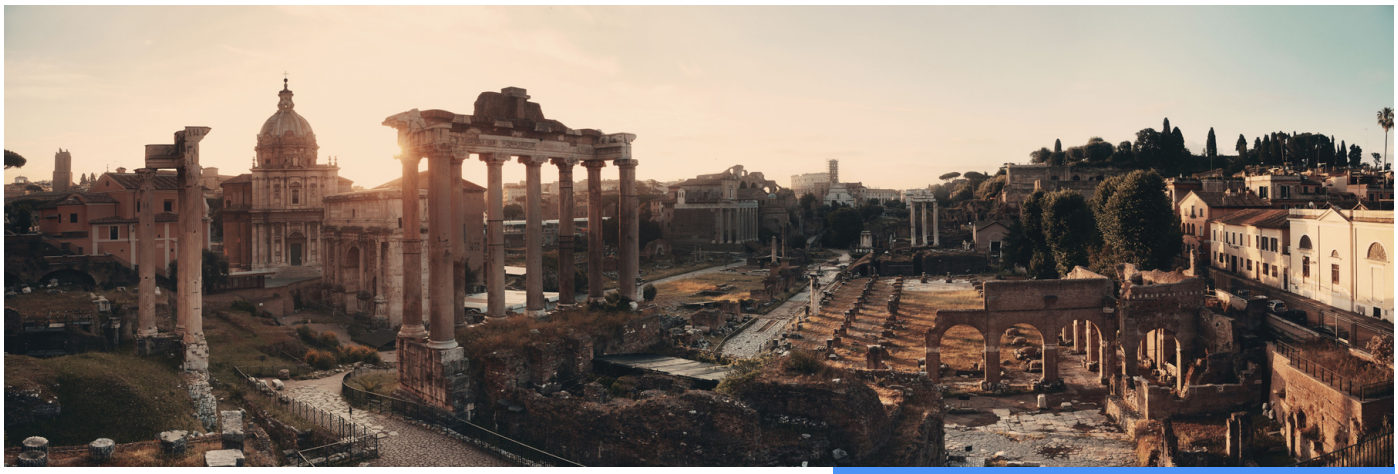
THE MALTA CLASSICS ASSOCIATION

SUMMER ISSUE '23

NEWSLETTER



LETTER
From the Editor

By Nikolai Zammit

Salvete omnes!

In this edition, we have curated an exceptional selection of articles that will intrigue and engage your passion for Classical studies. First up, we have "Ancient Values: A Short Dance Film." This unique piece explores the fusion of dance with the timeless themes of classical antiquity, bringing the past to life through the medium of dance and film. Our next feature article, "Caryatid Figures in Greek Temples," invites you to delve into the world of architectural marvels. Explore the origin and symbolism of these sculpted female figures that have graced Greek temples for centuries, and discover the stories they silently tell.

"Pandora's Jar: Women in the Greek Myths" is an engaging read for those intrigued by the portrayal of women in Greek mythology. This review offers valuable insights into Natalie Haynes' novel that sheds new light on the female characters who have often been overshadowed in ancient narratives.

For those with an interest in Roman history and architecture, "Nero's Domus Aurea in Rome" takes you on a journey through the villa of the Roman emperor Nero. Last but certainly not least, "Linking Metal and Classics" explores the connection between Classical studies and the world of metal music. This article delves into how the themes and imagery of the Classics have inspired metal artists, creating a unique link between ancient history and modern musical expression.

As always, if there is something you would like included in the newsletter; both articles and creative works, or if you have a project or event that we can share with the Classics community, just kindly send us an email at info@classicsmalta.org or contact us on our Facebook page.

IN THIS ISSUE

Malta Classics Association

ANCIENT VALUES: A SHORT DANCE FILM

For my project, I created a short dance film entitled *Ancient Values*. Its aim was to dive into particularly important values, introduced in the first ten lines, with huge resonance throughout Homer's *Odyssey*. My intention was to give importance to the movement's power of concreteness, in order to show how it is still possible today to deal with ancient values as something always true. By the analysis of the poem's first ten lines, I chose to work with the following four particular values: "Ἄνδρα", "Πολύπτροπον", "νόστιμον ἦμαρ", and "θεά, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπὲ καὶ ἡμῖν". These gave birth to the respective four sections of the film. In relation to each value, I opted for different movement approaches and directorial choices that I am going to illustrate in this article.

The first section presents Ἄνδρα through a readable narrative sequence of movements. The choreography's gestures purpose to symbolise Ἄνδρα as the man educated to be brave and fight for his motherland. He is respected inside what is defined as the "society of guilt" in the Homeric poem. He is characterised by his own ἀρετή and by courage, strength, skill in fighting, and respect for his companions as well as for the adversary in battle. His acts are strictly dominated by loyalty to the gods, τύχη, and mortality. I investigated what for me is the relationship between war and movement in dance terms, researching for a masculine way of moving and a powerful way of feeling the movement.

