

# Classical Studies at McGill

## Newsletter 6, 2013-14



The site of Umm Qais, ancient Gadara, in northern Jordan, overlooking the Golan Heights and the border lands between Israel and Syria. Photograph by Alfred Seiland.

**Modern encounters with antiquity** differ vastly in the countries and cultures that occupy the space of the Imperium Romanum. Imagine travelling to all major sites of the Roman world – from Hadrian’s Wall to Sarmizegetusa in Romania, on to the frontier fortresses in the deserts of Arabia and Africa – to capture the rich diversity of the Roman legacy today. This is what Alfred Seiland did. For years, Seiland, award-winning photographer and Professor of Photography, has been indefatigably crisscrossing the Mediterranean world in search of the perfect shot of ancient Rome. Don’t get me wrong: his work is free from postcard postures and Classics kitsch. Seiland’s project started from a piece of commissioned work for the New York Times Magazine, when he was asked to document the principal filming of HBO’s Rome Series. The encounter was so intense that it sent Seiland on an extraordinary journey through time and space. His photography is the most comprehensive photographic documentation of what Rome was, and the space it occupies in different societies today.

The thoughts triggered by Seiland’s photos range from aperçu to aporia. Other images betray a cheerful sense of subtle irony. The picture ‘At the Rubicon’ captures a middle-aged man in a swim suit who is undecided whether he should jump into the rill from a landing bridge. The set of the Aegades Islands, known for the decisive sea battle that was (cont. page 3)



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## Cato in America. Classical Reception on Interstate-81

### By Michael Fronda

A colleague in the department, an expert on early US history, emailed me with a question. He was looking at documents from the 1790s pertaining to conflicts between settlers in the Southwest Territories and the neighboring Creek and Cherokee. In some documents, someone – probably probably John Sevier, one of the founders of Tennessee – inserted the phrase “Carthage delenda est” next to reports of alleged Creek atrocities. The phrase obviously references Cato the Elder’s famous statement “Carthage must be destroyed”. My colleague asked me where Sevier would have learned the phrase.

It is well known that the American Founding Fathers were highly influenced by classical antiquity, but this era of American history witnessed a wider increase in interest in ancient Greece and Rome. This development corresponded to important publications in English on various aspects of classical antiquity, such as Winkelmann’s *Reflections on the Paintings and Art of the Greeks* (translated into English 1765), Revett and Stuart’s *The Antiquities of Athens and Other Monuments of Greece* (1762), and the first volume of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776). These works and others fired interest in Greek and Roman history, art, architecture, and archaeology.

Meanwhile, English translations of Greek and Roman literature were more widely available. For example, the most important source for Cato the Elder is Plutarch’s biography, which was already translated into English in 1683 under the direction of the literary giant John Dryden as part of his *Plutarch’s Lives Translated From the Greek by Several Hands*. To return to my colleague’s question, anyone with a modest education would have known the story of Cato the Elder. It is surprising neither that John Sevier knew about Cato the Elder, nor that he looked to Cato as a model statesman and patriot. That he articulated his view of the conflict with Native Americans through an oblique ancient allusion underscores the depth of contemporary classical reception.

I thought about this email exchange on a visit to my hometown, Binghamton, NY. The drive from Montreal through central New York to Binghamton passes by

dozens of towns with classical names, some well known, like Troy and Syracuse, others tiny villages like Romulus and Fabius. These names all date to c. 1800 and testify to the era’s classical fervor. Such town names are not unique to this state, but there is a specific story behind the peculiar density of classical nomenclature in upstate New York.

During the American Revolution, the US Congress voted to give 100 acres of land to veterans of the Continental Army. Enlistment in New York lagged far behind other states, so in 1781 the New York legislature promised an additional 500 acres to veterans. Approximately two million contiguous acres (8000 km<sup>2</sup>) of bounty land was reserved for veterans. This huge area, called the Central New York Military Tract, was divided into 28 townships, each surveyed into 100 plots. Larger plots were reserved for officers, while standard 600-acre plots were assigned to non-officers by lot. The process clearly mimicked the Roman practice of founding veteran’s colonies.

The original names of the townships are curious. Twenty-four names are drawn from classical antiquity (e.g., Lysander, Hannibal, Brutus, Camillus, Cicero, Manlius, Aurelius, and, of course, Cato, among others), while four come from English literature and philosophy (Milton, Locke, Dryden, Sterling).

