



Dr Ben Cartlidge visiting us with his talk 'Deus ex Machina'

# Agora

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## CLASSICS TO SHARE AND ENJOY

As the classics community eagerly awaits the arrival of Matt Damon's *Odysseus* on the big screen in summer, we at the LSA CA have been busy on our own intellectual odyssey, exploring a range of fascinating themes and topics from around the ancient Mediterranean.

We have heard talks from leading experts on ancient drama, early Christian poetry and the history of the marathon race – not to mention Professor Michael Scott's highly entertaining lecture on the ancient Olympics, followed by a delicious meal at Tiggis. In our Book Club we have recently explored the life of an infamous Roman empress in Emma Southon's biography of Agrippina, and our next read is *Seneca* by Emily Wilson. Classics Club also continues to thrive. For the next two sessions, we will be discussing our predictions for and responses to Christopher Nolan's *Odyssey*, so please do come along (more information at the back of this issue)! If you are interested in joining any of our online sessions, you can get in touch via [lsaclassics@gmail.com](mailto:lsaclassics@gmail.com).

At the [Grand Final of our Ancient Worlds Competition](#), our judge, actor Misia Butler, faced a difficult decision as our finalists presented their answers to the question: 'If you could resurrect any ancient figure today, who would it be and why?' Aspasia of Miletus

was the character chosen by both our winner, Isabelle from Leicester Grammar School (who also won the People's Choice Award), and the Lancashire Award recipient, May from Runshaw College.

As we take a break from our lecture programme over the summer months, our fabulous writing team have been hard at work preparing this latest issue of *Agora*. We begin with a look at the development of medicine in antiquity by Sophia Robinson (page 2). With the *Odyssey* film on the horizon, Homer has a strong presence in this edition. Lorna Lee interviews Erica Stevenson on her forthcoming book *The Odyssey Effect* (page 5), Jimena Chandler-Daza explores the Homeric phrase 'wine-dark sea' (page 9), and Stephen Jones reviews Julia Kindt's *The Trojan Horse and Other Stories* (page 12). Molly Mather rounds off this issue with a look at the Greek city of Olynthos (page 13).

And as ever, we have a great prize on offer for our Classical Crossword (page 8). Submit your answer by **Saturday 11 July** and you could be selected to win a copy of Conn Iggulden's *Nero*!

We hope you enjoy *Agora* issue 14!

Declan Boyd, Editor 🏆

# Medical practice and its evolution in the ancient world

SOPHIA ROBINSON

Throughout human history, the quest to understand and treat illness has been a central concern of every civilisation. Long before the development of modern science and technology, ancient cultures devised intricate systems of medicine based on rational observation and religious tradition, ultimately shaping the foundations of Western medicine. This essay explores the diverse practices, beliefs and innovations of medicine in the Graeco-Roman world, examining how early healers treated disease and how their ideas continue to influence contemporary medical thought.

## Religion

Religion in the ancient world was deeply embedded in all aspects of civic life. Deities were not only central to religious belief but also played a significant role in medical thought and practice. We see this in the remains and documentation of religious sanctuaries to gods such as Asklepios, who presided over healing. This god's healing sanctuary at Epidauros was one of the most

renowned in the Greek world and served as a place of pilgrimage for those seeking both physical healing and divine presence.

The belief that the gods were physically present at such sites was underpinned by the notion that they not only inhabited their cult statues but also attended acts of worship. As Xenophanes observed, 'mortals believe that gods are born and have clothing and voices and bodies like their own'. This statement underscores the Greeks' anthropomorphic conceptualisation of the gods and reinforces their accessibility within sanctuary spaces.

Votives were often left at sites like Epidauros, serving as expressions of gratitude towards the deities for their divine intervention in matters of health. A notable example of this is the votive relief foot of Tyche, a woman who made this offering to Asklepios in the first century CE for healing that part of her body. In the inscription, Tyche explicitly names the gods as her healers. This well-preserved example, now on display in the British



The abaton or 'sleeping chamber' of the sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros

Museum, offers insight into ancient Greek worship and the integration of religious practice into medical treatment.

### The rise of rationalism in medicine

Whilst religion had a strong hold over Greek medicine and was intermingled with civic life throughout the classical period, there were pockets of civilisation that doubted the existence of these medical deities, or the anthropomorphism of deities altogether as in the case of Thucydides.

Hippocrates, born into a line of Asklepiads (priest-like physicians), rejected his hereditary teachings and religious foundations. He focused on a natural approach to medicine, laying importance on understanding the patient's health instead of simply relying on the divine. The Hippocratic Corpus, assumed to be compiled by a multitude of authors all following the ideas of Hippocrates himself, provides a wide range of medical theories and clinical observations, including some of the earliest discussions of mental health.

In contrast to the widespread belief that mental illness was a sign of divine punishment or supernatural intervention, the Hippocratic Corpus adopted a rational approach to understanding the health of the mind. It introduced vocabulary to help describe mental illnesses and organised them based on intensity. This represents a significant departure from the religious approach to health, especially significant considering how many texts there are in the Hippocratic Corpus and how widely they inspired other writers.

