

Conference Report

The Hercules Project conference Celebrating Hercules in the Modern World took place 7th-9th July in Leeds, with 32 delegates in attendance. A further 5 delegates took part through the virtual conference package, with audio recordings of papers, handouts and PowerPoint slides being made available online.



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Delegate Breakdown

Nearly two thirds of delegates were speakers (including two virtual delegates), accounting for 25/39 delegate places (64%). A number of speakers came from the same institutions, but the interdisciplinary nature of the conference meant that many of those individuals had not previously met and several delegates commented to the organisers that doing so was a good thing (e.g. "I can't believe I had to come half-way across the world to meet someone I can collaborate with at home!").

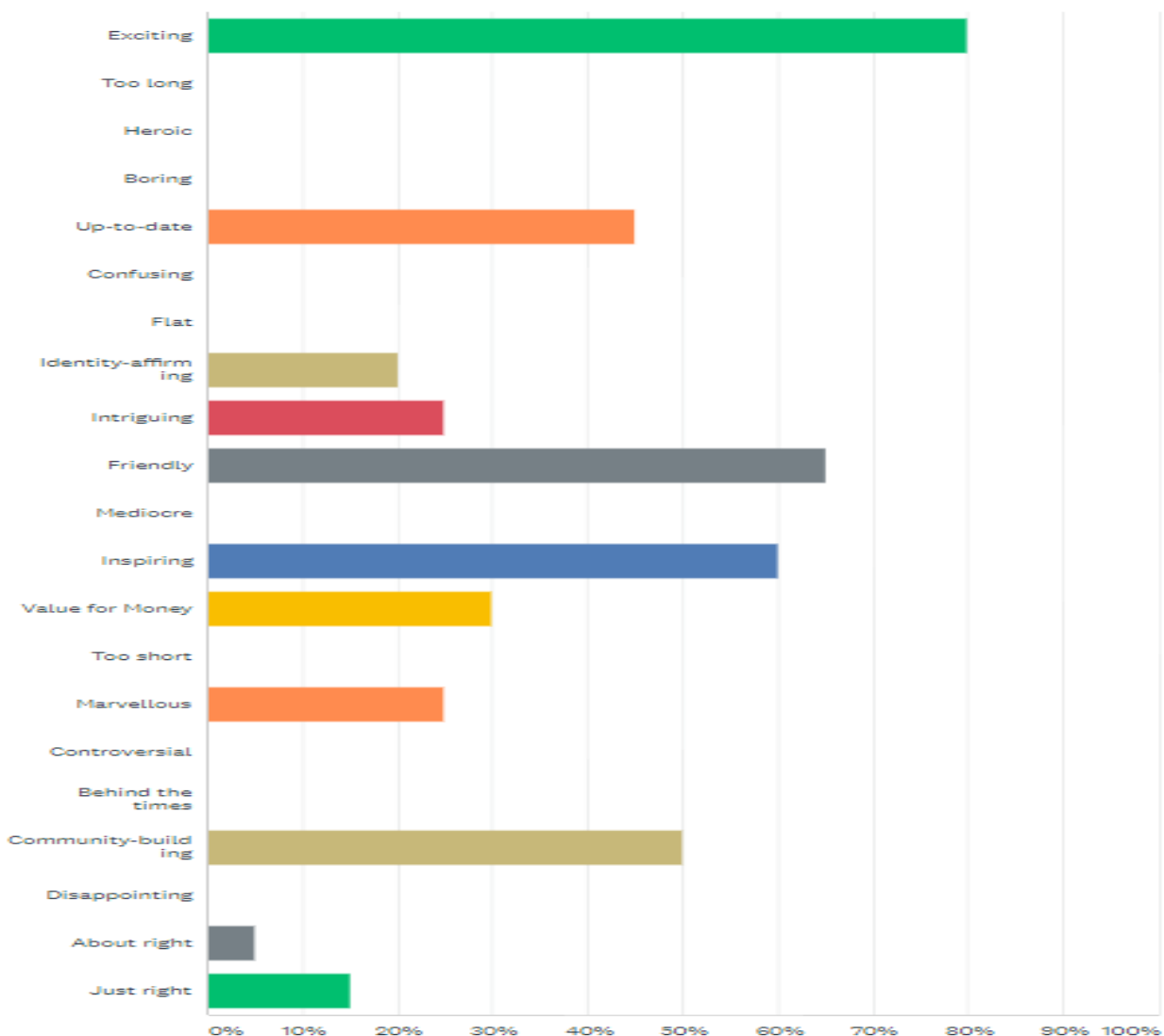
University	Non-speaker Full	Non-speaker Day	Virtual Delegates	Speakers Full	Speakers Day
Leeds, UK	3	2	0	4	0
Almeria, Spain	0	0	0	1	0
Bar Ilan, Israel	0	0	0	1	0
Bergamo, Italy	0	0	0	1	0
Brooklyn College, USA	0	0	0	1	0
Cambridge, UK	0	0	0	1	0
Columbia, USA	1	0	0	0	0
Illinois, USA	0	0	0	1	0
KCL, UK	0	1	0	0	0
Leuven, Belgium	0	0	0	1	0
Liege, Belgium	0	0	0	1	0
Maynooth, Ireland	0	0	0	1	0
Monash, Australia	0	0	0	1	0
Montclair State, USA	0	0	0	3	0
Oxford, UK	0	0	0	0	1
Pompeu Fabra, Spain	0	0	0	1	0
Queensland, Australia	1	0	0	0	0
Roehampton, UK	2	0	0	0	0
Split, Croatia	0	0	0	0	1
Sunderland, UK	0	0	0	0	1
Thessaloniki, Greece	1	0	0	0	0
Wake Forest, USA	0	0	0	1	0
York, UK	0	0	0	1	0
Ohio State, USA	0	0	1	0	0
Otago, New Zealand	0	0	2	0	0
San Marino, San Marino	0	0	1	0	0
Moscow	0	0	1	0	0
Total	8	3	5	20	3

