

# THE MCA NEWSLETTER



Malta  
Classics  
Association

## THIS ISSUE

**2** Message from the  
Executive President

**3** Address of the  
Honorary President

**8** Annual Report 2021

**10** List of Events

## LETTER From the Editor

*Salvete omnes!*

Welcome to the February 2022 edition of the Malta Classics Association Newsletter. In this special edition of the Newsletter, our newly elected executive president Samuel Azzopardi welcomes forth the new year with a message to the classical enthusiasts.

Following that is the transcript of an address by the Honorary President, Victor Bonnici, read to the members of the MCA present at the 2021 AGM. The Annual Report is also transcribed, as delivered by Claire Bugeja, covering what we have been up to between the 1st January 2021 and 31st December 2021.

Lastly, keep an eye out for the 'List of Events' section! We are excited to announce new events held both virtually and physically, including; Tragic Thursdays, two public lectures, and the long-awaited Annual Conference of Contemporary Research in Classics.

As always, if 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 at [info@classicsmalta.org](mailto:info@classicsmalta.org) or contact us on our Facebook page.

Stay safe, and I hope you enjoy this special issue.

*Nikolai Zammit*

# Message from the Executive President of the Malta Classics Association 2022/23

The MCA would first of all like to mark the passing of Dr Biagio Vella. Dr Vella was a scholar and teacher who loved the Classics and whose passion and dedication allowed many of his students to experience the wonders of ancient Rome and Greece. His service to Classics in Malta will not easily be forgotten, and many of us in the MCA have fond memories of his learned teaching both as a lecturer at the University and through his contributions to the MCA and its public lectures. Dr Vella was Honorary President of the MCA in 2015. We express our condolences to his family and friends.

The greatest strength of the MCA lies in the passion of so many volunteers who dedicate their time and energy towards the MCA's aims of promoting and supporting the teaching of Classics in Malta. In the past year, the precious work of these volunteers has allowed us to organise active and engaging social media campaigns on a variety of topics of Classical interest, a virtual conference, a number of public lectures, and the publication of the 7th volume of the Melita Classica academic journal. Besides these evident projects, the volunteer members of the Executive Committee took care of the many bureaucratic processes imposed on voluntary organisations by the banks and the government. This thankless service often goes unnoticed, but takes countless hours and great energy, and so I thank all those who are involved in these backstage-processes.

During the MCA's Annual General Meeting this past January, the members accepted to pass an amendment to the Statute which modifies the term of office of each Executive Committee to two years. This move will allow the MCA's Executive Committee to cut down on the bureaucracy associated with the change in terms and allow us to plan for events in the longer term.

This and future newsletters will keep you informed of the many different projects and events that the MCA will be organising over the course of the two coming years. We hope to be able to meet you all in person soon.



Samuel Azzopardi  
Executive President 2022/23

# **Address of the Honorary President of the Malta Classics Association to the Annual General Meeting,**

11 January 2022

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen.

And allow me first of all to congratulate all you members newly elected to serve on the executive committee for this current year, and I wish you every success in your administration.

And allow me also, please, to thank you for electing me Honorary President of our Malta Classics Association. I am, honestly, deeply moved and humbled by your nomination.

For although it's not in my nature, I can assure you that I intend to carry this title with the utmost pride for the span of time that our Statute allows – just as with head held high I have, to the best of my ability, administered, with your advice and counsel, our Association's coffers for the past ten years, in fact, ever since its inception.

No thanks was ever expected – for I always considered it a duty discharged towards an Association which I believed had great potential. So it was a great surprise when the President, Prof Horatio C. R. Vella, and the committee invited me to a convivium on relinquishing my post as Treasurer.

Profs Vella went beyond the call of duty and in truly heroic fashion (or was my mind playing games) entertained us beneath his roof and nobly spread his table. For when the viands fixed on spits had been cooked and placed on boards, and copious draughts of the dark red wine and the ice-cold waters of Ida's winding streams had washed it down, then Phemius himself took up his lyre and sang the deeds of yore while the guest, overwhelmed in his breast with secret joy, bowed his blushing head beneath his cloak.

