



## **Myth at the heart of the Roman Empire**

*Why study myth?*

### **Chris Emlyn-Hughes:**

Myth gives people a unique insight into the societies they are studying. How does this happen? Well, myths are traditional stories. They're stories told over and over again which involve people and situations which are of deep interest and concern, sometimes even anxiety, to the societies which tell them. If you study myth you get to the heart of what a society's all about.

### **Paula:**

Myth, I suppose, at the most basic level, it's about these wonderful stories in a whole different landscape from the past, and yet we find myth is in the fabric of our cultural life today.

### **Chris**

For the Greeks and the Romans, especially the Greeks, myth pervaded every aspect of their life. If you're going to study myth, A330 is a quick way of really covering the whole range of society.

### **Valerie Hope:**

Hopefully people will begin to see how myth functioned in the ancient world, and also the richness of the material involved, the wonderful examples, the wide range of evidence that they will engage with. But above all we hope that people will, yes, realise that myth did have a purpose and a function in ancient society, but also that it was about entertainment, it was about people having fun.

### **Chris**

The other important thing about Greek and Roman myth is it has a very very strong afterlife. European civilization from the ancient world, through Christianity, the Renaissance to modern times found these myths as a fertile source of ideas which they used again and again in order to express ideas in their own age. What I find really exciting is the way creative artists have used the myths in order to express the ideas of society, the tensions between people and ideas in that society and they do it in extremely expressive and creative way.

### **Valerie Hope:**

Gaining an insight into another society helps us see our own society sometimes more clearly, and I think myth is something that pervaded not only Greek and Roman society, but pervaded our own society. We still have those links back to ancient myth, in our buildings, in our architecture, in our language, all sorts of common references in everyday life in modern society reflect and build on Greek and Roman myth.

### **Paula James:**

Myth in those times had a journey, had a kind of a narrative trajectory I suppose we'd say, and myths got refashioned, they got reused, preoccupations of a particular age became part of the myth, it's one of the reasons why they transform right up into the present day.

Myth insinuates itself, I would say, in all kinds of different media of expression, from high to popular culture, and this is what's fascinating about tracing it, and looking at the origins of some of these stories.

When we look at the way the myths are told today it tells us an awful lot about ourselves, our ideologies, our political pre-occupations perhaps as well. I suppose all kinds of issues spring to mind about control, and about power, and about identity, or loss of identity, which is very frequently explored in myths.

**Chris**

We may think we don't need myth anymore, that we're in a new world of scientific rational thought, but we still have myth and we still need myth.