The second section of *Ancient Values* concerns Πολύτροπον. It is the attribute that describes Odysseus throughout the entire poem and it could be interpreted as "a man with a multifaceted mind". This section has been created by conceiving a man with a multifaceted mind, who has been physically in many places and has suffered many pains in his heart. In this section's slow-motion frames, only bare feet are presented, just feet like the ones of everyone. The feet are the source of support and strength of every human being. As every part of the body, they are "multifaceted", having an under and upper surface, sides, and fronts. However, they are the part of our body that is constantly in contact with the soil via the plant and with air via the upper surface. They are the part that mostly carries and holds on the skin the traces and touches of the places where someone has been.

The value of the third section is νόστιμον ἦμαρ, "the day of return", which is the inner motor of the Odyssey. The theme of νόστιμος is one of the most ancient principles among populations, times, societies, and human beings; without this principle, there is no myth and legend. It is the hallmark of Odysseus, ἀνήρ to which was allowed to come back home unlike his companions. This section aims to be the most abstract and poetic part of the film in relation to its powerful subjectivity. The return in the Odyssey is interpretable in many different ways, every time Odysseus tells about his adventures through a flashback, he returns to that memory, especially in his heart's suffering. It is even possible to consider how anyone who reads the Odyssey is doing a journey in his or her own life and does one or more than one return. Since in the examined lines, the νόστιμον ἦμαρ is something that went lost, the respective sequence is entirely composed by an improvisation on the most ancient melody discovered so far – the Hurrian Hymn to Nikkal (1400 BC).

Moreover, to improvise concerns an intrinsic loss factor by definition. Nothing remains in body and mind, except for a bare recordance – that after a short time will be lost likewise. I also thought that the day of the return is something that sooner or later must necessarily be faced in the course of one's journey walking across the events; similarly, when it is time to leave for a journey, the day of return is often impossible to imagine or to think about.

The fourth and last section is dedicated to θεά, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπὲ καὶ ἡμῖν. This periphrasis is the fundamental and traditional epic expedient which concerns the ἀοιδός's pray to the Muse, who has the divine power to reveal the poem's sequence of events. Mythologically, the invocated omniscient entity is traditionally defined as Clio, one of the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, goddess of remembrance – to which song and dance are also attributed. This section's landscape is the sea because it will be the most dominant component from the end of these first ten lines onwards. I intuitively decided to present a movement sequence mainly inspired by Graham technique exercises through which the Muse's traditionality and rooted importance has been expressed by a likewise dance language in movement. The movement phrase follows a modular structure as much as the epic line does; the repetitions of patterns and their modularity are exactly relatable to the line's rhythmical composition. Furthermore Martha Graham dedicated most of her choreographic research and consequently repertoire to Greek mythology and the ancient world. Having belonged to the generation post-Isadora Duncan, and having been a student of Ruth St Denis, Martha Grahamand her technique were simply the most appropriate to express the Muse's figure. Her visual imagery was pretty much conditioned by the idea of Greek myth and tradition in relation with her own time. This brought her to define a new aesthetic of movement, which always fascinates me, as a mover and at the same time as a Classics and Dance Studies student.

Creating this work made me reflect on the power of the movement and how something so fluid and in constant evolution is still and will remain forever one of the oldest things that constitute part of human history, body and skin. The creative process made me deal with several possible ways of using my knowledge differently and following unexpected pathways. It has been relevant to me to focus on how much it is of deep importance and necessity not only "to do", but above all "to think" dance in its historical and ancient value.

By: Antea Buro

This article was originally written for the Classics unit CLA3129 [Survey of Classical Epic] at UM.

THE ORIGINS AND USE OF CARYATID FIGURES AS INTEGRAL ARCHITECTURAL SCULPTURE IN GREEK TEMPLES

The ancient Greek Caryatid has been identified as a female figure, draped in laborious togas or draperies and integrated within the building as an integral part, substituting the column. Several theories with regards to their origins have been put forth, all of which try to present a credible reason as to how these ethereal figures came to be.

In his *De Architectura*, Libri Decem, Vitruvius opens the first book by making reference to the caryatids, theorising how they came to be. Vitruvius explains the reason for 'erect[ing] marble statues of robed women … instead of columns on his building' [1]. He mentions a city called Carya in the Peloponnese which fought against Greece and allied itself with the Persians. However, when the Greeks were victorious over the Persians, war was declared on the Caryates, killing the men of the city and taking the women in captivity. The Greeks wanted to display the perpetual image of slavery, hence, they did not allow the matrons to leave any of their ornaments or robes behind. Vitruvius goes on by stating how the Greek architects would have created architectural designs integrating these matrons sustaining a heavy load in order for future generations to recall the punished Caryates for their offence.

More recent studies on the figures have brought forth theories of origin that are based on influences rather than historic events. The earliest examples within the Greek world are located in Delphi. Between the seventh and fourth centuries BC, a number of treasuries were built, among which are an archaic group of Ionic and Aeolic treasuries which present connections with Anatolia. The finest of these is the Treasury of Siphnos (Fig. 1) which replaced its columns for female figures. Considering that these figures replaced columns, they did not only sustain and support the weight of the entablature, they also 'created a more solid façade'[2] in comparison to the Aeolic Treasuries which utilised more delicate fluted shaft columns.

