



Harrison, J., Johnson, E., Kerr, D., Newsome D. J., and Strong, J. (2008) "Classical Association Conference Report, Liverpool, 27-30 March 2008". *Rosetta* **4**: 27-36.  
[http://rosetta.bham.ac.uk/Issue\\_04/Harrison\\_etal.htm](http://rosetta.bham.ac.uk/Issue_04/Harrison_etal.htm)

---

**Classical Association Conference Report  
Liverpool, 27-30 March 2008**

Report by Juliette Harrisson, Deborah Kerr, Jo Strong, Erika Johnson and David J. Newsome

*University of Birmingham*

|                                       |                    |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Introduction                          | Juliette Harrisson |
| Entertainment Overview                | Deborah Kerr       |
| Plenary Speaker: Robert Harris        | Jo Strong          |
| Panel Review: Voyages with Jason      | Juliette Harrisson |
| Panel Review: Astronomy and Antiquity | Erika Johnson      |
| Panel Review: Living in the City II   | Jo Strong          |
| Panel Review: <i>Carmen Solutum</i>   | Juliette Harrisson |
| Panel Review: Time, Place and Space   | Juliette Harrisson |
| Panel Review: Republican Rome         | David J. Newsome   |

**Introduction**

The 2008 Classical Association conference at the University of Liverpool had an overall theme of ‘The World in One City’. This theme encompassed a wide variety of panels and plenary talks, only a fraction of which are represented here. This report aims to provide a snapshot of the conference, offering detailed reviews of a few of the panels. It is hoped that the reader will get a general sense of the great breadth of scholarly work presented at the conference, covering among other things myth, literature, archaeology and reception of the classical world.

JH

**Entertainment Overview**

This year is Liverpool’s year as European Capital of Culture, and so there were various local cultural delicacies for Classical Association delegates to savour. As with previous CA conferences, the weekend began with a leisurely arrival on the Thursday, with a drinks reception at the Sefton Park Palm House and introduction from the Mayor, followed by dinner (self-service back at the university accommodation) and the first plenary lecture of the conference – Alessandro Barchiesi, ‘Alexandria and Rome’.

Panels then began at 8:30am sharp on the Friday morning, and continued throughout the day. Friday’s entertainment had delegates being bussed to Liverpool’s majestic Anglican Cathedral for a drinks reception and formal dinner held in the nave of the cathedral, accompanying the incumbent CA President’s – Robert Harris, author of novels such as *Enigma* and *Pompeii* –

plenary lecture 'Cicero as Hero'. After dinner entertainment consisted of a demonstration of a recreation of the Golden Lyre of Ur and accompanying Sumerian proverbs and an excerpt from Gilgamesh, as well as a demonstration of the cathedral's amazing organ. This magnificent setting was marred only by the freezing draughts ever-present in such a high-roofed stone building. Most delegates had to keep their coats on, and much amusement was had watching the horizontal flames of the centrepiece candles get closer to the surrounding flowers!

Saturday morning was given over to panels, with the afternoon left free. Various excursions were laid on by the University, to local landmarks such as the Lady Lever Gallery, Speke Hall, and, of course, the famous waterfront of the Albert Docks and a trip on the Yellow 'Duckmarine'. Your correspondents, however, opted for the stay-at-home choice, which was a showing of the Oxford Classics Outreach Programme's 'Aeneid: The Musical'. Well recommended for an irreverent look at such a favourite. The evening's entertainment was Tim Whitmarsh's plenary lecture on 'The Romance between Greece and the East', followed by music and dancing in the main hall.

Sunday morning squeezed in another two sets of panels (and a rush around the book sale for some last minute bargains) before it was time to lunch and leave. It marked the culmination of a thoroughly enjoyable conference – see you in Glasgow next year!

