

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Liverpool
Unit of Assessment: 31 – Classics
Title of case study: Ancient History Beyond the Academy: Herodotus, Persia and the Greeks
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research on the historian Herodotus, the history of the Achaemenid Persian empire, and the complex relationship between Greek and Persian worlds in the Classical period has had an impact in two main ways:</p> <p>1. Teaching and learning of Ancient History in UK Classrooms</p> <p>Working with partner institutions, such as the Oxford Cambridge and RSA awarding body (OCR), the Historical Association and the Reading Odyssey project, it has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contributed to the professional development of secondary teachers of Ancient History; • improved the educational experience of secondary students (indirectly through CPD, and directly through the provision of resources), • shaped the awarding body's thinking on future changes to the curriculum, • increased the uptake of Ancient History as a school subject in the UK. <p>2. Public understanding of Ancient History outside the Classroom</p> <p>Through popular publications, exhibitions, webinars, and through influence on popular historians, it has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extended and deepened public understanding of the ancient world and its interfaces with the present.
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Research on ancient Persia by Harrison and Tuplin is distinctive in its challenge to rose-tinted views of the Achaemenid empire, a view that has dominated scholarship and public understanding. This challenge is based on both new interpretations of the historiographical tradition, ancient and modern, and the analysis of documents from the Achaemenid period, which shed light on detailed questions of imperial administration and the experiences of the empire's subjects.</p> <p>i) Tom Harrison (Rathbone Professor of Ancient History and Classical Archaeology at Liverpool, 2004-present) has presented a sustained challenge to a number of aspects of the dominant orthodoxy on Persia of the last two decades, in particular examining the use of Greek sources for the writing of Persian history. His 2011 monograph, <i>Writing Ancient Persia</i> particularly brings out continuities in the history of scholarship on Persia since the nineteenth century, questions the recent emphasis on the tolerance and openness of Persian imperialism, and on minimising the role of violence and exploitation. He has also explored how ancient narratives of Alexander the Great reflect Persian royal ideology and its representation in earlier Greek sources (Harrison, 2009).</p> <p>ii) Harrison's work on Greek historiography has focussed on developing a contextual understanding of Herodotus' <i>Histories</i>, in particular the ways in which they are informed by religious assumptions, contemporary views of geography or the nature of language (for example, Harrison, 2000b). His work has also illuminated aspects of the Greek representation of foreign peoples, arguing strongly, for example, for a jingoistic reading of Aeschylus' <i>Persians</i> and for the play's reflection of Athenian democratic and imperial ideology (Harrison, 2000a).</p> <p>iii) Across his career, Christopher Tuplin (University of Liverpool Professor of Ancient History, 1976-present) has illuminated understanding of central aspects of the Achaemenid Persian empire. His vast scholarly output has been fundamental to understanding the realities of, for example, the administration of the empire, Persian military organisation, travel within the empire, and the empire's impact on its subject peoples (see especially Tuplin 2010, 2011). Since 2010 he has coordinated the AHRC-funded 'Arshama project' (with John Ma, Fellow and Tutor, University Lecturer (CUF) in Ancient History, University of Oxford), a collaboration designed to provide a new edition and analysis of the archive of correspondence of a Persian satrap, a crucial source for understanding the character of Persian provincial administration (including its exploitative aspect). The results of this project are published as Tuplin 2013.</p>
3. References to the research

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Harrison, T., 2000a, *The Emptiness of Asia: Aeschylus' Persians and the History of the Fifth Century*, London: Duckworth. *This monograph was submitted to RAE 2001 by the University of St. Andrews.*

Harrison, T., 2000b, *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *This monograph, described as an 'indispensable starting point' by Deborah Boedeker (Classical World 96.2, 2003: 218), and 'masterly' by Charles Fornara (Classical Review, 51.2, 2001: 238-9), was submitted to RAE 2001 by the University of St. Andrews.*

Harrison, T., 2010, *Writing Ancient Persia*, London: Bloomsbury. *This work, which "deserves attention of every serious Achaemenid historian", according to Jan P. Stronk (Gnomon 84.5, 2013: 465-7), is a REF2 output as part of the current REF submission.*

Harrison, T., 2010, 'Oliver Stone, *Alexander* and the Unity of Mankind', in in F. Greenland and P. Cartledge (eds.), *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History and Culture Studies*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 219-42. *This article, specially commissioned as part of a targeted response to the film Alexander (2004), is a REF2 output as part of the current REF submission.*

Tuplin, C. J., 2010, "The limitations of Persianization: reflections on cultural politics in the Persian Empire", in E. Gruen (ed.), *Cultural Identity and the Ancient Mediterranean*, Los Angeles: Getty Institute: 150-182. *This chapter arose from Tuplin's invited contribution to the conference 'Cultural Identity and the Peoples of the Ancient Mediterranean' (12-13 June 2008), and was commissioned by Professor Erich Gruen, then Villa Professor in Residence at the Getty Villa.*