After their appearance at Delphi, the caryatids were not reproduced in any later buildings. This was the case until the Erechtheion, located on the Athenian Acropolis, was built in the last quarter of the fifth century BC. The similarities between the figures at the Erechtheion South Porch (Fig.2) and those at Delphi suggest that the architect was aware of what was produced in the earlier structures[3].

One may note the developments that were made from the earlier caryatids to the maidens at the Erechtheion. Since the six caryatids were placed in front of a solid wall, they are emphasised in a manner that creates an attribution to the goddess this temple was built for. In view of the architect's efforts and decisions to isolate the figures from the building, create visual illusions to deemphasise the load that is being withheld and portray them in an almost ethereal manner. In light of this, Vitruvius' account would prove to be unsatisfactory, as none of the previously mentioned elements would have been produced if the architect was aiming to portray enslaved women. The alterations the architect executed enhanced the caryatids' dignity and due to various maidens related to Athena's cult, the caryatids were the perfect addition[4].

Therefore, it can be concluded that such female figures were not a product of historical events, yet originated through the filtration of ideas and inspiration. The caryatids not only substitute the column and form part of the integral superstructure of the building but also aestheticized its façade. The use of caryatids became rather sporadic, however, they would reach their most sumptuous form during the Roman period, when Vitruvius would publish his account.

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[1] Vitruvius, The Ten Books on Architecture, Harvard University Press, 1914, 6

[2] Ione Mylonas Shear, Maidens in Greek Architecture: The Origin of the « Caryatids », Bulletin de correspondance hellénique. Volume 123, 1, 1999, 75

