

# CLUBS AND SOCIETIES

## CLASSICAL SOCIETY

city for them, and fled carrying the treasures of Troy. This tradition paints Aeneas as traitor, deserter, and lying storyteller like Ulysses. Is there an allusion to this strand when Dido accuses the 'dutiful' Aeneas of 'undutiful deeds'?

Aeneas' story to Dido seems to be flawed and suspicious. Why is the Horse made now of fir, now of maple, now of pine, now of oak? Aeneas tells Dido that Sinon unlocked the Horse – but the next moment he describes himself as asleep: is this an alibi? His description of Hector's ghost (horribly mutilated) is inconsistent with the restoration of Hector's body in *Iliad* 24: is Aeneas trying to do down Hector in order to win credit with Dido? By identifying himself with an 'unknowing shepherd' in the fire and torrent simile, is Aeneas again contriving an alibi and arguing his innocence (I did not know what was going on)? Aeneas also describes how he and his Trojan comrades donned Greek armour after ambushing a party of the invaders, 'mingling with the Greeks'. When

he loses his wife Creusa, he returns to Troy, seeing the Greeks guarding the loot of Troy. Is this why he is able, later in the poem, to hand out the treasures of Troy as gifts? Did he steal them? In another simile the ants (= Trojans) are pushing their food (the Latin word means 'loot') up a hill: is this a tacit reference to Aeneas' looting of the treasures of Troy and a deal done with the Greeks? Aeneas also tells Dido the story of Sinon, who was welcomed by the Trojans, but then betrayed them: this is exactly what Aeneas does to his listener, Dido: is Aeneas a Ulyssean trickster, himself beguiling Dido?

By such means does Virgil subtly incorporate into Book II the sinister rumours about Aeneas. Embedded in Book II is the lesson that Dido would have been well advised to observe in Book IV: 'beware of *Trojans* (let alone Greeks) bearing gifts'!

CMJ

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## ODYSSEUS UNBOUND SEMINAR

The Classical Society was delighted to welcome Robert Bittlestone (a King's parent) and James Diggle (Professor of Classics, Cambridge) to give a presentation on the subject of their recent book, *Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca*. The book proposes that the location of Odysseus' homeland of Ithaca was not the island that bears this name today, but the western peninsula of Cephalonia, which is called Paliki.

Mr Bittlestone and Professor Diggle produced convincing evidence in favour of the hypothesis. Their main source was the text of Homer's *Odyssey* itself, and it was shown how Homer's description of Odysseus' Ithaca (as being 'low-lying, furthest out to sea and towards the west') in no way accords with modern Ithaca, whereas Paliki is a perfect match. The speakers made a strong case in support of Paliki being a separate island in the late Greek Bronze Age, with a sea-channel (described by the ancient geographer Strabo) cutting between the two parts of modern Cephalonia. The potential existence of such a channel is supported by the expert opinion of John Underhill (Professor of Stratigraphy at Edinburgh, and third co-author of the book): repeated seismic activity seems to have been responsible for the infill of this channel.

The presentation in Collyer Hall described the first phase of the project in search of Homer's Ithaca, and argued persuasively that almost all the sites described in the *Odyssey* have been identified, including places such as Phorcys Bay, Eumaios' pig farm and perhaps even the palace of Odysseus itself. The next phase of the investigation will involve definitive geological assessment

conducted by bore-holes drilled into 'Strabo's Channel' in order to determine whether Paliki was an island in antiquity. The third, and

*Seminar speaker  
Robert Bittlestone with  
Alex Payne*



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most exciting phase, would involve excavation of the actual places identified – and we hope that KCS Classics students will be on site, trowels in hand!

If it can reasonably be proven that Homer's descriptions of Odysseus' homeland are not fantasy, then we are forced to wonder what else is not fantasy in the *Odyssey*: what about the events described? What about the characters themselves? The consequences could be momentous, and we shall certainly never read the *Odyssey* in the same way again.

The 200 students who attended the seminar felt privileged to have experienced a ground-breaking presentation, supported by cutting-edge computer technology. The seminar was repeated later that evening to a similar-sized audience of parents, friends and guests, and copies of the book itself (generously signed by the authors) were in much demand. Our profound thanks to Robert Bittlestone and James Diggle for a very special event.

Aleem Meghji & CMJ

## CLASSICAL SOCIETY SYMPOSIUM

After the great success of last year's event, the Second Annual Classical Society Symposium was eagerly anticipated by all members of the Classics community. The evening featured two lectures by distinguished academics, followed by an authentic Greek banquet in the Dining Hall (including retsina – a pungent Attic wine - hopefully for the last time), a prayer read in Greek, and an after-dinner speech by a sixth-form Classicist.

The first lecture, entitled 'Tales of *Mortal Passion in Ovid's Metamorphoses*' was delivered by the wonderful Dr Efi Spentzou of Royal Holloway. She skillfully navigated the labyrinthine narrative of Ovid's epic by focusing on several of the poem's many lively episodes. In doing so, she emphasised the way in which Ovid subverts traditional attitudes and challenges our expectations through his unique presentation of myth. It was a great pleasure to hear a speech by a *Nona fide* Athenian: Dr Spentzou's Mediterranean lilt brought the material to life, and her reading before dinner of Mr Jackson's translation of the *Grace* taught us all a lesson in Greek pronunciation!

The second speaker was himself a distinguished member of the Classics Department at King's for many years - Mr Michael Barry. His arrival was met with frenzied cheers and applause: a measure of his considerable reputation amongst all those he has taught. I [his speech on *Symposium Scenes in Greek Art* truly set the tone for the rest of the evening. He described several aspects of an ancient Greek symposium, such as the food, the etiquette (or lack thereof), the setting, and, of course, the drinking habits of the guests. Mr Barry's highly informative speech was punctured by frequent bouts of uproarious laughter,



both at his own comments and at some of the more graphic scenes which were displayed on the screen.

The dinner itself surpassed even the heights of its predecessor. The catering staff produced a delicious three-course meal in traditional Greek style, which was enjoyed immensely by all. After the meal, the third speech of the evening was given by yours truly, reflecting upon the excellent lectures given earlier, and highlighting some of the more exotic moments I have witnessed as a pupil in the King's Classics Department. I fear I could not resist an emotional *peroratio*, anticipating the end of the Upper Sixth members' careers as King's Classicists, and thanking all those who have made it so memorable.

Many thanks must go to Mr Jackson for organising the occasion with incredible efficiency and enthusiasm, to the speakers, Dr Spentzou and Mr Barry, to the catering staff, and to all who attended and contributed to such a fantastic evening: *mirabile dictu*, as Virgil would doubtless have said.

Thomas Westwell