Conversation with ... Dr Michael Scott

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Abstract *Associate Professor Michael Scott is a researcher and lecturer based in the department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Warwick. He is also President of the Lytham St Annes Classical Association. Prior to his appointment at Warwick, Michael was the Moses and Mary Finley Research Fellow in ancient history at Darwin College, as well as an Affiliated Lecturer in the Faculty of Classics, at Cambridge University. Michael's research and teaching engages with interdisciplinary approaches to the literary, epigraphic and material evidence to investigate ancient Greek and Roman society, particularly focusing on Delphi and Olympia as religious spaces.*

While Michael has contributed significantly to the field of classics and ancient history by publishing extensively, he has also enjoyed great success in engaging wider audiences with the ancient world. He regularly talks in schools around the country, writes books intended for the popular market as well as articles for national and international newspapers and magazines. Michael's experience in writing and presenting a range of programmes intended for TV and radio audiences has made him a household name. He has written and presented programmes for the National Geographic, History Channel, Nova, and the BBC including Delphi: bellybutton of the ancient world (BBC4); Guilty Pleasures: luxury in the ancient and medieval words (BBC4); Jesus: rise to power (Natural Geographic); Ancient Discoveries (History Channel); Who were the Greeks? (BBC2); The Mystery of the X Tombs (BBC2/Nova); The Greatest Show on Earth (BBC4, in conjunction with the Open University). He has also presented a radio series for BBC Radio 4, Spin the Globe. Michael's most recent programme, Roman Britain from the Air, was aired on ITV in December 2014.

In this interview, I talk to him about his engagement with other disciplines within the humanities, his forthcoming book project, and his experiences writing and presenting TV and radio documentaries.

Keywords: Michael Scott; BBC; Classics; Ancient world; Roman Cyprus

Introduction

Walking along the grooves of well trodden paths, posing next to statues (or rather, positioning your face in the gap where the portrait of a statue is missing), clambering up the steps of a temple façade or sitting in the seats of an ancient theatre (health and safety permitting) are some of the many ways to engage with antiquity, bringing both the distant past *and* present to life. Playing 'tourist' allows one to observe, experience and imagine particular objects and spaces together rather than in isolation. Looking at inscriptions and their statues, votives, monumental dedications and buildings *in situ* draws together archaeology and ancient history. Furthermore, observing the deliberate arrangement of these artefacts, or at least how they might be re-arranged for the benefit of a visitor/tourist, along with the spaces in which they inhabited (be it on an ancient site or in a museum) encourages reflection upon ancient and modern engagement, interpretation, perception and experience of space. The intersection of these disciplines, and themes, lie at the heart of Michael Scott's investigations of the Greek and Roman worlds. For Michael, the sites of Delphi and Olympia have been crucial spaces of inspiration. For me, and my engagement with these themes to date, it has been the sanctuary of Paphian Aphrodite at Palaipahos (the modern day village of Kouklia) in Cyprus. In 2011, I made my first 'pilgrimage' to the sanctuary of Paphian Aphrodite at Palaipahos and it transformed the way in which I thought about 'space', particularly ancient religious spaces.

I can remember walking in the dry heat as I approached the ticket office of the site. I stopped inside briefly to enjoy the shade. I paid my fee to enter and paused for a moment before going further. On the other side of the door lay one of the greatest religious and political arenas of the island. I was full of excitement and anticipation to see this site for the first time. Widely revered as the 'home' of the great goddess Aphrodite and her cult centre on the island, the antiquity, authority and supremacy of the sanctuary and goddess was well known. After all, Cyprus was synonymous with the birth of Aphrodite and her worship. The discovery of votives and statue bases at the site indicate the prestige of the religious site and its local and regional importance as high profile visitors and notable figures were celebrated there with monuments. Furthermore, references to the sanctuary in ancient literary texts evoke its atmosphere, the smells, sounds, symbols and sights particular to its character. A particularly interesting account, provided by the Roman historian Tacitus, describes the future Emperor Titus' visit to the sanctuary to receive an oracle - which foretold the good fortune of his family - at a time of great political crisis. In this account, the sanctuary is presented as ancient and a place where quirky, local rituals and

traditions were upheld and practiced.[1] As I was on the verge of stepping foot into the sanctuary, these legends, anecdotes and myths were at the forefront of my mind. I had been aware of them for years and all had influenced my own imagination as to what the sanctuary would have looked, smelt and sounded like up until this point. How would the knowledge of these motifs and symbols have influenced the interpretation, experience and behaviour of other pilgrims, tourists, visitors, officials of empire, devotees of the goddess? How would I feel and behave within the sanctuary now that I was on its threshold?