[3] John M. Camp, Archaeology of Athens, Yale University Press, 2001, 99

[4] Mylonas Shear, 1999, 84

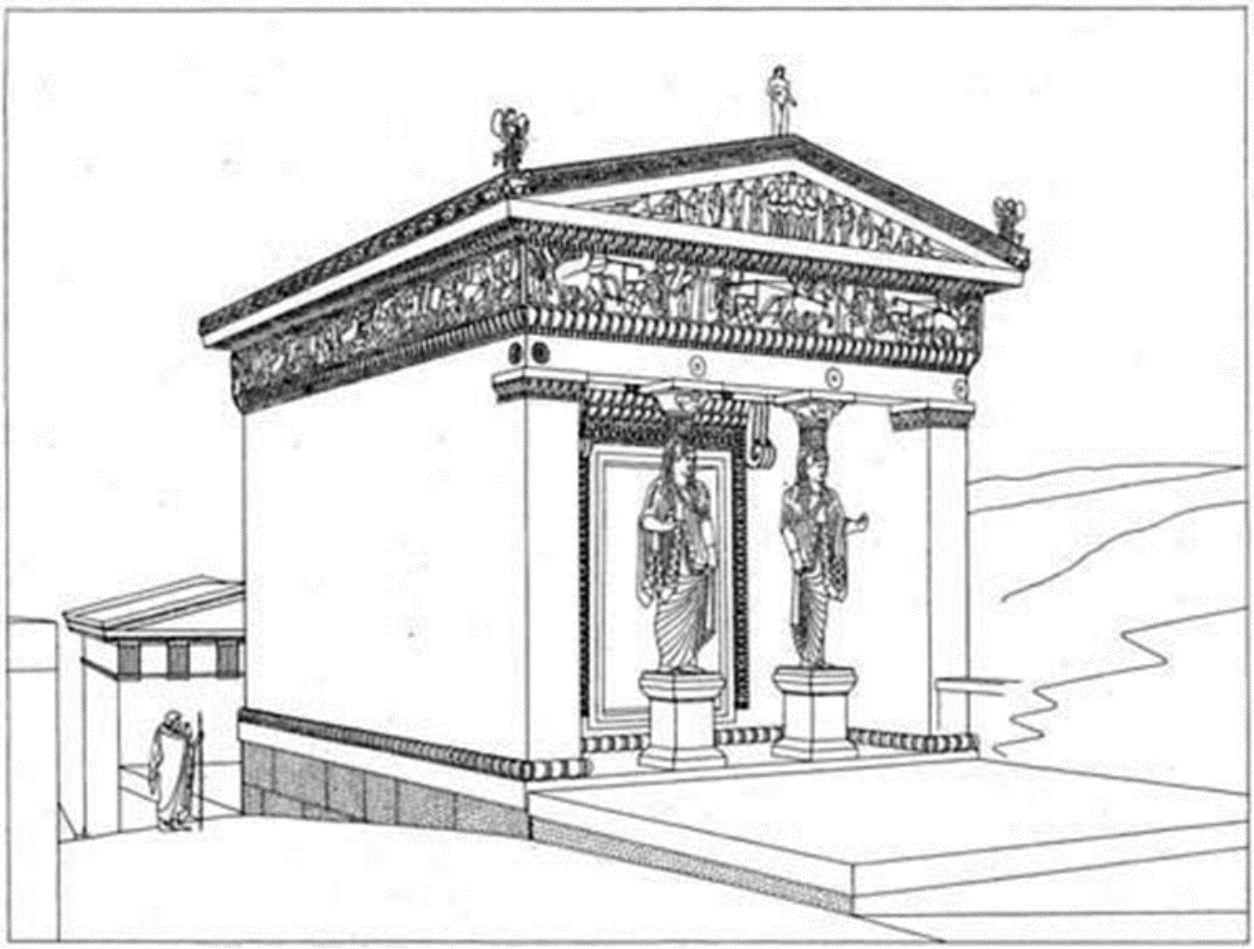

Figure 1: Artistic Rendition of the Treasury of Siphnos

Figure 2: The caryatids located on the South Porch of the Erechtheion

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By: Brooke Vella

This article was submitted by *The History of Art and Fine Arts Students' Association* at UM.

PANDORA'S JAR: WOMEN IN THE GREEK MYTHS

This month I read….

Women in Greek Mythology

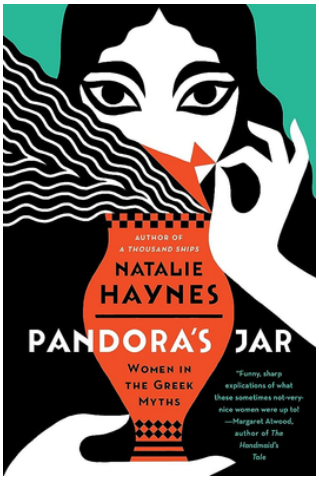
This month I read Natalie Haynes' Pandora's Jar: Women in the Greek Myths (Picador, 2020). Each of the book's ten chapters focuses on some of Greek mythology's most famous women: Pandora, Jocasta, Helen, Medusa, Clytemnestra, Eurydice, Phaedra, Medea, Penelope, and the Amazons, (who, in keeping with their collective warrior ethos and culture, are examined as a group with particular emphasis on their most well-known heroines).

None of these women are obscure names, and each budding classicist would be comfortable and confident that they would guess the right name if they were challenged to identify these characters from just their entry in any dictionary of Greek mythology. And yet Haynes challenges the ways we think – or have been taught to think – about these characters by placing them at the center of their stories and forcing our focus away from the male heroes in whose exploits these women are generally made to feature as supporting characters. In *Pandora's Jar*, it is Jason, Perseus, Odysseus, Achilles, and their peers are in the background.

Guided by this new focus, Haynes challenges us to review our preconceptions of these female characters and to pause for a moment to consider the same stories from their perspective: what did they want? What were they feeling? What was the real motivation behind their choices and actions? And then, very pointedly, why did the Greeks and the Romans leave the answers to these questions out so often in their retellings?

Pandora's Jar is also remarkable because it doesn't stop in the ancient world. In each chapter, Haynes traces the history of the representation and invocation of these mythological women throughout the ages and in various media, ranging from literature to the silver screen and compels us to analyse just how far the way we think about these women and their roles in the myths has been filtered and modified through centuries of Chinese Whispers.

Although the book is a work of non-fiction of great merit as an introductory tool for literary criticism and the study of reception, Haynes' flowing writing style, and keen attention to not expect too considerable depth of prior knowledge from her readers makes going through the book an enjoyable experience that makes *Pandora's Jar* an excellent companion for someone with even a passing interest in Greek myth.



The inclusion of Helen, Clytemnestra, and Jocasta reminded me of Haynes' novels, *Children of Jocasta* (Pan Macmillan, 2019) and *A Thousand Ships* (Picador, 2020). In the former, Haynes takes up the story of Oedipus with which we are all familiar but focuses primarily on the lived experience of Jocasta and her daughter Ismene. However, neither is presented as speaking in the first person. Haynes does take considerable liberty with adapting and modifying what has come to be the accepted 'canon' of this Theban tragedy. The other novel, A Thousand Ships deals with the Trojan War and its aftermath. Once again, the emphasis is on the women: Hecuba, Andromache, Polyxena, Helen, and even Penelope who waits patiently (although increasingly less so – understandably) for her husband Odysseus to return home. Although well-researched and excellent in bringing forward references to these women in Classical but less well-known texts, these novels which are not meant to act as textbooks are an interesting way to apply the very real and very valid arguments in Pandora's Jar by inviting us to fully immerse ourselves in the experience and perspectives of these women. For these reasons, they should be in every classicist's to-read pile.

THE MAIN ARCHITECTURAL COMPONENTS OF NERO'S DOMUS AUREA IN ROME

During his reign (54-68 AD), Emperor Nero had plans of constructing lavishly extravagant buildings, one of which is famously known as the Domus Aurea, also known as the Golden House. This colossal complex was built in the heart of ancient Rome after the city was extensively damaged by the great fire in 64 AD, despite the original plan having not been completed.