DMK

Plenary speaker:

Robert Harris: 'Cicero as Hero'

The gala dinner for the conference was held in the rather spectacular setting of Liverpool Cathedral, preceded by an address by the president of the Classical Association. The Classical Association has a policy of their president either being an academic or someone who has a close association with the world of classics. This year the president was Robert Harris, author of such books as *Fatherland* and *Enigma* and more importantly from a classical point of view, *Pompeii* and *Imperium*. We'll focus on his discussion of his classical books as this formed the central part of his speech. He informed us that Cicero would have been very proud to be discussed in this setting over 2000 years later although he would have been surprised by the wealth of academic discussion in barbarian Britain! In fact in the manner of a Cicero, Robert Harris held his audience with anecdotes from his journalism days and his own struggle to

write a classical book. He read from his diaries from the days of working on *Pompeii*, which he said had never been revealed publicly before (although again like Cicero this may have been a rhetorical trope designed to engage his audience – which admittedly worked).

Overall this was a very witty speech from someone practised at public speaking and acted as an appetiser for the dinner (unlike the rather avant-garde entertainment after the main course).

JS

Panel: *Voyages with Jason: The Argonautic Myth and Its Reception*

Chair: Helen Lovatt

Papers:

Dalida Agri: 'Pindar, Valerius and Apollonios: Jason's Argonautica and the trials of a wannabe hero'

Toni Badnall: "'Who lit the fleece-shaped beacon?': Monty Python and the Lemnian women'

Charlotte Brown: 'Zarabouka and Zeff: Argonauts for children'

Carl Buckland: 'A nightmare of disgust and deprivation': the pollution of food in the Phineus and Harpies scene'

Sarah Miles: 'Fragments of female disorder: the Lemnian episode in fifth-century Attic drama'

Charlotte Onyett: 'Catullus 64 and Pavese's *Dialogues with Leuco*'

Charlotte Roe: 'Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tanglewood Tales* and Julian Hawthorne, *The Golden Fleece*'

The structure of this panel was slightly different to the majority of other panels given at the conference, as all papers were given in one long, continuous session, with half an hour left at the end of the session for questions. This meant that this panel was very difficult to 'dip in and out of' for anyone wanting to see papers in another panel running at that time. This structure also meant that questions arising from the first paper could not be brought up until over an hour later. The advantage of this structure is that, in theory, the resulting final discussion could go into some depth and pull together all the papers that had been heard. However, the great disadvantage was that, by the end of the session, ideas relating to the early papers were no longer fresh, and the discussion, as a result, was actually a little slow.

All of the papers in this panel were inspired by a module taught at the University of Nottingham on the myth of Jason and the Argonauts and its reception, and were presented by postgraduate teaching assistants who had given tutorials on the module and some undergraduates who had taken the module. This allowed a fascinating glimpse into the nature of the module, which could be very productive from a teaching and learning point of view,

offering a basis for comparison with the University of Birmingham's own Myth module. However, the resulting discussion was somewhat hampered by this restriction, as more than one question was answered with 'We don't cover that in the module'. Included among the panel were three undergraduate students (Charlotte Brown, Charlotte Onyett and Charlotte Roe) who repeated the five-minute oral presentations they had done as part of their assessment for the module. These three papers provided interesting examples of the reception of the Argonautic myth that might have been unfamiliar to many, such as the children's stories discussed by Charlotte Brown, but were necessarily brief and provided fairly basic information.

Of the other papers, Toni Badnall's paper also focused on reception and offered an informative look at the recurring mythic theme of female temptresses. Dalida Agri's paper on Jason as a Hellenistic hero looked into Jason's character, suggesting that, as a hero, his character is of more psychological and political interest, rather than relying on brute strength. Carl Buckland discussed the links between dining and civilisation in mythic characters, while Sarah Miles discussed several Attic dramas on the subject of the Lemnian women, which have survived only in fragments.

Overall, the panel was an interesting one, offering a wide-ranging view of the Argonautic myth and its reception. However, it suffered a little from being based entirely on a taught module, as this restricted both the papers and, most particularly, the final discussion.