I entered the sanctuary and my imagination went into overdrive. It had to because the scene that lay before me was bare. Having been stripped of its structures and treasures over the centuries by archaeologists and looters, either searching for treasure or building material to construct more modern edifices, all that remains are an eclectic collection of buildings, flora and fauna. Trees beaten by the sun, the foundations of the various building phases from the Roman period, an impressive monolithic slab dating back to the site's Mycenaean age and the buildings of the Lusignan Sugar Cane refinement factory – now the site's museum and store rooms are amongst the ruins. There is not a trace of the sanctuary as described by Tacitus in his description of Titus' visit. It is hard to imagine that it was a site of hyper activity, nevertheless, standing directly in the site and looking out across the near blank canvas of space that lay before me I was reminded even more about the multifaceted way in which 'space' could be experienced and perceived by any given person or groups of people at any given time - and over time. Furthermore, the role of memory and the past was fundamental to the transformation of space over time, whether the space in question was altered and renovated out of necessity, accidentally, or deliberately.

Since 2011, I have been a frequent 'pilgrim' to the sanctuary and it never ceases to amaze me how I have observed the quiet respectful behaviour of other visitors. The almost empty space still manages to evoke an atmosphere of great antiquity and inspires and commands particular behaviour from those who visit. The ancient mythological associations of the sanctuary continue to influence the landscape of Paphos and the behaviour of visitors at some of its famous landmarks. For instance, the beach that is celebrated as the place where the goddess was washed to shore having been born from the sea is decorated with hearts crafted out of stones – a reverend nod to the goddess and the identity of the island as the island of love.

[1] **Tacitus, *Historiae*, 2.2-4**. Cf. **Suetonius, *Divus Titus*, 5**.

The manipulation of space, how it has been perceived and experienced over time, to evoke particular emotions and reactions is nothing new. Investigating the organisation, manipulation and transformation of ancient spaces, particularly religious space, was a theme that drew me to Michael Scott's work. Michael has explored the well-documented religious sites of Delphi and Olympia – which would have attracted visitors seeking out oracles. More than this, like the sanctuary of Paphian Aphrodite, these sites became important arenas for the display of political power – locally and globally – for the expression of identity, local – collective – and that pertaining to the wider empire. The sites of these sanctuaries and how they were built up, described, inhabited, experienced, shaped over centuries is a fascinating aspect of human history to explore. Like the sanctuary of Paphian Aphrodite, and other sanctuaries located across ancient Cyprus, Delphi and Olympia present fascinating cultural melting pots and piecing together the often fragmented evidence that remains from this awe-inspiring and awesome period of history is part of the fun.

The Interview

EH: I would like to begin with a question about 'space' – a theme that is at the very heart of how you have approached some of your investigations of the ancient world. One thing that really strikes me with your work, and has influenced how I have conducted my own studies, is your exploration of how ancient spaces were used and experienced in antiquity. The way that the fluid and complex meaning of space, both private and public, is explored invariably throughout your publications is quite striking. Could you explain how you became to be interested in this theme?

MS: For the Classical World, space is part of a bigger thing which I would label a kind of 'archaeology of the senses'. I think it came into the study of the Greek and Roman worlds actually via the study of the prehistoric Aegean. So, in the era before texts when all people had to study was the archaeological record. This kind of Aegean prehistory was seen even then as a little bit the poor relation to the study of the Greek and Roman world where we are overflowing with texts that tell us about 'stuff'.