Who came up with these names? Some say Simeon DeWitt, the Surveyor General of New York State, who was responsible for mapping the Military Tract. DeWitt certainly shared the era’s classical enthusiasm: he settled in a town known as The Flats and changed its name to Ithaca. Others argue that Robert Harpur, a clerk who worked under DeWitt in the Surveyor General’s office, named the townships. He was a mathematician, pioneer and politician, and also a passionate amateur classicist. The township names most probably came from Dryden’s popular translation of Plutarch, and it is no coincidence that Dryden is one of the few non-classical names among the Military Tract townships. Over the many decades boundary lines and town names have changed, yet most of those original Military Tract towns can still be found on the map.

## Into the Cave of the Sibyl

### By Bill Gladhill

This summer I organized the *Symposium Cumanum: Aeneid Six and its Cultural Reception*, an annual meeting at the Villa Vergiliana under the auspices of the Vergilian Society, Harry Wilks Study Center, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici University of Naples Federico II, British Virgil Society, McGill University, and Accademia Virgiliana di Mantova. This was a major international conference bringing together some of the leading voices on Latin Literature and its Reception. Over a three-day period at both the Villa Vergiliana at Cuma and the University of Naples Federico II the symposium explored the manifold and myriad ways *Aeneid Six* shaped not only literary traditions, but the intellectual and spiritual horizons of western thought itself.

While there were many highlights of the conference – such as late night swimming with Maggie Kilgour and Philip Hardie, or speaking at the world’s oldest academic institution (founded in 1224) in the University of Naples Federico II, or touring Naples’ underground city, or

listening to some amazing talks by Alison Keith, Joseph Farrell, Alessandro Schiesaro and Emily Gowers (to name just a few) – the main attraction was Alessandro Barchiesi’s keynote address at the Cave of the Sibyl. This amazing archaeological site is a short ten minute walk from the Villa Vergiliana, accompanied by all the dangers and pitfalls associated with Italian roads and the motorists upon them. The group made its way to an orchestral enclosure looking over the Bay of Naples with a canopy of trees filled with singing birds offering a setting for an academic talk which will not easily be forgotten. Professor Barchiesi’s talk exemplified the theme of the conference as his words on Aeneas’ first encounter with Italy at the Cave of the Sibyl circumscribed the actual cave, drawing from the ancient poem and the ancient remains around us the living force of antiquity in the present day, that push and pull of tradition, which unceasingly alters our present every time we read, every time teach, every time we learn, every time we think about antiquity.

## Director’s Welcome

(cont. from page 1) fought there at the end of the First Punic War, shows the calm blue sea with sailing boats that are caught in the doldrums. “There is nothing wrong with silence and calmness when you approach imperial might, and think about its caducity,” says Seiland. The book is of course anything but calm. In fact, it bursts through all dimensions: weighing 7.5 kilos, the volume contains an overwhelming cornucopia of visual approaches to our field. In a way, I can’t help but think of Seiland as a Piranesi of the Digital Age (Alfred Seiland, *Imperium Romanum. Opus Magnum* 2013; [www.hatjecantz.de](http://www.hatjecantz.de)).

Alfred Seiland’s upcoming guest lecture will no doubt be one of the highlights in our action-packed 2013-14 calendar. Kicking the year off with a visit by the Director of the Canadian Institute in Greece in September (an event that is co-sponsored by the Canadian Embassy in Greece), we have already secured a long list of guest speakers that will spice up the year for everyone. This newsletter will tell you more about the details, from

trips to plays to research operations carried out by professors and students.

And the best is yet to come. With classes and exams out of the way, the road will be cleared for the perfect post-season in May 2014, when our department hosts the Joint Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of Canada and the Association of Ancient Historians. I wish you all a fantastic academic year. Go Classics Go!

Hans Beck, MacNaughton Professor and Director

SOCIETY OF CLASSICAL STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

McGill

Joint Annual Meeting

Classical Association of Canada  
The Association of Ancient Historians

McGill University, May 6-10, 2014

THE ASSOCIATION OF ANCIENT HISTORIANS

## The Eye of the Beholder

### By Lynn Kozak

As a new fellow at McGill's Institute for the Public Life of Arts (IPLAI) and Ideas for 2013-5, I will be working closely with Professor Garth Green (Religious Studies) on a project called *(In)visibilities*. The project will expand and build on my on-going research on sight and performance in ancient Greek texts, and will seek new perspectives through an interdisciplinary exchange with my colleagues in IPLAI.