Tuplin, C. J., 2011, "Managing the World: Herodotus on Persian imperial administration", in R. Rollinger et al. (edd.), *Herodotus and the Persian Empire*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag: 39-64. *This paper was specially commissioned for the conference (and related volume) on 'Herodotus and the Persian Empire', in Innsbruck, in Nov. 2008.*

Tuplin, C.J. (with John Ma and others), 2013, [The Arshama Letters from the Bodleian Library. Text and Commentary](#). *This publication arose from the AHRC-funded network, 'Communication, language and power in the Achaemenid empire: the correspondence of the satrap Arshama'.*

4. Details of the impact

Liverpool research by Harrison and Tuplin on Herodotus, Persia and the Greeks impacts on the teaching, study and writing of ancient history by teachers, school students, interested adults who are not in formal education, and popular historians. Working with partner institutions, such as OCR awarding body, the Historical Association or Reading Odyssey, it re-defines not only knowledge and understanding of this topic amongst these beneficiaries, but also the ways in which they learn about the topics.

1. Impacts on the teaching and learning of Ancient History in UK Classrooms

Through continuing professional development (CPD) activities for teachers, on-going engagement with the OCR awarding body and the creation of research-based resources for teachers and students alike, Liverpool research has improved the quality of ancient history education in the classroom and contributed to the present renaissance of the subject in secondary and tertiary education.

a. The Liverpool Ancient History Teachers' Summer School (now extended into a nationwide programme of courses) is a unique programme of CPD for school-teachers delivered by academic staff, that provides in-depth introductions to core topics in the GCSE, AS and A-level curriculum. In sessions dedicated to 'Herodotus', 'Ancient Persia' and 'Alexander' in August 2012 and July 2013, the 31 participants were introduced to recent Liverpool research: namely, Tuplin's work on Persian exploitation of the empire (as evidenced in the correspondence of the satrap Arshama), Harrison's work on Herodotean historiography, his critique of the broad contours of recent Achaemenid scholarship (especially in relation to the themes of tolerance and openness) and his analysis of the background of the Alexander tradition in earlier Greek traditions on Persia.

Participants subsequently commented on the ways in which the sessions had changed their understanding and the experience of the pupils they teach (corroborating source 1a). They spoke, for example, of how the sessions had ‘deepen[ed their] knowledge of the subject, of how they felt ‘much more enlightened’, and that they felt they had ‘benefitted greatly from their [Christopher Tuplin and Tom Harrison’s] expertise and insights’, that ‘the topic [of Persia] really did come to life for me’, and that Harrison’s ‘incredible grasp on the nuances of the sources for (and scholarship about) the Achaemenid Empire has clarified numerous confusions I would otherwise have passed on’. In particular, participants commented on how the sessions had been useful ‘in re-thinking Herodotus’, ‘for considering the perspectives of the Persian Empire’, or in underlining the view ‘that there is another side to Xerxes’. The sessions were also credited with ‘[unveiling] a plethora of new materials ... to strengthen the source base available to pupils’, ‘particularly epigraphical sources’ and graphics. Participants also commented on how the sessions had prompted ‘ideas for production of tasks to be used in my classes, and different methods of approaching my subjects’, that the course had made them realise that ‘there is not just one correct answer and it is the skills that the students need rather than the answers’, that they had changed the questions that they would study as a result of the sessions, and that overall the effect of the sessions would be to ‘[improve] grades and educational experiences’.

b. Liverpool’s development of research-based CPD for teachers of Ancient History has also had a marked effect on the uptake of Ancient History as a school subject, and on the thinking of the one UK awarding body who offer it as a subject, the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA awarding body. The Chair of Examiners for Classics attributes a significant aspect of the increase in the uptake of Ancient History to the effect of the courses based on Liverpool research (corroborating source 1b) suggesting, e.g. that they were instrumental in a 30% rise in the number of centres entering for the GCSE from 2012 to 2013 (either through our directly persuading schools to take up Ancient History or through supporting them to do so). She also credits the courses with raising the profile of the subject within the wider history community, with encouraging OCR to engage directly with Higher Education Institutions in the development of the curriculum, and to ensure that the development of qualifications (especially in relation to Persia) ‘reflect[s] the most recent academic thinking’.