In Aegean prehistory, the monuments, the buildings, the remains have to speak for themselves. As such, people who focussed in that area had cast the net very wide, very early on to try to find theoretical approaches that would help them to interpret and understand those monuments. What they turned to was a sort of exploration of space that had been going on

in geography and anthropology over the past forty years. This had turned our understanding of space from something which is two-dimensional and static – you can put on a map and go 'that's it' – into an understanding of space as something which is three-dimensional, but which is fluid and constantly changing, *and* constantly being perceived in multiple ways at any one time as well as over time. Space [can be seen] as a fluid, social construct that you are actively involved in yourself, creating and changing, as much as being affected by it. So, little by little, as these ideas about space and monuments and place started to filter into the study of the prehistoric Aegean, they have been taken on board by people who work in more mainstream Greek and Roman periods, including myself.

When I first came to it when starting the PhD, I knew that I wanted to sit on the sort of history-stroke-archaeology boundary. [I knew] that I wanted to work within the Greek world and that I wanted to do something where you could show that the material culture had an active thing to say about the historical discourse in what has often been a very text orientated discourse in Greek history. And within that very kind of dictatorial text dictated discourse, because there are one or two key names that everyone refers to, we struggle in a way to get beyond the canvas that they draw of what this world was like. So while I was casting around for different places to focus on, Delphi came into my mind. Through discussions with others it became clear that on one hand this is a fantastic site from the point of view of resources. There is tons of 'stuff' there and it had by that stage been excavated by the French for nigh on a hundred years, so from my perspective lots of published material as well, which was very handy. At the same time, it was a site which, while it had been published and studied a lot, had *not* been thought about in these spatial terms. Yet, of course, was an important site for huge numbers of historical moments within Greek history.

Why did it attract me? I think because I have always been fundamentally interested in experience and perception. They are two words which are very difficult to define, that I think previous generations of scholars have been very uncertain about using and particularly for those involved in the art and archaeology of the ancient Greek world it has not been part and parcel of their approach to the material. We all know that studying art and archaeology in the Greek world has transformed from a sort of study of connoisseurship, if you like, from identification through to a study of function and now we are in a place where people are saying, 'what next?'. *That's* where space reacts to archaeology of the senses, this idea that actually if you start to think about how these things were understood within their context *through* the different senses that one can appreciate a place you get a whole different way of engaging with

this material. And material not just as 'art', wonderful works of art, but material as objects in people's lives that have meanings and the way those meanings change over time.

EH: One thing that I would like to reflect upon briefly is that you draw upon the very fact that we have archaeological records and catalogues, products of archaeological expeditions and all very necessary documents which enable us as historians to understand how sites existed and what their components were. Also, you have said that sometimes the presentation of this information in catalogue form has encouraged scholars to look at objects or buildings in isolation in the past. What you do in your studies is to pull all of those resources together very successfully to provide an overview of the site. One thing that influenced my research into Roman Cyprus was a chapter in your study of Delphi, which considered the organisation of religious sites, in particular how people would think about where monuments, honorific statues or otherwise, could be set up. Your work really does represent this new movement in how we look at archaeology and think about how spaces were experienced.

In terms of thinking about space, the key words and phrases that currently dominate our vocabulary include communal experience, cultural identity, collective identity and memory. I think that this vocabulary is reflective of the world in which we live in today, especially as we live in a digital age where everyone is connected somehow or another. With so many trends influencing the way in which we approach antiquity, what was it particularly about spatial studies that appealed to you the most over other theoretical models or themes that you could have drawn upon? Perhaps could you elaborate on some of the other influences that you have brought into your work other than the study of space?

MS: Ok, so I think there's a couple of points to make. One is I am absolutely certain that archaeological material needs to be presented, published, catalogued in the way that it is with the different sanctuaries or different site reports. I think that you are absolutely right that that does, and can, lead to over isolated, over mono-focused study of them. That is not just a trend of scholarship, that is actually part of the international trends of scholarship that different countries do scholarship in very different ways.

You are also absolutely right that there are always buzz words. The other great buzz word that was around when I was starting off with PhD work was 'identity'...'identity' and 'ethnicity'. They were sort of *everywhere*

and you could not write a proposal for anything unless it touched on ideas of 'what does this mean for identity and ethnicity?'. I knew that I did not want to sit squarely within that, but I also knew that space, experience and perception could well have a lot to do with identity and ethnicity, and presentation of identity is what I was interested in. That's what led to a lot of the material [I was] thinking about, 'well ok, *how* do we assume or understand intentionality behind the creation of monuments if we are going to say that these monuments have this message inherent in them and mean something?'. Then we have to say something about the degree to which that message is intentional or not.