Promoting and advancing Hippocratic teaching, the Greek physician and surgeon Galen, active in the second and third centuries CE, was also extremely innovative in his medical practices. His systematic use of dissection and venesection allowed him to argue against prevailing anatomical theories, particularly the Erasistratean School, which believed that *pneuma* (life force), rather than blood, flowed through the arteries. Through observation and practice, Galen proved that it was blood, advancing knowledge of the vascular system. He also made major

contributions to a more accurate study of the cardiovascular system and the functions of the different arteries in the heart.



Asklepios (*centre*) arrives by boat on Kos island and is greeted by Hippocrates (*left*) (second or third century CE mosaic)

[This photo \(Kos museum mosaic\)](#) by [Tedmek](#) is licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

The rationalism of Hippocrates, combined with Galen's investigations and practice of venesection, marked a pivotal shift in the development of medical thought. Their contributions helped guide medicine along the more evidence-based route, straying away from relying on the gods for healing.

### Roman sanitation

Before the rise of Augustus as Rome's first emperor, the Roman army had little knowledge of medicine and often abandoned wounded soldiers who were unable to walk during the critical moments of battle. However, following Augustus's ascension and military reforms, including his tax increase to maintain a regular salary for soldiers, legions began to finally transform and develop into stronger forces.

One development was the introduction of the *capsarii*, the first-hand medics, who helped transport the injured to other, more experienced physicians with different specialisations. These medics can be seen on Trajan's Column in Rome, highlighting their importance to the Imperial Roman army.

Not only did this provide quicker and more accurate assistance on the battlefield; it also strengthened and provided resilience to the Roman army by reducing preventable losses through the presence of medical professionals. The emergence of new medical opportunities and specialisations needed in the military provided more jobs, particularly attracting retired soldiers.

Augustus's military reforms therefore fostered the advancement of Roman medical knowledge and encouraged the development of distinct fields within Roman medicine.



*Capsarii tending the wounded on Trajan's Column (second century CE)*

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### The patient experience and social context

Although medical knowledge generally advanced over the centuries, significant social disparities persisted in diagnosis, treatment and distribution of medical care – particularly in relation to sex. Aristotle, building upon the famous Hippocratic belief in the four humours, theorised that women were inherently more biologically vulnerable and medically deficient than men.

This idea not only contributed to a sex-based disparity in medical treatment but also reinforced systematic gender biases within medical theory and practice, which continue in the twenty-first century. The idea that women

possessed a colder 'humour' than men served to rationalise male dominance in the medical profession, effectively excluding women from formal roles as physicians and institutionalising their marginalisation within this sphere.

Enslaved people experienced a notable, though limited, shift in their access to medicine and legal protection, particularly during the reign of the emperor Claudius. Claudius introduced a law stating that if a master abandoned a sick slave rather than providing proper medical treatment, and the slave survived the illness, they would be granted freedom. Furthermore, according to Suetonius, if a master intentionally killed a slave to avoid the cost or effort of medical intervention, he could be prosecuted for murder. These legal reforms resulted in increased medical attention for enslaved individuals, often granting them more rights and freedom in this area than the average Roman women, whose medical needs were often overlooked or dismissed within Rome's patriarchal structures.

In conclusion, ancient medicine was far from primitive. Instead, it embodies a complex and evolving intellectual and practical tradition that laid the foundation for many aspects of modern medical thought. From the ritual healing practices found throughout ancient Greece to the systematic approaches of Hippocratic and Galenic medicine, ancient practitioners demonstrated a continuous pursuit of knowledge that became increasingly grounded in observation and rationalism. Whilst religion overshadowed much of the archaic and classical periods of the Mediterranean civilisations, evolution of these practices was occurring alongside, revealing an ever more sophisticated understanding of the human body. The legacy of ancient medicine continues to inspire and push the study of medicine in the twenty-first century. 🏛️

# An interview with Erica Stevenson

LORNA LEE

Lorna Lee spoke to Erica Stevenson, host of [MoAn Inc. on YouTube](#), about her forthcoming book *The Odyssey Effect*.



Your first book, *The Odyssey Effect*, will be hitting bookshops in June! Could you tell us what awaits us inside?

*The Odyssey Effect* follows how Homer's *Odyssey* has had an immense influence over literature, film and art in every single era of history. With themes of loyalty, homecoming and temptation, the story passed down from the eighth century BCE is anything BUT inaccessible or unrelatable. My book really looks into how each period of history managed to find its way back to Homer; by unpacking new renditions, adaptations and (sometimes) side stories that came into existence thanks to the poem, *The Odyssey Effect* explores what these portrayals of the famous tale can tell us about the people of these times.

The book is ideal for pop culture fans, newbies to classics, and people who are interested in seeing the lasting impact of Odysseus's story on humankind.

**What was your first encounter with *The Odyssey* and what drew you towards writing a book about it?** The first time I encountered *The Odyssey*, I was actually in a mental health hospital. I was admitted (forcibly) at sixteen years old and became incredibly bored when I found myself the only patient on the ward for some time. I was given *The Odyssey* by my school classics teacher to keep me busy, and I completely fell in love.

