

Harvard Summer Program in Olympia and Nafplion, Greece Comparative Cultures Seminar Newsletter #2 Summer 2011

Class of '11

The 2011 summer session began on Monday, June 27th. As in previous years, the Program spent the first three weeks in Olympia and moved on to Nafplion for the remaining two. This summer CCS faculty and staff were pleased to welcome twenty-four students from around the world—fourteen women and ten men. Sixteen participants were from Harvard College and eight others hailed from other U.S. and international universities including Barnard College, Northwestern University, University of Arizona, Notre Dame, St. Andrews (Scotland), Patras University (Greece), and Beijing and Fudan Universities (China). Members of the CCS team were pleased to welcome this year's students, distinguished guest faculty, and lecturers into its continually expanding alumni network!



Class of 2011 (Photo, Emily Wharton, 2011)

Participants were drawn from diverse fields of the humanities and approached their material from a variety of perspectives and methodologies. For example, while Michael Puett's (Harvard University) macro-historical presentation highlighted the significance of East Asian trade networks for the rise of early Chinese imperial formations, Ioli Kalavrezou (Harvard University) closely analyzed visual aspects of three Byzantine art objects in order to discuss the relationship between gift-giving and diplomacy in the Byzantine empire. Included in the line-up of workshop participants were Dimiter Angelov (University of Birmingham), Sahar Bazzaz (College of the Holy Cross), Mata Dova (Hellenic College), Greg Nagy (Harvard University), Eleni Paleologou (National Archaeological Museum, Nafplion), Yiannis Petropoulos (Democritus University of Thrace), Nicolas Prevelakis (Harvard University), Anna Stavrakopoulou (Aristotle University), and George Syrimis (Yale University).

2011 V.I.P.'s

Following a successful graduate seminar that was taught for the first time at Harvard University this past spring semester, Professors Emma Dench and Michael Puett gladly accepted the invitation to join the Program in Olympia offering a master-class for students entitled, "*Rome and China: a dialogue*".



Dench is the author of numerous publications

Professor **Emma Dench** studied at Wadham College, Oxford (BA Hons Literae Humaniores 1987) and at St. Hugh's College, Oxford (DPhil in Ancient History 1993). In 2007, she joined the Harvard faculty with appointments in both the departments of Classics and History. Professor

Professor **Michael Puett** received his degrees from the Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago (M.A. 1987, PhD, 1994). He is currently Professor of Chinese History in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University and served as Department Chair from 2005 to 2008. Professor Puett's publishing record is prolific. Titles include, *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*, (co-authored with Robert Weller, Adam Seligman and Bennett Simon, Oxford



Workshop Participants during discussion

"Imperial Objects in Circulation"

Members of the CCS team and invited guest faculty participated in a workshop entitled, "Imperial Objects of Circulation", which convened from June 21st to June 23rd in the Iatrou Building at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Nafplion, Greece. This two-day event—the third in a series of research workshops organized by the CCS group on the comparative study of empires—was conceived very broadly to include art-objects, commodities, and texts, while the idea of circulation was meant to cover trade, travel, and gift-exchange among other forms.



Professors Nagy, Petropoulos and Syrimis, during the latter's presentation

including: *From Barbarians to New Men: Greek, Roman, and Modern Perceptions of Peoples from the Centra Apennines* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995) and *Romulus' Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian* (Oxford University Press, 2005). She is currently preparing, *Imperialism and Culture in the Roman World*, for publication by the Cambridge University Press series *Key Themes in Ancient History*. Professor Dench's ongoing projects include a study of the retrospective writing of the Roman Republican past in classical antiquity.

Q and A with Emma Dench and Michael Puett

1. Given your different fields, why did you decide to teach a course together?

ED: To be honest, it was an inspired suggestion by a colleague in the History Department at Harvard (Professor Hue-Tam Ho Tai) who knows us both. For my part, I had really enjoyed co-teaching in the past, in London, but, more importantly, wanted to do something different and challenging. I've been a bit uncomfortable with the assumption that Rome belongs 'naturally' to the western tradition for quite some years, and I was excited about the possibility of thinking about this issue in different ways. Michael is an amazing scholar and an extremely charismatic teacher, so I knew that this would be great fun as well as very stimulating intellectually.

MP: I have long been an admirer of Emma's brilliant scholarship, and had long heard as well how extraordinary a teacher Emma is. So I was very excited about Hue-Tam's suggestion that we consider teaching a class together. I have also been interested for some time in comparative work between the early cultures of China and the Mediterranean region, and the idea of exploring this in a classroom setting with such a wonderful scholar and teacher as Emma was tremendously exciting.

