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Emeritus Professor of Classics

[Classics, Ancient History and Archaeology \(/schools/historycultures/departments/caha/index.aspx\)](/schools/historycultures/departments/caha/index.aspx)

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About

I'm most widely known as a specialist in ancient Greek music and musicology, and in the points of intersection between musical theory and philosophy.

Biography

A bald summary of my academic career would look something like this. In 1970, after a first degree in Lit. Hum. at Oxford and a PhD in the philosophy of biology at the Australian National University, I joined the University of Warwick's Philosophy Department as their ancient Greek specialist. I stayed at Warwick till 1992, with a gap between 1976 and 1978 when I taught in the Classics Faculty at Cambridge.

By 1990 I was thinking that I'd like to detach myself from the philosophers and become something more like a regular classicist; so I moved first, in 1992, to the Classics Department at the University of Otago (New Zealand), and from there in 1996 to its counterpart at Birmingham, from which I finally retired in 2008. From 2000 to 2003 I held a British Academy Research Professorship, and in 2005 the Academy elected me as a Fellow.

Early in my time at Cambridge in the 1970s I came across texts in ancient musical theory, a topic on which very few people were working at that time; I was immediately hooked, and have been at it ever since. Since then I have published a ridiculous number of articles and half a dozen books on the subject.

In 1993 I founded an international society for the study of Greek and Roman music (called [Moisa \(http://www.moisasociety.org/\)](http://www.moisasociety.org/)), whose initial aim was merely to locate others who were interested in the subject world-wide and to put them in touch with one another (there turned out to be surprisingly many of them). In its original form the society lapsed after a couple of years – I was too busy with other things – but thanks very largely to the efforts of colleagues in Italy, Canada and the USA it was re-founded in 2006, on a much more ambitious basis; anyone interested can read all about it on its website.

Nowadays the discipline is flourishing. There is a healthy number of dedicated specialists (including some very talented scholars whose doctoral research I was lucky enough to supervise at Birmingham), but it has also taken its place on the regular agenda of philosophers, historians of science, students of ancient poetry and drama, social historians, archaeologists, iconologists and many others.

Conferences and seminars crop up like mushrooms, and whereas in the 1970s it would have been hard to fill a shelf with relevant publications, a glance at the bibliographies on the Moisa website will show that there are now enough to stock a small library. There are plenty of people well able to carry the work forward without me now, but I don't plan to pack it in just yet.

Meanwhile I seem to have found time for helping my wife to raise a large family, for a great deal of amateur music-making, for plenty of cricket (but I'm getting too creaky nowadays), for the DIY restoration and conversion of semi-derelict buildings, and for good many other such healthy and less healthy activities. But this isn't the place to go into all that.

Research

My recent researches in ancient Greek musical theory and related aspects of ancient philosophy have led me into the tangled thickets of Neoplatonism. I have done a little work on Proclus, but my main current project is to produce a re-edited text and an annotated translation of Porphyry's Commentary on Ptolemy's *Harmonics*, to be published by Cambridge University Press. It will appear, with luck, in 2012.

Other activities

I have been an invited speaker at innumerable conferences and seminars. Regular events to which I contribute include the annual conference of Moisa (mentioned in the biography above), of which I am President, and the week-long sequence of seminars on ancient Greek music which I conduct every summer, together with Prof. Egert Pöhlmann and Dr Eleonora Rocconi, at the Ionian University in Corfu. I have given several series of lectures at universities and research institutes in Italy, where there is a remarkable amount of interest in ancient music; in 1991 I was a Visiting Fellow at the University of Queensland, and in 2007 I was a Visiting Professor at the University of Texas at Austin.

Publications

Here I list only my principal books; there are also some 60 articles on ancient music and musicology, along with a few others on non-musical topics.

- *The Science of Harmonics in Classical Greece*, Cambridge University Press 2007
- *La psicomusicologia nella Grecia antica* (tr. Angelo Meriani), Alfredo Guida Editore, Naples, 2005
- *Euterpe: Ricerche sulla musica greca e romana* (tr. Eleonora Rocconi), Edizioni ETS, Pisa, 2002
- *Scientific Method in Ptolemy's Harmonics*, Cambridge University Press 2000
- *Greek Musical Writings: vol. 2, Harmonic and Acoustic Theory*, Cambridge University Press 1989
- *Greek Musical Writings: vol. 1, The Musician and His Art*, Cambridge University Press 1984