Through the Domus Aurea, Nero was able to egocentrically incorporate what he believed his position and worth to be, which also gave his talented architects, pointed out as Severus and Celer by Tacitus, a freedom in expressing these ideas[1].

The Domus Aurea, as described by Suetonius in his biography of Nero, was of magnificent size with a large enough vestibule to house a colossal statue of Nero. The area also featured a vast pond with pastures and vineyards surrounding the site. The rest of the palace was described as being gilded and adorned with gems and mother of pearl. The dining rooms had an ivory ceiling, and the main banquet hall had a circular setting which was described as 'constantly revolved day and night, like the heavens'. In addition, the baths would always be supplied with seawater, or sulphur water[2]. The only remaining well-preserved part of the Domus Aurea is the villa known as the Esquiline Wing, as well as the previously mentioned vestibule with Nero's 36-meter statue.

As the matter currently stands, this sector is known to be the first inheritor of the technologies which surrounded vaulted concrete structures during the second and early first centuries BC, and it is highly likely that the Roman revolution in architecture was primarily manifested in the Domus Aurea. Nero wanted to break away from the conventional architecture used in the past, instead, he wanted to belong to the world of art from which Severus was able to work creatively[3].

The Esquiline Wing puts forth the idea of pre-Neronian architecture and proposes some major phases of Nero's palace project. The building of the Esquiline wing would have originally been made of two stories, the upper floor is today lost, but it would have probably consisted of a belvedere covering the hill. This sizeable fragment is made up of around 150 rooms located within the substructures of Trajan's Baths, these rooms contain evidence which suggests a chronology of the building process of the palace[4]. The importance given to this wing is essentially due to the daring introduction of polygonal shapes to circumvent the repetition which occurs when building so many rooms. Although the fascination of constructing buildings with combinations of curved and polygonal architectural structures was planted here, the prime revolutionary aspect of the Domus Aurea remains to be its plan.

The eastern sector of the Domus Aurea likely contained two open pentagonal courts with surrounding service rooms, the centre of symmetry between these courts was the Octagonal room (Fig. 1&2). This room is considered to be a masterpiece of Roman architecture, it is considered to be the predecessor of the Pantheon from both the technical and symbolic aspects[5].

Some concluding remarks about the marvel of the Domus Aurea include the immense capabilities which Nero's architects had as they brilliantly executed this timeless structure. With the building of this villa, a new style was born which would impact the generation of architects and artists to come in a way that would historically revolutionise the story of art as it distinguished new architectural features which would quickly be adopted in homes and provinces. Although this massive complex was probably never completed, one is still able to see the grandeur and developing styles that were being experimented with.

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[1] William L. MacDonald, The Architecture of the Roman Empire I, Revised Edition, Yale University Press, 1 London, 1982, 30-31

[2] MacDonald, 31-32

[3] Ibid., 42

[4] Larry F. Ball, The Domus Aurea, and the Roman Architectural Revolution, Cambridge University Press, 3 United Kingdom, 2003, 7

[5] Hannah Robert, et al. Nero's 'Solar' Kingship and the Architecture of the Domus Aurea. Numen, vol. 63, no. 9 5/6, 2016, pp. 514. Accessed 11 May 2022 from http://www.jstor.org/stable/44505307

