



CLASSICS NEWSLETTER

This is the newsletter for anything to do with ancient Mediterranean cultures, including Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Persian empire.

Blood Moon Lunar Eclipse May 2022

Life imitated art this term as a lunar eclipse seemed to turn the moon a crimson colour in the early hours of May 16th 2022. This phenomenon occurs when the earth's atmosphere bends the light from the sun during a full lunar eclipse, and you can see how rich a red colour the moon appears to be in this photo of the full moon rising over the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey (CREDIT: Mucahid Yapici/AP).

The image of a blood red moon will be familiar to Latin GCSE students who have been studying Roman superstition & magic for their Latin literature unit. In one poem, the writer Ovid claims that he has seen the witch Dipsas turn the moon red and the stars dripping with blood. Whilst some of the other things he accuses Dipsas of are firmly in the realm of fictitious magic - turning herself into an owl, controlling the weather, and raising ghosts from tombs - turning the moon red is the only one of Dipsas' powers that he says that he has seen in action (everything else he just suspects) and so it could well be a reference to the Blood Moon phenomenon.

sanguine, si qua fides, stillantia sidera vidi; I have seen, if you believe me, stars dripping with blood;
purpureus Lunae sanguine vultus erat. the face of the Moon was crimson with blood.

Ovid, *Amores* 1.8.11-12

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Did you know...?

The Hagia Sophia has been a mosque since 1453, but it was originally built under the reign of the Roman emperor Justinian I in AD 537 and at that time was the largest Christian church in the Eastern Roman Empire.

The Politics of Gossip

What do Julius Caesar, Donald Trump and Boris Johnson all have in common? All 3 men have been subject to much scrutiny about their hair! During the time of the Roman Republic and Caesar, it was just as commonplace as it is today to gossip about a leader's personal life and appearance. Julius Caesar is the most well-known politician of ancient times, and as a result, many modern and contemporary rumours about him exist, many of which are true.

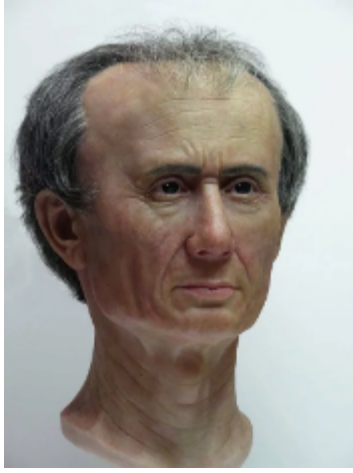
Julius Caesar was born in 100 BC into an old aristocratic family and was an ambitious politician and general. He was made consul in 59BC, and his famous conquest of Gaul (France) was in 58-50BC. He gave himself sole power after victory in the civil war (48-45BC), however, he was accused of aspiring to kingship and was killed in 44BC on the Ides of March (see page 4 for more about the Ides). He was a very capable politician but was disrespectful of convention and constitutions, which was reflected in both his public and private life.

The ancient writer Suetonius has long been considered the gossipmonger among Roman historians (much like the Lady Whistledown of *Bridgerton!*). He wrote in one of his books "*vini parcissimum ne inimici quidem negaverunt. Marci Catonis est: unum ex omnibus Caesarem ad evertendam rem publicam sobrium accessisse.*" This translates to "That he drank very little wine, not even his enemies denied. There is a saying of Marcus Cato: 'Caesar is the only man who tried to overthrow the state when sober.'" This was a very bold claim because it was rare for a Roman not to drink alcohol. Also, Suetonius lived more than 150 years after Caesar, so can he even be trusted? This is an important question to ask when you analyse sources, both in history lessons and in your everyday life when you read a news article for example. In this case, Suetonius is a fairly reliable author as he was a historian who had access to the imperial archives so could review many documents from the time. This seems to be a good quality of Caesars' because it meant he was ruling with a clear head. However, not all writing is so complimentary to him.

Some more translations of Suetonius' work are: "He is said to be tall of stature, with a pale complexion, with beautiful limbs, rather a full face, and keen, dark eyes. His health was good, although towards the end of his life he used to faint all of a sudden and even had nightmares."

From this, we can see that Caesar was thought to be handsome and of mostly good health. He took great care of his appearance, however, some thought him to be too vain. "He was most particular in the care of his body –not only did he have his hair cut and shaved carefully but he also had his body hair plucked out –as some have alleged with disapproval." Removing body hair was not socially acceptable for Roman men.