JH

Panel: *Astronomy and Antiquity*

Chair: Alun Salt

Papers:

Efrosyni Boutsikas: 'Astronomy and ancient Greek cult: new perspectives to Greek religious architecture and cult practices'

Mike Edmunds: 'Impossible to ignore? Some uncomfortable implications of the Antikythera Mechanism'

Stamatina Mastorakou: 'Astronomy, Stoicism and politics in Aratus' *Phaenomena*'

Alexandra Smith: 'Eclipses as a tool of chronology'

This panel started out with a discussion of the possible use of constellations as a basis for the structure of architecture. Boutsikas discussed how the timing of the visibility of the constellation of Draco from the Erechtheion coincided with the major festivals of Athens. This was especially important as the Erechtheion has the earliest evidence of cult practice on

the Acropolis. Being able to see Draco was important since the earliest origin myths involved snakes; snakes and dragons were often connected in ancient myths. The second paper was a basic description of the Antikythera Mechanism followed by the newest discoveries made concerning the device. Work continues on figuring out the entirety of its secrets, but many advances have been made in a short time, including deciphering numbers written on some parts of it so that it seems the device could be positioned to a certain date and would show what astronomical phenomena might occur. The third paper discussed how astronomy was incorporated into literary sources and set up alongside other concepts. The final paper showed how eclipse data can be used to date the sightings recorded in antiquity.

Overall, the papers focused on the different uses of astronomy in daily life. The constellations visible to the visitor to the temple, the use of a mechanism that predicted astronomical events, the political use of views on astronomy, and the use of astronomy to more precisely date texts. The papers were well written and easily understandable, even for participants not versed in astronomy. It is interesting to note that Babylonian astronomy was mentioned in two of the papers as a precursor and possible influence on the later development of astronomy. The only problem with this panel was that the room in which it was held did not have a proper screen for the projection of the presentations, only a white brick wall. This makes a difference when the presentations involve pictures of constellations and images of the devices. Obviously, this was not the fault of the presenters and they all made sure to point out specific features that were not so easily viewed.

EJ

Panel: *Living in the City II*

Chair: Matthew Fitzjohn

Papers:

David Newsome: *'in celeberrima parte urbis: the Forum Romanum in the literary topos of movement'*

Jo Strong: *'How do Romans born outside Rome read domestic space? Ingratiating yourself with the city'*

Deborah Chatr Aryamontri: *'Living conditions of the urban middle class in the Roman Empire'*

Hannah Platts: *'Beyond the boundary: villa life, an extension of life in the city?'*

Response: Robin Osborne

Again, as with some of the other panels, this one was structured slightly differently with questions being received at the end. As with the Voyages with Jason panel, this made it

difficult to dip into panels with many people arriving expecting to hear a paper and then being treated to a different one, although this may have broadened their horizons! However this affected the organisation of the panel with some papers running over and some people being given more time for questions than others. I feel a more traditional format would have worked more effectively. This lack of time management also resulted in Robin Osborne being unable to give a response due to time constraints.

David Newsome discussed the Forum Romanum and the various pathways/roads which surrounded it and how the direction one approached the Forum from affected one's experience of its spatiality and centrality. My own paper focussed on Cicero's *De Domo Sua* and explored how the experience of exile combined with being born outside of the city of Rome resulted in Cicero closely associating both himself and his house with Rome, portraying the restoration of both as the ultimate saviours of Rome. Deborah Chatr Aryamontri's paper examined the literary sources surrounding the Roman *insula*, particularly exploring Juvenal *Satire* 3. She argued that there was a deep divide between the rich and the poor in ancient Rome, exemplified by their differing living conditions. Hannah Platts argued that the villa did not in fact belong to the realm of the countryside (departing from established arguments) but in fact wall paintings and mosaics point towards the villa being an extension of life in the city, with urban architecture being shown in the background of wall decoration.

Overall the papers on the panel were very successful and all followed on smoothly from one another, although the focus was archaeological rather than literary.

JS

Panel: *Carmen Solutum: Interactions of Poetry and History in Flavian Literature*

Chair: Helen Lovatt

Papers:

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Antony Augoustakis: | 'Seascapes in Silius and Tacitus'                                    |
| Bruce Gibson:       | 'A consular historian? Silius' historical methods'                   |
| Eleni Manolaraki:   | 'Pliny's poetry: rewriting Egypt in the <i>Panygericus</i> '         |
| Victoria Pagán:     | 'The power of the preface from Statius to Pliny'                     |
| Tim Stover:         | 'Epic and empire: Valerius' <i>Argonautica</i> and Vespasianic Rome' |

Like the Voyages with Jason and Living in the City panels mentioned above, speakers in this panel gave their papers consecutively, with time left for questions at the end. This resulted in some of the same problems as those panels; by the end of the session, questions for the first

paper had been half-forgotten, and some papers produced significantly more questions than others.

