

Welcome to the first episode of Tell Me Muse. I, Cindy, a Classics student will chat with some of my friends about their research and studies. The goal is to find out “What is Classics?”. It is a broad term covering everything from ancient languages, cultures, religions, and societies. I want to share the experience with others and to find who studies it and what attracts them to the ancient world.

Today I will talk to Christiane Marie Cantwell, who just graduated in 2021 and whose research lies in archeology. Today her paper combines a study of agency and gender theory with archeology. Is on the topic of Roman Gaul and the role of women in religion, while ending with a strange mystery cult that encourages Bull castration.

Introducing Christiane-Marie

Cindy. I thought we would get things rolling by talking a bit about you, Christiane-Marie. What hobbies do you like?

Christiane-Marie. So my name is Christiane-Marie. I'm a recent graduate and was doing a double major in Classics and linguistics. I'm from Montreal, and I play the piano. I was really involved in the community of McGill and I really enjoyed my four years here.

Cindy. So, Classics was not your original goal, how did you enter and end up studying it?

Christiane-Marie. I had applied to economics and ended up in Classics through a twist of fate. I really wanted to study politics and economics at first. All the schools I applied to asked for your program directly except McGill. I also wanted a minor in linguistics since it was a practical thing and was really set on majoring in economics. But I thought economics classes were so boring! And I had to do math which I hated. It was actually the worst grade I ever got. The only class I did like was intro to archeology which I took on a whim. I fell in love with it. I always liked history but I never thought ancient history was relatable. This was why I didn't like it originally, and why I didn't think there was a career there. But these classes brought me back in, I loved it, it felt like a puzzle and like uncovering the past. But my mother told me to wait another semester, and I did and hated it even more. And then I applied to go to Salapia with Dr. Totten for archeology. I went and loved it, declared a Classics major, and started my Latin and Greek. And so this is how I became a Classics major, really by accident. Without taking that one class I wouldn't be here right now.

Cindy. So you got into your degree much later than most. What challenges did you face as a result, since you started your languages a year later? Were there any other challenges?

Christiane-Marie. Languages are made for a three-year program. So most people start in the first year so you can do Advanced in your last year. But program advisers tell you not to take both intros the first year so I only did intro Latin the first year and loved it with Prof. Sirois. But I couldn't take intro to Ancient Greek until my third year because I went to Salapia again. That was a big disadvantage in my language skills, but I am lucky since I was pretty good at

languages and figuring out the puzzles of ancient languages. If you're not good it will be hard to get all your credits in the end. It was really difficult to figure out how to do honors and in the end, I couldn't do it. You have to know to do Classics before you start. I still really enjoyed my other classes but it is harder when you start later. I know people who did Latin in high school, which was never an option for me. So you come in and some people already know some authors like Ovid and Virgil which I didn't know except by name. And I still had a bit of material culture like philology.

Cindy. I agree. Languages are definitely a big component of the degree here at McGill. But you are a great example of someone who started later and was able to have proficiency in both languages. Could you talk about your experience at the dig at Salapia?

Experience at the Salapia Dig Site

Christiane-Marie. My first time was as a student excavator, and I really loved it. But it is not for everyone. Archeology is romanticized as super fun. But the truth is not that: you will be digging for a day and not getting anywhere. You have to be ok with not finding anything good. Most people don't find statues, for example. For some people, this is a wake-up call to what archeology is. And archeology is hard work. You wake up at 5 AM to be at the dig at 6 and then you only have two 30 min breaks throughout the day in the hot Italian sun. And there isn't always a reward. You will work and find a wooden floor, clean it and take a picture and then destroy it. It is not easy or glorious work. But I thought it was so much fun!

Salapia has 3 phases, a medieval site, a late antique site, and a field survey project. I started as a field survey where you walked on the ground and looked at sites, and then you put it in a geographic plot and started with that. Is a great intro since you look at the ground and pick up a lot of rocks that look like old rocks since pottery often looks like rocks. And you get to talk with people, you make a lot of great friends there, I made some of my best friends at McGill. But it really isn't for everyone, some people hated it. My first summer I was in the medieval site and then in the late antique site with Prof Totten the following summer. You just have to do your thing and you have to be positive. You have some amazing things but when you tell people they don't get it, like discovering a simple hearth.

Cindy. I have the flip side of this because I am not an archeologist. When I read papers I see all these photos and I don't get as excited as you when seeing all of these amphoras.

Christiane-Marie. One of the really cool things that I got to do the second summer was being an excavator and a field intern. You work all day and then you go back to the workplace then you can take a shower or do a lab, which means to sit in front of a bucket of water and to clean the pottery.

Cindy. How does reconstruction work, is it like piecing stuff together like a puzzle?