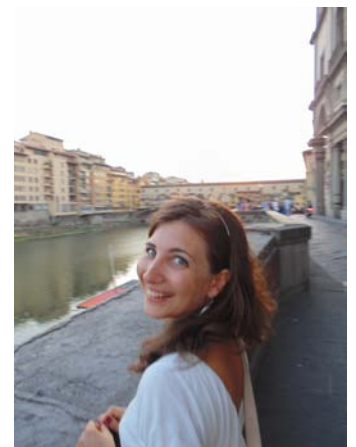
A text and its performance work in concert to occupy the overlap between the theatre of the mind and the sensible world. With epic performance, there is a body in front of your eyes, and a voice coming out of that body. But who is speaking? The performer, a narrator, a character? A god? How do we reconcile the physical reality of the performer and his space with the story he tells? In a theatre space, characters are again embodied in actors before the eyes of the audience. But they wear a mask, they change their voice, they switch genders and ages, they become gods. The space itself shifts – a stage building becomes a palace, the *theatron* becomes the marketplace of Argos, or the Mediterranean Sea heaving with Egyptian ships.

The audience sits between the real space of the performance and the imagined space of what is performed, while their individual minds and communal experience allow the two spaces to interact and create meaning.

This play between the real and the imagined is a key component to inspiration. Plato and Aristotle both write extensively on the senses and how they relate the soul to its surroundings; the senses become intermediaries bridging the mutable and the material with the permanent, the absolute, the divine. Vision takes on a particular importance, where the viewer initiates sight by literally touching the viewed object with his vision, creating a spiritual and a physical connection. This understanding of physical sight is taken up as a model for contact with the divine throughout the Christian period, from Augustine through monastic traditions, to the Renaissance, with Nicolas of Cusa's treatise *On the Vision of God* and Marsilio Ficino's work on Plato.

Our senses situate us in worlds that are both material and abstract, real and imagined, and as our sensible perceptions change and morph, we think on how we might alter the world we sense, as much as how what we sense might alter our selves. As I continue my practical experiments on the roles of the senses in performance and staging, I feel grateful for this opportunity to develop my research in new directions, through teaching and interdisciplinary exchanges as a part of IPLAI.

Monica D'Agostini joins Classical Studies as **Research Associate** in 2013-14. Dr. D'Agostini, who received her PhD from the University of Bologna, is a specialist on historiographical traditions on Hellenistic courts and kings. In her PhD thesis, she turned to the first century of Seleucid rule, exploring the portrait of the Seleucid queen Laodice I in ancient literary sources, with the aim to draw the political panorama of her rule and the way her actions affected contemporary and successive events to her reign. Over the course of her PhD D'Agostini spent a research period in Canada at the Waterloo Institute for Hellenistic Studies and became an active member of the Seleucid Study Group. When she attended Seleucid Study Day 4 hosted by our department in February 2013, she was nothing but thrilled by McGill and Montreal. "The academic environment of McGill Classical studies will truly enrich my work on ancient historiography and the history of the Hellenistic kingdoms." Welcome, Monica D'Agostini!



## The McGill Summer Institute in Classical Studies By John Serrati, Director of SICS

In its second year of operation during 2013, the Summer Institute for Classical Studies (SICS) welcomed thirteen undergraduate and high school students from five different countries to McGill. Participants lived as McGill students for the summer and sat side-by-side with our own undergraduates in Classics courses for which they received university credit. *CLAS 203 Classical Mythology* introduced students to the rich literary traditions of the Greeks and Romans, and explored the religious geography of the ancient Mediterranean world. *CLAS 206 Classics and Modern Media* offered a glimpse of how the ancient world has been received, interpreted, used, and abused in modern times, from politics to video games and Hollywood movies. The capstone experience, however, was *CLAS 210*, an intensive introductory Latin course, which allowed the students to immerse themselves for one blissful summer in the language of Caesar and Cicero.

The experience of participants was enriched not only by campus life, but through spending their summer in a culturally dynamic and bilingual city that played host to annual international festivals and sporting events in 2013. Participants spent many evenings in the *Quartier des spectacles* taking in the jazz and comedy shows, while several were pleasantly surprised to learn about the eclectic selection of movies on offer at the smaller Fantasia Film Festival.

