

**Institution:** University of Leeds

**Unit of Assessment:** 31 (Classics)

**Title of case study:**

*2. Herculean Labours: enriching the public understanding of our classical mythological heritage*

**1. Summary of the impact**

Research 2005-12 has opened up new perspectives on Herakles-Hercules, tracing links between the ancient hero and his post-classical incarnations, and laying the foundations for further study of Hercules' long-lasting cross-cultural significance. The impact has three strands:

- on individual public users – enriching lives via novel interpretations of the quintessential ancient Greek hero;
- on the public engagement practice of Leeds City Museum 2011-13;
- on the planning process for the 2015-16 programme of a range of museums in the UK, continental Europe and beyond which are to host an innovative type of touring exhibition.

**2. Underpinning research**

The case study is based on research published between 2005 and 2012 by **Dr Emma Stafford** (Leeds 2000-present, Senior Lecturer since 2005). This culminated in the monograph [1], which investigates Herakles' role in ancient Greek and Roman literature, art, politics and religion, and his many manifestations between antiquity and the present day. *Herakles* has a particularly wide scope, due to the subject's extraordinary range in the ancient world – in terms of chronology (he is present from the earliest Greek to the latest Latin sources), of medium (he appears in all genres of literature, all kinds of artwork), and of weight of narrative (three times as many episodes attach to him as to any other ancient hero) – and to Herakles' extraordinary status as both hero and god.

The book's substantial final chapter sketches the hero-god's continuing presence in literature and art from late antiquity via the Renaissance to the twenty-first century. It includes consideration of: Hercules' appropriation by Christianity; his emergence in the Renaissance as a exemplary figure and a prototype for virtuous living; his role as political emblem; his particular relevance to France, as supposed forefather of the monarchy and paradoxical hero of the Revolution; re-workings of Sophokles' and Euripides' tragedies on Hercules' death and madness; the hero's appearance in modern popular media. The book's major contribution is that, by bringing together a wider range of material than has ever previously been assembled (visual as well as literary, from Homer to the present day), it has facilitated cross-cultural, cross-media comparisons, drawing attention to significant continuities as well as culturally-specific disjunctions.

The three papers [2-4] were foundational for the 2012 book, developing particular themes in more depth than possible in the book. Paper [2] enlists the case of Herakles in the on-going scholarly debate over the relationship between ritual (especially sacrificial) practice and the character of its recipient, arguing against a recent trend which has seen the two as unrelated. Paper [3] focuses on the issue of Herakles' liminal status as a hero-god, and shows that the articulation of this status in the story of his apotheosis is the most distinctive aspect of his multi-faceted mythology. Paper [4] takes as its point of departure Prodikos' famous story of the young Herakles' choice between a life of vice and one of virtue, presented to him by Vice and Virtue personified. It argues that the Greek hero has a particular tendency to association with personifications, which is in turn a feature of his aptness for allegorical narrative – an insight important to the monograph's narrative of continuity between ancient and post-classical images of the hero.

The final chapter of [1] includes discussion of a reinterpretation of the hero by the contemporary New Zealand artist Marian Maguire: her series of etchings and lithographs *The Labours of Herakles* feature a Herakles inspired by Attic black-figure vases inserted into nineteenth-century scenes of New Zealand, making witty comment on European colonisation. Correspondence between **Stafford** and Maguire arising from the book led to the artist's agreement to present her work at the *Hercules: a Hero for All Ages* conference at Leeds in June 2013 (supported by a grant from Creative New Zealand) and was crucial to development of the exhibition detailed below (4b).

### 3. References to the research

1. E.J. Stafford (2012), *Herakles (Gods and Heroes in the Ancient World series, Routledge)*. ISBN 9780415300681. This book is listed in REF2. Reviews describe it as 'important and stimulating... comprehensive, well-documented... both descriptive and analytical' (*Journal of Hellenic Studies* 133, 2013 DOI: 10.1017/S0075426913000608); 'succeeds admirably in combining description and analysis... this book is now the place to start (and keep returning to) for anyone interested in the world's most famous hero' (*Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2012.09.52). The final chapter is singled out as 'particularly informative... fascinating' (*JHS*), 'the best chapter of the book' (*BMCR*).
2. E.J. Stafford (2005a) 'Héraklès: encore et toujours le problème du *heros theos*', *Kernos* 18: 391-406. DOI: 10.4000/kernos.1912. This paper was submitted to RAE 2008; it is available online, or a copy can be supplied on request.
3. E.J. Stafford (2010) 'Herakles: between gods and heroes', in J.N. Bremmer and A. Erskine (eds) *The Gods of Ancient Greece: Identities and Transformations (Edinburgh Leventis Studies 5)*, Edinburgh, 228-44. ISBN: 9780748637980. The *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* describes the volume as one 'that pushes at the boundaries of our research' (2011.04.55). A copy of the paper can be supplied on request.
4. E.J. Stafford (2005b) 'Vice or Virtue?: Herakles and the art of allegory', in L. Rawlings (ed.) *Herakles and Hercules: exploring a Greco-Roman divinity* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales), 71-96. ISBN-13: 9781905125050. This paper was submitted to RAE 2008; a copy can be supplied on request.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### a) Impact on Leeds City Museum's annual programme of events and on the public

The research outlined above formed the basis for public engagement activities which have played a key role in developing the UOA's relationship with Leeds City Museum. These have helped to increase the Museum's footfall, and have brought about changes in the type of event the Museum includes in its programme. Impact on members of the public includes enrichment of their engagement with cultural heritage.