Thank you again, Prof Vella, and you honourable members of the Committee; your

kind gesture is truly appreciated; and lest we forget, our kind regards should also go to the Lady of the House, Mrs Vivienne Vella.

During the past decade, I have had the honour to collaborate with very many persons who served our Association, especially the members of the Committee. I have seen them come and, with a heavy heart, go – satisfied that they had given their best for the good of our Association, and like autumn leaves give way to younger faces, bearing even more progressive ideas, blazing with still more ardour in promoting and furthering our beloved Classics, like the forest in spring, yearning to go.

For our Association may be small in numbers, its active membership generally restricted to present, recent, and the not-so-recent pupils and lecturers of the Classics at our Alma Mater.

But let us not forget that it draws and attracts. Testimony is our packed lecture halls. The reason why they come may be varied:

An older generation (unfortunately, fast scattering) fondly reminisces those faraway days when they handled the ancient Masters and poured out their hearts on each word and every verse – those very same words which surely must have been recalled in both the happy and the difficult times of their life; on the other hand, a younger generation mesmerised by ancient civilisations that were the cradles of our own, firmly believing that the threads that span these long-gone eras to our own, although slim and tender, have never, indeed, been severed, but still stretch out, nourishing the present, guiding, inspiring, enlightening, and why not, enlivening our present daily life.

Another area which our Association has strived for, even since its inception, was publication. There have been successes, to be sure, but I'm afraid that in recent years our annual journal has suffered from a lack of high quality papers offered for publication, sufficiently varied to attract wide readership. A pity indeed, but at least, it is very heartening to see that the new editorial board is in earnest to address this deficiency, and hopefully, we can expect some good papers in the coming years. I wish them every success.

But since you have today kindly afforded me a podium, allow me please to direct your attention to a recurring problem facing Maltese researchers when tackling documentary sources of our Island's history written in Latin.

You are all well aware, that the primary sources of the history of our islands, especially up to the beginning of the 19th century lie in languages other than our own – mainly Italian and Latin, and, to a lesser extent, to others. Vast lengths of shelving groan under the weight of documentation awaiting the attention of the researcher.

But even if the language hurdle is overcome (no mean task, despite that a few presumptuous know-it-all contemptuously speak of it as dog-Latin) there remain others, not least, the state of the medium upon which the words were written, or even of what remains of the ink that once drew them up, or of those missing parts which have served as nourishment to generations of termites. Think you're over? There's still the hand of the scribe to tackle, who, conscious of the hefty price of paper and his haste in writing it all down in the shortest possible time, abbreviated the greater part of his text.

The perennial question that for long has faced the researcher was how to transcribe that recovered text through printing type, and today with computer keys. A principal problem

concerns abbreviated words, but not only.

For the researcher is expected to choose (for there is as yet no one fixed rule on this small island called Malta) from among one of three methods, broadly applied locally, for expanding abbreviations, namely,

either to transcribe in print a text attempting to imitate as closely as possible an exact rendering of the original,

or to expand the abbreviated words and pass over them in silence as if they had been originally written in that way;

or to expand the words, applying critical signs to distinguish all those letters used to expand the abbreviated words.

And with regard to the latter option, our researcher is also then expected to make another decision: which critical signs should be applied – there being round brackets and square brackets and so many other sets of brackets – to differentiate the letters of expansion from the original, and whether these critical signs should be applied to each and every abbreviated word in the text irrespective of their commonality and frequency of use, or whether simply to the most important?

All three methods, but especially Two and Three, have been used extensively even up to the present day.

For all three have their pros and cons and their exponents have been men of academic worth and stature. There are also variations between these extremes, such that the most common words are expanded and passed over in silence while others, which might have some important bearing on the meaning of the text might have critical signs denoting the editorial expansions.

But there is as yet no agreement which is the better way to transcribe and the poor researcher is obliged to choose one from

the many, always in trepidation lest his choice might be unfortunate, thus falling foul of his readers and his critics.

