

<b>Institution:</b> University of Liverpool
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 31 – Classics
<b>Title of case study:</b> Classics and the Creative Communities
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Reappraisals of modern responses to antiquity by members of Liverpool’s Receptions Research Group (Paul, Hobden and Harrison) from 2004 to 2013 have had impact upon the methods, perspectives, and practices of members of creative communities internationally. Our research thus enables new ways of thinking and forms of expression and benefits practitioners in terms of their personal and professional development.</p> <p>Three separate examples are included in this case study:</p> <p>(1) <b>Film-makers:</b> Analysis by Paul of the biopic <i>Alexander</i> (2004) led Hollywood director Oliver Stone to re-appraise his approach to the subject (2009) and thereby reflect upon his methods as cinematic story-teller.</p> <p>(2) <b>Media practitioners:</b> Hobden’s research into ancient world documentaries and the associated Documenting Antiquity workshop (2013) has created opportunities for British media professionals to explore and refine understanding of their own practice, thus contributing to their professional development.</p> <p>(3) <b>Theatre producers:</b> Harrison’s work on Herodotus and empire inspired Australian artist Alison Richards to reconceptualise how performance theatre might contribute to political conversations in ‘X marks the spot’, a theatrical performance paper by the artist (performed in August 2010).</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Reception studies analyse post-antique responses to antiquity. Receptions research at Liverpool by Joanna Paul, Fiona Hobden, and Tom Harrison additionally impacts back upon such responses. On the one hand, the critical appraisal of how and why antiquity is reimagined on screen offers the creators of film and television new paradigms for perceiving their work and a stimulus to review and develop their methods and approach. On the other, fresh interpretation of the interaction between ancient historiography and modern imperialisms permits the appropriation of these interpretations into experimental theatrical work that re-envision modern engagements with the Classical world. Our work thus not only reflects upon but shapes modern receptions of antiquity, enabling new ways of thinking amongst media professionals and inspiring innovative forms of artistic expression. There are three strands of underpinning research.</p> <p>(1) Analyses of <b>cinematic receptions of antiquity</b> by Joanna Paul (Lecturer in Classical Studies, 2006-9; J.P. Postgate Early Career Fellow in Classics, 2009-11) offer a nuanced reappraisal of the changing and malleable role of the Classical world – its literature, art and history – in film by identifying generic, production and cultural factors that influence its varying depictions. The method and value of this work, which have also informed her 2013 monograph (section 3 (ii)), are exemplified in her 2009 treatment of <i>Alexander</i> (dir. O. Stone, 2004), which interrogates the film’s content, structures, and themes through the prism of cinema’s epic tradition. It demonstrates how the film grapples with the historiographical challenges attendant upon <i>Alexander</i>, drawing particular attention to the problems associated with creating a narrative of his life. Paul’s work enhances understanding of <i>Alexander</i>’s place within the modern imagination, of the film as a reception of <i>Alexander</i> and a modern epic, and of the new character and socio-political contexts of the recently reprised genre.</p> <p>(2) Research by Fiona Hobden (Lecturer in Greek Culture, 2003-11; Senior Lecturer in Greek Culture, 2011-present) on <b>television documentaries about the ancient world</b>, conducted from 2011 onwards, explores the hows, whys and effects of this distinctive mode of historiography. With</p>

particular attention to audio-visual and narrative strategies, it reveals the rhetorical synergies between setting and story. Her work draws particular attention to how archaeology on-screen – both the physical remains of antiquity and their excavation/analysis – acts persuasively to authorize statements about antiquity. It also examines audience responses to ancient world programmes, considers how these programmes build upon other cultural encounters with antiquity through tourism, television and film, and opens up a conversation on quality.

(3) Work by Tom Harrison (Rathbone Professor of Ancient History and Classical Archaeology, 2004-present) on **ancient and modern imperialism**, a focus of research from 2005 to the present, redefines the relationship between ancient and modern discourses on power. It establishes how ancient historians like Herodotus represented imperialism, how such representations influenced nineteenth- and twentieth-century conceptualizations of contemporary imperialism, and how modern readings of ancient imperialism continue to be cast back into ancient histories. One particular effect is the impression that ancient authors appear to comment forward upon modern-day politics.