So, obviously, the identity-ethnicity scholarship was a large part of the background to what I was working on. I think for me, why the experience of space won out as a main focus was its something which leaps across the gap between the ancient past and modern world. The more I got into it, the more I felt that my own way of engaging with the world we all live in, was changing as a result.

I like that dialogue between the modern world – the world we live in and the world that we study of two and a half thousand years ago. That when you walked into a space you suddenly started seeing it in a very different way because you were analysing the way that it was affecting you and that you were affecting it. That fluid social construct rather than the static and unchanging dynamic.

I will always remember a cartoon...I don't have a lot of enjoyment reading theory books, but I remember vividly that there was a cartoon in one of them and it was simply of two doors leading into toilets. Over one there was a very decorative architectural frame and a big sign that said 'MEN'. Over the other one there was a lesser frame with a sign that said 'BOYS'. And it simply said, 'Which do you choose?'. That really made it clear to me that how much the way space is characterised both through text and through architecture and art forces constant decisions back on you about how you identify yourself. That combined with suddenly realising when you walk around space how you are made to act and feel within a place.

So all of those things, just that interrelationship if you like, between what I was reading about and thinking about in relation to the ancient world affecting and interacting with how I was understanding my own world around me and vice versa. I think that, for *me,* made this a really fruitful and interesting aspect to focus on which, at the same time, we all need to do. And to a certain extent, I think space is getting to the point where it is becoming a big label for everything that it may be losing its value and verve in a way.

EH: This dilemma of what models can we turn to and how can we assess their accuracy in aiding us to study the ancient cultures, was what I was thinking of in relation to how you came to study space and the models that influenced you.

At the start of my PhD, I spent a long time reading various studies on theory and what was out there. There were so many things that appealed to me and some of them had very obvious limitations – while they worked for some case studies in the provinces they would not have necessarily worked for my case study...and I did not want to have a model or a theory where I felt pressured to make the evidence fit, for the sake of a trend, which would be the wrong way to approach scholarship. So I went for a much looser model inspired by other disciplines within the humanities.

My own research of Roman Cyprus sets up a very loose definition of 'insiders' (Cypriots) and 'outsiders' (non-Cypriots) and I felt that this framework could allow me that flexibility to explore the multifaceted nature of experience in a collective way and in terms of speaking about an individual and how they experienced living under Roman rule. In the case of Cyprus, we in fact find that Cypriots negotiate and articulate their power, status and identity through monuments using symbols and terms that could be interpreted as behaving as insiders and/or outsiders when looking at primary archaeological and literary evidence. For me, that flexibility of allowing for grey areas in our interpretation of ancient artefacts is key; an individual or collective experience or perception of identity or space, let's say, is always going to be something that is fluid and multifaceted. So that is why I was asking you that question because there are so many trends that can influence you.

MS: I think you are right. I took a very much similar tact that when you go into space and theory and start looking at it at the hardcore end, it gets very hardcore into things spatial syntax and all sorts of nodal diagrams that turns into what is now another big area of network theory and mapping relationships across space and time. I too, because I wanted to sit not squarely within archaeology but on this archaeology-history boundary, I wanted whatever I ended up writing to speak to historians and for those people to want to engage with the material culture. I don't think that is helped in many ways by encasing the material culture in extraordinarily difficult to understand and complex theories. That was partly behind the space and society book, when I followed up on Delphi and Olympia, it's saying, 'Hey look, historians! Let's have a look at a number of case studies where you can think about different kinds of space and not have to apply difficult, complex theories and create nodal diagrams and do all this sort of stuff. But just taking some basic principles

about space and what the experience and perception of space might mean for the understanding of material culture and actually do something interesting with the history as a result. If you want your work to speak to a wide audience within the academic world, let alone wider audiences out there, it needs to be approachable and engage-able with and show its value and applicability to as wide a different range of scholars and their interests as possible'.

EH: This leads quite nicely to the next thing that I would like to ask you – what is next for you?