2. What questions/issues did you seek to address in your seminar on China and Rome? How did these questions influence how you designed the course and selected the readings?

We should say at the outset that this was a 'graduate seminar in general education', which encourages graduate students to think about the whole process of course design from start to finish, so even the initial questions and issues underlying the course were on the table.

Most of the existing scholarship that compares Rome and China either takes more of a social science perspective or considers a Roman case study and then a Chinese case study separately. As cultural historians, we strongly believe that the specifics of societies and cultures really matter: can empires really arise and maintain themselves without intimate engagement with the beliefs, cultural norms and historical trajectories of the peoples they govern? We chose case studies together with the students, and we all tried to keep ourselves focused on aspects of culture that are associated with empire: examples included violence, religion, and ancient and modern accounts of the rise and fall of specific empires. One of the main challenges was to concentrate both on the socio-specific aspects of each case study individually and then to bring it into conversation with the case study from the other culture, and really try to analyze the different stories about empires that emerged from this process.

3. What aspects of the course did your students enjoy the most? What aspects did you enjoy the most?

ED: I find it quite hard to separate the aspects I enjoyed from the aspects the students enjoyed, because the atmosphere in the seminar room was electric on each occasion, and I found the discussions so interesting and stimulating that I would be thinking of them several days and even weeks after they had taken place. There were a number of topics that I think particularly fascinated us all: I won't forget one discussion on the respective Roman and Chinese worlds each 'full of gods' in very different ways. More generally, I think that we all enjoyed the challenge, and even the risks, of bringing together two different ancient traditions and two different historiographies that are so rarely juxtaposed.

MP: The atmosphere in the classroom was so inspiring. I think all of us – professors and students alike – found that working in areas with which we were unfamiliar was exhilarating, and it opened up hosts of questions that we had never contemplated before. The result was a true community feeling in the classroom, in which we were all working together as we tried to explore these new and exciting questions.

University Press, 2008) and *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002). Professor Puett's most recent title, *Narrative, Authorship, and Historiography: Studies on Sima Qian's Shiji (Records of the Historian)*, is forthcoming from the State University of New York Press.

George Syrimis

Dr. **George Syrimis** joined the Program in the summer of 2008 and since then he has become an indispensable member of the Faculty. His course, "Our Greece: Western visions of Modern Greece", has proven to be one of the most popular seminars offered by the Program.

Professor Syrimis received a Fulbright Scholarship to study at Cornell University, where he completed his B.S. in Education in 1990. He subsequently pursued graduate work at Harvard University where he received his PhD in Comparative Literature focusing on the poetics of C.P. Cavafy's love poems. He has published articles on the oral tradition, as well as on the works of Georgios Vizyenos, C.P. Cavafy, Mikis Theodorakis and Nikos Kazantzakis. In addition to his academic work, he has also developed two electronic projects (Lexis and Ikones) for the instruction of modern Greek. His research interests include music and national identity, religion and literature, cultural studies, reception studies, and gender and sexuality. He is currently the Associate Chair and Lecturer in Comparative Literature, Yale University.



4. How have your respective scholarly and intellectual interests shaped the way you teach together?

ED: I've learned so much from Michael, and his insights and interests have made me look at Rome quite differently: for example, I think that in the past I've had a rather too 'secular' view of Rome, and that that has changed quite a bit during this seminar. I think that it has helped that we are both strongly cultural in our focus, and I've certainly thought about this quite a lot, and seen it as a very positive thing, and something that is worth explaining and emphasizing more. But this broadly shared focus has, in my view, made it much easier to have a genuine conversation rather than each of us talking about quite different things.

MP: Teaching with Emma has been a complete joy. I have learned so much from working with her, and have learned so much about the types of questions that can be posed concerning our early materials. For example, I have learned in particular to think anew about notions of identity and perceptions of the other in early China. There are suddenly a host of new and exciting questions to ask of the early Chinese sources. I have also learned so much from Emma's tremendous pedagogical skills.

The Coordinators



Christos Giannopoulos is the Executive Manager of Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies in Greece and Fellow in Educational Management of the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington D.C. A native of Messolonghi, Greece, he studied at the University of Ioannina, School of Education, and completed his PhD in Management of Educational Organizations in 2008. Before becoming the Executive Manager at CHS-Greece, he served as Administrative and Financial Coordinator at Ioannina University.