### 3. References to the research

#### (1) Film-makers

i. Paul, J., 2009, 'Oliver Stone's *Alexander* and the Cinematic Epic Tradition' in F. Greenland and P. Cartledge (eds.), *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History and Culture Studies*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 15-35.

*This chapter was solicited by the editors as part of a targeted response to the film Alexander (2004).*

ii. Paul, J. 2013, *Film and the Classical Epic Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*This monograph, published in the prestigious 'Classical Presences' series, has been submitted by the Open University as a REF2 output in the current REF submission.*

#### (2) Media practitioners

i. Hobden, F., 2013, 'The archaeological aesthetic in ancient world documentary', *Media, Culture & Society* 35.3: 74-89.

*This work, published in a major international peer-reviewed journal for media research, ranked 25/72 in Communication and 49/137 in Sociology, is included as a reserve REF2 output in the current REF submission.*

ii. Hobden, F., 2013, 'Presenting the past: authenticity and authority in *Athens: The Truth about Democracy* (Lion TV, 2007)', *Classical Receptions Journal* 5.1: 1-37.

*This article, published in the leading international journal for Classical Reception Studies, has been submitted as a REF2 output in the current REF submission.*

#### (3) Theatre producers

i. Harrison, T., 2008, 'Ancient and modern imperialism', *Greece & Rome* 55.1: 1-22. *This research is published in a long-established peer-reviewed journal published by the Classical Association.*

ii. Harrison, T. 2009, 'Herodotus on the American empire', *Classical World* 102.4: 383-93.

*This article is published in a special section of the journal, featuring work by leading international scholars on Herodotus; the paper was originally presented in March 2007 at the New York University Ranieri Colloquium in Ancient Studies.*

### 4. Details of the impact

The impact of Receptions research at Liverpool on communities that create receptions of antiquity today is evidenced in the fields of film, television, and theatre. In each instance, analyses of contemporary responses to antiquity have inspired individuals to reappraise their methods, perspectives and practices or to use the research as a springboard for their own interrogative analyses, thus leading to new ways of thinking and modes of expression at personal and

professional levels.

(1) **Film-makers:** In her 2009 work on *Alexander* (2004), a biopic by Hollywood director Oliver Stone, Joanna Paul traces the film's production environment, its generic appropriation of 'new epic' conventions and its relationship with older works, and the narrative structure it imposes upon the biography of Alexander the Great. In the process, she evaluates the success of the film, and wonders 'what would have been done differently had the director listened to Aristotle as carefully as Alexander did' (p. 28). Paul argues that the philosopher's proposition that epic and tragedy should be shaped around 'a single action, not a single hero' could have been applied successfully to this cinematic epic. This idea had direct impact upon Oliver Stone. In a written response that forms the epilogue to the edited collection featuring Paul's work (Greenland & Cartledge, 2009), he remarks firstly on the perspicuity of her observations – 'Dr. Paul perhaps gets to the nut of it in my mind' – and then proceeds to 'follow(s) the lead given by Dr. Paul' (p.343) to imagine how his revised *Alexander* could be read with a 'single action' at its core. He states explicitly that 'Dr Paul, in pointing to Aristotle's "single action," has opened my eyes to what I missed at the time' (p. 348). *The director acquired new understandings of his own work as a film-maker and story-teller, and its possibilities, by engaging with Paul's research.* (See Section 5 (1))