To compound it all, our ancient scribes frequently used shorthand symbols in lieu of a letter or group of letters, especially those frequently used, such as the macron on a vowel for substituting a succeeding -m or -n, symbols for the most common declension endings -orum, -arum, -ibus, -us, and syllables with onset p-, q-, l-, c- as well as others less common.

The question poses: Are these shorthand symbols actually abbreviations and should they be rendered as such with critical signs, or should they be simply transcribed expanded without any notation whatsoever as if the symbol used was an alternative to the letter or group of letters?

But the expansion of abbreviated words is just one facet of transcription.

For our manuscripts are replete with erasures, interlineal insertions, marginal notes, vacant spaces, difficult readings due to oxidising ink, or ink too faint to read, torn or termite-bored pages, oftentimes with frayed edges; being only too human, grammatical mistakes do crop up, needing correction, and maybe editorial additions for a complete sense of the text

Speaking of grammar, it is a fact that 15th and 16th century authors especially, took liberties with the diphthongs, most commonly the -ae, which they wrote as an e, probably in the same way that it came to be pronounced; also a predominance to substitute the -tio- to -cio-, as also in adopting a marked difference in spelling from classical Latin. Should the transcriber allow the word to stand as it was written or should it be amended consonant to Ciceronian Latin irrespective of the fact that it was written a millennium and a half later?

There are still more difficulties looming: should

the u in transcription be differentiated according to its consonantal or vowel value and changed accordingly for easy reading into a v and a u? Should the i and the j be similarly treated? And when should capital letters apply? Our ancient writers were rather haphazard as to its use, oftentimes writing proper names in small letters, but others, without any particular reason, started with a majuscule.

Punctuation was a free for all, and when used, much different from what we're used to today. Hence, the question: should a punctuation regime similar to our own be applied, and if different from the original, is it necessary to illustrate to the reader each time an amendment has been applied, or should a general note explaining the amendments suffice? And should the Oxford comma, almost universally employed in documents be retained, or should it be discarded?

Highlighted above, are some of the problems facing the transcriber of our Latin texts still extant in our archives. When the Masters are sought for guidance, it is soon discovered that a rainbow of diversity is the order of the day. The methods applied by each differ from one author to another and each zealously defends and guards his own particular system applied in all of his previous publications.

It is rather strange to say that in this year and age there is as yet no common approach to the problem; it still remains highly contentious.

The budding researcher is then thrown into the arena, expected to adopt one system or a combination of two or more, many times arbitrarily, and given his inexperience, his choice is governed more by expediency than by rationality.

The ultimate malaise is suffered by the poor reader to whom after all the research is directed, who is obliged to keep in mind and

reference each author's own idiosyncrasy and suffer the inconvenience of disparateness through no fault of his own.

But there is yet another area, related to the above, where unanimity of approach has also been lacking, leading to a serious remiss on the part of academic excellence.

Once upon a time, thousands of inscriptions paved the floors of our churches in Malta, or were affixed to our walls, city gates, fortifications, palaces, gardens, fountains, granaries, and buildings, both private and public. Not a few are still standing, although many have been destroyed. Still, not all their texts have been lost. We are extremely lucky in that many inscriptions have survived the ravages of Time, and of those that have been lost or destroyed, many texts have survived in the writings of various authors, who providentially had thought fit to record them in manuscripts, although grave doubts exist today to what extent their actual line division has been retained in transcription since they employed no line numbering.

There is unanimous consensus that inscriptions are of the utmost importance since they are generally considered contemporaneous records of our political, ecclesiastical and social history and reference to them have been, and still are, resorted to by researchers. But even a cursory glance would immediately expose the fact that absolutely no uniformity of recording the monumental text, the transcription in its expanded form, or its translation exists at all. The sigla used in expansion of words (and abbreviations do proliferate in inscriptions) and to describe the state of the text itself, are as diverse as the authors. So is the format of presenting the text in its monumental, transcribed and translated format, with some choosing as their preferred mode a centre alignment, others a justified, or any other alignment as fancy might take hold, with the end result oftentimes being an

aberration of the original aesthetics.