Christiane-Marie. No, you don't actually do reconstruction yourself. Salapia teams up with a university from the region, the University of Foggia. Roberto de Fretto is the prof from Foggia who has the medieval site and Dr. Totten has the late antique one. Roberto brings back the findings to his lab and does the reconstruction there.

Cindy. Yes, I get it, I could see myself getting into this process.

Christiane-Marie. I found this great piece once, it was a new olive field that had been tilled, and it was glaze ware. Inside the glaze, you can see where they had been repaired (by the ancients) and you could see where the metal clasps would go when repaired, and I thought this was cool since you could tell the age of the object itself and the processes it went through.

Why Archeology?

Cindy. What draws you to archeology? What makes it different from other areas of Classics? At McGill there is a big interest in interacting with primary sources and their original languages, what connections does archeology have with that?

Christiane-Marie. What brought me into archeology is its materiality of it. You can touch things that people thousands of years ago touched, you can see what they did and reconstruct their lives. You know that people touched it and not just the elites, all people could touch it and this is what draws me to it. It doesn't mean you can't do that with history and literature, but I really think of classical archeology as a multi-diverse work that is intertwined with literature and history. This is called Integrated Classics. And the same thing can be said of literature studies, you can't make an argument about Ovid without taking into account the history or the political culture of Rome. What does graffiti in Rome tell of us of the time, for instance. You need to know the period's history and politics. Archeology can confirm what historians say and bolster history. We shouldn't use archeology to prove history but you can do independent work and take strands from each work to create a better product.

Cindy. I think this is so true, especially with written text. It is easy to forget that they were people behind this writing. I remember a professor that told us that the moon is the same moon that Socrates looked up to, and it really astounded me. It is shocking that you can still have common objects that these people touched and saw. It was a really powerful moment.

Christiane-Marie. Yeah. The idea of touching something that they touch excites me. That they were other people and stories. It is such a removed past that we feel like they aren't people sometimes. Classics have fallen prey to people reshaping it to their own goals, on purpose so that only white men can feel reflected in this past. This has alienated people because they don't feel reflected, especially since it was a purpose to alienate others from learning a history that they are interested in. It is not a universal history that we should put on a pedestal, but it is unique and interesting. But no one should feel alienated either from studying it.

Research Paper: Women's Agency in Gaul

Cindy. This is actually a great point to turn to the research paper because it is on an area that is not given the most area in the study of Classics which is Roman Gaul. How did you end up with Gaul? Can you take us through your main arguments?

Christiane-Marie. My paper is about Roman Gaul and the Roman social and religious effect upon the native indigenous people in Gaul. Gaul for those who don't know, and that is totally fair, is now the area of France, with a bit of Spain, Belgium, Switzerland and which went up to the Netherlands. It was a Roman province conquered by Caesar and conquest went on until the 120s when it became a Roman province 'like any other'.

I am interested in Gaul because not a lot of stuff is said on it. Also, I was looking for something to study and I was told to think about past scholarship and what you can say about something new. I thought that I couldn't talk about Pompeii and take a new approach as an undergraduate student. And so as I was thinking about what to study, which is new, I saw this research paper from a Ph.D. student studying in Tampa, Arizona who wrote a paper on the votive tradition in Gaul, and especially on body part votives. These were little statues of human body parts dedicated to a god as a wish. Men and women dedicate different types of wishes and votives. Women dedicate more in a Roman style and men in a Gallic style. I was interested, and I thought that there was a new approach that could be taken.

And my second reason was that I loved "Astérix et Obélix", a french comic book about this indestructible little village in Armorique. Caesar is the main character, and they go all over the ancient world, meeting Cleopatra. They even made a movie about it! Is a big francophone thing. So I thought why don't I do Gaul? It is part of the culture that I consumed. Of course, it helps that I speak French and that I can read most of the work that has been written on it which is in French. I wanted to make it more accessible to anglophones by writing an English paper on Gaul as well. How the French stuff works is not at all how the anglophone works. There is an older philological tradition and different theories that are applied.

I wanted to apply different theories on my paper, which is on women's role in changing the indigenous religion in Gaul after the Roman conquest. I used two theories, agency theory and gender theory.

Agency theory is that everyone has a choice, I could choose for example to stop talking to Cindy right now. But although everyone has a choice, these are conditioned by our environment and the power that we have over them. I could stop talking to Cindy but I won't because social cues tell me not to do so; it influences my decision but doesn't force me to make it. And I really like this type of theory because it gives agency to all individuals in the ancient world: slaves, women, and children. So for women who were powerless, you could say that they had a choice, although they were constrained by gender norms and what they could do in life (and this is so much more powerful for me) they did what they could in their situation and not what men wanted to. Same for slaves, they were constrained by their environment which put their choices in very

small boxes, but they still had some. That is the danger with this theory. Slaves don't have the choice to be free, but the theory tells how they are constrained with power structures related to other people. But at least it gave people agency and makes them people.

