



Inclusive Classics Initiative

Report on 'Towards a More Inclusive Classics' Conference 25-26 June 2020

by **Barbara Goff and Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis**

1. Introduction

Black Lives Matter and the effects of Covid-19, including the global economic recession, have intensified the need to address in greater depth the ways in which Classics is not inclusive, and what can be done to change this. A lack of inclusivity results in some people and groups feeling unwelcome in the discipline, and sometimes deciding to leave it; and it also has the pernicious effect of putting off potential students and future academics who never even start out in the subject. We could imagine them as a lost cohort of Classicists. The development of the discipline in a more inclusive direction is the most urgent issue facing Classics today both for ethical reasons and practical ones – ultimately to ensure the survival of the subject. If Classics in practice does not include certain sectors of the population, and if it is perceived to actively exclude groups, the case for state funding at universities will be severely weakened at a time of increasing social need, when all government-funded bodies are under pressure to demonstrate their worth and relevance.

Before the momentous events of 2020 Classics, like many other Humanities disciplines such as History, Mediaeval Studies and Art History, had embarked on the processes of self-scrutiny and critical understanding of its past and future that is associated with the term 'decolonising'. Initiatives have included curriculum review, workshops, conference panels, and networks of interested academics such as the DecolonisingClassics list run by Dr Ellie Roberts. For an indication of the necessity of such activity, see for instance, Hardeep Singh Dhindsa, [What Studying Classics Taught me about my Relationship with Western Civilisation](#). Decolonisation entails the examination of a discipline in order to see how it has contributed to the perpetuation of illegitimate hierarchies, usually of race and ethnicity, but also to propose how the discipline could better flourish in, and serve, a contemporary multicultural society. But this process is even more urgent in a world ever more aware of profound racial, gender, economic and other inequalities, and where the onslaught of Covid-19 has exposed not only unsustainable inequities but also the myriad ways in which populations are linked and interdependent.

The case of Classics is particularly fraught, since the Greeks and Romans have been, and sometimes still are characterised as the founders of a European tradition understood both as superior and as white. Elevation of the study of Greece and Rome has also contributed to other forms of discrimination by virtue of its prominence in an education that was historically tied to social privilege. Contesting this history has taken many forms. Classical Reception Studies have foregrounded ways in which subaltern populations in former colonies, women, and working-class students have used the Classics for their own purposes; and in the UK at least, the changing demographics, and finances, of higher education generally have led to all kinds of revisions to curriculum, scholarship, and outreach. It is important too to remember

that Classics is not at all a timeless and marmoreal discipline, but has responded in earlier periods to far-reaching changes, such as the move to teaching in translation, and the greater prominence of the study of gender.

2. The workshop: origin, format and content

Our workshop 'Towards a more inclusive Classics' was conceived as a contribution to the movement of decolonising Classics. It grew out of conversations at the '[Classics and Race: research and pedagogy](#)' workshop organised by Dr Sian Lewis at the University of St Andrews in October 2019. We are both engaged in aspects of decolonisation and inclusivity in our research: Barbara has researched African receptions of Greek tragedy, and the roles of Classics in the British colonies of West Africa; Alexia has worked on non-elite religion and pilgrimage in ancient Greece, and is now working on the reception of classical material culture in communities of late Ottoman Greece and challenging the predominance of Grand Tour narratives. In the pre-Covid-19 era we planned a one-day workshop at the Institute of Classical Studies in London in the expectation of gathering about 30 people face to face, with the additional option of Skype participation in order to widen access. We sent out an open Call for Papers and selected twelve speakers, some of whom were non-UK based. We had received financial support for the event from the Classical Association, the CUCD Teaching Committee, and the Institute of Classical Studies. As a result of the lockdown we decided to hold the event online over two half days. The CA, CUCD and ICS continued to support us and were flexible in allowing us to use funds for IT expenses rather than postgraduate bursaries etc for which we were very grateful. What we had imagined as simply a move of the workshop from in person to online, actually became a far more dramatic transformation: it resulted in a much bigger, more international and more diverse group of participants who are engaged with Classics in a variety of professional ways. Instead of 30 mainly London-based participants there were 160 registered participants from 12 countries and 5 continents. While the majority were academics there were at least 31 students, 31 teachers, and 5 involved with collections / heritage.