This panel offered an interesting cross-section of views on the interaction of Flavian poetry and history. Tim Stover focussed on parallels between the political situation and the state of epic poetry, noting that ‘both Rome and Roman epic were in ruins’, and comparing Valerius’ reconstruction of Roman epic from the ruinous poetry of Lucan to Vespasian’s reconstruction of Rome. Bruce Gibson suggested that Silius may not be so far from an historian as has been thought, but noted that this may indicate a need to re-evaluate historians, rather than Silius. Eleni Manolaraki and Victoria Pagán both discussed Pliny the Younger, Manolaraki noting that his *Panegyricus* might be productively suggested through a historiographical, as well as literary, lens; Pagán, on the other hand, explored one way in Pliny appears to take inspiration from poetry in his historical letters, through the use of the preface. Antony Augoustakis compared the use of seascapes in Silius and Tacitus, suggesting that these provide an insight into the historian’s use of literary sources.

The papers in this panel tied together very well, offering between them an impressively detailed look at the interplay of history and literature in the Flavian period. Although the ensuing discussion was somewhat hampered by the problem of the first paper being harder to remember in detail than the last, it was clear that the papers complemented each other well and may well add significantly to our understanding of the issues raised.

JH

Panel: *Time, Place and Space*

Chair: Duncan Kennedy

Papers:

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Genevieve Lively: | ‘Underground/overground: time, place and trace in the “reception” of <i>Gradyva</i> ’                          |
| Hannah Mossman:   | ‘The island space’   |
| Ellen O’Gorman:   | ‘Greeks and Carthaginians in the Roman afterlife’  |
| Sam Thomas:       | ‘When myths attack: conflict and continuity in representations of time and place in Lucan’s <i>Civil War</i> ’ |

Hannah Mossman was, unfortunately, unable to attend, and her paper was read out by Duncan Kennedy. Inevitably, this meant that she could not answer questions on her work, but her paper was still included in the panel.



Papers in this panel covered a wide range of literature, but were held together by the overarching themes of time and place. Ellen O’Gorman looked at Polybius’ treatment of Greeks and Carthaginians, suggesting that time in his history has more of a physical than a chronological dimension, and that the Carthaginians’ ‘one last argument’ may refer to the underworld. Hannah Mossman’s paper focussed on the significance of digressional visits to islands in ancient poetry and fiction. Sam Thomas looked at the sometimes overlooked mythic elements in Lucan’s famously un-mythic epic poem, suggesting that, rather than being absent, myths are violently present, especially in the form of the snakes in the desert that attack Cato and his men. Genevieve Lively’s paper discussed an early twentieth century novel about time travel to a specific place (Pompeii) and its reception, in which the categories of time and place become fluid and interchangeable, the past being conceptualised as below, rather than behind, us.

Overall, this panel offered a fascinating look at the categories of time and place and how these can be manipulated and intertwined. The panel covered a very wide range of literature; it might perhaps be fruitful in the future to further explore these themes in more tightly focussed selections of works, looking in detail at ancient historical texts, ancient imaginative literature, reception and so on.

JH

Panel: *Republican Rome: A Cosmopolitan City*

Chair: Elaine Fantham & Gesine Manuwald

Papers:

Andrew Erskine: ‘Rome and Mediterranean Culture’

Peter Wiseman: ‘Roman Republican literature and the “interpretative community”’

Matthew Leigh: ‘Roman drama as Greek’

Nicholas Purcell: ‘Conclusions’

Coming at the end of a conference that had, with varying degrees of success, aimed at a unifying premise of ‘The World in One City’, there was a sense that this session might provide the most vibrant exegesis of this theme. We had already heard the arguments for Alexandria as the clearest proponent (‘Alexandria: The World in One City?’ chaired by Colin Adams); now it was Rome’s turn. The list of contributors had an impressive *gravitas*: Elaine Fantham, the most recent recipient of the (very rare) Distinguished Service Award of the American Philological Association; Andrew Erskine, a leading authority on the relationship between Greece and Rome; Matthew Leigh, an expert on the role of comedy and drama in the

rise of Rome; Gesine Manuwald, who recently published a translation and commentary of Cicero's *Phillipics*; Nicholas Purcell who, with Peregrine Horden, rewrote the way we approach the Mediterranean, in *The Corrupting Sea*; and Peter Wiseman, a historian of such versatility that he can claim authority in almost all sub-divisions of Roman scholarship.

