

29th Annual Ancient History Day

Saturday 16 March 2024

Abel Smith Lecture Theatre

HEROES AND ANTI-HEROES

Program

9:00—9:10am Welcome by **Dr Janette McWilliam**, Classics and Ancient History Discipline Convenor, who will introduce the Head of the School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry, **Professor Lisa Featherstone**, and invite her to open the event.
Chair, **Associate Professor Dorothy Watts AM** will outline the day's proceedings.

9:10—10am *The epic of Gilgamesh*
Emeritus Professor Trevor Bryce

10—10:50am *Heracles, the heroic rogue*
Professor Alastair Blanshard

10:50—11:20am MORNING TEA (30 mins)

11:20am—12:10pm *Was Cyrus "the Great" of Persia, really great?*
Associate Professor Dorothy Watts AM

12:10—1:00pm *Aeneas the True?*
Dr Anne Rogerson, University of Sydney

1:00—2:15pm LUNCH (1 hr 15 mins)
The RD Milns Antiquities Museum will be open during the lunch period.

2:15—3:05pm *Poison, persuasion and power: enduring images of Rome's 'evil' empresses*
Ms Tyla Cascaes, PhD candidate

3:05—3:55pm *St George and the dragon*
Dr Amelia Robertson Brown

3:55—4pm Vote of thanks to all speakers and participants
Dr Paul Eliadis AM, President of Friends of Antiquity

The epic of Gilgamesh

Emeritus Professor Trevor Bryce

'Gilgamesh', first composed around 2000 BC, is one of the great ancestors of the epic genre. It tells how Gilgamesh, a harsh, despotic ruler of the city of Uruk in Mesopotamia, abandons his city and embarks on a quest for the secret of eternal life. After many adventures, his mission ends in failure. He returns to his city a chastened, wiser man. Resigned to his fate that as a mortal he will one day die, he resumes his duties as king of Uruk, ruling with justice and wisdom, and building a city of surpassing splendour. Who actually composed the epic, and who were its audiences? Was Gilgamesh a real person? We shall explore the possibilities.

Heracles, the heroic rogue

Professor Alastair Blanshard

Few characters bring out the ambiguous nature of ancient heroism more than Heracles. At times, he exemplifies the very best qualities of humanity. He is brave, kind, generous and operates with a tremendous sense of justice. Yet, at other times, he is deceitful, violent, and vengeful. He appears as a bestial figure driven totally by the worst appetites. In this lecture, we explore both sides of the hero. The lecture suggests that it is possible to reconcile these very different faces of the hero if we see Heracles as embodying the strengths and failings of humanity and see in the myths of Heracles a story about humanity's capacity for redemption.

Was Cyrus "the Great" of Persia, really great?

Associate Professor Dorothy Watts AM

Cyrus II of Persia was the founder of the first Persian Empire, defeating his nearby enemies the Medes, and then expanding the kingdom to the north, east and west. This presentation will examine his progress to domination, and whether he was a worthy recipient of the epithet "the Great".

Aeneas the True?

Dr Anne Rogerson (University of Sydney)

Ancient epic is peopled with all kinds of heroes: brave, cunning, wise, swift-footed, and even swifter to anger. But when Virgil sat down to write the epic that established Rome's claim to world domination he looked outside this list for a new epithet and chose ... *pietas*. Obedient dedication to the needs of family, nation and the gods became the defining feature of Aeneas, perhaps the most reluctant hero of Greek and Roman epic. This lecture will explore Aeneas' heroism and critical responses to it, asking just what kind of a hero is Aeneas 'the True'.

Poison, persuasion and power: enduring images of Rome's 'evil' empresses

Ms Tyla Cascaes

From its conception, cinema has been captivated by the morally corrupt and corrupting women of ancient Rome – especially Messalina, Agrippina, and Poppaea Sabina. In the midst of the political shift from republic to empire, ancient authors used these empresses to negotiate their place in the new political economy, using them as narrative tools to emphasise the traits of the emperor and to imply an intimate knowledge of the imperial family. The impressions they created lasted well into the twentieth century and allowed filmmakers to repeat these patterns. This paper looks for the ancient inspiration behind these empresses before assessing the reach and repetition of their images in cinema.

St George and the dragon

Dr Amelia Roberston Brown

In the tale of St George and the dragon, who is the hero and who is the anti-hero? It might seem clear, as St George (Hagios Georgos) remains an important figure of the western and eastern churches. He is patron of England, and our own Greek Orthodox Community in Brisbane. Yet dragon-focused tales have also proliferated in recent fiction, and even in Antiquity and the Middle Ages dragons were not always the enemy of mortals. This talk looks at some of the art and literature of St George and his defeat of a dragon from Late Antiquity to today.