My book, *The Odyssey Effect*, wasn't actually something I came up with. Quarto, my publishers, came to me with the job of writing this book. I accepted their offer because it was something I knew I could realistically do under such tight deadlines as the ones I had!

**What was your research process like? Are there any books or resources you would recommend?**

My research process was VERY tight and therefore had to be really purposeful. I signed my contract at the end of May 2025 and spent from that point until the end of June just reading. Luckily for me, I'm incredibly familiar with Homeric scholarship and the reception of Homer, meaning I had a general idea of where I was going to go on my whistlestop tour of a book. All I had to do was re-read and figure out how to summarise such complex topics into a sentence!

For any classicist, the best resource is always the ancient source you're working from. In my case, I needed to continuously go back to *The Odyssey* to make sure I was always remembering Homer's words correctly. I had an unhealthy relationship with the Ancient Greek during that time!

Which aspects of the book did you find most interesting to research?

Honestly, every chapter I worked on was interesting. Since I only had two months to write the book after my one month of reading (my first manuscript was due on the first of September), the little time I spent in each period of history was utterly fascinating. There was always a complex idea I wished I could delve more into or a chapter that could have gotten a whole book of its own! I did love the Victorian era, though. Trying to unpack everything that was going on regarding elitism in how the subject of classics was promoted, but also the new public interest in the ancient world, was a really difficult topic to tackle in so few words!

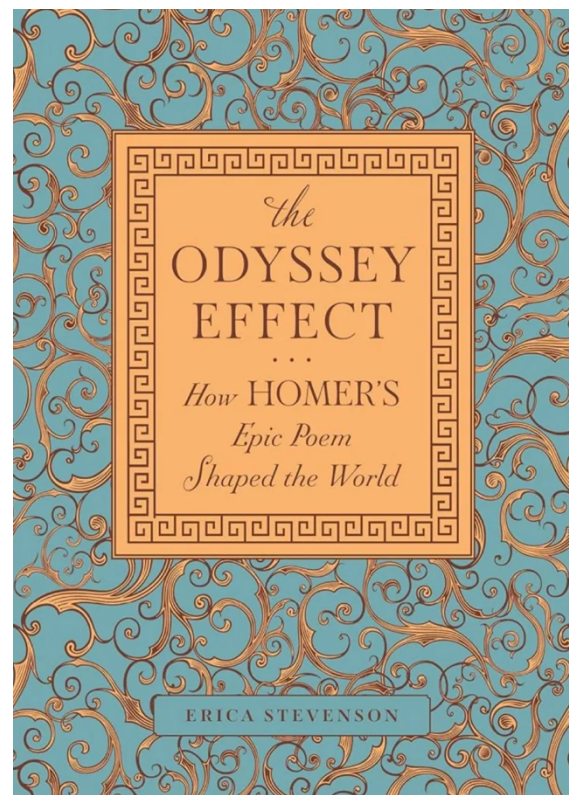
Is there anything you discovered during the research process that did not make the final book but you wish could have?

Nuance (hahaha). Really though, this book doesn't allow for any nuance or any ambiguity whatsoever because of the word count and the book's intended audience. That's just how illustrated introductory public facing books are. There's so much interesting scholarship that happens in the grey zone, where fascinating questions are asked and counter propositions are brought forward, leading to enthralling new lines of academic study. All of that, unfortunately, had to simply end up living in my Word Doc.

Was your writing approach or the content that you included influenced by your experience creating content for MoAn (Modern Ancients) Inc.?

Absolutely. When I was given this project, it was pitched to me as a book for people who watched Christopher Nolan's film and wanted to learn more about the ancient poem and its impact on people through all points of history. It's supposed to be fun, easy to read and presented in digestible pieces. This is a similar approach to how I conduct myself with MoAn Inc. – a lot of what I do online is done with the idea of creating classics content for someone who is NOT a classicist nor someone who necessarily wants to be.

Trying to reduce the entirety of human history from the eighth century BCE onwards into forty thousand words is really hard! My goal was to shimmy it into place with jokes, silly lines and very basic concepts to get a general idea across. I wanted to meet people where they were at and hopefully encourage them to pick up another book or watch a film I've spoken about, or maybe even go see one of the many plays I mentioned that were inspired by Homer's work. The goal was not to give an in-depth or analytical take on anything I wrote about, though I am trying to balance that out in my online content leading up to the book's release.



What do you hope readers will take away from *The Odyssey Effect*?

I really hope that they don't stop at *The Odyssey Effect*. This book is not meant to be the be-all-end-all of someone's relationship with Homer. There's an abundance of research I simply couldn't get into in forty thousand words. I hope that people read my book and go on to devour everything else – my book should simply be the first, introductory place for newbies to Homer, *The Odyssey* and the poem's reception from ancient to modern times. It should never be seen as something to

quote, reference or live by, but rather something to give the reader more confidence in themselves to get stuck into something else dealing with the epic poem.

