

*Edited by Alice Merry, Rebecca Pound and Francesca Kapfer-Gill*

## The Munich Exchange

By Maeve O'Dwyer

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, I was part of a group of students from Cambridge who travelled to Munich on an annual exchange with German students also studying Classics. I think I can speak for the entire group when I say that we had an amazing time!



The Students

The students we met were wonderful and each one of us had a designated person to stay with. They organised for us to have a tour around their extensive cast gallery, and brought us to all the Classical sights in the area. For those who understood German, there were lectures, and for those who didn't, they were free to roam around Munich. There were many exhibits nearby, such as Classical pottery, sculpture and the Kandinsky modern art exhibition. We visited the Christmas markets countless times and even went on a trip to Salzburg and a more sombre visit to Dachau.

Snow fell on Munich, and we had great fun with it! We even went ice-skating together in Munich city centre. The Germans laughed at us for getting so excited when it snowed again that week. We had had an amazing time and a wonderful Christmas holiday, not to mention much shopping to bring home!

On February 28<sup>th</sup> the German students came to Cambridge and stayed in various colleges. We were all thrilled to see each other again and this time it was us who led the way for sight-seeing. They very much enjoyed their stay and liked London so much they went twice!

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The highlight for all of us, Cambridge and Munich students alike, was undoubtedly the tour Robin Osborne was kind enough to give us around King's College Chapel, including the roof! The part where we climbed over the triangular lead roof to see the views from the other side of the chapel was great fun and accompanied by much good-natured shrieking.

For anyone who thinks a week in Munich having a great time with wonderful people sounds like their cup of tea, keep an eye on the Faculty notice board next term for your chance!



On King's Chapel Roof

## Interview with the Undergraduate Reps, Fran and James

By Maeve O' Dwyer

Our Undergraduate Representatives, Fran and James, kindly agreed to an interview in order to let the students know a little more about themselves and what they do.

**So what made you want to be Undergraduate Reps?**

**Fran-** Mainly because it sounded interesting and because representation is important. Also, it lets me be altruistic and a bit nosy. I like to see how things work.

**James-** Well, I wanted to play to my strengths. I'm rubbish at sport and music and stuff, but I am good at talking, especially in a way I probably shouldn't and to people I probably shouldn't!

**Do you enjoy it?**

**Fran-** Yes, it can be very interesting. Sometimes I resent it a little time wise, but it lets you appreciate how the Faculty works from a different viewpoint and you get to see people fighting in meetings!

**What exactly do you do?**

**Fran-** We attend meetings, everything from different parts of the Faculty getting together or presenting reports, such as IT or Teaching, to the Faculty Board meetings. Before the Faculty Board meetings we usually meet up with Malcolm Schofield, who is the Chair, and discuss the agenda with him. Everything must be approved by the Faculty Board so the meetings are quite interesting! Our aim at the meetings is to bring up any issues brought to us by students, and also to represent the undergraduates in any issue which we feel may affect them.

**What have you achieved as Undergraduate Reps?**

**Fran-** We synchronized all the clocks in the Faculty! We're also intending to do more outreach work with the Cast Gallery. We think that putting photos of all the works online would encourage more people to come, and also serve as a useful resource for students of art and archaeology.

**James-** I'm really interested in making the Faculty more environmentally friendly and we've been working with Stephen Howard to make that happen. It can take a while for things to change here but a systematic look at how to improve sensibly is underway. I suggested those little signs in the common room about putting the computers on standby and Stephen put them up. We were also behind making lecture notes available online.

**Have many students contacted you with concerns?**

**James-** Yes, quite a few! The lecture notes online and the synchronization of the clocks were issues that were brought to us. We've also been contacted about the Part 1A course changing next year and the confusion

over the amount of work needed to be done before undergrads arrive. The standard of lecturing is brought up often, which the faculty is already very dedicated to maintaining at as high a standard as possible, hence the feedback forms.

**Would you recommend students run for Undergraduate Rep?**

**James-** Yes, you get to know the people running the faculty better.

**Fran-** It's very interesting and reps are essential because often when people are unhappy with some aspect of the faculty, they don't realise either that the Faculty might be unaware of the issue, or that there are good reasons for it which no-one has explained to the student.

**What skills do you need?**

**James-** Not to be intimidated by scary people!

**Do you think that people should be allowed to run together?**

**Fran-** I don't think it's a contentious enough position to matter. I think it's great that James and I are in different years, because we have different viewpoints.

