



# POLYTROPOS AJAX

*Roots, Evolution and Reception of a  
Multifaceted Hero*

8 December 2021

Trinity College Dublin

## PROGRAMME

9.00-9.15 Registration

9.15. Welcome by Professor Monica Gale  
(Trinity College Dublin)

9.20. Introductory remarks by Dr Silvia Speriani  
(Trinity College Dublin)

### AJAX THE GREEK

9.30-10.20. Professor Giampiero Scafoglio  
(Université Côte d'Azur)

#### **A Primitive and yet Civilized Hero. Further Observations on Ajax in the *Iliad***

Respondent: Dr Sophie Bocksberger  
(University of Oxford)

10.20-11.10. Professor Glenn W. Most (Scuola  
Normale Superiore)

#### **Sophocles' Ajax between Achilles, Hector, and Odysseus**

Respondent: Dr Francesco Morosi (Università  
di Pisa)

Coffee/tea break

11.30-12.20. Professor Anna Anguissola  
(Università di Pisa)

#### **A Hero through his Objects. The Construction of Ajax's Image**

Respondent: Dr Robinson Krämer (Universität  
Rostock)



Lunch

### ROMAN AJAX(ES)

13.40-14.30. Professor Sophia Papaioannou  
(The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)

#### **Ajax and the Reception of the '*Alius Achilles*' Theme in the Latin Epic Tradition**

Respondent: Dr Silvia Speriani (Trinity College Dublin)

14.30-15.20 Professor Maria Jennifer Falcone  
(Università di Pavia)

#### **Hero, Antagonist and Cousin: Some Remarks on Ajax Telamonius in the *Ilias Latina***

Respondent: Mr. George Prekas (Trinity College Dublin)

coffee/tea break

### AJAX'S AFTERLIFE

15.40-16.30. Professor Fiona Macintosh  
(University of Oxford)

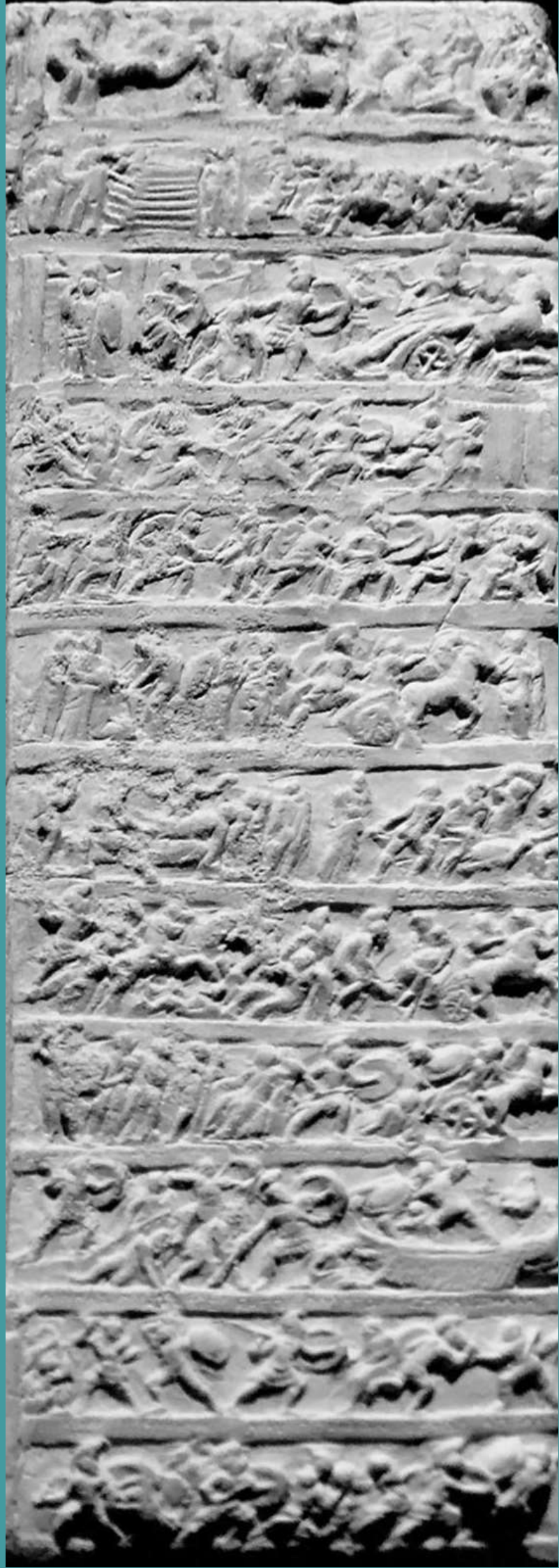
#### **On Staging or not Staging Sophocles' *Ajax***