MS: I think to a certain extent people who study the Greek and Roman worlds *have* to believe in interdisciplinarity and in a wider geographical focus. These worlds were not isolated countries as we understand them. They were constantly interacting and cultures who themselves were morphing and changing over time and space. So, to a certain extent I think academics and academic departments and the whole division of academic study in this area has led us to be a bit blinkered.

Why is it that departments study only Greek and Roman history and not other cultures within the Mediterranean, let alone anywhere else? Why aren't there more courses and focuses which allow for that interdisciplinary and cross-cultural study? Partly it is because to study them in 'one' in the first place requires a certain amount of specialisation to be able to engage with the material – and to do more than one is difficult enough, to do several is well nigh impossible. So there's the question of actual just ability to get in-depth and involved with these different cultures but I think it's an important thing to do more of.

I came to it through the study of Greek Religion, so having done Delphi in the PhD when I was a research fellow, through the material culture of Delphi, I got much more interested in the Greek religion as a process and did quite a lot of work thinking about the materiality of ritual around the Greek world. What became incredibly clear, particularly from sites like Delos, is that these are absolute melting pots of culture and cultural practices. In fact religion in the ancient Mediterranean is one of *the* most interdisciplinary, inter cultural, cross cultural – whatever term you want to use for it – aspects of their lives.

What the new project is doing is taking that one step further and combining that with my other sort of bug bear about how we study history, which is that we tend to study history in isolated periods. The way it was explained to me when I was at school is that the teacher

would literally say, 'Right lads, we are getting in a spaceship now and we are taking off and we are landing in 'X'. Now we are going to be in 'X' for a while and then right!...we are going back in our spaceship and heading over 'there''. So people end up with this very potted, weird kind of understanding of history, where you know a little bit about 'here' and a bit [about] over 'there' and [about] over 'there' – and I include myself in this – with very little understanding of how it all fits together.

EH: I am smiling and nodding because I have the same memories and experience of that at school.

MS: I think it's not a British thing or an epoch thing, I think it is pretty much an international thing because you have to define areas for focus, you have to define curriculums, you have to define what's the focus of the exam is going to be, etc. It's very hard to think of another way of doing it.

It was in 2012, around the time of the Olympics, when we were all coming together for a kind of international festival, thinking about different ways in which one could approach this problem and I came up with an idea called *Spin the Globe,* which we took to BBC Radio 4 – and is now in its second season – where we took famous dates in history and said, 'Ok, so we know about this one thing that is happening here, everyone knows about it, its stuck in your head, but what happens if we spin the globe and find out what else was happening around the world?' Now that is a half hour programme in which we try to 'spin the globe' to four-five other times to other places. Now that has a fascination factor just to put these parallel stories of history from around the world in some kind of comparison. That, I think, is in itself rewarding. But what you can't do in a half hour radio documentary is take that one step further and start to say, 'Ok, these things were all happening at the same time, but what does that do for our understanding of any one of them? What kind of approach to 'that' event or 'that' event can we have if we do it in the context of the global surround? How does our understanding of history change by trying to take a global perspective?'.

Now, within the academic world, this is nothing new. You can go to the library here in Warwick and you can find a whole section entitled Global History. There's a wide Blackwell volume or some sort of companion volume to Global History. It has *never* caught on in the mainstream as a sort of approach for history. Certainly not in the ancient world, although there have been sparks, if you like, of cross cultural comparison on a wider scale than simply saying, 'What's happening around the

Mediterranean?'. They have been in two particular places, one is in the history of medicine and the history of philosophy, particularly through the work of Professor Sir Geoffrey Lloyd, who has done long term comparisons between ancient Greek and Chinese thought.[2] The other increasingly has been in terms of Empire and that has been led by people like Walter Scheidel over in the States who looks at comparisons between the Roman Empire and the Chinese Han Empire, and looking at strategies and problems of 'Empire' in these cross cultural ways.[3]

The book project takes, if you like, *Spin the Globe* and situates it very much in the ancient world, and says, 'Ok, let's take a couple of key dates in the ancient world, see what else is happening around the ancient world. Particularly, let's try to bring together stuff which has a thematic unity to it.' So, there will be a chapter on politics for instance, which takes as its key date 508 BC and the invention of democracy in Athens. What else was happening in 508 BC? Well, you don't have to go very far because surprisingly, or not very surprisingly enough, the Roman Republic was supposedly founded in just the year before – 509. But, go a little bit further to China, for instance, and it just so happens that around 508 is exactly when Confucius is at the height of his office, developing his own ideas about politics and the perfect society as you have the republic emerging and democracy emerging in republican Italy and democratic Greece.