The format was experimental. We benefitted from feedback from our twelve speakers on what might work best, and in particular we took the suggestion by Ellen Adams to pre-circulate materials rather than having all presentations live, not least as the live online format can be difficult for those with disabilities such as hearing impairment, autism and ADHD. The pre-circulated materials were of various kinds, including video presentations, PowerPoints, and traditional papers, many with specific reading suggestions. The workshop was on Zoom, and we had technical support from Dr James Lloyd (University of Reading). Five-minute presentations were followed by ten minutes of Question and Answer, with questions fed into the chat function and relayed to the speaker by a moderator. At the end of each panel of three presentations, participants were whisked off into randomly assigned breakout rooms of c.8 people for more sustained 'face to face' conversations and the possibility of meeting colleagues from around the world. A plenary panel at the end was made up not of our invited speakers but of selected participants in the conference from different areas of the discipline, career stage and geographical location: Ashley Chhibber (PhD candidate, University of Nottingham, UK), Viviana Diez (Lecturer in Latin, Universidad de Buenos Aires, and Associate Professor in Classics, Universidad Nacional de Río Negro, Argentina), Lottie Mortimer (Cobham Free School, UK), Pedro Machado Sanches (Associate Professor, Universidade Federal de Pelotas, Brazil), and Cassandra Tran (PhD candidate, McMaster University, Canada). The panel discussed concrete suggestions put forward by each breakout room to make the teaching of Classics more inclusive (more on that below in section 4).

Materials from the presentations are available at <https://ics.sas.ac.uk/events/towards-more-inclusive-classics>. Inclusivity was interpreted broadly by speakers both in terms of ancient subjects and of our own demographic as Classicists. It included discussions about ethnicity, class, gender, and disability.

Dr Sam Agbamu (Royal Holloway, University of London, UK) opened the workshop in Panel One 'Rethinking the Materials' with a reflective and powerful presentation entitled 'Can the *instrumenta domini* dismantle the *domus domini*?' This questioned whether true inclusivity could be achieved in the face of entrenched inequalities in society and within the hierarchical structures of the university. Using the concept of 'a third space' for a truly inclusive Classics he highlighted the important role of practical initiatives such as The Sportula and Sportula Europe (<https://thesportula.wordpress.com>; <https://sportulaeurope.wordpress.com>) in supporting Classicists from marginalised groups and of online forums critiquing the discipline such as Eidolon (<https://eidolon.pub>) and Everyday Orientalism (<https://everydayorientalism.wordpress.com>). He argued for relocating Reception Studies from the margins to the centre of the discipline not least in order to highlight the culturally specific and often exclusionary roots of Classics; and on a micro level he suggested the practice of collaborative close readings of texts to decentre the instructor and to promote the value of all interpretations.

In 'Democratising Roman poetry' Professor Peter Kruschwitz (University of Vienna, Austria) showcased the research of MAPPOLA – Mapping Out the Poetic Landscape(s) of the Roman Empire, an ERC-funded advanced grant project which he leads. He explored four Latin poems, originally inscribed on stone, and from different parts of the Roman empire, thereby challenging the stranglehold of the Rome-centred Latin canon. In this searching out of geographical diversity, Kruschwitz demonstrated that other kinds of diversity immediately follow, including gender, social, ethnic, and racial. There were more female voices in his presentation than in many undergraduate Classics degrees, let alone modules! The place of material culture and performativity emerged as important avenues for accessing marginalised poets and receivers; we glimpsed an emerging panorama of diverse Latin poetry which does not do away with the well-known and well-loved 'classics' but which has the potential to cast a new light on them.

'Diversifying the Classics curriculum' in the Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology at the University of Liverpool was the topic discussed by Dr Fiona Hobden (University of Liverpool, UK) together with Kate Caraway and Serafina Nicolosi (both PhD candidates, University of Liverpool, UK). This set out the rationale for changing the curriculum, highlighting the way that Classics as traditionally taught makes some people feel uncomfortable and unwelcome, and arguing for the importance of students from diverse backgrounds and of diverse identities seeing themselves reflected in the materials studied. The commitment to a radical and holistic assessment of the curriculum (rather than piecemeal) and the centring of student voices in the delivery of this change came across very clearly and we look forward to hearing how the process unfolds and what the results are.

