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# MAKING [ANCIENT] HISTORY AT MMU

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**M**anchester Metropolitan University has a well-established and highly successful undergraduate History programme. This programme covered everything from pirates to prohibition but, until very recently, the one thing it did not cover was Ancient History. The students, however, felt there was something missing, a lacuna in their academic lives. They were well aware that history did not begin in the Medieval period, and they wanted an opportunity to study the ancient world. To meet this demand, an experimental position was created for an Ancient Historian.

This position, which I (Jason) filled, was initially part-time and for twelve months only, although something more permanent was envisaged if Ancient History could be successfully established. Challenges, of course, were substantial. There were no Ancient History books in the library, no journal subscriptions, and no teaching resources. There was no tradition of ancient history at MMU, so, naturally, students had no experience of working within such a distinct discipline. Finally, I was a new member of staff with no track record: would students risk taking an entirely new subject with an entirely new member of staff?

Thankfully, support was not lacking, and was unstintingly provided both by my own colleagues at MMU and by friends at the nearby University of Manchester (where I did my PhD). I was given a relatively light teaching load and 12 months to prepare the ground. I spent the time building up library stocks, journal subscriptions and planning new units, all of which were ready to launch in September 2013. Undergraduates in their second year would be offered an introductory course imaginatively entitled ‘Greeks and Romans’, which would be co-convened by an existing colleague, Dr. Ben Edwards (an Archaeologist), and the third years would get a choice of special subjects: ‘Romans and Barbarians’ with Ben, and/or ‘Warrior Societies’ with me. Anxiously, we waited to see if they would recruit enough students to run...

We needn’t have worried: around 150 students in total took the ancient units, and they were received so well that the Dean sent Ben and I letters of commendation. The same units ran again, to similar acclaim in 2014/15, and during that year, as a result of student demand for ancient languages, I also started teaching Classical Greek, just for fun, on Thursday evenings. This student demand, however, was now outstripping the resources we had to meet it: more students wanted to do Ancient History dissertations than could be supervised; they wanted to learn Latin as well as Greek; they also wanted to look beyond the traditional confines of Greece and Rome...

There was, of course, only one thing to do: MMU would have to offer a BA in Ancient History, and to do this, we would have to recruit another Ancient Historian. In Summer 2015, a permanent position was advertised for an established academic, and our new BAs in Ancient History, and Ancient and Medieval History were offered to students later that same year.



**Professor Hans van Wees celebrates the launch of our degrees at the inaugural Whitehead Lecture, October 2015 [L-R Jason Crowley; Hans van Wees; April Pudsey; Ben Edwards]**

This is where I (April) came in. The opportunity to be a part of shaping two new degree programmes from the ground up (after having taught on some fantastic established programmes elsewhere for the best part of a decade) was an exciting and attractive prospect.

We quickly realised we were in a strong position to give students three distinct ancient societies – Greece, Egypt and Rome – and to offer an ironic (and revisionist!) nod to the old ‘warfare and weaving’ dichotomy with our respective research-led specialisms. To our students’ great credit, they embrace both *hoplites* and *hetairai*, the *phalanx* and the *familia*, with extraordinary enthusiasm. Our flagship 30 credit first year ‘Introduction to Ancient History’ module reflects this diversity – unusually for Ancient History our students get all three societies in equal measure in their first year, in a move to encourage the direction of teaching of Ancient History toward a more global outlook. They look at Achaemenid Persia and the Persian Wars in their ‘Greece’ block, and again in ‘Egypt’ from the perspective of Egyptian sources from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Persian Period of the country’s history. They explore ideas of monarchy, divinity and ruler cult through Alexander the Great, The Pharaohs and Ptolemaic Kings, and the Roman Emperors. As well as meeting the key ancient historical authors, inscriptions and papyri, this format gives our students a chance to meet a wide array of ancient sources, including graffiti, from that carved by punters on the wall of a brothel in Pompeii, to that of the Greek mercenary soldiers writing on Ramesses II’s left leg in Memphis, former capital of Egypt. Our current intake of first years on the two degrees (34 students) take this unit, and so do over 45 other students on the BA History, as one of their options. For 2016/17 we’ve divided the second year ‘Greeks and Romans’ unit into two new full units and introduced a new third year specialism unit ‘From Cleopatra to the Coptic Christians: Egypt in the Roman and Late Antique World’. At this time, every indication is that student numbers on these units will allow us opportunity to recruit and train dedicated Associate Lecturers to assist with seminar teaching.