If you start to look at those three moments, and look at the before and after of those moments and how they develop, you can start to not just compare and contrast what republican government, democratic government, Confucian government looked like, but also think about what they were all each aiming for, what similar problems they faced and what different solutions did they decide to come up with and what was the reasoning behind the necessity for those different kinds of solutions, what did they in turn try to prioritise and that sort of thing?

Equally, I think by uniting those moments, there is a really interesting story. Today, we are all about democracy. We love it, but when you look at the United States and its terminology for its system it is all Roman republican. In China, Confucius has, if you like now in the twenty-first century, almost a democratic tinge to its understanding. And so flagging up those three moments, that all started at the same point in time, actually makes you think, 'what have we done with them since then?' That is almost as important a story as [looking at] what was happening at the time [when they were formed] because each have been through three incredible rollercoaster rides to emerge in their twenty-first

[2] Some recent publications include: **Lloyd** (**2004**); (**2005**); and (**2006**).
[3] Cf. **Scheidel ed.** (**2009**).

century usage and no doubt they will continue change. So, the politics chapter for this new book will look at these three moments in the ancient world, and how they compare and contrast, and what looking at them in parallel offers us as a way of understanding each individually. But also springs the question of how have they come to have a place in today's society.

Military warfare is another chapter. That is going to take the moment of 218 BC and Hannibal's crossing of the Alps with his elephants – you know, one of the kind of dramatic warfare moments that we love because it is just so bizarre in its style. When you look at warfare around about 218 BC what you realise is that for everywhere from Spain across the whole of the Mediterranean, across the whole of Asia Minor, across the whole of central Asia indeed all the way to China in a continuous sweep across that entire vast span of land, pretty much every world and empire is in seismic military shift at that same moment in time. Going all the way to China for instance to 202 when the Han empire is developing and is coming to the fore.

That chapter looks at not only how these worlds are experiencing their military shift, *but* – in a different way to the politics chapter – how they are directly connected. Actually, it's what's happening 'here' that is having a domino effect, if you like, that is making something happen over 'here'. Or, because this is happening over 'here', that helps explain that decision over 'there'. So a different kind of connection, rather than an academic one, in which the Greeks and the Romans are being compared and contrasted with Confucius. This is the chapter in which there are direct links, so to understand one bit of history you *have* to really, to get the full picture, be understanding that bit of history over there.

Then the third chapter will look at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge and that moment of the beginning of Rome's conversion to Christianity and looking at how that compares, around about the same time, with a shift in the nature of Hindu worship in India and also the introduction of Buddhism to China. So looking at *how* different cultures experienced and determined a significant change in religious attitudes all around about the same time.

EH: How would you go about explaining the political and religious shifts that occur at similar times across the globe in antiquity? It cannot just be a coincidence - there must be something else at play here?

MS: There is a very delicate balance where you have to place yourself between talking about big tectonic movements and giving space and importance to smaller, more localised seismic shifts. Where you draw that balance is absolutely critical because the moment you try to force your evidence into the whole world being in an 'axial age' of change you are bound to come up to exceptions to that. Equally, just saying that everyone is doing their own different thing, that there are *no* connections between them, is wrong.

In the politics chapter, between Rome and Greece there are oodles of connections. The very fact that they come up with their date of 509 is because it is Greek historians who work it out from Greek Olympiad dates to put themselves in parallel – because they *want* to be seen in parallel. How you then relate that to Confucius is more difficult. We do not know about any direct connection between the Chinese world and the Mediterranean world in that period. By the time of the Roman Empire, they are sending official ambassadors to one another, you have got the whole Silk Route going – *there* is a more obvious and real connection. So, in some ways I would want to have my cake and eat it; I would like to say that *yes* isn't this interesting that at the same moment in time you have got three big political shifts happening that have developed ideas which have fundamentally shaped our world. Republicanism, Democracy and Confucianism have been shaping large parts of our world for centuries. Why that's happened and how that has happened is a very interesting story which people *should* be much more aware about and if the chapter can get that across, then you can sit somewhere in the middle between saying 'yes, there does seem to be something big here', but we are not saying the whole world is in change, each individual place does have its own dynamics going on as well. That, I think, is the place that we have to put ourselves.