Panel Two addressed aspects of 'Access through Social Media and in Museums'. In her presentation on 'Blindness, deafness and new appreciations of ancient art: Sensing the Parthenon Galleries in the British Museum' Dr Ellen Adams (King's College, University of London) argued that ableism is inherent in academia and that Classics is implicated in this. She described strategies developed for blind and partially-sighted people in museums, specifically audio descriptions and touch tours. She explored what these can offer people with

a range of sightedness when engaging with classical art, and argued for the great potential of touch description.

In her presentation on '*Pharos*: Doing justice to the Classics – Documenting the misuse of *De Raptu Proserpinae*' Sarah Marshall (BA student, Vassar College, US) showcased the important work that the online journal *Pharos* does in combating appropriations of Classics by hate groups. Marshall focused on the use of the myth of Persephone by 'Incels' to threaten violence against women and discussed the pros and cons of engaging online with purveyors of hate.

Dr Charlie Kerrigan (Trinity College Dublin, Ireland) spoke on 'Decolonizing Classics: A view from Dublin', describing his work on the TCD Blog 'Confabulations' (<https://www.tcd.ie/classics/livinglatin/confabulations.php>). 'Confabulations' is research-led and reaches out to diverse audiences particularly those without knowledge of the classical languages. Blog posts often explore the quotidian and the small-scale, while at the same time applying postcolonial approaches and informed by the history of Ireland.

Panel 3 was on 'Pedagogical Approaches' and began with the work of Dr Evelien Bracke, (Ghent University, Belgium) introducing disadvantaged primary school children to Ancient Greek. This project, which is taught by university students, targets especially minority or immigrant children who may often be discouraged from learning Latin or Ancient Greek, despite the fact that they may already have more than one modern language. The project has developed the children's confidence and raised their aspirations, as well as enabling professional development among the university students. It builds on earlier work undertaken in Swansea with the [The Iris Project](#).

Dr Marco Ricucci (Liceo Leonardo da Vinci, Milan, and Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy) then asked us "Dys-Latin": Should studying a dead language be an overwhelmingly time-consuming and demanding task for dyslexic students?' His presentation explored strategies for teaching Latin to students with dyslexia and showed how many of them, such as colour-coding of grammatical elements, were of use to all students. The role of spoken Latin was also discussed.

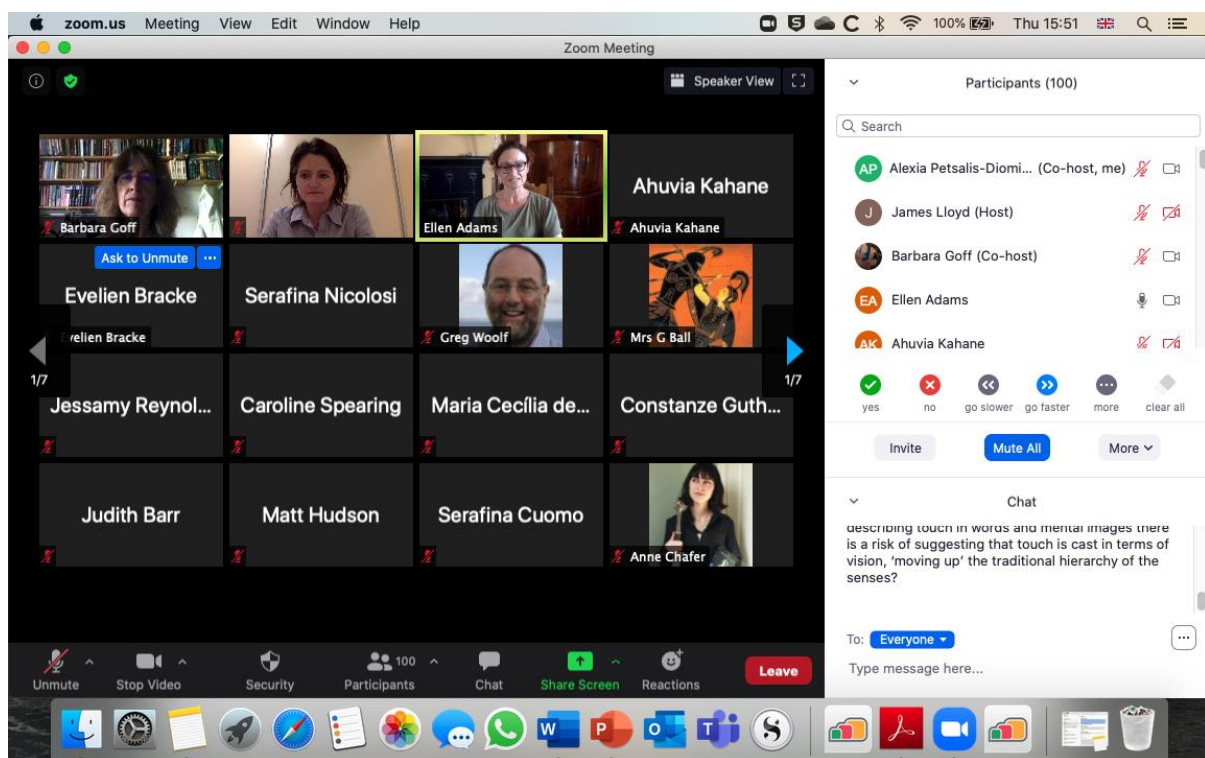
Dr Sharon Marshall (University of Exeter, UK) presented on 'Embedding inclusivity through non-traditional assessment'. She runs a module in which students respond creatively to an aspect of the ancient world. The module involves work-in-progress seminars and peer feedback, as well as the actual production of the project and accompanying critical interpretation. The presentation showcased the creative outputs but also delved into questions of assessment, attainment and student buy-in. Questions were also addressed about the role of such 'diverse' modules within the curriculum overall.