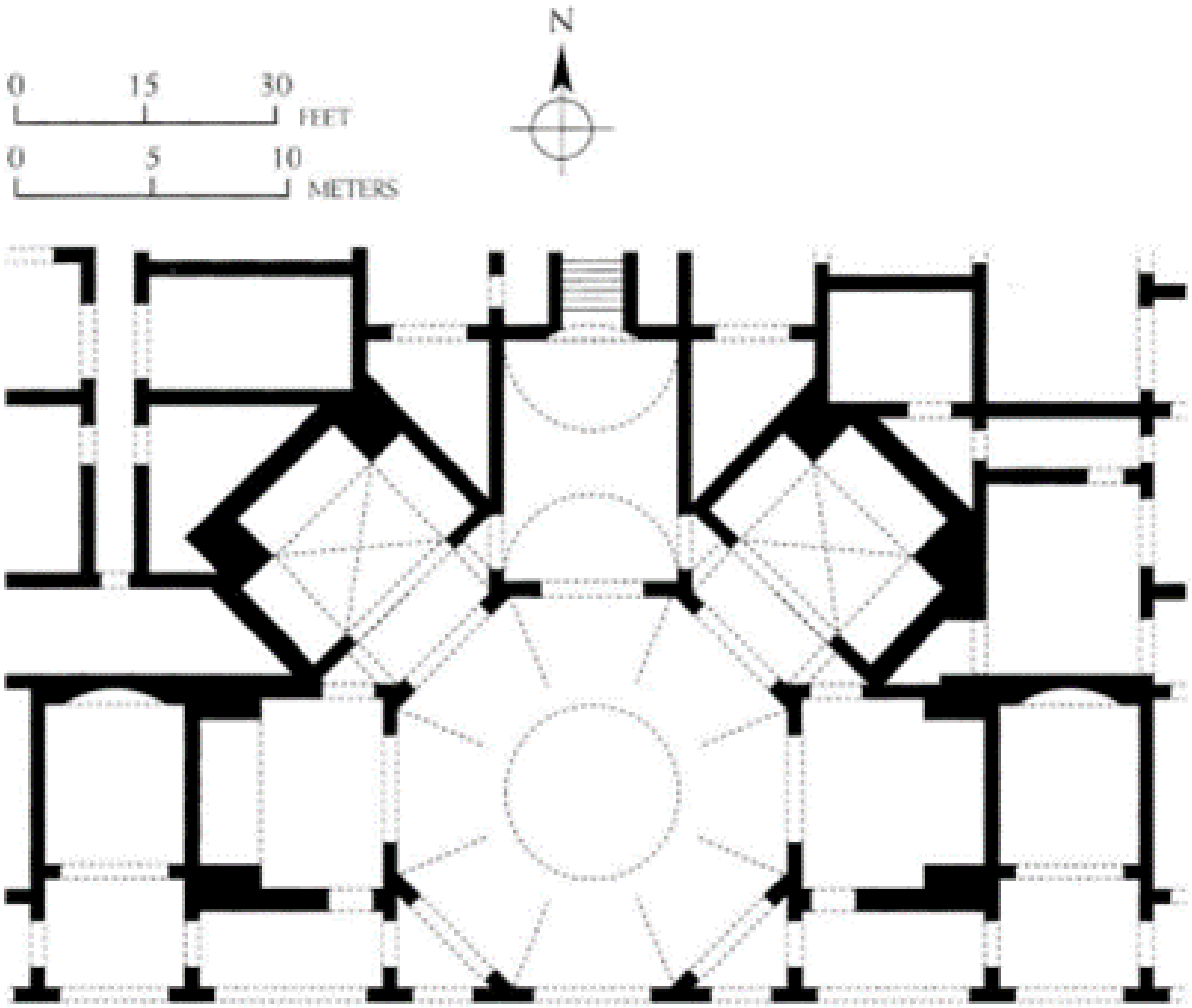

Figure 1 – Octagonal room in the Domus Aurea plan and section

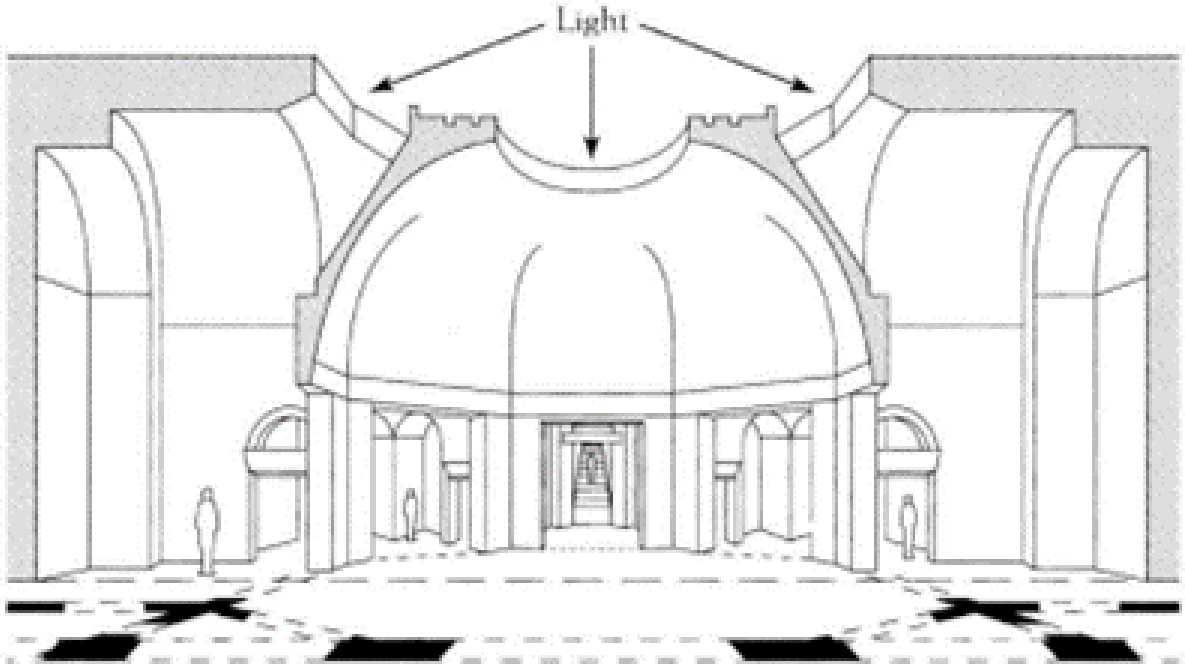

Figure 2 – The Octagonal room presently and a reconstructed image

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By: Emma Fenech Montebello

This article was submitted by *The History of Art and Fine Arts Students' Association* at UM.

