

# Research to investigate links between Ancient Greeks and modern science fiction

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New research into the Ancient Greeks shows their knowledge of travel inspired early forms of fantasy and science fiction writing.

There is a long tradition of fantasy in Greek literature that begins with Odysseus' fantastic travels in Homer's *Odyssey*. Dr Karen Ni-Mheallaigh, at the University of Liverpool's School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology, is exploring fantasy in ancient literature, examining theories of modern science fiction writing and how these can be applied to texts from the ancient world.

Dr Ni-Mheallaigh is looking at the work of 2nd century AD writer, Lucian of Samosata, who wrote *True Histories*, a travel narrative that includes an account of a trip to the moon and interstellar warfare. Antihanes of Berge - who wrote about his travels in the far north of Europe, where it was so cold that conversations 'froze in the air,' - will also be examined, as well as the writer Herodotus who wrote about 'flying snakes; and 'giant gold-digging ants' in India.

Dr Ni-Mheallaigh explains: "Fantasy writing in the ancient world is still relatively unexplored from a literary perspective. What is so interesting about these fantastical journeys is that many of them are written in the form of truthful travel logs and historical texts. The Greeks had a fascination with the exotic and other worlds and some writers travelled to the north and Far East to satisfy their intrigue. The cultures they found there were so different from their own that they were inspired to fantasize and speculate about even more remote and exotic worlds.

"The Greeks seemed to have had an anxiety about writing pure fiction, and so writers who were notorious for their 'tall' tales – such as Ctesias, Antiphanes and Megathenes - would write about their adventures in the form of travel logs, or back up their findings with pseudo-documentary evidence, such as 'rediscovered' texts or invented

inscriptions.

"It was Lucian who was the first to admit that everything he wrote was untrue and could never occur. His writing-style is however calculated to convince his reader that all his adventures are in fact true. His writing plays a very clever game with the reader's mind, and, like all science fiction and fantasy writing today, allows the reader to ponder, what if...?"

Source: University of Liverpool

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