In our final Panel Four 'Diversity in the Curriculum' Dr Danielle Lambert (King's College, University of London) spoke 'On the benefits of having no prior Classical education'. She argued that fresh insights are brought to the discipline by students who begin their studies of the classical world at university – and not years before at school. She was also candid about reactions she has had from some Classicists expressing surprise that a person from South Korea is part of the discipline, illustrating how deeply embedded are notions of whom Classics 'belongs', or is relevant, to.

Next Dr Stephen Harrison (University of Swansea, UK) presented on 'Teaching ancient Persia: Decolonising ancient history through source-based teaching'. He argued for the

importance of integrating the Near East, particularly Persia, into the teaching of Greek History. He also demonstrated the way that teaching unfamiliar materials offered particular opportunities for developing students' skills and confidence.

Finally Dr Daniel Orrells (King's College, University of London, UK) made a presentation on 'Classical antiquity at the fin de siècle: an experiment in teaching'. Here, in an unintended but neat ring composition linking to Sam Abgamu's paper which opened the workshop, Orrells discussed the importance of Reception Studies for the discipline, focusing on the author and activist W. E. B. Du Bois. He argued that Reception Studies enable students to think about the political, cultural and intellectual contexts of the construction of the discipline of Classics, and to address pressing political issues today.



Screenshot from 'Towards a more Inclusive Classics' online workshop, 25 June 2020

3. Participants' responses

Ashley Chhibber, participant and panellist, has written about the experience of being part of the conference; this account can be accessed here: <https://mixedupinclassics.wordpress.com/2020/07/22/inclusive-classics-conference/>

Themes from the 'chat'

The liveliness and conviviality of the chat was a feature of the online workshop that we had not expected. There were generous offers to share teaching resources such as 'deliberate mistake' worksheets and blog post marking criteria. There is an Annex at the end of this report with resources suggested in the chat.

The chat often generated themes of its own that spun off from the speakers' presentations and sparked people's imagination independently. Several themes became prominent over the two days. Most important was the focus on the necessity to 'decolonise' the secondary school curriculum alongside the university version. Several participants raised the question of how we might decolonise teaching materials without also revising the structures, institutions and funding of education. There was inevitable discussion of the equation of 'classical' with 'elite' or fee-paying education, and of efforts to dismantle that identity. Conversely, Classical Reception often appeared as a route to decolonisation because it promotes a more interrogatory and self-conscious attitude towards the materials and the tradition. The question of how Classicists define the ancient world is also one of pedagogy, as we inherit geographical and historical boundaries (e.g. Late Antiquity) that promulgate predetermined and arbitrary divisions. Certain time periods and certain topics, such as popular culture, remain quite difficult to teach. There was discussion of renaming the discipline 'Ancient World Studies' or 'Ancient Mediterranean Studies', to get away from the necessarily hierarchical connotations of 'Classics', but participants noted that there were problems of inclusion and exclusion other possible names too.