**James-** I agree. I'm representing students even though I've never sat an exam here, whereas Fran has, but I can remember what issues affect incoming students the most. I think it would be great to have a representative from each year.

**Is there anything you would like to change in the faculty?**

**Fran-** I think that the workload for second year courses needs to be made clearer. The difficulty level can vary quite a bit depending on the course, for example the Second Sophistic course seems to be very hard.

**Finally, have you any message for the students?**

**Fran-** If there is any problem or issue even vaguely troubling you, just email us! We meet regularly and can bring it up at the next SSJC meeting, or do something sooner like email Holly Kinnear about it or explain the reasons behind whatever it is.

**James-** Good luck in your exams!

**Fran-** Good luck!

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## Andromaque by Jean Racine

Reviewed by Ploy Radford

I approached this play with mild apprehension as my French is somewhat limited to ‘Où est sont les toilettes?’ and ‘Parlez-vous Anglais?’ and I doubted that either of those phrases would turn up in this story.

What Jean Racine’s *Andromaque* does feature though is a fast-paced exploration of the relationship between passion and control, with well-known classical characters as Racine’s guinea pigs.

The play opens with the arrival of Orestes at the court of Pyrrhus: he has been sent by Greece to demand that Pyrrhus hand Astyanax over. Pyrrhus at first refuses in the futile hope that this will finally win the heart of the grieving Andromache, with whom he is besotted, much to the chagrin of the neglected Hermione. Orestes, who is himself passionately in love with Hermione, hopes that this turn of events will mean he can finally win Hermione. However, things do not go according to plan, and what follows is a spider’s web of manipulation as each character tries to achieve their changing desires.

Predictably the surtitles did not do Racine’s language justice and were distracting; as was the over-acting of a

couple of characters. In particular, the shrill tantrums and exaggerated flirting of Camille Japy’s Hermione made me wonder how she attracted Orestes, let alone manipulated him.

The male members of the cast, however, gave a strong performance: Christophe Grégoire (Pyrrhus) in particular was an electrifying presence on the stage, radiating power; Xavier Boiffier’s Orestes harrowingly communicated his passion and despair, whilst Mathieu Spinosi (Astyanax) dealt well with his role as a young boy, sometimes bringing humour to the action.

The staging was excellent with dramatic lighting and inspired use of confetti. But what I particularly liked was the meta-theatrical decision to have all the actors seated on the stage throughout the play. The consistent presence of all the characters, regardless of whether they were directly involved in a particular scene, asked the audience to consider who, if anyone, was truly in control and demanded that we analysed each motive more closely.

The production overcame admirably the difficulty of surtitles and created a visually arresting performance that captured the audience’s attention from the start and refused to let go.

## Euripides’ Bacchae

Reviewed by Rebecca Pound

It’s not often that ancient Greek plays come to Cambridge, much less ones in the original language. So, by all rights, it should be quite an event (for classicists at least!). And this critically acclaimed production of Euripides’ *Bacchae* that has toured across Europe and the States certainly *was* an event. In fact, its only real flaw was the decision to stage it for just *one* matinee performance out of term. You really could have blinked and missed it.

The *Bacchae* recounts the gory vengeance that Dionysus takes on those who refuse to believe he really is a god. He drives the women of Thebes, including his own aunts, into an ecstatic frenzy and eventually tricks them into tearing his cousin Pentheus apart - the perfect blend of tragedy and horror. It’s an object lesson in the perils of crossing the gods, yet it also questions the moral superiority of the gods to humans. But before this turns into a literature essay...

In an age where it’s fashionable to ‘update’ the classics and drive home to your audience just how relevant Euripides remains (no, really), it was almost refreshing to see a production of Greek tragedy that aimed for the traditional and the authentic. A particularly inspired stroke was to set the choral odes to music, with the help of instruments played by chorus members. Simple yet

effective, it dramatically underlined the mysticism of the exotic Dionysiac rites that are the lynchpin of the play.

That’s not to say that the production didn’t include its own modern twist. An unusual move that really paid off was the choice of an all-female cast, reversing ancient Greek tradition. And what fantastic actresses they were. Wild-haired and wild-eyed, they brought the frenzy of bacchic rituals to life - or else, Pentheus’ haughty curiosity, or Dionysius’ calm calculation.

However, I do have one piece of advice if you’re going to see a play in a foreign language: read the play first. I thought I would manage well enough with just the English surtitles, which worked fine for the first two minutes, but only sporadically from thereon in. In fact, the whole of the first dramatic messenger’s speech was summed up as: “I am afraid to speak.”

