘Aithiopsis’, it is clear that although it works simplistically as a description of darker skin, there is much more to it than that. Firstly, the description is extremely complimentary – comparing the glow of darker skin to the finest bronze or the best wine. Secondly, the word suggests a heroic excellence that touches on the divine. In Greece, bronze statues of victorious athletes were not portraits but memorials of how they came closest to the gods in victory.

This tone of admiration accords with Herodotus’ description of the Ethiopians as being taller than other people and living twice as long. The Ethiopian king is portrayed as a wise ruler, brave but not greedy for power or wealth, who outsmarts the Persian spies in the cleverness of his responses to the costly gifts which are intended to intimidate and impress him, questioning their true value. [Herodotus 3.17ff].

At the beginning of the *Odyssey* [Od. 1.22] Poseidon has gone to visit the Ethiopians, ‘most distant of men’. In Herodotus’ time the name was still used to refer to all peoples living south of Egypt.

The most famous Ethiopian in classical literature was Memnon, son of Tithonus, a prince of Troy who, after being killed by Achilles, was carried off by Eos, the goddess of the dawn, to the ends of the earth. The Ethiopis, one of the lost epics of the Homeric cycle, describes his struggles against Achilles, whom he almost equalled in prowess, and how after his death his mother persuaded Zeus to grant him immortality.

Thus, both Homer and Herodotus describe Ethiopians and Africans in general as a mysterious and different people, whose distant location, customs and appearance made them worthy of admiration and respect, as being close to the gods.



Herodotus

Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art
(<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/245829>)

ZEUS' CURSE

by Yasmin Vassallo

One day,
after millennia of
having our demons
locked inside.

We will unleash them,
the monsters
the demons and

He will be standing
right in front of us
in bare flesh,

Ready to unleash the
same demons I
have locked inside
for too long.

As our demons
become one, we feel
relieved yet also
fulfilled...

That we finally found
that one person that
makes us whole.

And by that day
we will finally break
Zeus' curse.

Two bodies,
Joined as one.



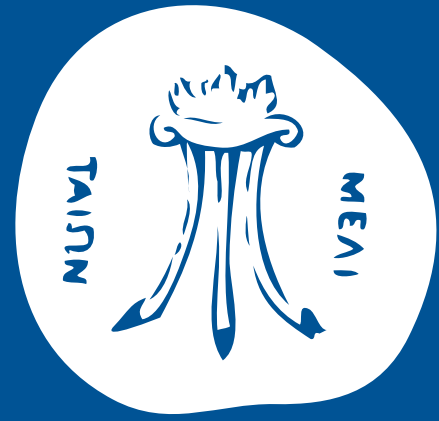
Editor's Commentary on the Poem

Vassallo's poem interweaves a temporal sense ("after millennia") with a fusion of different life forces among which are various "monsters" and "demons".

The poet's final statement "Two bodies, / Joined as one" echoes the story of two souls becoming one in search of each other's 'soulmate' as told by Aristophanes in Plato's 'Symposium' (189e-191d).

Overall, the poem shows a heightened sensual sensitivity coupled by an awareness of a philosophical consciousness.

the power of the CLASSICAL WORD



pandemic

noun //

An outbreak of a disease prevalent either over a whole country or globally.

From the Classical Greek πᾶς (pas) meaning 'all' and δῆμος (demos) meaning 'people'.

animate

adjective or verb //

Used to describe something exhibiting signs of life or movement, i.e. to bring to life.

From the Latin *animo* meaning 'to give life' or 'to animate'.

infinity

noun //

The quality of a boundless, limitless, eternal space, time and / or object without finality

From the Latin *infinitus* meaning 'boundless' or 'infinite'.

hermit

noun //

An individual living in solitude, typically to strengthen a religious or spiritual discipline.

From the Classical Greek ἐρημος (eremos) meaning 'solitary' or 'deserted'.

telescope

noun //

An optical instrument used by astronomers to magnify the sky and its celestial bodies.

From the Classical Greek τῆλε (tele) meaning 'far away' and σκοπός (skopos) meaning 'watcher'.

doctor

noun //

A general practitioner of medicine or a specialist in some field, a particular title of scholars.

From the Latin *doctor* meaning 'teacher', 'instructor' or 'trainer'.