What is even worse is the fact that there exists no simple (numerical) reference system for the inscriptions written in the Latin language and set up since the early 16th century even up to the present day, in other words a *Corpus Melitense Inscriptionum Latinarum*.

In order to see how tiring upon a researcher this lack of reference is, and exhausting (not to mention obfuscating) upon the reader, try, for example, to make a reference to an inscription in Malta of the Order's period, and continually refer to it in a paper, and the disadvantage would immediately make itself apparent. Comparing two or more is out of the question without some easily recognisable reference acceptable to all and sundry.

And yet, almost a century ago in Leiden (in 1931, in fact) scholars from around the world established a system of rules and sigla on how to describe and indicate the condition of an epigraphic text in a modern edition; it was so universally adopted by classical scholarship that its usage can now be understood by any scholar anywhere in the world without having to continually refer to guidelines.

For some reason or other, the Leiden Convention has completely passed us by, and individual authors have instead used their own sigla to describe an inscription, although there is evidence that one or two did adopt the system, but even then, only partially.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have placed before you two inter related subjects which, even *prima facie*, are in dire need of attention for furthering classical scholarship in our country. They have been abandoned for too long.

I believe that it is about time that the matter of uniformity in transcription is addressed both for present scholarship to succeed as well as for the future.

Both these subjects are matters of interest to us.

And our Malta Classics Association does have an important role to play – surely not as an authoritative arbiter laying down in its omniscient wisdom a definite rule for all and sundry to obey, otherwise be damned. It should never even dare to presume to undertake such a course. For it is understood, that even though it means well, yet it does not have all the expertise needed for such a task. On its own, it is probable that our Association does not even have the complete ability to indicate all the problems that face the transcription and presentation of ancient texts and inscriptions, the disciplines involved being so varied. Professionals and experts in the academic fields and disciplines mentioned are needed to prepare reports.

But it can inspire, organise, and guide.

Under its aegis and through its connections gained over the years, in Malta and abroad, especially through the unstinting services provided by our Prof Vella in relation to Euro Classica and other foreign Universities, it can draw upon all available expertise and assistance both locally as well as from abroad. For this is not a matter of inventing the wheel again, but of identifying the problems and supplying solutions, and getting them to be

accepted by the largest number possible of people and academic disciplines in Malta.

And here, I believe, lies the secret of success: that participation is laid open to the widest concourse possible, inviting the largest number of academic disciplines to participate, from those having the most at stake even to the very least, allowing them a voice in identifying problems, suggesting solutions, participating in the decision making and a final say in the drawing up of the final Convention.

Reaching consensus among such a wide range of interested parties, would surely pave the way for conclusions to be universally accepted, thus furthering in the process the principal aims of our Association, not to mention the rebound in glory due to our Malta Classics Association under whose auspices the entire Convention would have been initiated, developed, matured and successfully completed.

Thank you for your attention and I heartily wish you all the best.

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Victor Bonnici

# Annual Report

## 2021

This Annual Report covers the period 1st January 2021 to 31st December 2021.

This year saw a successful virtual International Conference, with the participation of presenters from all across the world, as well as the launch of Volume 7 of the MCA's own journal, the Melita Classica. Due in part to the pandemic, many of the public lectures given were done so virtually, thus reaching an international audience which would otherwise have been a difficult feat to accomplish.

The Board of Administrators

During this period the administrators were:

- o The President, Prof Horatio C. R. Vella.
- o The Vice-President, Mr James Farrugia.
- o The Secretary, Ms Claire Bugeja, preceded by Dr Jurgen Gatt who resigned his post earlier in the year.
- o The Treasurer, Mr Victor Bonnici, followed by Mr Andrew Debono Cauchi after his resignation. Andrew was also the Editor of the Newsletter after Ms Elizabeth Kemp before passing on the responsibility to Mr Nikolai Zammit.
- o The Archivist, Mr Samuel Azzopardi (preceded by Ms Elizabeth Kemp), who also heads a number of subcommittees including the Publications subcommittee and the Conference subcommittee. He is also the editor of the Melita Classica.
- o The PRO, a position formerly held by Ms Dora Marossy and for some time by Ms Maria Giuliana Fenech, is now being shared by Mr Steve DeMarco and Mr Nikolai Zammit. Nikolai is also the Gozo liaison officer.
- o The Events Officer, Ms Raina El-Masri.