**If you could give a piece of advice on writing about or communicating ancient history and mythology, what would it be?**

Remember who your audience is and speak directly to them. This is the most important thing for anyone wanting to communicate ancient history. Picture a member of this 'audience' sitting in front of you and having a coffee – how would you present your topic to them, right there and then? You can pick whatever audience you want (there is no right or wrong way to do this), but just remember who that is.

Every time I sit down to film, I picture the camera as a real person. In my case, that's not another classicist, it's a student really struggling with reading the ancient text or someone who never got the chance to go to uni who happens to be invited to a dinner party filled with highly, formally educated people but doesn't know the first thing about the ancient Greeks and wants to sound like they fit in (when I was writing my book, I also frequently had my non-classics friends read chunks of it to make sure it made sense for them!). Your intended audience can be anyone you want it to be, but you need to always be speaking directly to them, no matter what. Your ability to deliver consistently to your chosen audience is the key to your success.

### Quick-fire round... *Odyssey* edition

**What would be your must-pack item for a Homeric *Odyssey*?**

A map, for sure. Lots of problems could have been avoided with one of those bad boys.

**Would you rather hang out with Circe on Aeaea or Calypso on Ogygia?**

Circe 1000%.

**Would you brave Scylla or Charybdis?**

Charybdis. There's simply too much to keep your eye on with Scylla, haha.

**Which mythological (or historical) figure would you talk to in the underworld?**

Locusta. I say this a lot, but I do genuinely mean it. She's noted as being the woman who gave the poison to Agrippina the Younger that ultimately killed the emperor Claudius. Tacitus tells us that this isn't the first time she's done such a business deal – oh, no – she's a FAMOUS poisoner. Therefore... I just need to know how the hell someone got into such an industry? Was it her lifelong dream to be an infamous poisoner? Did she stumble into this accidentally? Did she have a poisoner mentor or what?? We need more information about Locusta!!!!

**Favourite (or least favourite) character in *The Odyssey*?**

I'm going to give a really boring answer, but I love Penelope. She will always be my queen.

**Do you have a favourite *Odyssey* translation?**

I can't pick one! And I won't! I think they're all wonderful for their intended audiences and are therefore fabulous additions to the Homeric canon!

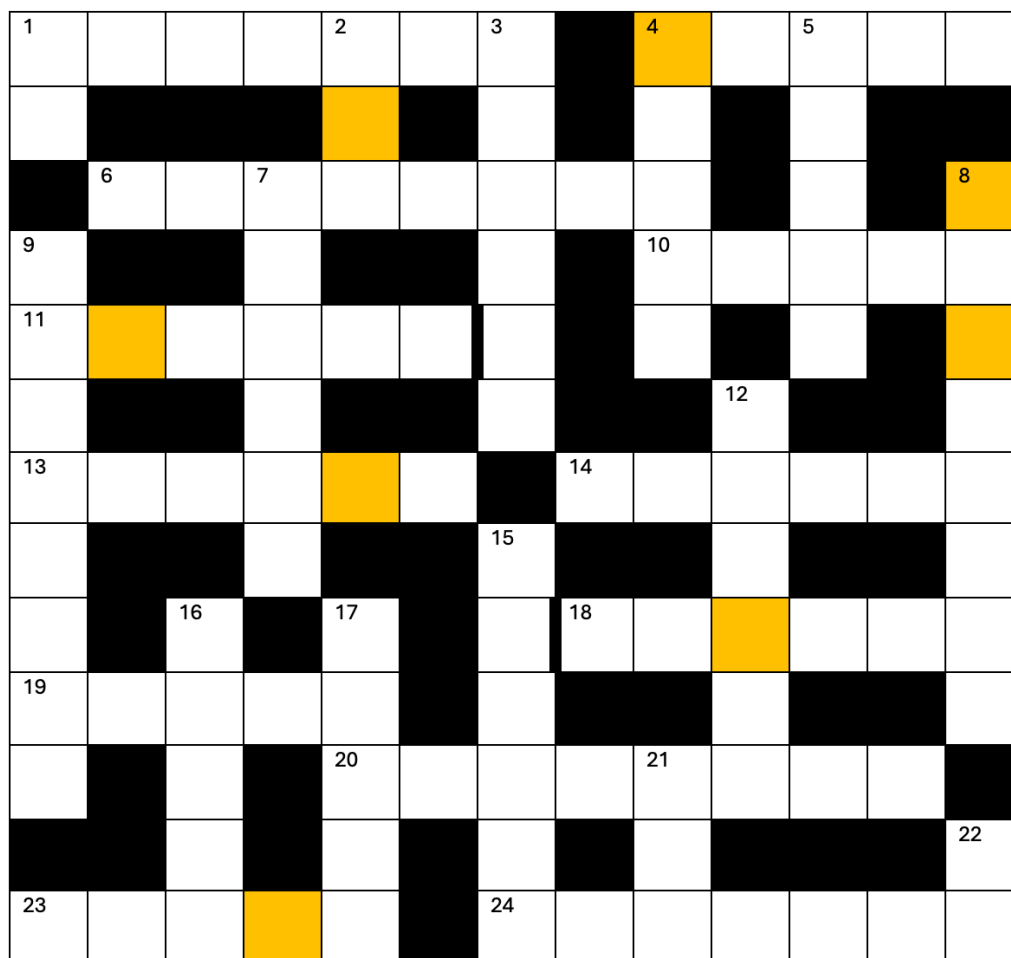
**Which scene in *The Odyssey* do you look forward to seeing adapted most?**

Odysseus and the sirens! I loved researching the sirens for my book and seeing how they have changed and adapted overtime genuinely blew my mind. I'm always excited to see new ways one can interpret these bizarre monsters!