Possibly the most amusing aspect of Suetonius' work to a modern reader is his fixation with Caesars' thinning hair. He mentions it three times in just one of his books! (*Divus Iulius*, ch.45). It can be seen in the busts of his head that he was going bald at the back, and many claimed that he wore his laurel wreath (traditionally a symbol of victory) as a cover for his head. Because of this, people inferred that he was consistent and eager to hide his flaws.



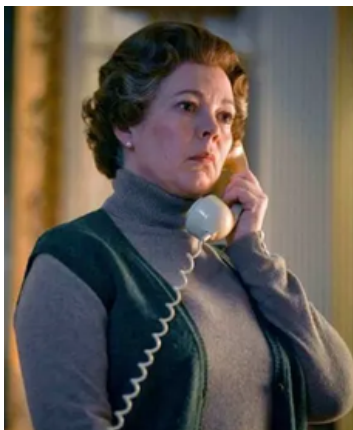
Just like many prominent politicians nowadays, it seems that Caesar was eager to stand out in any way that he could. Suetonius writes “Even the manner of his dress was extraordinary. For he would wear a broad-striped tunic with fringed sleeves down to his wrists, and always belted on the outside –though he wore his belt rather loosely. Indeed, this is what provoked the warning Sulla is supposed to have given the aristocrats on numerous occasions: ‘Beware of the boy with the loose belt.’ By tying his toga in a different way from everyone else, he made himself notable and conspicuous (in a good or bad way.)



Overall, his lifestyle was remarkable and unconventional due to his abstinence from wine, meticulous body care, extravagant dress, baldness and ways of concealing it. But how does this link to his political life? Well, perhaps his abstinence shows his great ambition and self-control, his vanity represents his desire for total control, and his fashion sense shows his disrespect for the rules and attention-seeking. Thus his private life is symbolic of his political life- capable but arrogant.



By discussing his private matters such as affairs or physical appearance, the Roman people were able to discuss their political views without expressly saying it. A news headline from March 2019 (before Boris Johnson as Prime Minister) reads “Boris Johnson’s new haircut fires up rumour mill about Tory leadership challenge” and another said “Boris Johnson the haircut is a ‘rebrand’ - is MP hoping for Prime Minister role with a new look?”



So, what’s the point of political gossip? Gossip brings politicians closer to the people, humanising them. Also, haircuts and love affairs are more accessible topics than financial reform and military conquests, which are not often topics of conversation for most, however even they convey an idea of the politician as a politician –and may influence elections, etc.

These all link to everyday life, but for the historian/classicist, analysing gossip is analysing politics - in the ancient world, the line is grey and blurred, just as it is today. Studying Classical literature such as this can give you a new perception of the modern world. So when you hear a story on the news or watch the next episode of ‘The Crown’, think about how the gossip in those reflects the political agenda of the politician or reporter. Humans have been gossiping for millennia, and although it can help us to build up an image of a person, opinions based on gossip are often misinformed and misleading.

Abigail Cherry 12M

Year 10 Latin Trip to Bath

On Monday 7th March 2022, fifty-nine Year 10 Latin students spent the day in Aquae Sulis, better known today as the town of Bath. We visited the Roman Baths Museum where 2000 years of history was waiting to be discovered and explored.



We were lucky enough to have visited on a day where the Great Bath was being drained, and so we could see the beautiful stone that laid underneath the water, and the coins and various artefacts that tourists and Roman citizens alike threw into the bath for good luck and to pay homage to the goddess, Sulis Minerva.

Although we'd learnt about the town and its significance to the Roman empire in class, it did not compare to being able to visit the actual site, and the artefacts that we saw and handled. At times, it was hard to believe that these had all survived this long! According to our classes, a favourite was the defixiones, or curse tablets that citizens wrote to curse people who did them wrong - whether they stole from them, harmed someone, or ate their food. It was interesting to decipher the Latin on the tablets, which is different to the language we know today, and curse tablets are part of our Latin Literature Unit at GCSE.



We then took a self-guided tour around the grounds, exploring behaviours of citizens and the history of artefacts. At one point we were even given the both interesting and dreadful experience of drinking clean spring water which the Romans would have used! It was disgusting and warm, but an experience all the same! The baths were amazing, with an interactive element: there were actors and actresses recreating the activities that Roman citizens would have participated in, and we could speak to them 'in character' about the Roman experience.