Many students enrolled with the goal of beginning their Latin training with an intensive course, while others were seeking summer credit to further degrees at their home institutions. Still others came in order to lay the groundwork for the future, as the SICS offered them a strong platform to foster applications for both undergraduate and graduate study. Summer Institute faculty make every effort to accommodate individual goals and motivations, while simultaneously offering



everyone the classic McGill student experience. By all accounts, our participants had a great and rewarding summer studying classics at McGill and living in Montreal. All of us look forward to furthering the Institute's success and expanding its offerings in the years to come.



“The summer intensive Latin is one of my favorite classes,” says **Martin Sirois**, who taught the course this year. “With a group of over 30 students coming from various places and backgrounds, the intensive (and intense!) format is very beneficial to learning the language, since classes meet four mornings for seven consecutive weeks. During those weeks we certainly do hard work, yet we manage to have some laughs in a relaxed environment while getting the students ready to pursue Latin at the next level. The Summer Institute is a great way to set students on a fruitful student career path in Classics.”

## Notes from the Classics Play

### By Negar Banakar

While the McGill Classics' Play has become an integral tradition in student life, this year a new element keeps us challenged: comedy! Having begun my own McGill theatre experience by playing the murderous Klytaimnestra, it is with great pleasure that my final theatre adventure comes full circle, since we will definitely feel a change of tone with Aristophanes' humor and no death at all. Translation will continue into the fall with the help of advanced Greek students and we will engage in a joke workshop with professional comedians, some of whom are involved in translation processes of their own.

I am thrilled to be a part of the translation process and see how different various translations are from the original Greek – there are a world of possibilities and the Classics' Play is finding its way to a *Lysistrata* that is set amidst the second World War. The intensity, the power struggle, and of course, the jazz! All this, and it will be making its way to Montreal in February 2014 at Mainline Theatre, the Westmount Community Centre, and the Hellenic Cultural Centre.



If you would like to be a part of the 2014 *Lysistrata* production team, auditions will be held in November! If you would like to get involved, or to support the play, please visit <http://www.mcgill.ca/classics/classicsplay> or <https://www.facebook.com/classicsplay>. For any of the above or any questions, please contact me at [negar.banakar@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:negar.banakar@mail.mcgill.ca). We look forward to it!

## Summer Trip to Greece, May-June 2013

### By Chloë Bigio (U3)



When Professor Beck first told me about the 2013 Classics Summer Field Trip, I was very interested, but also quite hesitant in signing up given that I am not a Classics Major. Ultimately the combination of the opportunity to take it for credit as CLAS 347 along with my personal and academic interest in Ancient Greek History prevailed, and he succeeded in convincing me. To say I made the right decision would be a major understatement! Visiting numerous sites over the duration of the 16 day trip, our time was split between the iconic 'world renowned sites' such as the Parthenon, and those of less popular standing – but of equal historical and archaeological significance. We also spent a day visiting Thebes with a group of classics students from the University of Athens, with whom we took part in a one-day seminar on Greek Federalism. The major sites we explored

included the Agora and the Acropolis in Athens, Delphi, Olympia, and finally Mycenae and Corinth. While most are familiar with these places at least by name, for those of us who have had the opportunity to go further and study them in the classroom, surveying them first hand greatly (cont. on page 7)

Photo image: Professors Hans Beck and Kostas Buraselis with a group of McGill and U Athens students on the Ismenion Hill in Thebes.

## The 50th anniversary of Modern Greek Studies at McGill: entering a new era By Tassos Anastassiadis

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of teaching Modern Greek at McGill. In the last few years the program has grown in natural harmony with Classical studies. This pattern will continue this year with more events, a visiting scholar from the Finish Academy of Sciences through the Onassis Senior Scholar program for the winter term teaching on the posterity of Hellenic philosophy, and more. To say that to understand modern Greece without referring to the classical past is a well-known trope. But as students of the Classical tradition learn, the opposite is also true. For the last 500 years the development of the study of Classics, and one can say of a European or western identity has been profoundly intertwined with the progressive emergence of the Tour phenomenon. From Byron to Durrell, from Chateaubriand and Flaubert to Simone de Beauvoir, from Twain to Henry Miller, from Curtius and K.O. Müller to Heidegger, the reading of classics is illuminated by the existential experience of going *there* and discovering the ever-evolving and fascinating modernity of the classics of course but also, more surprisingly perhaps, Greece itself. This year we will (im)modestly try to attach ourselves to this eclectic bandwagon. To celebrate the 50th anniversary, we will start offering a fellowship for a one-month summer Tour of Greece to an achieving graduating student in the Neo-Hellenic studies minor. Just as their illustrious counterparts, the fellows will keep some form of diary and be sharing with the rest of us (one way or another) the experience of their voyage. Smooth sailing to the McGill *dilettanti* society!