(2) **Media practitioners:** Fiona Hobden's research on ancient world documentaries provided the background, stimulus and framework for the Documenting Antiquity workshop, which met for the first time in July 2013. The workshop, the first of its type ever to be held in the UK, is a mixed group comprising commissioners, directors, and producers from the primary UK broadcasters (BBC, ITV) and production houses (Lion TV, Tern TV, MediaLab UK) and academics from Classics, Ancient History and Media Studies. With its purpose to examine the character, effects, and future directions of ancient world documentaries, two journal articles by Hobden (2013a, 2013b) made logical starting points. During discussion of 'processes, priorities, practicalities, and purposes' and 'telling stories', programme-makers discussed the use of archaeological artefacts to narrate and substantiate ancient history, the construction of presenters as reliably academic, and what makes a good (and bad) programme about antiquity – key ideas in the pre-circulated research. The impact of this discussion on participants was recognized in feedback. *Filtered through the workshop, Hobden's research provided a prism through which members of the media community could articulate and interrogate their own experiences and practices. It thereby played a role in their personal and professional development.* (See Section 5 (2) and (3), below.)

(3) **Theatre producers:** Members of the theatre community have also benefited from Liverpool research. The impact of Tom Harrison's work on the creative practice of Alison Richards, an Australian theatre artist and practice-based researcher at Monash University, is witnessed in her experimental performance paper 'X Marks the Spot' (22 August 2010, Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne). The performance took place at a multi-disciplinary conference entitled "From Sappho to X": Classics, Performance, Reception', before an audience of 120 theatre professionals, Humanities scholars, and members of the public. Richards first encountered Harrison's research whilst scoping out Classical scholarship on the relationship between ancient and modern. As certified in both the script and Richard's written testimonial, *Harrison's ideas and methods directly influenced both the spoken content and physical shape of the resulting performance.*

i) Spoken quotations from Harrison's 2008 paper regarding the mutual comprehension of ancient and modern empires, the potential of classical reception studies to expose ideology in ancient/modern discourses, and his question 'can an understanding of ancient imperialisms cast light on contemporary experience?' follow immediately upon observations regarding modern appropriations of the Classical, including the perverse priority in Australia of a 'Western legacy of performance', when the country's population originates globally and its geopolitical alignment is with Asia; all the while the speaker builds her own arena of ancient imperial ambition drawn from Herodotus in sand (pp.3-4). Harrison's observations are directly integrated into the performance event, so as to inform its particular consideration, through performance, of the 'potential contribution of contemporary theatre theory and performance practice to Classical reception studies' (p. 2). Later in the piece, his assertion of Herodotus' multivocality and resultant ambiguity on matters of power are a particular inspiration for thinking about this theoretical issue (p. 5: 'I am

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particularly interested in ... claimed by Harrison on Herodotus' behalf'). The remainder of Richard's piece emulates this multivocality by resurrecting and re-scripting female voices from the Classical past (p.7). (See Section 5 (4) and (5), below.)

ii) Harrison's introduction of a family photograph into his analysis of modern imperialism inspired Richards to use an atlas belonging to her grandmother as a prop during her own analysis: a physical mapping of ancient empires in sand on-stage. (See Section 5 (5), below.)

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

(1) Oliver Stone is influenced by Paul's analysis of *Alexander* in this published **written response**: Stone, O., 2009, 'Afterword', in F. Greenland and P. Cartledge (eds.), *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History and Culture Studies*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 337-51.

(2) A [summary of feedback](#) provides evidence for developments in professional understanding through key ideas in Hobden's research by participants in the Documenting Antiquity workshop.

(3) A **testimonial** from an independent director-producer of Ancient History programmes and participant in the first Documenting Antiquity workshop, attests to the utility of Hobden's work to practitioners, in particular, her critical analysis of how programmes authorize their particular histories encourages reflection upon the issue of why a story is told in a particular way.

(4) The [script](#) for 'X Marks the spot' demonstrates explicit engagement by its creator Alison Richards with the core ideas in Harrison's research; see especially pp. 4-5, 8.

(5) In a **testimonial**, a performer/writer/director from Black Hole Theatre Inc. describes how Harrison's research into the links between ancient and modern ways of constructing histories surrounding the Persian Wars stimulated the themes at the heart of her performance.