Feedback from Delegates

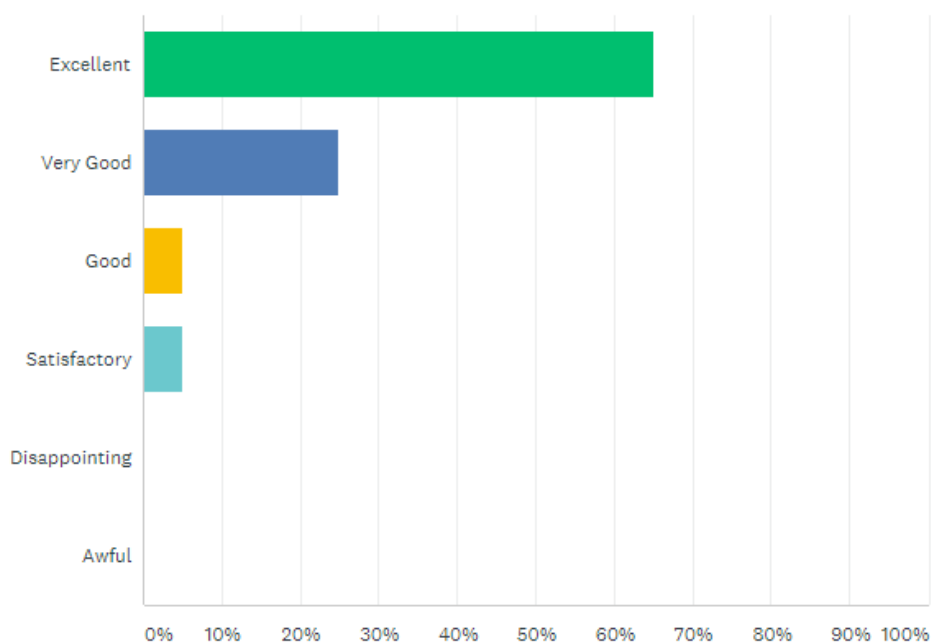
20/32 physical delegates returned feedback forms (2 Project Team members who were engaged in administration during the conference rather than present for the papers did not return feedback forms), a return rate of 62.5%.

The questionnaire covered a number of areas, ranging from general experience to quality of papers, and effects on behaviour, from organisation to catering and accommodation.

- 1) Gathering opinions of the conference experience as a whole by delegates selecting, or adding, words/phrases. Delegates thought the conference was:



2) Delegates were asked to assess the quality of the papers and were very positive about this.



Excellent (6)	Very Good (5)	Good (4)	Satisfactory (3)	Disappointing (2)	Awful (1)
65%	25%	5%	5%	0%	0%

Overall rating: $((13 \times 6) + (5 \times 5) + (1 \times 4) + (1 \times 3)) / 20 = 5.5$

3) This question sought suggestions for further areas which might be explored by the project. 25% of delegates responded to this question, but only three of the responses actually suggested further areas for the project to explore, suggesting that coverage is seen as at least adequate and at most wide-ranging enough to be viewed as comprehensive.