**i)** As part of the Leeds-City-Council coordinated *Light Night* (October 2010), the event *Underworlds Live at Leeds* was designed by Dr Eleanor OKell (Visiting Fellow in Classics since September 2009) and **Stafford**, drawing on [2] and [3]. This walking tour incorporated Leeds City Museum's Ancient Worlds Galleries and various city sights into a journey through the ancient Underworld. Oral feedback from audience members on the night indicated that the event drew new visitors into the Museum who would visit again.

Building on this success, for *Light Night* 2011 the same team designed *In the Footsteps of Hercules*. Research insights from work on the monograph [1] underpinned a presentation of Hercules which linked ancient versions of his story with artefacts in the City Museum's Ancient Worlds Galleries and public sculpture around Leeds. Participants were guided by a map, interpretative poster-points linked each item/location to an episode – e.g. the Town Hall's lionskin-clad head of Hercules with the Nemean Lion labour – and actors playing mythological characters provided live story-telling. One stop on the tour, 'Tales of Hercules' (**Stafford** and actor), invited the public to hear Iphikles' comically subversive version of his more famous brother's exploits.

The Museum commented that the tour 'represented a departure from previous practice for the Museum' and that they were 'keen to repeat' this innovation [A]; they noted visitor-numbers of c.4000, equivalent to a whole week's footfall in the peak school holiday period, and commented that the event 'had helped attract new audiences to the Museum on the night and [had] encouraged them to return to the Museum at a later date' [B]. The Museum was keen to commit to further classically-themed events for *Light Nights* 2012 and 2013 (see REF 3a).

**ii)** As detailed in REF3a, the series *Classics in Our Lunchtimes* launched at the City Museum in October 2011. These talks have included two by **Stafford**: *Olympic Beginnings* (June 2012) drew on the monograph's [1] discussion of Herakles' role as founder of the Olympic Games; *Hercules'*

*Choice: from ancient Greece to Temple Newsam* (May 2013) drew on paper [4], while focusing on a particular example in Leeds Museums and Galleries' own collection. The Museum commented that **Stafford's** 'participation in the series gave an opportunity for a new exploration of the Greek collection and its themes' and that someone with her 'research expertise could help bring the collections to life' [A]. Audience feedback rated both talks 'excellent' or 'very good' and indicated that almost all were likely to attend again [C].

#### **b) Impact on exhibition design and event-programming at Leeds City Museum and beyond**

Between May 2012 and July 2013 **Stafford** began a collaboration with Prof. John Prag (former Curator at Manchester Museum) working on an exhibition based on Marian Maguire's *The Labours of Herakles* series (above §2). In preliminary designs for the exhibition, **Stafford** drew on the research of all four outputs. Discussion with Leeds City Museum over the same period led to its agreement to host this exhibition in spring 2015, displaying the modern prints alongside a number of antiquities and post-classical artefacts depicting Herakles, thus presenting the same 2,500-year continuum discussed in her monograph.

The impact here is on the Museum's event-programming and on their exhibition practice. Making this kind of use of modern art in the display of pre-modern artefacts is an innovation for the Museum, extending the range of established practice. They have welcomed the 'exciting opportunity... to juxtapose contemporary artworks with objects from the Leeds and Manchester collections' [A], 'to tease out different stories... and bring to the public items that have rarely been exhibited or are less accessible' [D].

Between February and July 2013 four other museums have agreed to host the exhibition after its initial showing in Leeds: in the UK, Liverpool's Garstang Museum [E] and the Cambridge Museum of Classical Archaeology; in Germany, the Munich Antikensammlungen [F] and Würzburg's Martin von Wagner Museum. These form the nucleus of an international tour which will span a period from spring 2015 to winter 2016; talks are on-going with other institutions, including Newcastle's Great North Museum, Edinburgh University Library, the Musée Royal de Mariemont in Belgium and the Nicholson Museum in Sydney.

At each confirmed venue **Stafford** has been consulted on how the Maguire prints might be shown alongside a selection of objects from the local collections, again drawing on the monograph's central argument about cross-cultural continuities.

The impact here is again on event-programming, and on the museums' exhibition practices. For example: 'The project that [**Stafford**] has developed with the Maguire exhibition in Leeds is a totally new way of thinking about displaying classical collections. It's not something we have ever done before and it is a model that we are really interested in, because it offers a way to help us to interpret our collections and attract people to the museum beyond the normal range of public engagement' [E].

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- A. Statement from Curator of Archaeology, Leeds City Museum (16/8/12).
- B. Statement from Site Development Officer, Leeds City Museum (23/8/12).
- C. Audience feedback from Stafford's *Classics in our Lunchtimes* talks.
- D. Statement from Curator of Archaeology (2012-13 temporary cover), Leeds City Museum (7/6/13).
- E. Statement from Director of the Garstang Museum of Classical Archaeology, Liverpool (26/6/13).
- F. Statement from representative of the Munich Antikensammlungen (25/6/13).