The most enjoyable part of the trip was definitely for the majority of us seeing the baths. It was one thing to learn about them in our textbooks, but a whole new experience to see them for ourselves. Aquae Sulis is the setting of Cambridge Latin Course Book Three which we are currently studying in class. This trip fitted well into our GCSE course with the majority of Roman citizens spending a large portion of their time at the baths, as we study Roman daily routine as part of the GCSE Civilisation Unit. It definitely gave us a better outlook on what Roman citizens everyday life was like!

The Roman Baths were public baths built in around 60-70 AD, with the most important part of the complex being the sacred springs. It was designed both for people to use for exercising and to get clean, but because the hot water naturally comes out of the ground at the site, the Romans thought that it was a sacred place of pilgrimage and healing. If you were sick with any disease, for example arthritis, it was thought that a soothing bath in this holy spring would cure you, and people would travel great distances to visit. They built a temple dedicated to the goddess Minerva as part of the public baths complex. But long before the Romans arrived, these springs were seen as sacred - Celtic warriors lived on the surrounding hills and came to worship their goddess, Sulis.



Something (or someone) else we learned about was the famous soothsayer, Memor, who was featured in Book 3 of our Cambridge Latin Course. We were able to see his altar and translate it so we could understand his job better! Lucius Marcius Memor was a Roman soothsayer from Northern Italy who made an offering to the goddess Sulis Minerva, which was excavated and remained intact. It read - "Deae Suli • Lucius Marcius Memor, Haruspex, D[ono] D[edit]" ("To the goddess Sulis, Lucius Marcius Memor, Haruspex, gave this as a gift"). Being able to see the offering in real life was absolutely incredible and helped us create links between the museum and our learning.

At the end of our trip, we went to the infamous fudge shop which Dr Kerr has mentioned on many occasions, and it was a delicious end to a wonderful day. It was an amazing, educational experience and we would recommend it to all students! In true Camp Hill fashion, we'll leave with a quote:

Veni, vidi, vici
I came, I saw, I conquered

Fera Adebayo and Anoushka Bagchi, Year 10

The Ides of March - it's not just about Caesar!

Last term saw us pass the Ides of March - the 15 March and the 74th day in the Roman calendar. It's most well known as the date of Julius Caesar's assassination in 44BC, but before that fateful day the Ides was actually a time for religious celebration...

The Ides of each month were sacred to Jupiter, the king of the Roman gods. Every month, the Flamen Dialis, Jupiter's high priest, would lead the "Ides sheep" in procession along the "Sacred Street" to Rome's citadel, where it was sacrificed.

The Feast of Anna Perenna also fell on the Ides of March; Anna Perenna was the Roman goddess of "the year", whose festival originally concluded the ceremonies of the new year. It was a time of enthusiastic celebration, with picnics, drinking and revelry.

Some sources say that the Ides of March was also the date of "Marmuralia". This religious ceremony involved beating an old man dressed in animal skins and driving him from the city - the Romans' very own "scapegoat"!

And of course, we have to talk about Caesar's assassination. In 44B.C, Julius Caesar was stabbed to death at a meeting of the Senate, with as many as 60 conspirators involved. Ancient sources say that a soothsayer had warned Caesar that harm would come to him on the Ides of March. On his way to the Theatre of Pompey, where he would be assassinated, Caesar passed the soothsayer and joked, "Well, the Ides of March are come" (and that the prophecy had not been fulfilled), and the seer replied "Aye, they are come, but they are not gone." (Spooky.) Caesar's death was a crucial turning point in the crisis of the Roman Republic, and triggered the civil war that would result in the rise of the new Roman Empire.

So the Ides of March is a pretty important day (that definitely deserves its own national holiday because you can never have too many of those ☹️)



The festival of Anna Perenna



Classics in the News...

Ruins of ancient temple for Zeus Cassius discovered in Egypt's North Sinai:

The remains of a temple to Zeus has been uncovered by the Egyptian archaeological mission working at Tel Al-Farma in the North Sinai. The temple included a gate consisting of two large pink granite columns, which were inscribed with Classical Greek texts. These texts describe additions to the temple made by the Emperor Hadrian. The discovery of this temple highlights the far-reaching extent and hybrid nature of Roman religion throughout the ancient world.