Final breakout rooms suggestions

In the final breakout rooms participants discussed practical ways in which inclusivity could be embedded in the discipline of Classics. The following priorities emerged:

1. To ensure that institutions rather than individuals lead and embed inclusivity; and in particular not to allow the efforts at decolonisation to fall on the shoulders of the precariously employed.
2. To decentre Athens and Rome; and to foreground Classical Reception and the history of scholarship in order to destabilise the canon and expose biases throughout history and in modern scholarship.
3. To extend the activity of decolonisation and diversification beyond curriculum, learning and assessment to terminology, methodology and analytical frameworks.
4. To cast the relationship between lecturers and students as one of collaboration; students to be partners in the conversation, with ownership over their learning.
5. To foster collaboration between universities and schools, perhaps building repositories for resources and research.
6. To obtain greater access to museum collections, including online, although there was also concern over inequalities of provision in terms of students' connectivity.

4. Conclusions and future plans

While we had intended a stand-alone event with an output of teaching guidelines, we found that the workshop only scratched the surface of the issue of Inclusivity in Classics. There is an urgent need for ongoing conversations in order to work towards a more inclusive discipline and to ensure its healthy survival. While such conversations are happening, they seem to be happening in pockets and not across the board. Judging from the workshop they are occurring disproportionately amongst students and younger, early career, precarious scholars. They are also occurring disproportionately among women: although we did not ask people to state their gender when registering (and in future we will gather detailed statistics) participation appeared overwhelmingly female – 7 out of every 10. Certain institutions were represented by several academics at the workshop while other institutions were entirely absent. Given the large number of Classicists at Oxbridge in comparison to other institutions, and given the influence Oxbridge has within the discipline, it was noticeable – and disappointing – that there was only

one Oxbridge Fellow at the workshop. While the workshop was certainly international (roughly a third was non-UK based), there were certain countries with important Classics traditions which were again notably absent. The picture is complex, and the possibility that the workshop and more broadly the discourse of inclusivity makes certain people feel unwelcome should be considered. On the positive side the high number of school teachers at the workshop, and their vocal participation in breakout rooms, suggests that conversations about inclusivity are not only well underway in this sector but that the academy can learn much from school teachers.

Another striking feature of the workshop was the predominance of topics on pedagogy and social media that resulted from an open Call for Papers which had given equal weight to pedagogy and research. Do people feel a greater urgency to be more inclusive and to decolonise the discipline in their teaching rather than their research? Is this the case because our discipline – including its name, materials, approaches, history, and demographic – is palpably at odds with the values, interests, and identities of our students and those who might have been students but who were deterred? And is it the case that our discipline is less at odds with the values, interests, and identities of established academics pursuing research? If inclusivity is indeed lower on the research agenda than on the teaching one, as the response to the Call for Papers suggests, this should be further explored. For there is an inextricable connection between research and teaching, particularly at the postgraduate level, and the discipline needs new cohorts of Classicists expertly trained both in currently marginalised areas, such as Near Eastern languages, and in inclusive methodologies.

The workshop offered a forum for listening and learning from a diversity of experiences and approaches, for sharing resources and for fostering a sense of community. It has already inspired an exciting project by Dr Amy Coker to gather together a body of Latin unseen passages for GCSE level representing diverse voices in the Roman world and going beyond the standard canon (<https://twitter.com/AECoker/status/1281147115478093824>). Also Dr Claudia Portogallo has proposed setting up a platform for academics and school teachers offering teaching resources in a variety of languages and not just in English, emphasising the diversity of the ancient world.

The importance of the issues and the success of the workshop has led us to establish an 'Inclusive Classics Initiative'. In the first instance we are planning an annual international online conference, while we also have a growing mailing list of 160 people across the world who are interested in developing our discipline in a more inclusive direction. Inclusive Classics 2021 will delve deeper into the priorities identified in the final breakout rooms. If you wish to be part of this conversation, do get in touch with us.