“Maybe reception by actual contemporary young people would be salient, though difficult...”

“I was fascinated by Hercules outside the West - would love to see more re Hercules in the far east and global south.”

“Differences from depictions of Hercules in antiquity itself.”

The other two responses focused on the usefulness of the project/conference (“Very interesting and informative - helpful especially for ideas for teaching mythology.”) and a request for information (“A summary of Emma's closing talk by email.”).

4) 85% of delegates replied to the question asking what they would do as a result of the conference. Given that the initial call for papers had outlined the Hercules Project’s publication plans and that accepted papers were to be considered for publication, it was not surprising that answers were focused upon the publication of the papers delivered, but responses went beyond publication alone and also covered the development of research directions and incorporation of material into teaching.

Publication alone (8/17 47%)

- Submit an article to the conference volume.
- Revise talk for publication
- Submit an abstract for the Modern Hercules

- Publish, hopefully in the volume!
- Keep working on my paper and have it published.
- Prepare a conference-paper article.
- Publish the article
- Publish my paper

Publication plus (4/17 24%)

- Revise my paper in the light of what I learned.
- Rewrite my paper to incorporate feedback received.
- Hope to write up my paper following questions and comments and conversations, with enhanced awareness of Herakles in other contexts.
- Turn my paper into an article or book chapter. Incorporate ideas into my teaching and research.

Research direction (5/17 29%)

- Do more work on reception
- Consider the feedback and how it impacts my work.
- I plan to continue to work on Hercules and write a paper (a proper paper).
- Read more Hercules stuff.
- Look into evidence of modern and ancient local / national identities drawing on heroic figures like Hercules from the classical period in Spain / Portugal.

- 5) The organisation of the conference was acknowledged to be excellent with scores for the organisation *before* and *at* the conference scoring identically.

Excellent (6)	Very Good (5)	Good (4)	Satisfactory (3)	Disappointing (2)	Awful (1)
95%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Overall rating: $((18 \times 6) + (1 \times 5)) / 19 = 5.9$

Additional comments were: "Thank you Eleanor once again for the excellent organisation and also to Maria, who did a great job!", "The *best* organised conference! Kudos for Emma, Eleanor, and Maria."

- 6) The catering was also ranked highly.

Excellent (6)	Very Good (5)	Good (4)	Satisfactory (3)	Disappointing (2)	Awful (1)
42%	26%	11%	21%	0%	0%

Overall rating: $((8 \times 6) + (5 \times 5) + (2 \times 4) + (4 \times 3)) / 19 = 4.9$

Additional comments were: "The catering was very good: the lunchtime food didn't look fresh made. The dinners were better (very good).", "Beautiful - and beautiful looking - food, but very small portions at the conference dinner (emphasised by the very large plates!)."

- 7) 6 of the respondents had not stayed in the conference accommodation, but those who had rated it highly and were impressed with the quality given the price.

Excellent (6)	Very Good (5)	Good (4)	Satisfactory (3)	Disappointing (2)	Awful (1)
46%	46%	8%			

Overall rating: $((8 \times 6) + (6 \times 5) + (1 \times 4)) / 13 = 6.3$

Additional comments were: "Wow, very affordable for those of us w/o significant research support from our universities.", "It was very refreshing to have an affordable yet excellent accommodation/meals packages - we thank Leeds University.", "Thank you for the excellent consideration and being so helpful with everything.", "The accommodation at Storm Jameson is excellent."

Acknowledgement of Support (Funding)

Funding was received from:

- the AHRC for attendance by volume editors and Hercules Project Staff as part of the Hercules Project AHRC Network grant,
- the Classical Association for bursaries for PGRs (UK and USA) and a recent PHD graduate (UK),
- the Hellenic Society for a bursary for an early career academic (Germany)
- the Institute of Classical Studies for an overseas interdisciplinary speaker (Tomas Macostay, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain) and the presentation of a film of the world premiere of the 2017 dramatic musical work *Herakles* by Yorkshire Composer Tim Benjamin. Some feedback is available through the Hercules Project website (<https://herculesproject.leeds.ac.uk/musical-drama/>), more detailed feedback is available on request.

Bursars reports

Maria Haley (PGR, University of Leeds) – Classical Association

Thank you for funding my attendance at the Celebrating Hercules in the Modern World conference.

