

It is commonly thought that historians, especially scholars of classics, live in the past and ignore the present, but nothing could be further from the truth. They study the past to understand the present, for these two tenses do not form separate dimensions, but an intricate web of antecedents and consequences. For me, engaging with the study of antiquity offers a perspective for understanding where we come from and where we are headed.

At the age of 14, the writing of a short book sowed the seeds of my literary enthusiasm. Reading Homer, Ovid, Sophocles and others in high school literature classes, my interest was piqued by their references to mythology, which stimulated me to read Hesiod's "Theogony" and "Works and Days". Given my interest in female figures, Pandora as the primordial woman grabbed my attention. This led me to take up an online course in Classics at Wesleyan University, but after completing it, I only had more questions. Therefore, I joined the Milestone Institute, a programme of advanced studies, where I took a variety of courses, such as Primary Sources, Historical Reasoning and Close Reading: Literature. Thanks to the methods and skills I acquired, I could engage with Pandora's story more deeply. I researched its antique representations for an essay that I submitted to the Fitzwilliam Essay Prize, arguing that Pandora offers a special insight into how Archaic Greek thinkers such as Hesiod looked at women. Captivated by the variations of Pandora's ancient and modern interpretations, I started researching the ancient Greek mindset. Reading Jean-Pierre Vernant's "The Origins of Greek Thought" gave me a broad insight into the history and the cultural amalgam of Greek antiquity. However, I found the abyss between classical and recent perspectives on ancient female figures just as mesmerizing, for example how contemporary artists and thinkers still draw on the same myth of whence women originated but interpret it through their age's morality. Stimulated by this phenomenon, I investigated another staggering example: the contrast between Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, a captivating story of power and deception, and its modern interpretations. In the framework of the Mary Renault Essay Prize, I compared the original play to Chi-Raq, Spike Lee's *Lysistrata* inspired film. I argued its adequacy as a reception and its altered message in comparison with Aristophanes' Panhellenic notion.

While classical literature appears to be everywhere I look, the question remains: does classics offer anything beyond mythical stories? Reading Books I and II of Herodotus's "Histories" challenged my hitherto strong conviction of the Greek and Roman origins of European culture. Herodotus discards the notion of the primacy of Greek civilisation in a short story of Psammetichus' experiment. Should I perhaps look into Phrygian literature instead? Regardless, Herodotus not only doubts the existence of Greek superiority, but also questions the possibility of a unique, isolated culture from which all others are born. Greek culture stems just as much from its ancestors as from interactions with a diverse set of neighbours, whether the Greeks thought them to be barbarians or not, and is in no sense superior to other cultures.

Armed with this understanding, I now have an answer as to why I want to continue studying classics: Hellas and Rome are the surfaces on which a constant mingling of neighbouring cultures manifests and which give us insights into how it all started and where we might be headed. As Herodotus shows, whether one would intend to persuade a Hellene to eat their father's corpse or an Indian to burn it, all cultures are worthy of study, and – I would add – there is no better place to start than where it all began to come together.