And then I applied gender theory to it because I believe in gender theory and I thought that women's choices created gender norms and changed them. I really wanted to apply this to women. My thesis was that women in Gaul are changing the religion in Gaul after the Roman conquest. They are participating in religious romanization, as the culture is changing to include roman practices into their own. Up to this point, it was the elite who did this and men. I found that elites did this but women as well and that it changed depending on where you are in Gaul. In the South it is much more 'romanized' and their relationship to Rome must have been different since they were closer whereas in the north the relationship was probably more militarized, which would have influenced the choices of women in the North differently.

Cindy. This is really interesting because you are looking at choices that are able to be physically reflected in objects that are preserved, and then you are able to trace back their decisions by looking at the use of that object and its creation, from where it was created and then used and perhaps buried. How did that culture manifest itself in the material culture that you are working with? How can you tell that it was a deliberate choice? that there was a meaning behind their choices?

Christiane-Marie. You have to be careful because not all of these choices were deliberate. When you get up in the morning you brush your teeth and that is not a deliberative choice, you don't think about the choice you are making. And this was the same for these women, they didn't think that people would think of their choices in the future. They had choices in a range, and it is cool how women created norms together and decided what was ok to dedicate and what wasn't.

There were two types of religious materials, they are body part votives that are dedicated as wishes and altars that are wishes but bigger and you dedicate sacrifices which are more expensive and elite materials. And on those altars, you wrote your name and one of the gods you were dedicating it to because it was a contract with a god to know who was writing the wish. What I found is that when the woman makes an offering, if she has a gallic name she will most often make an offering to a Gallic deity, and if she had a roman name she most often dedicated to a Roman god, and if they had a mixed name they did not dedicate most often to mixed deities but pretty equally to Roman and Gallic deities.

Cindy. You mentioned that altars are more expensive than body part votives. Would it be correct to say that you are studying women of certain social classes? I am asking this because if the women are inscribing their names on altars, they're not illiterate, and writing is more of an elite skill and activity. Can you figure out from the objects what class and from what level the women came from?

Christiane-Marie. That is one of the weaknesses of the paper, it focuses on elite individuals a lot. But the votive tradition may have been accessible to more than the elite, a lot of them could have been mass fabricated. A lot of questions can come from that. The altars would have been elite, and the names would have been written out by the elite. There are some things that will have to remain secret. There could have been even more votives that were wood, a material more accessible to the lower class materials and that material is just gone.

Cindy. You start and end your paper talking about a ring, what makes it so special and fascinating for you?

Christiane-Marie. It is a gold ring that was inscribed inside it. It was dedicated to Serona, a goddess of the Seine River in a well or spring. The wish might have been dedicated to a goddess for healing or good luck, and it tells the woman's name, Callimentia Montiola. She dedicated the ring to a diety for a wish. It is the only gold ring found in Gaul, which really changes from the norm of dedication from these spaces. A bunch of body part votives were found in this well, and I was curious as to why she decided to dedicate a ring.

Why did women choose such materials, body part votives, and altars? Why couldn't they adapt to other Roman practices? The ring was one practice from Rome. It symbolizes that these were all choices. This woman decided to dedicate a ring, she didn't want a body part votive, she chose to make it a ring, and it is her choice that left this material. If everyone started to change to a ring we would have thousands of rings. One choice can affect others if it is perpetrated by others, and that is how traditions are made. Every year we all choose to celebrate Christmas and not to stop. In Roman Gaul, we see that women as a group chose to change how they dedicated to gods with tons of materials. But the rings show us how they are different choices.

Cindy. I am reminded of a social media phenomenon that is seen on tik-tok and Instagram. There are these trends going around, with the same background music and the same actions and movements to them. Each trend starts from somewhere, someone was the first creator, and then it becomes a phenomenon that is bigger than the individual that started it but the original action was somebody's choice. But the bigger question is how does your paper and your research, in general, contribute to discussions about romanization and roman choices in Gaul.

Christiane-Marie. It is about personal decisions and experiences of Roman conquest and Roman rule in the conversation. Romanization is a really Roman term and people have been fighting about it and what it means for decades. I try to use it with a grain of salt. What romanization means for me is cultural change. And people change their culture, it doesn't happen as a third party. People mold it and change it, and the questions are what are the agents and who changed it.

And also we don't want to give too much power to the Romans. Did the Romans change the cultures? Did they do it on purpose? we're not too sure, but they did something. In the 90s there was research on local elite and resistance models looking into this. For example, Greece wasn't too romanized and everyone was like 'the Romans had too much respect for greek culture' but

we never considered that the Greeks resisted culture change and defended their own. Some people say that the Romans didn't do anything, it was all the indigenous changing their culture to theirs. But that doesn't seem true to me. Are they really giving up their old traditions at the drop of a hat?