EH: This is a piece that is going to be greatly anticipated!

MS: By me as well! It is great fun to write. What I have been extremely heartened by is the welcome that this kind of approach has received. When we do the *Spin the Globe* radio programme everyone *gets* the idea, everyone *wants* to participate. We get academics on from different specialisms and they go, 'oh, you know, this is a really great opportunity to think about things in a wider perspective.' And equally, with the research for this book, I have found that people are very willing to engage with you and give you their time to discuss and talk about these different problems and issues. So I am hopeful that it will be seen as a

interesting and novel check, if you like, on the way that we think about and study history which has an application not just for academic study, but actually for the way we talk about history in the public arena and the way we teach history at undergraduate level.

EH: In discussing your recent and forthcoming projects, you have indicated the value of studying the ancient world. I want to now ask you more directly, what are the benefits of this field of research?

MS: I think the answer that does not get given enough is that it is in and of itself a *fascinating* period of history and a fascinating part of our human story. I don't think we are courageous enough in making *that* argument. I think we too often think that we have to make it [studying the ancient world] relevant to our modern lives, that it has to somehow influence the way in which we engage with our world in a direct and obvious way that many other subjects can do.

EH: Yes, and I think that we have become too burdened over the last ten years or so with the vocabulary of 'worth' and 'value' in trying to justify why we should study something that to some it might seem like it does not have any relevance at all because it is situated in such a distant past.

You have already mentioned the BBC radio series Spin the Globe...how did you became involved in writing and presenting TV and radio documentaries?

MS: It was partly by design and partly by accident. When I finished the PhD and started as a research fellow I had never really intended to be an academic. At every stage I got hooked back in to just do one more...*oh I'll just do an MA*...*oh I'll just do a PhD*...*I'll just do the research fellowship*...

I knew at that stage that if I was going to do this job, I wanted to spend a considerable portion of my time as an academic explaining to as wide a number of people as would listen why it is that I thought it was worthwhile studying the subject that I do. In my head that is intrinsically part of what being an academic should be about. So the question was how to go about doing that and there are lots of ways in which you *can* do it and all of them bring their own enjoyment. I was doing school talks, writing blogs, writing columns for the newspapers and magazines, things like that. I also did a lot of guiding on cruises, I was the inaugural guide on the *easycruise* tour of Ancient Greece and had great fun doing it.

Absolutely loved it. At the same time I said, 'I enjoy writing in different registers.' I find that quite refreshing to move from one register to another. And so I said, 'How about writing a popular history book?' So in 2008/9 started to write the first book *From Democrats to Kings* which was a wonderful process to write because I was writing alongside the Delphi and Olympia CUP book. And then in 2008, I saw an email that went around saying, 'oh, we are doing this TV programme for the history channel, we need to do an interview with someone about spying, does anyone know anything about ancient spying?' At the time, I knew a little bit about some of *the* great stories there from the Greek and Roman worlds about spying.

EH: As you do!

MS: As you do!...It's the stories like the slave having the message tattooed on his head, then his hair re-growing and him being sent as a secret message sender. Some of the stuff that I was in fact writing for the *Democrats to Kings* book about the fourth century, particularly when you look at some of the military tactic manuals that survive from that period – they are all about how do you get secret messages in and out from a besieged city and things like that [for example,] where you write a message on a goat bladder skin in pen and ink when it is blown up with water, then you take the water out you put it in a little flask filled with oil, both inside and outside the bladder, the message is completely invisible. Then the person gets the bladder and inflate it so they can read the message again. You know, its genius, genius stuff.