**Which works that reimagine or are inspired by *The Odyssey* would you recommend?**

Only one, because it constantly gets overlooked: *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*, 2004. 🍷

# Classical Crossword



## Across

- 1** Egyptian king who sacrificed foreigners to the gods (7)  
**4** Late antique poetess of Virgilian centos (5)  
**6** Wife of Protesilaus (8)      **10** Beloved of Daphnis (5)  
**11** Homeland of Jason (non-Latinised spelling) (6)  
**13** Pharaoh to whom Egypt's first pyramid belonged (6)  
**14** Ovid's Juliet character (6)  
**18** Ash-tree nymphs, born from the blood of Ouranos (6)  
**19** Deathplace of Cato the Younger (5)  
**20** Found between two metopes (8)  
**23** Title of Ptolemy I of Egypt; Greek for 'Saviour' (5)  
**24** Horace's snow-covered mountain (7)

Use the letters in the orange boxes to find the hidden word. Then email the hidden word to [lsaclassics@gmail.com](mailto:lsaclassics@gmail.com) by **Saturday 11 July** and one entry will be picked at random to win a copy of *Nero* by Conn Iggulden!

## Down

- 1** Bird-like part of the Egyptian soul (2)    **2** Colour of figures on Greek pottery, not black (3)  
**3** Trojan river (6)      **4** Aristophanic comedy featuring giant dung beetle (5)  
**5** Six of these make one drachma (5)    **7** Term used for founder of a Greek colony (6)  
**8** 'Brand' of marble used to build the Odeon of Herodes Atticus and Panathenaic Stadium (8)  
**9** Ancient Sicilian historian (8)    **12** Moses \_\_\_\_\_, author of *The World of Odysseus* (6)  
**15** Protagonist of Apuleius's *Golden Ass* (15)    **16** *Venit, vidit, \_\_\_\_\_* (5)  
**17** Latin for 'father' (5)    **21** Roman household god (3)    **22** Alternative name for Gaia (Earth) (2)



# Social media opportunity!

Want to share your love for classics with a wider audience and create informative content to promote engagement with the ancient world?



We're looking for new contributors to our Instagram content! If you're interested in working with us on this, we'd love to hear from you!



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# Homer's 'wine-dark sea'

JIMENA CHANDLER-DAZA

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* both describe the sea using the epithet 'wine-dark'. What did the 'wine-dark sea' truly mean when it first appeared in Western literature – and why is the term only used in Homer?

Wine-red is not a colour that is associated with the Aegean Sea, so we might question why this phrase was chosen. Focusing on the *Odyssey*, the description of the sea as wine-dark can be seen, in the context of journeys across the Aegean, to convey its vastness, to describe its reflection of the red sky at sunset onto the water, to portray the violence of the sea and to account for the absence of a word for the colour blue in the Ancient Greek language.

The most notable use of the phrase 'wine-dark sea' in the *Odyssey* is in descriptions of travels across the sea. For instance, Athene (disguised as Mentos) says that she has come to Ithaca 'across the wine-dark sea', and Athene later sends Telemachus's ship 'singing over the wine-dark sea'. The use of this epithet in the context of journeys is more prominent in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad*, where it is used both when describing journeys and when describing Achilles gazing out on the Aegean at sunset. Unlike the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* is primarily a journey-focused poem – a simple explanation as to why 'wine-dark' appears more often in travel contexts.

However, no epithet in epic poetry can be explained so simply; there is much more purpose behind the phrase 'wine-dark sea'. Odysseus spends ten years at sea after ten years of war, only for Tiresias to instruct him that, after he returns home, he must travel to a place so far into the mainland that they 'know nothing of the sea'. As Odysseus lives on the island of Ithaca, this journey must involve him traversing the sea again after his return; only then will he have fully completed his *nostos* (homeward journey). The sea is not only essential to Odysseus's journey,

simultaneously providing a route home but acting as a preventative force; it is also essential, according to Tiresias's prophecy, for Odysseus to set sail again once he has finished this journey. This is one of the most tragic aspects of the epic: to ensure he has completed his *nostos*, Odysseus cannot avoid sailing off again across the sea, the very thing that prolonged his journey. I will now explore why I think that 'wine-dark' reflects this tragedy perfectly, its imagery encapsulating the sea's daunting size and unpredictability, and the toils it causes for Odysseus.