Photo image: The beginning of the mass Tourism era: Jayne Mansfield on the Acropolis on February 15, 1957 (Athens, Benaki Museum)



## Field Trip to Greece (continued from page 6)



enhanced our academic perspective. Although we were all extremely excited about visiting these iconic sites, we soon realized the luxury and true pleasure of visiting those that were less well known, and thus not overrun with other visitors. Elis, Bassai, Messene, Sparta, and the Menelaion were my personal favorites. As this trip could also be taken for credit as CLAS 347, on each site, students gave comprehensive presentations on both its archaeological and historical features, and often a discussion moderated by the professors ensued. While some students searched for answers to their more in-depth historical queries, others sought to understand the more modern implications on these archaeological sites. The relevance of topography was emphasized greatly at each site, and as the trip wore on, it became much easier to

distinguish a pattern and why this was significant in the socio-political history of the specific polis. By day, we travelled from site to site, trekking under the hot Greek sun, visiting some of the most historically symbolic sites on this planet, and by night, we cheered with ouzo, celebrating our visit to Greece in some of the coolest beach towns!

Photo image: Alexandra Bilhete presenting her seminar paper at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia in Sparta.

## Geared for Action

### By François Gauthier

The Romans were famed warriors. This hardly comes as a surprise. Roman soldiers often figure prominently in modern representations of Roman society, from *Asterix the Gaul* to Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* and HBO's *Rome*. Each of these media portrays Rome's soldiers as uniformly clad killing machines. Sure, didn't Rome have a fearsome army filled with equally fearsome professional soldiers? Reality, like a well-aged wine, is more subtle. Rome did eventually field a professional army, but only after several centuries of wars waged with a citizen militia. These men fought with what weapons they could afford to buy. I am currently researching what kind of financial burden this represented for the common citizen.

When Augustus created a standing army, there occurred a marked divide between civilian and military life. What was earlier a duty that every citizen would eventually experience became a choice of career, one of the few in the ancient world where food and pay in cash were guaranteed. The creation of a standing army did not mean that the appearance of Roman soldiers would be as homogeneous as in modern

armies. Uniforms as we understand them today only appeared much later, during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Variations in weaponry and equipment represented the cosmopolitan nature of the Roman army. Palmyrenean archers from the East could serve in the same region alongside Batavian spearmen and Romanized Gallic legionaries.

I once showed to some of my friends a handful of pictures of modern renditions of Roman soldiers and asked what looked Roman to them. They all answered that the 'Trajan column legionary' was what looked the most Roman to them. Despite the fact that segmented armour is not the most widely attested type of Roman gear, thanks to modern media it has been categorized as the epitome of Romaness in popular imagination. But the Roman army continually evolved throughout its history, its adaptability and versatility reflecting the evolution of the society that created it. Trying to understand these developments is a fascinating endeavour, be it for Caesar's legions in the first century BCE or for Emperor Julian's army in the fourth century CE.

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## Classics Students Association (CSA)

### By Samantha Bickell, CSA President 2013-14

We would like to welcome you all to what will surely be another fantastic year with the CSA. The CSA is devoted to organizing fun and academic events for those who cherish the Ancient Mediterranean World to come together. Please look forward to Wine and Cheeses, movie nights, the Montreal Inter-University Classics Colloquium, and many other events throughout the year. We will be holding our Members At Large elections in mid-September and everyone interested is welcome to run; the dates and times will be announced on the Listserve at the beginning of the month. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us by email or come visit us in our office on the sixth floor of Leacock. The executive and I look forward to having a great year with everyone.

In addition, *Hirundo*, McGill's undergraduate Classics journal, will put out its twelfth publication this year. Authored, edited, and organized by undergraduates, the journal has won several awards and continues to strive for excellence in its coverage of the language, literature, history, and culture of the ancient world. CSA and *Hirundo* play an ever-growing part in the vibrant student life present at McGill University. We look forward to the upcoming academic year and, as always, welcome new Classics and Ancient History enthusiasts to join our association.