c. The impact of Harrison’s research on how ancient Persia is taught in schools is extended by his contribution to *Teaching History* (‘Polychronicon: Interpreting the Persian Wars’, 2013, pp. 36-7). Adopting an explicitly pedagogical perspective, and with an accompanying piece by an experienced teacher-trainer suggesting strategies for translating Harrison’s research into the classroom, the article poses fundamental questions about how ancient Persia should be studied, and presents varying perspectives on key themes such as the tolerance of the empire, its relationship to its subjects, and the use of Greek sources in reconstructing Persian history. As of September 2013, 68 secondary school teachers had downloaded this piece through the Historical Association website, in addition to others who accessed it through the print version – with a circulation of c.3,000, and an additional 900 individuals who accessed the whole journal online (corroborating source 1c). Additionally, Harrison’s perspective on ancient Persia formed the basis for an article (‘The Persian Empire. Myths and Realities’) in the *BBC History Magazine* (August 2011), reaching an [estimated readership of c. 72,000](#) (2011 circulation figures published by InPublishing).

d. School teachers and students are also the beneficiaries of Harrison’s research on the Persian empire, Greek-Persian relations, and Herodotus via the Historical Association Podcasted History project. According to statistics provided by the Historical Association, between April and September 2013, 355 secondary school teachers, 902 secondary students, and 147 other individuals have downloaded his podcasts (corroborating source 1c).

2. Impacts on the public understanding of Ancient History outside the Classroom

Tuplin’s and Harrison’s research on ancient Persia has also had an impact on the understanding of people learning about the ancient world outside of formal education, internationally. This is achieved through the dissemination of their ideas through other public-facing platforms, and through Harrison’s influence on a prominent popular historian with a worldwide readership in the

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hundreds of thousands

a. The Reading Odyssey project is a US non-profit organisation that provides on-line educational resources of 'intellectually curious' adults. 'The Persian Version', a live Jan. 2011 'webinar', since published online as a podcast, translates issues fundamental to Harrison's research on the historiographical tradition of the Persian Wars (esp. the difficulties of accessing a 'Persian version') into an accessible discussion of the battle of Marathon. On live transmission, the webinar had 1,200 participants across seven countries across Europe and the Americas. Since then, it has been downloaded approximately 1,000 times, many in classroom settings with audiences of 20 to 30 people (corroborating source 2a).

b. Harrison's wider work has reached even wider audiences through the mediation of Tom Holland's popular histories. Holland credits Harrison's distinctive treatment of Greek representations of Persia in his 'ground-breaking' *Emptiness of Asia* (Harrison 2000a) as playing 'the key role' in developing his understanding of Athenian perceptions of Persia, ideas which underpinned Holland's 2005 book, *Persian Fire*. This work has since been translated into 16 languages, and has sold 155,000 copies in the UK alone, and around half a million copies worldwide. His new translation of *Herodotus' Histories* (2013) for non-specialist audiences has similarly taken Harrison's research to non-specialist audiences, not just in print but through its serialisation in *The Guardian* and *Telegraph* newspapers, and radio programmes on Radio 3 and 5 Live. Holland credits his own persuasive 'case' for Herodotus 'in no small part' to the influence of Harrison's interpretations (corroborating source 2b).

c. The exhibition ('Thus Arshama speaks') associated with Tuplin's project on the correspondence of the Persian satrap Arshama presented central themes of Tuplin's commentary on the Arshama letters, for example their value for understanding the rationing of journeys within the empire, Arshama's epistolary practice, and his focus on maximising profit from his estates. The exhibition is estimated to have reached an audience of 19,500 in the Bodleian Library proscholium between 30 June and 16 July 2011 (corroborating source 2c, d).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Ancient History in the Classroom

- a. [Summary of feedback](#) from the Ancient History Teacher's Summer School and courses reveals the impact of Harrison's and Tuplin's research on ancient Persia upon participants in the courses.
- b. A testimonial from the Chair of Examiners for Classics, Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations awarding body, shows that Harrison's novel perspectives on ancient Persia have shaped thinking on the OCR Ancient History curriculum; it also suggests the role of the Liverpool-based CPD in increasing the uptake of Ancient History as a school subject
- c. The Website and Online Resources Officer of the Historical Association can be contacted to corroborate statistics on the use of Harrison's research via the *Teaching History* magazine and the Historical Association Podcasted History project.

2. Ancient History outside the Classroom

- a. The CEO of Creative Good, who is also the organiser of the Reading Odyssey project, can be contacted to corroborate statistics on the wide international reach of Harrison's podcast on the Persian Wars .
- b. Written testimony by a popular historian and TV/radio broadcaster corroborates the vital role played by Harrison's research in shaping the perspective on Herodotus, Athens, and the Persian War presented in his popular history book, *Persian Fire*; his testimony also confirms statistics on the sales figures of his publications.
- c. A staff member responsible for the exhibition at the Bodleian Library can be contacted to corroborate statistics on the likely footfall for the exhibition associated with Tuplin's project on the correspondence of the Persian satrap Arshama.
- d. [Introductory text](#) and [captions](#) used in the Bodleian Library exhibition, 'Thus Arshama speaks', show how the themes of the published Arshama commentary were central to the exhibition.