If Homer's intention in using this epithet was to emphasise the treacherous and tragic nature of Odysseus's journey, the deep colour of wine-red evokes the depth and vastness of the sea, and therefore the vastness of the journey Odysseus must make. Similarly, the intoxicating nature of wine suggests a sense of unpredictability, mirroring the perils caused by the sea. In Book 5, as his raft is torn apart by Poseidon's storm, Odysseus cries out in despair, 'And what if one of the gods does wreck me out on the wine-dark sea?', demonstrating the unpredictability he faces on this vast journey.

The initial impression that the wine-dark sea gave me was of a vast and dark plane, evoking



Odysseus sails past the sirens, one of the many threats he faces on the wine-dark sea



The sea turns wine-dark at sunset

images of danger. This mental image was probably due to the nature of the sea in the *Odyssey*: whilst it allows Odysseus to travel and eventually reach Ithaca, it is also the source of great toils for him and his men. Many of Odysseus's men are lost to the sea after Zeus smashes their ships to pieces after they slaughter the cattle of Helios. We can link these shipwrecks to the choice to describe the sea as 'wine-dark', portraying a dangerous and vast image perhaps even with connotations to blood, relating to the image of death.

In addition to this metaphorical interpretation, the wine-dark sea could also be considered a literal descriptor. With the notion that this wine-red comes from the reflection of a sunset sky, R. Rutherford-Dyer looks at the epithet almost scientifically. Rutherford-Dyer carefully observes that the events that occur when the sea is described as wine-dark are shortly followed by night, using the example of Telemachus's departure from Ithaca, sailing by night and reaching Pylos as the sun rises.

Although these sunsets at sea could certainly have inspired the epithet, it is difficult to prove that this was always what the bard was referring to, as there is not always a clear

timeline and because the epithet is not always used to describe such direct journeys. For example, Odysseus refers to having made his escape on the wine-dark sea in Book 6, upon reaching the island of Scherie after spending several weeks at sea – both day and night. This shows a much more general use of the epithet, not strictly having been derived from the sea at sunset which Rutherford-Dyer suggests.

Despite this, describing the sea using the colour blue could have been just as effective in painting a picture of the sea – but a word for blue is never seen in Homer. William Gladstone found that 'Homeric colours are really the modes and forms of light', meaning that colours in Homeric descriptions are more like shades. Specifically, Gladstone noted that wine in Homer indicates a dark hue. Therefore, with Gladstone's reasoning, the 'wine-dark sea' is used because Homer and the Greeks of the time could not easily distinguish between different hues of other colours that were not blue.

There is also the idea that the Greeks could not see blue at all, but this is due to colour perception rather than an actual biological difference. Blue is often the last colour to be

added to a culture's vocabulary, as what we call blues are often lumped in with greens or blacks: Old Norse *blár* (blue) really referred to blue-black or raven black. The widespread lack of a word for blue across languages perhaps explains why blue is not found in the poetry of Homer and why it is substituted with phrases such as 'wine-dark'.

But this still does not quite settle the question of why Homer chooses wine to describe the sea. When I picture the imagined wine in the epithet, I firstly see it in a glass with a deep red colour. However, the colour that wine stains can also be considered the wine-red that is

described in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Wine stains are often closer to purple than red. Although it is unlikely that the diluted wine of the ancient Greeks caused such pigmented stains, this could still help us make sense of why a seemingly red liquid (rather than any other colour) is used to describe the blue sea.

Ultimately, Homer's 'wine-dark sea' reflects a powerful image of the sea, tying together tragedy and journeys. It helps us to understand ancient colour perception as well as the overall importance of the sea as a setting in the *Odyssey*. 🍷

## Agora 13 Crossword answers

	F	I	G		V	L		A	S			
P	A	X		G	E	R	A	S		E	S	T
H	U		M		R		C			R		R
A	N	N	A		C	R	E	U	S	A		A
R	A		Z		I		D			P	A	N
N			D	A	N	A	A	N		I		S
A	C	C	A		G		E		O	S	S	A
B		O		D	E	I	M	O	S			L
A	R	M			T		O		C		S	P
Z		M	I	N	O	A	N		A	R	P	I
U		I			R		I		N		I	N
S	H	U		D	I	R	A	E		O	N	E
		S	A		X		N		A	R	A	

And the hidden word was... **HERCULES!!!**

# Review: *The Trojan Horse and Other Stories* by Julia Kindt

STEPHEN JONES

In this insightful and captivating book, *The Trojan Horse and Other Stories: Ten Ancient Creatures That Make Us Human*, Julia Kindt explores the relationships between ten ancient creatures and humans to consider three questions: What makes us human? What, if anything, sets us apart from all other creatures? And what does it mean to be human?

In antiquity, it was a philosophical tenet that humans were separated from animals because man possessed *logos* (speech or reason), thus enabling moral judgements to be made. This constitutes the backdrop to the stories in Kindt's book.



