

University of Exeter – Classics & Ancient History

We look forward to welcoming you to Exeter later this year, when you will begin your degree-level study of the ancient world. You may already be well acquainted with classical history and literature, or you may be a relative newcomer to the subject. Either way, the best possible preparation for your degree will be to read more widely during the summer vacation.

Even if you already know which modules you will be following, you are advised **not** to acquire any books relating to individual modules until you have received instructions from the relevant lecturers and tutors. The reading schedule and all other matters will be explained during the first few weeks after your arrival. (Many of the items that you will be asked to read will be provided in the Library or in electronic format when you have enrolled.)

What we invite you to do instead is to explore a range of ancient Greek and Roman literature in translation, using the list below as a guide. You are not expected to read all of these works (though there is no reason why you should not do so if you have time!) – just pick and choose the titles that appeal to you most. You could choose authors, genres, and texts that you have never read (or never even heard of) before now, or you could read the whole of a long text that you have only studied in short extracts. It is surprising how many new students have never read any classical literature apart from the GCSE and A-level set texts. Now is the time to expand your knowledge, make some new discoveries, and get a sense of what authors or types of writing you naturally prefer. Classics and Ancient History is a very broad subject area, and there is a huge amount of fascinating material waiting for you!

The list below represents a selection of works that will whet your appetite for things to come. These works will introduce you to many different genres of literature and many aspects of the history, myth, society and culture of the ancient world.

Homer, *The Odyssey*

One of the earliest surviving literary works, this exciting Greek epic describes Odysseus' journey home to Ithaca after the Trojan War. Many good translations exist, but we particularly recommend Walter Shewring's version (Oxford World's Classics) or the widely discussed new version by Emily Wilson (Norton).

Herodotus, *The Histories*

Greek history told in a way that is as gripping as any novel: this great work gives perspectives on several ancient civilisations. We especially recommend Robin Waterfield's translation (Oxford World Classics).

Sophocles, *Oedipus the King and Other Tragedies*

(Translated by Oliver Taplin, Oxford World's Classics). Some of the most moving and intellectually challenging drama ever written. If you have never read any Greek tragedy before, *Oedipus the King* is a great place to start

Plato, *Symposium*

(Translated by C.J. Gill, Penguin Classics). This dialogue about the nature of love is a good introduction to the figure of Socrates and to Greek philosophy generally.

Lucian, *Selected Dialogues*

(Translated by C.D.N. Costa, Oxford World's Classics). Did you know that the ancient Greeks enjoyed reading novels, including science fiction?

Plautus, *Four Comedies*

(Translated by Erich Segal, Oxford World's Classics). A great introduction to the world of Roman comedy. A particularly good place to begin would be *The Brothers Menaechmus*, the inspiration for Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*.

Catullus, *The Complete Poems*

(Translated by Guy Lee, Oxford World's Classics). Catullus was only a young man when he produced this wonderfully varied collection of verse – including love poetry to his mistress, vignettes of social, political and literary life at Rome, and some of the filthiest poems ever written.

Cicero, *Murder Trials*

(Translated by M. Grant, Penguin Classics). These gripping real-life law court speeches give us a vivid glimpse into Roman law and social history. *In Defence of Sextus Roscius of Amerina* would be a good starting-point.

Virgil, *The Aeneid*

(Translated by W. Jackson Knight, Penguin Classics). The classic Roman epic poem, narrating the fall of Troy and the origins of Rome.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

(Translated by D. Raeburn, Penguin Classics). Another Roman epic poem, which also happens to be the best single introduction to the full range of Greek myth. It contains many separate stories, linked by the theme of metamorphosis.

Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*

(Translated by Catharine Edwards, Oxford World's Classics). A brilliant, gripping, often scandalous example of Roman biographical writing. Suetonius is one of our best sources for the lives of emperors from Julius Caesar to Domitian.

Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*

(Translated by P.G. Walsh, Oxford World's Classics). One of the surviving examples of the ancient Roman novel: fantastical, picaresque and racy.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

(Translated by R. Hard, Oxford World's Classics). A fundamental work of Roman philosophy – and a bestseller as recently as 2002!

For those who are particularly interested in ancient history, art and archaeology there are so many good modern books available that it is hard to know where to start. Why not try some of the suggestions

below? (This is in no sense a comprehensive list, but we recommend these items because they are particularly accessible, well written or fun to read!)

Ray Laurence's *Roman Archaeology for Ancient Historians* (Routledge).

Richard T. Neer, *Art and Archaeology of the Greek World* (Thames & Hudson).

James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (HarperCollins).

Mary Beard, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome* (Profile).

Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford University Press).

Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (Bodley Head).

Armand d'Angour, *Socrates in Love* (Bloomsbury).