Respondent: Dr Estelle Baudou (University of Oxford)

16.30-17.10 Professor Ellen McLaughlin  
(Barnard College)

#### **Three Thousand Years of the Thousand-Yard Stare. Readings from *Ajax in Iraq***

17.10 Concluding remarks by Professor Stephen Harrison  
(University of Oxford)



# POLYTROPOS AJAX

## ROOTS, EVOLUTION AND RECEPTION OF A MULTIFACETED HERO

### ABSTRACTS

Professor Giampiero Scafoglio

Professor of Latin Language and Literature at the Côte d'Azur University

#### A Primitive and yet Civilized Hero. Further Observations on Ajax in the *Iliad*

My talk will start with a summary of the arguments developed in the first chapter of my book on Ajax, aimed at demonstrating the provenance of this character from the earliest phase (close to the Mycenaean world) in the stratified structure of the *Iliad*. However, taking a retrospective look on my book, I realize that the diachronic processes of construction of the Homeric text (the finding of the earliest origin of Ajax) has taken over the synchronic study of the character, which would highlight the individual and innovative contribution(s) of the reworking poet(s). Yet, Ajax's specificity cannot be understood, without considering all layers of his composite portrait, including the final work of integration and smoothing. For this purpose, first I will focus on the 'connecting scene' (the exchange of the weapons) that concludes the duel between Ajax and Hector, acting as a hinge between this episode (remain of an ancient song) and the book VII of the *Iliad*. Then, I will analyse Ajax's mode of communication, which bears clear signs of archaism and seems yet to confirm the originary 'otherness' of the hero in relation to his peers; but I will show how Ajax's primitivism is reworked and reinterpreted accordingly as a 'distinctive brand' and even a temperamental resource, which sometimes gets to make him look – as paradoxical as it may seem – extraordinarily modern.

Professor Glenn W. Most

Professor of Greek Philology (retired) at the Scuola Normale Superiore

#### Sophocles' Ajax between Achilles, Hector, and Odysseus

In Sophocles' *Ajax*, the hero's traumatic defeat for the arms of Achilles triggers an acute crisis of personal identity that leads to an episode of temporary hallucination and insanity and ends in his suicide. How can Ajax, Sophocles, and the audience reconstruct his traumatized identity? The Homeric and post-Homeric epic tradition offers at least three pertinent models for a heroic identity, Achilles, Hector, and Odysseus. Ajax might in principle have chosen the alternatives provided by all three of these other heroes; but Ajax cannot be other than he is. Sophocles employs a complex web of intertextual references in order to establish the grandeur, and the limits, of Ajax's version of heroism.

Professor Anna Anguissola  
Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of Pisa

### A Hero through his Objects. The Construction of Ajax's Image

By interrupting the pictorial field's continuity as meaningful additions to either an individual figure or the space around it, attributes are essential to identify characters in a composition, describe their personality, and characterise places and situations. The iconographic tradition about Ajax relies, in a way that is unparalleled in the Greek and Roman visual culture, on the potential of objects (weapons, statues, altars, and tools of daily life) and landscape to convey the sense of action and states of mind. The versatility of Ajax's personality and the fundamental ambiguity of episodes from his story require deep engagement, on the part of the artist, with the dimension of time and the visual tools that may assist in qualifying permanent/temporary states. By focusing on a small set of case studies, the paper discusses the role of objects in the construction of Ajax's image, thus highlighting significant changes in the character's visual tradition. In doing so, the paper offers new insights into the broader debate about attributes and parergonality in the Greek and Roman figural arts.