Erksine's discussion of the relationship between Rome and the Mediterranean reminded us all of the oft-neglected cultural influences of, for example, the Carthaginians; thus returning balance to 'Mediterranean' cultural affairs where, often, there is an imbalance toward over-emphasising the influence of the Greeks in Rome. Purcell's 'conclusions' were deliberately downplayed; the introduction from both chair and speaker rejecting the idea that this was a 'paper'. Still, it felt as much. Purcell's range of knowledge seems as wide as the Mediterranean itself; transgressing typical academic boundaries, as the sea transgresses the artificial borders of the countries for which it forms the coastline. His concluding discussion drew in themes from the papers but offered much more than a simple précis. However, overall, the session did not perhaps deliver on its promise. This may be as much a case of over-expectation as any genuine lack of coherence between the papers. Perhaps the problem lay in the chairing of the session. Although Fantham and Manuwald introduced the session and the papers with a disarming familiarity, the strands that ran between the four perhaps required a more detailed, and more organised, discussion in the final minutes.

The final words of this review are saved for Peter Wiseman's paper. One could be forgiven for thinking that his retirement is as much a falsehood as some of the myths – classical and scholarly – that formed the basis of his well received critique, *The Myths of Rome* (Exeter 2004). Not only was this book's success measured in the tireless advertising of its paperback reprint, but his latest, *Unwritten Rome* (Exeter 2008), was being heavily promoted in the conference flyers. Add this to organising and chairing a session on Catiline and the pace of his retirement is enough to embarrass many 'active' scholars. His contribution to this panel further demonstrated his persistent, critical vigour. Like his recent papers in the *PBSR* which responded to recent (controversial) identifications of key sites in the city of Rome (2004, 2007), this paper was a 'response to' Sander Goldberg's *Constructing Literature in the Roman Republic: Poetry and its Reception* (Cambridge 2006); the principal thesis behind that work being that literature was an elite pursuit. Wiseman drew on a range of sources to demonstrate how the antithesis of Goldberg's argument is, in fact, the more plausible reality;

that literature permeated through different strata of Roman society, by different media; the ‘book’ itself, the public recital, and later the theatre.

The power of the theatre as a means for the non-elite to engage with ‘elite’ pursuits has been well documented previously; most notably perhaps in Nicholas Horsfall’s study of the overlap between ‘mass culture’ and ‘elite written literature’ (‘The Cultural Horizons of the *Plebs Romana*’, 1996, *MAAR* 41, 101-120; see also *The Culture of the Roman Plebs*, London 2003). The counter-arguments are well-rehearsed. This made the paper enjoyable and agreeable, if not particularly demanding. Whereas Wiseman’s responses in the *PBSR* papers demonstrate a sharp, critical reading of the very few written sources that concern the Velabrum and Nova Via in the capital, one felt this paper had a considerably wider range of evidence with which to work. As such, it is less surprising that Wiseman can contradict Goldberg, than that Goldberg could reach such conclusions in the first instance. Therefore, the lack of a ‘head-to-head’ discussion was a disappointment. Wiseman’s paper hinged upon the quotation of passages from Goldberg that he disagreed with. Arguably, this does not represent Goldberg’s work as it fully deserves and taking sentences out of context is not the best lesson to follow. Still, despite this, there is certainly enough evidence in primary sources to give the Goldberg-thesis difficulty. Wiseman usefully ran through the most significant of these, and it will be interesting to see if this response develops into a paper.

Wiseman’s final quotation was apposite: from Varro in *The Lyre’s Ass*, ‘Farewell, and send me away with applause’. In spite of his retirement, it seems that this most eminent of classical scholars has no intention of saying *ualete* to the debate anytime soon; and that is to be thankfully received.

DJN