- o The Education Officer, Ms Maria Zammit, who resigned towards the end of the term.

- o Ms Maria Giuliana Fenech, who oversaw the MCA's presence on social media and assisted in the running to the Association in various other ways.

The role of Honorary President was held by Prof Mario Frendo

The committee met a total of 5 times during the year 2021, with the large majority of the members attending regularly.

Projects / Activities during the year

The year's events were started by a lecture given virtually by Prof Michael Zammit, titled 'The Sanskrit Frog: A Leap beyond Language', on the 1st of March. This was followed by the Virtual Maltese Conference of Contemporary Classics Research, held from Thursday 8th to Friday 9th April, where postgraduate students and early career academics were invited to present their research. The conference was addressed by Prof Christian Laes of the University of Manchester, who is also the current president of the Euroclassica. In addition, 27 international postgraduate students presented their research during the conference.

The second public lecture was given virtually by Rev. Dr. Nicholas Doublet, titled 'An Introduction to the Bishop's Tribunal', on the 9th of April. Later on, on the 23rd of April, the MCA's own Samuel Azzopardi gave a virtual talk on 'The Emergence of Dower in Late Antique Roman Law.'



During summer, on the 16th of July, Prof Horatio Vella delivered a virtual lecture on ‘Those Sacred Numbers’, a lecture he had previously given in 2019 which was restaged due to popular demand. The Committee also celebrated its 100th Meeting on the 27th of July.

The last public lecture of the year was given by Prof Mario Frendo on November 5th at the Carmelite Priory in Mdina. The talk was about ‘Ancient Greek Tragedy as Performance: Orality and Musicality’. This was the only public lecture given physically this year due to the ongoing pandemic and the restrictions that came with it.

The MCA organised a Christmas Event for its committee members, which also served as the official launch of Volume 7 of the Melita Classica, the publication of which was sponsored by Farson’s.

The MCA also taught several courses during summer and winter, including:

- Greek Mythology, taught by Prof Horatio Vella
- Ab Urbe Condita – A History of Rome from Foundation to Fall, taught by Samuel Azzopardi
- Sanskrit – Language and Culture, taught by Prof Michael Zammit
- The Song of Troy: An Introduction to Homer’s Iliad, taught by Steve DeMarco
- A follow-up course to Lingua Latina Ab Initio, Lingua Latina II, taught by Claire Bugeja
- Classical Studies Crash Course, taught by a number of lecturers
- Beginning Sanskrit, taught by Prof Michael Zammit

As in previous years, the MCA in collaboration with University’s Degree Plus also offered Ancient Greek, Modern Greek, Latin, Classical History, and Classical Mythology, available during the summer and/or the winter semesters.

Volume 8 of the Melita Classica is in the process of being finalised, with its publication set for early 2022. Two other publications, a collection of Maltese legends translated into Latin by Dr Carmel Serracino entitled Fabulae, and a Legal Latin Phrasebook, are also set to be published some time in 2022. Additionally, James Farrugia and Horatio Vella are collaborating on the production of a Classics-themed calendar.

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Delivered by

Claire Bugeja on the 11th of January 2022.



Malta  
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# Upcoming Events and Public Lectures

**24  
FEB**

**Tragic Thursdays; *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Euripides.  
19:00 - GUGAR Hangout & Bar (Valletta)**

**9  
MAR**

**Mr Andrew Debono Cauchi - '*On the Good*' - A talk  
on ancient Greek mathematics - (University of  
Malta, Msida)**

**24-26  
MAR**

**2nd Annual Conference of Contemporary Research  
in Classics (online)**

**01  
APR**

**Mr Francois Zammit - *Civil strife as the foundation  
of Classical Greek political thought* (online)**