Depiction of the Trojan Horse on the Mykonos vase (c. 700 BCE)

[This photo \(Mykonos vase\)](#) by Travelling Runes is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

On his return to Ithaca, Odysseus encounters his ageing dog Argos, who in the last moments of his life instantly recognises his master. At this, Odysseus sheds a tear, and Homer thereby acknowledges that our humanity is bound up with non-human creatures. Kindt explores this theme through the myths of the

Sphinx, the Minotaur, Polyphemus the Cyclops and the Trojan Horse, examining a range of tools used by ancient storytellers: anthropomorphism, metamorphosis, hybridity, moral equivalence, status quo challenge, hubristic behaviour, human exceptionalism, storytelling and metaphors.

Hubris and retribution are explored in the Minotaur myth, a story subsequently used by Picasso in his art to articulate aspects of his identity. Violence, with the loss of life, an aspect of man's (in)humanity, is drawn out in the two stories regarding horses: that of Achilles' talking horse Xanthus, and the Trojan Horse famous for spelling doom for Troy. Kindt also looks at the innovative use of a gadfly and honeybees in ancient investigations into individualism and collectivism in the sociopolitical world.

*The Trojan Horse and Other Stories* is written with clarity and purpose, and is suitable for the general reader. It draws on a wide range of material from the classical world, with frequent references to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as well as an extensive bibliography of secondary literature.

The book concludes that a sense of being human emerged in antiquity through complex negotiations and conversations between ourselves and other animals. It was the engagement with this process that made us human.

A recommended read! 🏺

# The most expensive house at Olynthos

MOLLY MATHER

In late summer 384 BCE, the Greek city of Olynthos was razed to the ground, so utterly destroyed that a visitor would not know it had ever been inhabited (Demosthenes, *Orations* 9.26). While this statement is certainly tinged with some hyperbole, it does give us an idea of the scale of the damage done.

Among the ruins of Olynthos have been found a selection of inscriptions detailing the sale or letting of various properties across the city. One such inscription, regarding a building labelled House A v 10, tells us that the sale was made at a staggering 5,300 drachmas, making this house the most expensive property not only in Olynthos but also within the whole Chalcidice region (the peninsula in northern Greece where Olynthos was located). So why was this house so expensive?

The inscription itself gives us some clues: the sale was to include 'the *pithos* room and all the things which bring income'. This is an unusual detail – only one other sale inscription mentions specific rooms, and that inscription says that the *pithos* room, among other rooms, was not to be included when the property was sold. The latter inscription was found on the street outside House A 4, which was on loan for 2,050 drachmas, less than half the price of A v 10. Properties available for loan would likely be offered at lower price than those for sale, but despite this, a *pithos* room, whose inclusion is detailed specifically

in the sale, was a valued asset that greatly increased the price of the property.

*Pithoi* were large earthenware storage jars. Somewhat frustratingly, none have been found on the site of House A v 10, so it is impossible to identify which was the *pithos* room, despite how important it seems to have been. But wherever this room was, it may have been connected to some sort of production or industry within the household, with the *pithoi* used to store the finished product. As we do not have the *pithoi* themselves, we also have no trace evidence of what they contained.

There is some potential evidence of olive oil production, however, that could explain this mystery industry. One of the potential 'things which bring income' (*ta misthophora*) found within the house was a large fragment of an olive crusher. This was discovered in the courtyard, which had been built with wide double doors that led onto street v and would have allowed carts with heavy loads into the courtyard. These are elements typical of other olive oil production sites and may indicate that