You can read more about the discovery here:

<https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/4/115274/Ruins-of-ancient-temple-for-Zeus-Cassius-discovered-in-Egypt%E2%80%99s>



Vesuvius ancient eruption rescuer identified at Herculaneum:



Experts have identified a senior military officer among the remains found in the ancient Roman town of Herculaneum in Naples. They believe that this man was a member of Pliny the Elder's rescue mission during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. The man was found with lots of money, a belt made of gold and silver, a sword with an ivory hilt, and tools linked to a Roman naval engineer.

You can read more about the discovery here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-57055163>

Historians use AI to transform the study of ancient texts:

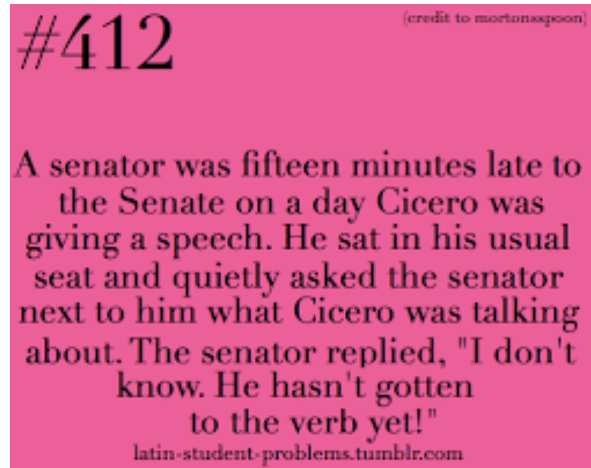
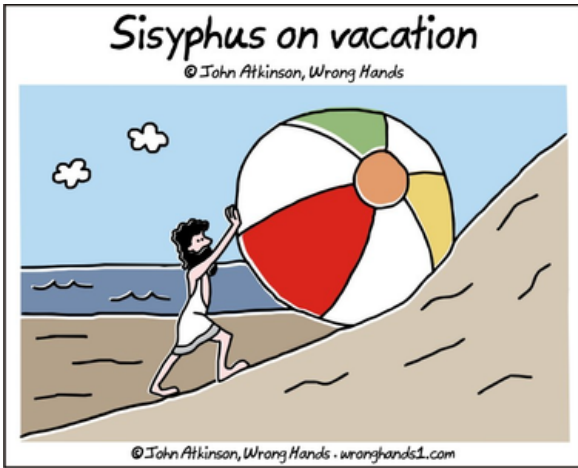
Ancient historians at the University of Oxford are creating the first deep neural network for the study of ancient texts, named Ithaca. Ithaca can help scholars fill in the gaps in texts and determine their date and provenance. The software has already helped re-date the Athenian Decrees, settling an ongoing scholarly debate. It is hoped "that models like Ithaca can unlock the cooperative potential between AI and the humanities, transforming the way we study and write about some of the most significant periods in human history".

You can read more about the discovery here:

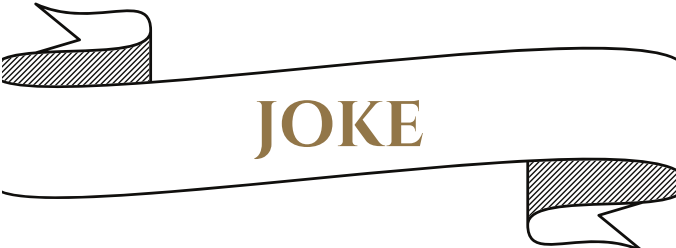
<https://www.classics.ox.ac.uk/article/historians-apply-state-of-the-art-ai-to-transform-the-study-of-ancient-texts>



Mememes and Jokes!



Are you the third principle part?
Because you're perfect.



How was the Roman Empire cut in half?

With a pair of Caesars.



Classical Competition

Mary Renault (Classical Reception) Essay Competition:

The Mary Renault Prize is a Classical Reception essay prize for school or college sixth form pupils, awarded by the Principal and Fellows of St Hugh's College, and funded by the royalties from Mary Renault's novels. The Principal and Fellows of St Hugh's College offer two or more Prizes, worth up to £500, for essays on classical reception or influence. The winning essay will be published on the College's website.

For more details visit:

<https://www.st-hughs.ox.ac.uk/prospective-students/outreach-at-st-hughs/the-mary-renault-prize/>

Open to: 6th Form Students **Deadline:** Friday 29th July 2022