The success (and liveliness!) of these two new BAs rests in large part on their supported integration with the rest of the History staff, students and programme. Our students take their dedicated Ancient (and some Medieval) units as part of a programme that includes thematic and historiographic approaches to world history more broadly -- and it’s precisely this framework that gives our new programmes a very distinct flavour. In their first year all History students at MMU (over 200) take ‘The Rise of Persecuting Society’, where they look at the nature of persecution from Christians in the Roman empire, to genocide in Rwanda. In their second year they take ‘Empires in World History’, for which I’ve developed a 6 week block on

premodern civilizations and empires: they will engage with ideas about state formation in the ancient Near East, imperial ideologies in dynastic Egypt and Achaemenid Persia, imperialism in Athens, Rome and the Han Chinese empire, and the growth of the Byzantine and first Islamic empires. This cross-over between Ancient and Medieval, and pre-modern and modern, is crucial to the practical aspects of running the degrees with limited specialist staff, but it also supports a more dynamic and diverse approach to teaching and learning Ancient and Medieval History – something which our students are quick to tell us they thoroughly enjoy.

The success of our student society's off-timetable Greek club, taught by Jason, was no surprise; Latin club fared just as well this year, with over 20 students sticking with me and my conjugations well into the second term. So, with the continued support of the Manchester Branch of the Classical Association and our friends and colleagues at 'the other place' (University of Manchester, CLAH), we are now offering an accredited unit in 'Latin Sources for Historians: from the Ancient to the Medieval World.' Students will learn Latin within a framework designed to get them engaging with inscriptions, long texts and other written sources. This should give us a chance to test the waters for future sources-focused Greek and Latin units across the board, and the growth of our Ancient and Medieval 'offer'.

The future of Ancient History at MMU now rests in the hands of a number of us: without the initial push, and continued support, from senior colleagues willing to invest in the venture, and without colleagues across the board who continue to support and allow us our creative indulgences, the student demand for more Ancient History would not have begun to have been met. And it's our legion of wonderfully proactive students at MMU who have led the charge from the frontline, and continue to do so. Our Ancient History and Classics Society is headed by a triumvirate of (now third year) students, who are still driving both curricular and extra-curricular passions...



**MMU Ancient History & Classics Society at Hadrian's Wall, November 2015.**

A Classical Revolution has begun at MMU. To enrich the Ancient History we (Claire, Stephen and Rose) had been studying on Jason Crowley's courses, and to celebrate the launch of the two new degrees, we launched the Ancient History and Classics Society in September 2015. The initial idea was to give students the opportunity to learn Greek and Latin, after a successful run of Greek club in the previous year. This concept evolved into a student-led society, in which we offered students trips and socials as well as ancient language classes.

Our first trip, which completely sold out, was to Hadrian's Wall last November. We took thirty students to Vindolanda, where our Archaeology lecturer, Ben Edwards, gave us a guided tour around the ruins of the fort, and then on to the fabulous Roman Army Museum. Due to the success of this trip, we are planning another trip to London to visit the British Museum's Faith After the Pharaohs exhibition with April Pudsey, and the Museum of London next term. Additionally we are planning an end-of-year trip to Rome in collaboration with the History Department, we plan to take 20 students around the Italian capital for a few days. April Pudsey has offered to guide us around some key sites.



We also have monthly, laid-back socials, offering passionate students an opportunity to spend time with their tutors and other like-minded students. These socials have been extremely successful and the society has taken off on an unprecedented scale, acquiring 100 paid members within the first month, ranging from foundation year students to third year veterans. Through this, we have aided a strong Ancient History community within MMU, due to our successful integration of lecturers and students.

This has made the new degree even more appealing to potential MMU students. The Classics and Ancient History community at University of Manchester frequently invite us to participate in some of their Classical Association talks, research talks and society events.

All of this has helped in putting MMU on the Classical map of Manchester and beyond.

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