Remains of houses in the northern part of Olynthos

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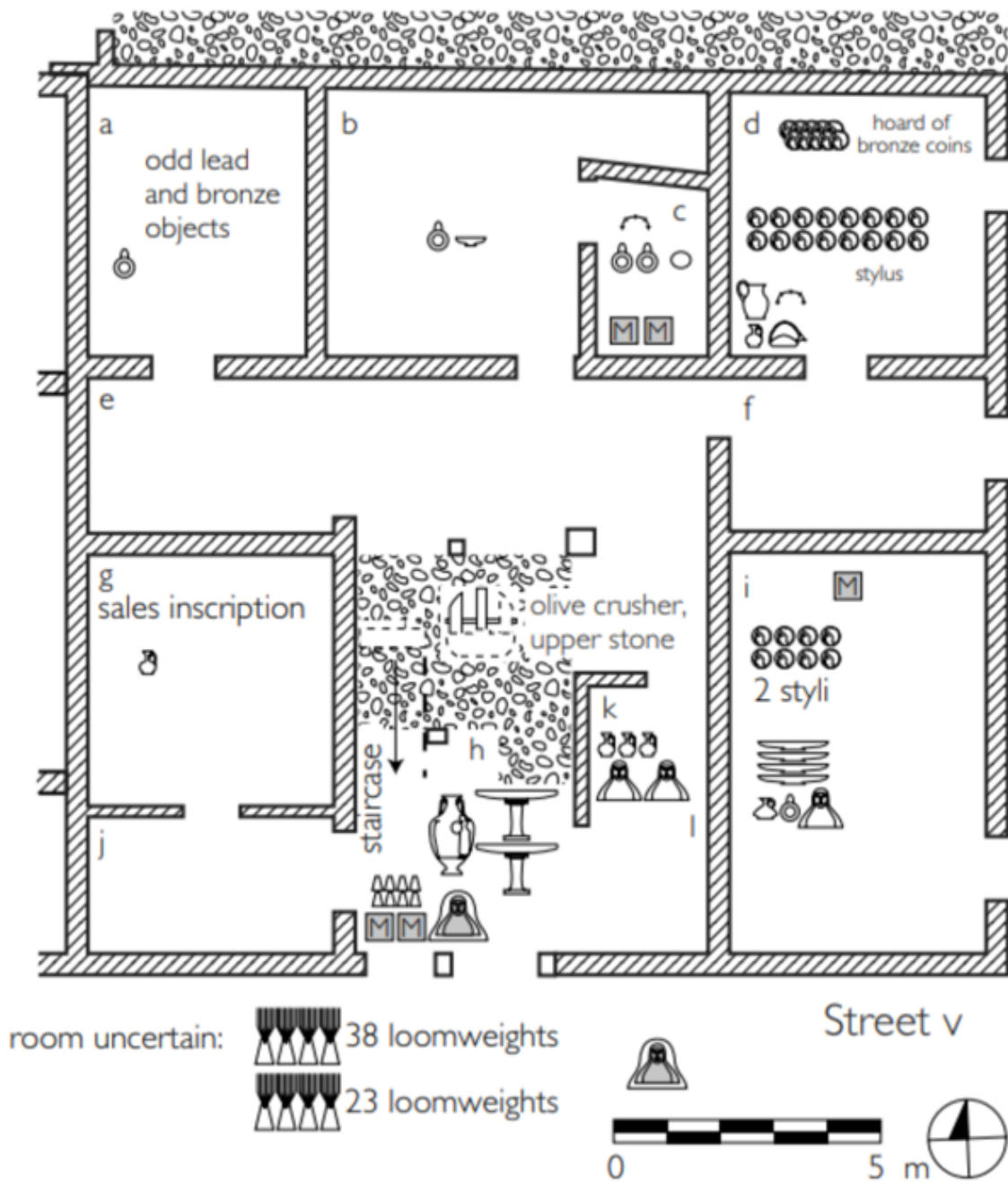


Image of House A v 10 and the artefacts found within, taken from Cahill N. 2002. *Household and City Organisation at Olynthus*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

this too was such a site. It is also possible that the two terracotta *louteria* (a type of shallow bowl on a pedestal) likewise found in the courtyard were involved in the process of crushing olives. This sort of equipment would not have been needed for smaller amounts of olives, with even the wealthiest households not using enough olive oil to justify possession of their own personal olive crusher. We may

therefore presume that this household regularly participated in a larger scale of olive oil production. Additionally, most olive growers would have rented time on an olive crusher, as investing in one was an expensive enterprise, but this house appears to have been constructed around a more permanent setup. So this property was either involved in a larger-scale production of olive oil, or they

were the ones who rented out their equipment for others to use – or possibly some combination of both.

It is also possible that the sale of this equipment included the slaves needed to operate it, further raising the price of the property. Based on the meagre information provided by the sale inscription, however, we can only guess at whether slaves were included.



*Pithos* from Crete, c. 675 BCE.

The eastern part of the plot contains three shops facing onto Avenue B. The northern two shops at least belonged to the owner of the house, as they offered direct access to the property. The third may also have been part of the property, but we have no way of knowing for sure from our current evidence. Whether the property included two or three shops, these would have been a significant way to earn an income and likely part of the sale. It is possible that one shop sold jewellery (suggested by finds of jewellery as well as some vases within), but again we cannot be certain. What was sold here may have been related to the goods stored in the *pithos* room and the olive crusher in the courtyard. The

spaces could have also been rented out to other traders who sold their own goods.

To offer an indication of the financial importance of these shops, the northernmost shop contained the seventh highest number of coins found within a single room in Olynthos, excluding hoards. It was evidently a popular store that would have brought in a not insignificant income. Whatever types of shops they were, they would have offered an influx of cash for the owner of the property, further increasing its value.

A total of seventy coins have been found in the whole property, the fifth highest in any house in Olynthos. These coins are not necessarily an indication of household wealth but instead can be used as an index for the intensity of monetary trade and commercial economy at play there. The fact that this is one of the largest amounts of money found at Olynthos indicates that there was a high level of economic activity taking place in this property.

It is not just the contents of the house that affect the price, though; the location is also an important factor. Although there are exceptions, as a general rule the properties closer to Olynthos's agora tended to sell for a higher price. The agora was the heart of any ancient Greek city – the economic as well as the religious and civic heart. This particular property was just one street away from the agora, and its proximity may well have contributed to the price of the sale. It is true that there were properties closer to the agora that sold for much lower prices: another inscription found at a similar distance from the agora shows that House A 11 sold for only 2,000 drachmas. But the situation of House A v 10 near to the agora would have likely brought more foot traffic past the shops included in the property, another incentive for the high price it commanded.

The likely presence of household industry, the shops to the eastern side of the property and the building's proximity to the civic heart of the city – all these factors combined in House A v 10 to create the perfect storm, and one very expensive home! 🏺

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