LINKING METAL AND CLASSICS

Classics and Metal are arguably the two greatest passions in my life, no matter how frustrating some translations may be or how sore I get after concerts, I always find myself going back for more and more on both accounts. There are several links between Classics and Metal, both direct and indirect. These can be seen through art, song lyrics, album names, and more. An immediately recognisable image to both metalheads and classicists is the timeless Led Zeppelin image of a winged figure, visible on both artworks and merchandise of the band, but there is more to this than meets the eye, as Mick Wall details in his biography '50 Years of Led Zeppelin: When Giants Walked the Earth'**.**

The logo is based on the painting Evening (Fall of Day) by 19th-century symbolic artist William Rimmer, finished c.1869-70, and depicts the Greek sun god Apollo, as a winged figure arching his back, rising from the earth at sunset. The Swan Song logo is nearly identical to the original; Rimmer depicts the figure with his left hand bent backward and his left-wing a large dark mass as the sun declines into shadow, whilst the Swan Song logo has both arms outstretched with the left wing spread more straightforwardly before him, as though greeting the sun.

Since then, there have been several interpretations of both pictures. Original observers of Rimmer's painting mistakenly understood it to be a depiction of Icarus and recently Robert Plant himself has maintained that the Swan Song logo depicts Icarus. Interestingly, when the logo was first revealed in 1974, many fans believed it to be a mythological depiction of Plant himself with wings. However, the most popular and enduring myth is that the winged figure is actually Lucifer as he is returning to the Light. This is a fair assumption due to Jimmy Page's ongoing work on the 'Lucifer Rising' soundtrack at the same time as the label's launch and is indeed an interpretation that Page would not have found fault with, although he has remained silent on the subject.

Nowadays one can buy Led Zeppelin shirts online with the word 'Swan Song' over the Rimmer painting instead of the label's actual logo. Meanwhile, the original painting by Rimmer can currently be found at the Boston Museum of Fine Art. In addition, Led Zeppelin also has a song called ‘Achilles’ Last Stand’ from their 1976 album ‘Presence’.

Latin is also prominently featured in various lyrics and song or album titles, both as proper Latin and pseudo-Latin. Many bands make use of Latin or pseudo-Latin lyrics to appear dark and evil, a particularly common phenomenon in bands with Satanic imagery, or else simply to stand out by featuring simple phrases in the language. ‘Adora Vivos’ by Woods of Ypres, a doom metal band, talks about how one should tell their loved ones how they feel about them while they are alive to hear such words as the dead want nothing, it is the living who should be worshipped.

“Adora Vivos - Our people are civilised…
Love the living while they’re still alive
Adora Vivos – Our people are civilised…
We shouldn’t worship the dead.”

The overall message is made all the more impactful by the fact that the song and album, the last one by the band, ‘Woods 5: Grey Skies & Electric Light’ (2012) were released posthumously following David Gold’s unexpected death in 2011 and while I only discovered the band in 2021 myself, they swiftly became one of my all-time favorite bands.

Helloween, a German power metal band has a song composed entirely in Latin ‘LAVDATE DOMINVM’ from their 1998 album ‘Better Than Raw’. As can be seen below, the song highly praises Jesus Christ and the Christian god and is also written with the letter ‘V’ instead of ‘U’, as can be seen in many Roman monuments.

The band Powerwolf, another power metal act from Germany, is known for their dual SatanicChristian imagery and refer to their live concerts as ‘Heavy Metal Mass.’ Their lyrics often feature Latin or pseudo-Latin lyrics, in order to invoke both Satanic as well as Christian themes; such as “Deus diabolu” in the song ‘Catholic in The Morning... Satanist at Night’ from the album ‘Bible of the Beast’ (2009) and “Christus, exelsis deum” from the title track of ‘Call of the Wild’ (2021).

Rotting Christ, a Greek black metal band, naturally uses Greek throughout their songs and album names. In fact, I originally started listening to Rotting Christ after asking a friend of mine for recommendations of bands that sing in Latin and or Greek, in order to get used to the Greek alphabet in advance for my second year of studies. I was particularly drawn to the song ‘Δαιμόνων βρῶσις’ from their 2010 album ‘AEALO’ which starts as follows:

“Νυκτὸς ἐσμὲν - We're the night's
φρικώδη τέκνα - awful children
κατάραι καλοῦσιν - curses are calling
ἡμᾶς εἰς Ἅδην - us to Hades
δαιμόνων βρῶσις ἔσῃ - food for demons you will become
σκιὰ ἀναίμακτος. - a bloodless shadow.”

I was drawn to this specific segment simply because the song title is spelled in Greek and starts with a poem in Ancient Greek, which I have since promptly memorized.

Some bands also write their name in Latin. An example of which can be seen in the Maltese black metal act Luciferi Regnum aka Kingdom of Lucifer. I was first introduced to them by a friend of mine who joined the band on guitar and was later fortunate enough to be present at their debut gig last December, where they were absolutely phenomenal on stage. I can proudly say I count them among my friends and so when I was asked to write this article they were one of my first thoughts. I later contacted the founder of the band to ask him if he could elaborate more about the name:

How did you guys get to that name? What inspired you to use Latin instead of using English?