Professor Sophia Papaioannou  
Professor of Latin Literature at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

### Ajax and the Reception of the 'Alius Achilles' Theme in the Latin Epic Tradition

Two elements in Ajax's Greek literary biography, his claim to the succession of Achilles and his madness and suicide, gave forth intelligent treatments in Augustan epic. In Ovid, *met.* 13.1-398, an episode that invests in the studied recollection of the 'Judgment of the Arms' to make a statement on metapoetics, Ajax and Ulysses argue their respective cases by reinterpreting the archaic epic tradition in different ways. Ajax's more traditional (accurate) recollection proves to be the wrong strategy.

Subtler is Ajax's reception in the *Aeneid*, beyond the acting of Dido, in at least three other episodes, and most notably, in *Aeneid* 5, in the boxing match between Entellus and Dares, where the performance of Entellus is informed by Ajax's role in the duel between Hector and Ajax in *Iliad* 7, and Ajax's participation in the *athla* of *Iliad* 23. By means of its placement in the book that has been characterized as a *mis-en-abyme* of the epic overall (Galinsky 1968), and in an episode that dramatizes an athletic competition (a conspicuously metapoetical trope), Ajax's intrusion underscores the significance of the '*alius Achilles*' theme in the construction of Aeneas' epic performance.

Professor Maria Jennifer Falcone  
Professor of Latin Literature at the University of Pavia

### Hero, Antagonist and Cousin: Some Remarks on Ajax Telamonius in the *Ilias Latina*

The author of the *Ilias Latina* – a literary complex epitome likely composed during the Neronian time – represents Ajax Telamonius in a very peculiar way. Not surprisingly, during Achilles' absence, he is first of all the best war heroes among the Greeks, brave and strong enough to face Hector, the most important figure of the poem. The key passage concerning Ajax is the duel followed by a dialogue at vv. 588-630: here, he is astonishingly presented as the son of Hesione, and therefore as Hector's cousin (a detail which is found in the *IL* for the first time, and later imitated by Late Antique authors). Mostly every other passage recalls or anticipates this moment. The intra-textual allusions highlight the kinship, indirectly invite readers to further compare other family members (Tecmessa ~ Andromacha; Eurysaces ~ Astyanax; Telamon ~ Priamos; Hesione ~ Hecuba) and doing so to recognise the greatness of Hector, and therefore of the Romans. Moreover, the author of the epitome 'translates' Homer by choosing words and expressions charged with further literary meanings related to the future of the character, thanks to very fine intertextual allusions to Ovid's *Armaurum Iudicium* (*met.* 13).

Professor Fiona Macintosh  
Professor of Classical Reception at the University of Oxford

### On Staging or not Staging Sophocles' *Ajax*

Scholarship often has considerable impact on a production (theatre directors regularly invite an academic into the rehearsal room). But performances also shape scholarship in powerful ways and the history of performances of Sophocles' *Ajax* is no exception here. It was in the wake of the wars in Vietnam, and then Afghanistan and Iraq, that the ancient Ajax began to be understood in performance in ways not previously recognised. This chapter examines the patchy performance reception of Sophocles' *Ajax* in antiquity, the early modern period, during its academic revivals following the Cambridge production of 1882, and then following its post-1980s rediscovery. The focus will be on that thorny question of staging the suicide and Peter Sellars' landmark production of 1986 will provide the main case study.



Professor Ellen McLaughlin

Actress, Playwright, Teacher of Playwriting at Barnard College of Columbia University

Three Thousand Years of the Thousand-Yard Stare. Readings from *Ajax in Iraq*

My play, *Ajax in Iraq*, was originally written for the graduate acting students at A.R.T. Institute at Harvard at the height of the American military's presence in Iraq in 2008. I will be reading excerpts and speaking about the process of writing it using material collected from several sources at the time, particularly interviews with veterans and their families. The play weaves together an adaptation of Sophocles' play about a great warrior's humiliation at the hands of his commanders, his consequent berserking and suicide, with a parallel modern-day tragedy about a female American soldier serving in Iraq. A modern chorus speaks directly to us, their material based on interviews conducted with soldiers and civilians, articulating the confusion and suffering that are the inevitable products of war. Athena, goddess of war, coolly presides over the whole piece with a sly, sadistic glint. The play engages with the Sophocles text, letting the modern and the ancient stories resonate against each other in the timeless human struggle to make sense of war.

Poster images:

*Tabula Iliaca capitolina*

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*Ajax the Great*, by Andrew Walaszek

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