

30th Annual Ancient History Day
Saturday 22 March 2025
Abel Smith Lecture Theatre, UQ St Lucia

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND THE CLASSICAL WORLD

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	<i>Pre-Socratic philosophers and the birth of rationality?</i> Professor Alastair Blanshard
10—10:50am	<i>Ancient pneumatic trick vessels</i> Dr Tatiana Bur, Australian National University
10:50—11:20am	MORNING TEA (30 MINS)
11:20am—12:10pm	<i>Greco-Roman technological wonder and the audience experience</i> Dr Janette McWilliam
12:10—1:00pm	<i>Foundations for imperium: the materials that built an empire</i> Mr Rory McLennan, PhD candidate
1—2pm	LUNCH (1 hr) The RD Milns Antiquities Museum will be open during the lunch period.
2—2:10pm	Raffle draws
2:10—3pm	<i>A Geographical Information Systems (GIS) study of women and children at the military site of Vindolanda in Roman Britain</i> Ms Paige Maunder
3—3:15pm	Vote of thanks to all speakers and participants Dr Paul Eliadis AM, President of Friends of Antiquity

Friends of Antiquity

In conjunction with the Discipline of Classics and Ancient History, School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry



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CREATE CHANGE

Pre-Socratic philosophers and the birth of rationality?

Professor Alastair Blanshard

Historians of science often point to the Pre-Socratic philosophers when searching for the origins of science. This presentation will examine this intriguing group of thinkers, led by a group of clever, witty, all-too-plausible teachers whose movement overturned centuries of established thought about the nature of the world, the gods, and the role of man. You will be introduced to some of the key figures in this revolution, showcasing some of their dazzling discoveries and mind-bending arguments (you will also learn why it is a bad idea to leap into an active volcano).

Ancient pneumatic trick vessels

Dr Tatiana Bur (Australian National University)

Mechanical knowledge in Classical antiquity was useful for a host of reasons. For example, it allowed great weights to be transported with ease, water to be carried and distributed, siege machines to be constructed, and ballistics to be shot great distances. But the ancient Greek science of mechanics—mechanica—also had applications in the realms of the playful and the miraculous. Pneumatic trick vessels are a fascinating case study that not only demonstrate the role of the ludic (playful) in ancient Greek mechanical practice but also serve to probe some social implications of the use of ancient mechanics at large.

Greco-Roman technological wonder and audience experience

Dr Janette McWilliam

Many modern representations of Roman mass entertainment often focus on the shedding of blood in the arena. However, the use of mechanical technologies which stimulated sensory perception, particularly sight, sound, and smell, were used in a variety of settings to make spectators feel part of the spectacle they were witnessing. This presentation explores the role of mechanical technology in creating audience experience in mass entertainment settings including naumachiae (naval battles), theatres, amphitheatres and circuses.

Foundations for imperium: the materials that built an empire

Mr Rory McLennan

Every year, millions of people visit the city of Rome to see its iconic ancient monuments: the Colosseum, the Pantheon and the Baths of Caracalla. Many who see these sites leave with a lasting sense of amazement and one question: how have so many of these ancient structures survived, while many modern buildings begin to fail within decades? Peering beneath the marble façade, this presentation will discuss the cutting edge-archaeological science that is revealing how Rome's remarkable ancient building materials and techniques helped truly make it 'The Eternal City'.

A Geographical Information Systems (GIS) study of women and children at the military site of Vindolanda in Roman Britain

Ms Paige Maunder

This presentation will use the rich archaeological record found at Vindolanda to map the presence of women and children. GIS is a technology that enables the analysis of location data, making it useful for producing spatial analysis of sites, in this case, two buildings (possibly military) at Vindolanda. This analysis supports the likely presence of women and children in both buildings, suggesting that fort life was far more fluid and complex than previously believed.

SPEAKERS

Professor Alastair Blanshard

Professor Alastair Blanshard is the Paul Eliadis Professor of Classics and Ancient History and current Director of the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation at The University of Queensland (UQ). Professor Blanshard was awarded his Master of Arts from UQ and obtained his PhD at the University of Cambridge. His research interests centre on Greek society, language and mythology and he is a world authority on the hero, Heracles. Professor Blanshard also looks at the links between ancient and modern societies and is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities.

Dr Tatiana Bur (Australian National University)

Dr Tatiana Bur joined the Australian National University's (ANU) Centre for Classical Studies as a Lecturer in Classics in 2023. Prior to this, she was the Moses and Mary Finley Research Fellow at Darwin College, University of Cambridge. Dr Bur is an ancient Greek cultural historian with particular interests in ancient technology, entertainment and religion. Her first monograph, *Technologies of the Marvellous in Ancient Greek Religion*, considers how mechanics and religion interacted in the ancient Greek world. She is currently writing on automata in ancient festivals, gender and science in antiquity, and the Antikythera mechanism as a religious object. Dr Bur was recently awarded an ANU Vice Chancellor's Award for Teaching Excellence (Early Career). She is also a team member on the ARC Discovery Project 'Night Vision in the Ancient Mediterranean'.

Dr Janette McWilliam

Dr Janette McWilliam is a Senior Lecturer in Classics and Ancient History and Higher Education Academy (HEA) Senior Fellow. She is currently Classics and Ancient History Discipline Convenor, stepping aside for a few years as Director and Senior Curator of the R.D. Milns Antiquities Museum, a position she held for 12 years. Dr McWilliam's other research interests are Greco-Roman social, political and cultural history, particularly Roman children and childhood, women, gender and sexuality, Latin epigraphy, ancient material culture, and pedagogical approaches to the teaching of Latin, Greek and Ancient History. Her most recent publication, *Family perpetrated and condoned violence in the education of male Greco-Roman Children*, is part of a themed volume on Ancient Domestic Violence (*Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 66.2), and she is currently working on epigraphic and pedagogical research projects.

Mr Rory McLennan

Mr Rory McLennan is currently completing his Master of Philosophy (Mphil) degree at UQ. His thesis, *Foundations for Imperium*, focuses on understanding the role neighbouring Greek, Carthaginian and Italian communities played in the development of Rome's iconic Imperial building technologies. His research interests include ancient water use and management, paleoclimatology and public archaeology.

Ms Paige Maunder

Ms Paige Maunder has recently completed her Master of Philosophy (Mphil) in Ancient History at UQ. She works as a tour guide and museum assistant at the R.D. Milns Antiquities Museum and is a current Team Leader at the Queensland Museum, supporting the Visitor Experience team for the 'Discovering Ancient Egypt' exhibition. She hopes to pursue a PhD in the near future, to continue to investigate the lives of marginalised members of military communities, such as women and children, both free and enslaved.