"*Basically, when I decided I want to start an extreme metal/black metal band I needed a name that people wouldn’t forget and at the same time, I wanted a morbid name to keep the dark feel to the name. I started writing a bunch of random ideas for names and there were these two words that linked up great together which was the Kingdom Of Lucifer. I decided to translate it to Latin as it was more catchy, dark, and mysterious which was the whole concept from the start."*

Classics is also represented in metal through songs about figures from Greek and Roman history and mythology. American heavy metal band Huntress in the song ‘Oracle’ from the 2013 album ‘Starbound Beast’, talks about the oracle at Delphi, describing her as “The vessel divine” and how “Omens wise slip from her lips of your demise”. While the lyrics are simplistic at face value, one must also understand that Jill Janus, the late founder, and singer of Huntress, was herself a practicing pagan whose music was influenced by her practices.

Ex Deo is a symphonic death metal band that takes inspiration from Roman history, with albums focusing on Romulus (2009), I Caligula (2012), The Immortal Wars (2017), and most recently The Thirteen Years of Nero (2021). As such each album sheds light on a certain period from Roman history. For example, ‘The Immortal Wars’ follows the Second Punic War, with the opening number ‘The Rise of Hannibal’, featuring the alleged blood oath the young Hannibal is said to have made:

"Father, on this day I promise to never be a friend of Rome, to treat them as a mortal enemy. This promise I make with my blood. I am the son of Carthage, and let the blood of Rome flow in the oceans of war."

The album also covers the infamous Crossing of the Alps and later the famed Battle of Zama, with a healthy amount of Roman patriotism in between. Meanwhile, the cover art depicts a Roman soldier looking at a dead elephant after a bloody battle, with corpses dotting the ground and a banner reading out the album and band name.

Maltese progressive metal act, Delirium features the Gorgon Medusa. Being a Maltese band, I was fortunate enough to watch them live last December and later got in contact with them for this article, asking them the following:

What does the figure of Medusa mean to you personally? What drew you to use her for your message on social media?

“The figure of Medusa is usually viewed and thought of as a strong female figure due to the fact that she turns the men who look at her into stone. However, many people don't realize that she has this ability through a curse, not through her own doing or desire. Athena curses her after she is raped by [Poseidon] - Medusa was therefore actually a victim and not really a hero. Athena cursed her so she may never be with any man again, whether she desired to or not. We, therefore, focused more on the fact that she is a victim in our song, Medusa. She has a deadly stare, she might sometimes use it for vindictive purposes, but can never actually turn her ability off, so she is destined to be alone.*

In our song, Medusa attempts to regain power in her life by seeking joy in turning the men who stare into stone. It is her sort of revenge for having this curse thrust upon her. She, therefore, aimed to charm the men in her life to get them close enough for her to turn them into stone and gain power over them in that way. This is where social media comes in since so many people nowadays seek approval and gratification through the amount of social media likes and followers, which often gives people a false sense of entitlement or a false ego when in fact, many people obsess over social media usually feel unsatisfied by themselves or their lives in reality and so attempt to put on a fake "happy" facade. We focus on how much attention Medusa wishes to gain through social media so that she can get the attention, however in the end, she turns herself into stone (in our video) after realising she's lost her power, as yet again, she realises she is alone. She becomes the victim and does not realise it until it is too late."

English rock and roll legends Motörhead often talk about war and death in their lyrics. They mention gladiators and Spartans in ‘Death or Glory’ from ‘Bastards’ (1993) amongst a list of other soldiers who have fought and died in war, as well as in the title track of their 1986 album ‘Orgasmotron’, where frontman Lemmy declares in his signature gravelly voice:

“I march before a martyred world, an army for the fight
I speak of great heroic days, of victory and might
I hold a banner drenched in blood, I urge you to be brave
I lead you to your destiny, I lead you to your grave
Your bones will build my palaces, your eyes will stud my crown
For I am Mars, the god of war, and I will cut you down.”

There are countless more bands who have been inspired by the Classics in some way or another than what I have mentioned here that are also worth listening to. These include heavy metal band Manowar, who has composed a 28-minute song entitled ‘Achilles, Agony, and Ecstasy in Eight Parts’, as well as their 2022 EP ‘Highlights from the Revenge of Odysseus’, Iron Maiden with songs such as ‘Flight of Icarus’ and ‘Alexander the Great’ and Virgin Steele who wrote a metal opera inspired by the Oresteia entitled ‘The House of Atreus Act I & II’, first released separately in 1999 and 2000 but later joined in a 2016 compilation. The Italian power metal band Warkings is even fronted by a Roman Tribune, with a Spartan on drums.

This all goes to show that there are innumerable links between Metal and Classics both past and present, with many more yet to come by bands old, new, and future. If you wish to discuss the subject further you can easily find me at either a bar or a show in my signature battle-jacket where I will be more than happy to discuss the subject over a drink.

By: Andrew Cassar

Article submitted to the Malta Classics Association.