I started off doing what they call 'talking head interviews' where you are the experts who turn up, they record a talk with you for two hours and then use about thirty seconds of it. So I thought, this is great, I want to be more involved in the programme, I want to be able to give more of a voice, a direction, the story is one that I am more in agreement with. And so slowly over time as you get known and are able to give people good interviews that are usable and watchable on television, they come back for more. I started to do more on site-location. Then in 2010, I got my first author/presenter programme with BBC 4, which was about Delphi. And that was an absolutely wonderful experience because, from the beginning of the programme, from its very seed to termination, I was involved in telling the story and getting to narrate it and explore it in my own words and in the way I wanted to do it. The other exciting thing about that – that I continue to enjoy from doing television – is that you bring a certain amount of knowledge and understanding of the subject.

What you are not an expert in is how to tell that story in words and pictures and sound ...

EH: ... All at the same time ...

MS: ... All at the same time, within an hour format, through a box where you want people who are tired at the end of the day, and they have got a million other things on their minds, to pay attention to. The people who work in TV *are* the experts in that. So actually, it's a fascinating dialogue when you are saying, '*This* is the story. How do we tell this story to work for this medium?' Again, it's a different kind of register, it's a different kind storytelling, which I found particularly enjoyable and interesting just as a process to go through as opposed to anything else. So that has continued to work with the BBC.

Then you find that working on different channels, you have different kinds of things to develop. So recently, I have worked with ITV for the first time. That again is a very different kind of thing. For the American channels, for National Geographic, for the History Channel, again, very different styles of telling stories. For me, it's not about 'dumbing-down', you are not 'dumbing-down' the story, but you *are* having to think about how to explain and get across complicated ideas in a way that does not presume previous knowledge. *That's* the goal and if you can do that in a format which, is at its basic level, has to be entertaining – television is an entertainment format as much as it is an informative format – then, *that's* the goal and I enjoy doing that. I think it is a worthwhile thing to do and again I think there is a wave of a desire for expert-authored programmes on all sorts of different subjects, and I think that it is great that there are a number of different voices out there telling the stories because everyone tells the story in a different way, everyone has a different personality.

EH: Do you think attitudes are changing towards involvement in these kinds of outputs, widening participation by disseminating information to wider audiences through TV and radio?

MS: I think it is changing quite dramatically. I won't lie, when I first started out doing this stuff in 2007/2008, not just about TV but even about writing popular access books, I was advised by a number of different people, 'Don't do it. For your academic career, don't do it'.

I think that you are never more vulnerable to being taken advantage of by the TV world than when you first start out in it. Which is why I think I would have desperately have loved, and which thankfully is now coming more into play, is training at that first stage in an academic career of how to engage with TV and the media more widely. As I said, I was advised not to do it because it was said that it would reflect badly on my status as an academic ...

EH: ...that you weren't perhaps 'serious' enough?

MS: Yes, exactly. I think that can happen. I think things have changed quite dramatically in the last three or four years: led in part by things like the development of impact and REF; led by big grant applications now demanding to know about public dissemination at the very outset of the project and it being a fundamental part of the project itself; led by demands now for open access for material; led by this wave of desire for expert-authored books that people from top Professors downwards have got involved in; led by the number of expert-authored TV programmes.

I think what is exciting is that disseminating academic knowledge about the ancient world to the public is nothing new. The model however, was always – and I think that this has been true up until very recently – build up your academic career, then when you were established as a professor you turned outwards and started talking to the wider world. I think that's a missed opportunity and what I wanted to do for *me* was to have a career where those two were intermixed from the very beginning. I think *now* because our world in academia demands that we take more account of impact from the 'get-go', we are now getting more training from the 'get-go' for young researchers as to how to engage with these worlds and how to do it safely – if that's the word! I think that this will encourage people to see it as part of being an academic throughout their careers, that this is an option to them, and I think that there are very strong and interesting advantages to it being so.

At the moment, the way that the impact system works is you write a piece of academic work which is published and *then* that has impact on the public and it is a very uni-directional thing. What I found, is that from writing the popular access audience books, from doing the lectures, from doing the TV programmes, actually my mind has been turned to focus on things that I had not been focussing on academically, in my core academic research, but which I have gone, 'oh, that is really interesting'. So doing those bits of outreach and engagement have actually led me to want to go and research something particular over 'here' from an

academic standpoint. So I see it for myself, very much a two way street where academic work leads to impact but doing engagement work and impact also leads to academic interest and development. I would like to see us move towards that, recognising that virtuous circle rather than seeing it as a one way street.

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