ANNEX: Resources listed in the 'chat'

Inclusivity in universities and secondary schools

Antiracist Classics from a USA perspective:

<https://multiculturalclassics.wordpress.com/teaching-resources-for-all-levels>

Decolonising the curriculum webinars from colleagues in Birmingham:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAKeA6DdfZRZ6VQQcazR1iA>

https://twitter.com/dtc_unibham

Decolonising research methodology: <https://theconversation.com/decolonising-research-methodology-must-include-undoing-its-dirty-history-83912>

Advocating Classics Education: www.aceclassics.org.uk
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000k88h> (an episode of Free Thinking)

Moves towards different types of inclusivity in secondary schools:
statement from the Cambridge Schools Classics Project, <https://cambridgescp.com/black-lives-matter-statement-cscp>

For the 'Inventing the Barbarian' component of the Classical Civilisation GCSE, a session from Warwick on the Persian evidence:
<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/classics/warwickclassicsnetwork/events/classciv2020/>

A Latin reader focussed on women: <https://feminaeromanae.org/>

A new Key Stage 3 Latin book: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/superpage/de-romanis>

The Classical Association's Teaching Committee is keen to help with these kinds of discussions: <https://classicalassociation.org/teaching.html>. Arlene Holmes-Henderson, outreach officer of the Classical Association, is open to discussions of school curricula and related research. She reminded participants that the OCR exam board has a Classics Consultative Forum which meets twice a year with teacher members from all school types, academics and teacher trainers.

Revising materials and approaches

Another important thread was on how to extend and diversify the curriculum by using non-canonical texts and objects, moving away from Athenocentrism and Romanocentrism, and by focussing on non-traditional students:

Edward Courtney, *Musa Lapidaria: a selection of Latin verse inscriptions* (American Classical Studies 96, 1995); Matthew Hartnett, *By Roman hands: inscriptions and graffiti for students of Latin* (Newburyport, MA : Focus Pub./R Pullins Co., 2008). These both make more accessible the Carmina Latina Epigraphica.

The Digital Library of Late-Antique Texts (<https://digiliblt.uniupo.it>)

Achaemenid inscriptions online:
<https://www.livius.org/sources/content/achaemenid-royal-inscriptions/>

Seleucid coinage: <http://numismatics.org/sco/>

Some teachers found that the Literature and Culture paper in the Latin GCSE from OCR may also offer scope for moving beyond the canon.

Teaching resources from CripAntiquity, advocating for disabled people in the study of antiquity:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Nknr7n4bSXAjigUA7skrZnWvbDU3IQ5AEp0DiEU_MLU/edit
<https://cripantiquity.com/>

Teaching Greek to socially disadvantaged children in Belgium: materials may be found at <https://www.oudegriekenjongehelden.ugent.be/lesmaterialen/>
Research on the issue in the German context: *Integration durch Sprache. Schüler nichtdeutscher Herkunft lernen Latein*, hrsg. von Stefan Kipf (Bamberg: Buchner 2014).

Teaching Latin to dyslexic students generated a lot of discussion of spoken Latin groups like the Cambridge Latinitas Project (<https://oxfordlatinitas.org/>). There are several student societies which promote spoken Latin, and there are also lecturers like Dr Juan Coderch at St Andrews <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/classics/people/jc210>. However, the Accademia Vivarium Novum, which also promotes spoken Latin (and whose students have been instrumental in founding societies for spoken Latin in the UK), was noted as problematic because it excludes women during the academic year.

Resources on feminist pedagogy:

<https://wcc->

uk.blogs.sas.ac.uk/files/2016/07/PracticalTipsforFeministPedagogyintheClassics.pdf

<https://cucd.blogs.sas.ac.uk/files/2015/01/MACKIN-COOK-FALLAS-Feminist-pedagogy.pdf>

<https://cucd.blogs.sas.ac.uk/files/2015/01/MACKIN2520COOK2520FALLAS2520Tips2520for2520feminist2520pedagogy-1.pdf>

There was interest in the ways in which pedagogy devised for students with particular difficulties, e.g. sight-impaired or dyslexic, could also work to teach non-disabled students, suggesting as so often that inclusive teaching (such as audio description, dual-coding) really is for everyone. In this connection there was interest in 'Touching the Past', a pedagogical and research interdisciplinary project which takes Brazilian students from other areas than archaeology for two-week-long immersive trips to excavations in Greece where they are given an opportunity to perceive the past through the sensorial experience of digging and working with material culture, in order to learn more about the interaction between touching and viewing. In 2020 a website, an online Symposium (9-11 November) and a book are being organized. For further information, contact tocandopassado@gmail.com.

The work of Pharos in combatting right-wing uses of the Classics:

<http://www.pharosclassics.org>, @pharosclassics on Facebook and Twitter

Blogging postcolonial narratives about Classics:

<https://www.tcd.ie/classics/livinglatin/confabulations.php>

In these contexts, there was discussion about how to change minds away from harmfully exclusive versions of the Classics.

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