"I first learned about the Harvard-Olympia Summer Program in 2003 and quickly applied. I received one of two scholarships offered to Greek students by the Kokkalis Foundation to attend the program. That year, twenty students attended the program, each with unique experiences and ambitious in his/her own way. Although we were all from

different backgrounds we quickly became friends and had a unifying goal: to take advantage of this life-altering opportunity. The structure of the program and its unique interdisciplinary curriculum as well as the continuous interaction with the professors, provided the opportunity to challenge myself intellectually and personally. The program was one of the most powerful experiences I had ever had. A year later Professor Anna Stavrakopoulou, the Director of the Olympia Program at the time, phoned me to ask if I would like to become the coordinator of the program. I accepted and worked as the program coordinator in 2005, 2007 and 2008. In addition to my administrative duties, I also taught an introductory class in Modern Greek History for the 2008 summer session. Participating as a student was an important experience, but contributing to the organization and implementation of the program was a new and equally powerful challenge that was closely connected to my field of studies and professional experience. My role as coordinator eventually evolved into my current position at CHS-Nafplion.

There are no words to describe how grateful I am to Professor Nagy, Professor Stavrakopoulou, all the other professors of the program, and of course the Harvard Summer School, and I would like to suggest to every future participant to take advantage of the great opportunity that this program and its professors have to offer. It is a "once in a lifetime experience" that can become "an experience of a lifetime"!

Marina Cheilitsi graduated with a law degree from Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece in 2010. During her studies she held internships in international and governmental institutions and briefly practiced law after graduation. Marina participated in the 2008 Harvard-Olympia Summer program in Greece with a full scholarship from the Center for Hellenic Studies (Harvard University, Washington, DC). Since then, she has served as the program administrator, taking up the torch from Christos and providing invaluable help with the organization and management of the program on the ground. In January 2011, she became Programs Coordinator for CHS-Greece. In September 2011 she will begin her Masters in Maritime Studies at the University of Peiraius in Athens, Greece.



Christos and Marina (Photo, Alice Hu, 2008)

"My life changed in important ways from the very first day that I became a student in the Harvard-Olympia Summer program. A Google search brought me to the Harvard Summer School website, and I immediately contacted Professor Anna Stavrakopoulou, one of the seven-person teaching team and the program's coordinator at the time, to find out about the application process. I received a scholarship from the Center for Hellenic Studies, which made it possible for me to take part in the program. When I applied to become a student in the Olympia Program, I was studying law at Aristotle University in Thessaloniki (degree conferred in 2010), and although I had studied several foreign languages and participated in international student forums, I realized that these five weeks offered a unique academic experience; it was not just the exchange of knowledge that was invaluable but also all these moments of fun and wonderful time I spent with my roommate, my classmates and the professors! After I was offered the position as coordinator and started working on the administrative part of the program, I realized how much effort the team had made in order to develop and realize this exciting program. Working alongside the professors has given me the experience and confidence to take risks and try to improve the program from year to year. I want to thank all the students I have met so far, who have made my job as administrator so pleasurable. And I also need to express my gratitude to all faculty members, and Yota Batsaki particularly, whom I consider by now family! In a nutshell,

these three years that I have been working for the Program have changed my life completely. Not only do I get to work with wonderful students from Harvard and other universities all over the world, but I am also lucky enough to contribute to what turns out to be a life-transforming experience for all concerned. And every year at the end of the summer session, it feels wonderful to see the happy faces of students who leave with a desire to return to Greece in the future!”

Faculty News

- In June 2011, **Yota Batsaki** (PhD Harvard, 2002) took up the post of Executive Director at Harvard University’s Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection located in Washington, DC. Dumbarton Oaks is dedicated to supporting scholarship internationally in Byzantine, Garden and Landscape, and Pre-Columbian studies.
- **Dimiter Angelov** (PhD Harvard 2002, Lecturer in Byzantine History at the University of Birmingham, UK) held a residential Fellowship in Byzantines studies at Dumbarton Oaks during the Spring of 2011. The fellowship enabled Dimiter to advance with a new book project, a historical biography of the thirteenth-century Byzantine emperor and philosopher Theodore Laskaris.

Useful to Know

- ✓ New addition to the Program: one-day trip to the island of Poros! On July 27th students, faculty and staff traveled to the island of Poros, a perfect destination for those interested in the Greek island experience! This excursion was the fifth and last one of the Program, and it purposed to offer a break of the intense writing of the final paper!
- ✓ Preparations for Summer 2012 (June 25--July 29, 2012) have already begun! Look for details in the upcoming newsletter.

*We look forward to your feedback!
Please feel free to send us photos and texts
for the Fall 2011 newsletter.*

*We will be more than happy to host any other news
you want to share among
our network of more than 160 alumni and friends!*

For more information, email us at:

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Castle of Methoni (Photo, Diego Lopez, 2011)