The panels on Hercules in reception encouraged me to think about how I could incorporate reception into workshops for outreach in the short term and in teaching/ module design in the future. The oratorio performance of Hercules provided a great example of research outcomes besides publication and how they might impact non-specialists; not simply by presenting classics to them, but by getting them involved in the research process. This is a research method I may need to consider including (on a smaller scale) for postdoctoral applications to enhance the impact of my future projects.

More immediately, I will be considering further research into Seneca's *Hercules Furens*. As I work on Thyestes tragedies before Seneca and have written on Seneca's *Medea* in the past, *Hercules Furens* is a tragic infanticide that I have not yet explored. Following the excellent variety of papers at the Heracles conference, I will now be able to contextualise Seneca's play in the mythical tradition.

Kate Meng Brassel (PGR, University of Columbia) – Classical Association

I applied for a bursary to attend the Hercules Conference in Leeds for two reasons: (1) I am preparing to teach a course to undergraduates on Hercules (ancient and modern) and (2) I am working on a paper for publication on Hercules, ethical choice, and theater, a subject outside my dissertation research and therefore one for which I need to acquire a broader understanding.

The conference was even more useful than I anticipated. In addition to subjects that I already knew I wanted to learn about (e.g. reception in film and television), I learned that, for example, comic and graphic literature are essential to have a holistic view of the reception of Hercules in the 20th and 21st centuries. In spite of the breadth of the range of subjects, many of the speakers pitched their papers in such a way that non-specialists could understand, while at the same time showing that what they were proposing was innovative. There was a healthy mix among speakers of research that seemed new within the individual speaker's sub-field and research that showed that the individual was pushing a *status quaestionis* forward.

The conference atmosphere was collegial and open, which enabled interdisciplinary conversation, both within the lecture room and over coffee and meals. Participants' questions were useful rather than hostile. The contributions during question periods of scholars who had been at the previous Hercules conference were very much appreciated – they made for the sense of an ongoing dialogue and contextualized narrower subjects.

I also found out that scholars in the immediate vicinity of my home university were interested in the same subjects and had considered questions similar to mine. I would have been unlikely to discover this outside of this conference as there is not a great deal of communication among our departments.

Henry Clarke (PGR, University of Leeds) – Classical Association

I would like to extend my gratitude to the Classical Association for enabling me to participate in the Celebrating Hercules in the Modern World Conference, without your support my involvement would not have been possible. Chairing the panel on Iberian Hercules provided me with the opportunity to familiarise myself with the work of several academics with research interests parallel to my own, and to discuss these throughout the day after what was a lively discussion on historical and modern receptions of Hercules in the Iberian peninsula. I have since been able to make some potential research contacts in institutions in both Spain and Portugal with a view to arranging conference sessions and/or collaborative projects on identity through history and myth. The opportunity to chair at an international conference was a new experience for me, having only primarily chaired at postgraduate conferences and research colloquiums in the past. This was in all an extremely valuable experience which I hope to repeat in the near future. I would also like to thank Dr Emma Stafford, Dr Eleanor OKell and the rest of the Hercules Conference organising team for what was a well-organised and inspiring conference, and for inviting me to be a part of it.

Alexandra Eppinger (Early Career academic, University of Mainz) – Hellenic Society

Owing to a bursary from the Hellenic Society, I was able to attend the conference “Celebrating Hercules in the Modern World” without incurring financial difficulties. For several reasons, participating in the conference was important to me.

The paper I presented (“Hercules the Younger? Heroic allusions in late eighteenth century British political cartoons”), while part of my continuing work on Hercules, was my first foray into classical reception studies. Due to the positive feedback to my paper, I am resolved to further pursue this field of academic study in the future, specifically with regards to the use of Hercules imagery in British pictorial satire.

The conference was an opportunity not only to meet new people working on various aspects of Hercules, but also to get reacquainted with colleagues I had met at the previous Hercules conference in Leeds in 2013 in order to talk about a contribution to an edited volume in person, and to consider collaborating on a future project in classical reception.

Since my paper might possibly get picked up for publication in one of the edited volumes of the Leeds Hercules Project, my participation in the conference could also lead to a new entry in my publications list.

Attending a conference at a British university provided a welcome opportunity to practise my skills in presenting my own research in a foreign language in a clear and concise way to an international audience.

On a final note, the invigorating atmosphere of academic exchange and the feeling of being included in a group of like-minded people doing innovative research on Hercules served as a much needed-stimulus to continue my work not only on Hercules in particular, but in Ancient History in general.