I think there is a conversation to be had on that and what the Gauls had on the Romans. And that is starting to be researched but I am really interested in that. How did the bronzes impact the Romans who were there? There is no one-way street.

Future Plans

Cindy. Let's talk about your future plans. Next year you are starting a master's degree at Cambridge University. Are you going to stick with Gaul, or are you moving on to a different subject?

Christiane-Marie. I want to go full throttle with Gaul! The research proposal I submitted is about the taurobolium. The whole reason I was able to do this research proposal was that I was doing an independent study on altars and who dedicated to them. A lot dedicated to the taurobolium and I was like 'what is this?'. And so I googled it and it means baptism by blood. I started to wonder why they were so many in Gaul, for example, 14 women dedicated to them in Gaul. I talked to professor Wendt about it and looked into a Christian writer from the 4th century AD, Prudentius, who says that it is a baptism by bull's blood, or might be cutting off the testicles of bulls and to dedicate those.

This was a mystery cult so no one really knows actually. So *bonna dea*, or the *magna mater* has unique priests who castrated themselves. Maybe dedicating the bull's testicles to her represented a dedicee's devotion without actually castrating yourself, which wasn't seen positively in Roman Society. But the problem is why were women dedicating to her? Women couldn't become eunuchs. It turns out that women could only practice the taurobolium in Roman Gaul and that it is practiced to a degree in Gaul unmatched except for Rome itself. Why was this ritual so popular in Gaul? And why can women participate? What happens in this ritual?

Something else I would love to do is the reception of *Astérix and Obélix*, like Ceasar in *Astérix and Obélix*? How is he depicted? What does that tell us of the francophone psyche and their understanding of the classical world?

Cindy. I actually think I saw a movie adaption on Netflix.

Christiane-Marie. There is a whole theme park!

Cindy. This reminds me of *Percy Jackson* because this is how so many kids get into Classics since they realized that there is an entire field dedicated to it.

Christiane-Marie. Kind of, I would have to see what people in francophone areas think and know about it. I really am interested in *Astérix and Obélix*.

Advice for Archeology Enthusiasts

Cindy. Is there any advice you could give to students interested in classical archeology, or tips you could share having completed the program yourself?

Christiane-Marie. One thing I regret not doing is an Archeology Minor in the Anthropology department. I would recommend taking it as a Minor to take the course on the archeology of other spaces because it is super helpful, and to take classical archeology as soon as you can, and also to get to know Dr. Totten. And if you can, go to Salapia and find digs! You can go on the American archeology website where a bunch of schools put ads. But before applying ask a faculty member at McGill. Make sure they are safe because not all spaces are safe for women, people of color, and queer people. Also, some spaces are after your money and won't teach you anything. So it is really good to ask the faculty to approve of these people.

Open Letter to the McGill Classics Program

Cindy. You were also instrumental in the creation of the McGill open letter Classics. Can you explain what it is and why you wrote it?

Christiane-Marie. I wrote it with many other Classics students. It is a whole letter about what the department of Classics at McGill can do better to create a better environment and recognize the colonial and racist underpinnings and uses of Classics. Classics is one of the oldest fields and with that comes much problematic history, and by not facing it there has been a harmful effect on students. So the letter is filled with recommendations to the faculty signed by the students association about what we would like to do, like more support on language learning, more diverse classes that don't focus only on Greece and Rome, more diverse faculty, more outreach to CEGEPs and high schools that don't know that this is a career path and don't see themselves represented.

This came out after George Floyd's death and all the BLM protests. I was talked with my friends about their experiences and realized that I couldn't write it alone because these were not all my experiences, and so I did the preamble and asks some of my friends to write some parts, and then presented it to the student's faculty and body for review and then after correction they presented it for reading. Is not meant to be a quick fix, but is meant to be something that students can have in 10 years so that they can ask, "Why they don't have this now when we asked about it in 2020?".

Cindy. There's definitely a lot of work to be done and an open letter is, of course, a beginning for all of that. Now, for the last question of the interview: What does Classics mean to you?

What Does Classics Mean to You?

Christiane-Marie. Classics is a really fun field. What you learn about it is really interesting. Learning the languages as well, since I have always liked learning languages, and the community at McGill is fun. For me, it is not the best discipline in the world, or better than others, it is just something fun to study, and if you think it is a cool thing to study then there will be jobs for you after graduating. You learn to think, write and solve puzzles in Classics. If you think it is cool, do it!

This was a conversation with 2021 graduate Christiane-Marie. Tune in next time for a conversation with Neha Rahman who just finished her master's at Cambridge.

Thank you for listening to Tell Me Muse.

Transcript by Zoe Louchet