Yet it really was an inspired production. It was successful both in its interesting directorial choices and its excellent cast who threw themselves into the harrowing tragedy and filled every *oimoi* with emotion. But most importantly of all, they allowed Euripides’ skill as a tragedian to shine forth and ensured it was a story their audience will not be forgetting in a hurry.

The director’s website intimates that a production of *Troades* is planned for later this year or next; it can only be hoped that this too eventually comes to Cambridge.

## Calendar of Events

### SHAH 'ABBAS

#### THE REMAKING OF IRAN

Reading Room, British Museum  
19<sup>th</sup> February - 14<sup>th</sup> June

### PHEDRE

By Jean Racine

In a version by Ted Hughes

National Theatre  
4<sup>th</sup> June - 7<sup>th</sup> August

PHEDRE will also be broadcast to cinema screens around the world by NT Live on 25<sup>th</sup> June.

For more details go to [nationaltheatre.org.uk/ntlive](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk/ntlive)

### EURIPIDES

#### TROJAN WOMEN

Peterhouse Scholars' Garden  
16th, 17th and 18th June at 4pm

### HERODOTEANS' GARDEN PARTY

Memorial Court front lawns  
Clare College  
19th June, 2.30-5pm

### SHAKESPEARE

#### TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre  
12<sup>th</sup> July - 20<sup>th</sup> September

### EURIPIDES

#### HELEN

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre  
World Premiere of a new version  
by Frank McGuinness  
2<sup>nd</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> August

### MOCTEZUMA

#### AZTEC RULER

Reading Room, British Museum  
24<sup>th</sup> September 2009 -  
24<sup>th</sup> January 2010

## Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran

By Aaron Masters

Yes, it's not classical - by about a millennium in fact, even if we're being generous with our dates - but following on from the review of *Babylon: Myth and Reality* in our last issue I thought I would have a look at what the British Museum has in store at the moment.

*Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* tells the story of the intelligent and ruthless ruler of Iran from 1587 to 1629 (CE, alas). It continues the BM's focus on "great leaders", following on from similar exhibitions on Hadrian and Qin Shihuangdi (of Terracotta Army fame). And like those earlier exhibitions it makes excellent use of what was the Round Reading Room in the centre of the museum. The wooden partitions ergonomically guide visitors through the various exhibits, and provide space for contextual information to be displayed large enough to be read even if groups of tourists want to stand and stare (as they all too often do).

The designers of the exhibition have done a great job of putting the history of Iran into a broader context (such as economic links with Elizabethan England) and, as a newcomer to the subject, I found these explanations particularly valuable.

As for the exhibits themselves, however, I must admit to having been less than impressed. Compared to the previous incarnations of the series, there was little of the "wow-factor" that could grab the interest of the yet-to-be enthusiast and, more importantly, justify the £10 price-tag. While individual pieces were indeed beautiful (the examples of blue-china imported to Iran from China in particular stood out for me), the accompanying descriptions were sparse (often only giving a heading and a date) and as always difficult to read due to the ever-static crowds. Perhaps as a classicist I'm biased, but to me the Hadrian exhibition smacked of better planning and more money spent.

Another important feature of all these exhibitions is the inherent element of propaganda. It is particularly noticeable in this case: *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* is presented in association with the Iran Heritage Foundation. Despite current political tensions, the whole exhibition has a pervasive hint of "Come to Isfahan! Spent lots of money!" (Not that I'm condemning the sentiment, as it has succeeded in convincing me at least of the beauty of a city about which I knew so little).

In the end then, the exhibition would indeed serve as an impressively thorough collection for those interested in the history of Islam and/or the Middle-East. However, for the casual observer, a similar experience could probably be had from the free and already impressive permanent collections on the subject at the BM.

We have Aztecs to look forward to later on in the year, the BM tells us; but for now *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* will continue to invite your attention until the 14<sup>th</sup> of June.

Good luck in your exams and enjoy the summer!

Contributors to this issue: Maeve O'Dwyer, Francesca Kapfer-Gill, Ploy Radford, Rebecca Pound,  
Alice Merry and Aaron Masters

Please get in touch if you would like to write an article, contribute a photo or get involved.  
Email: [akm53@cam.ac.uk](mailto:akm53@cam.ac.uk) Join our Facebook group: CAMBRIDGE CLASSICS NEWSLETTER

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