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About this lecture series 'The history written on the classical body'

We conduct our daily relations with other people not simply on the basis of what they say, but of what we deduce from their appearance. But we write our history on the basis of texts alone. What happens if we try to write our history not from texts but from appearances? These lectures explore this question for the world of classical Greece, and in particular classical Athens, and argue that if we put the visual rather than the verbal evidence at the forefront of our account we discover a set of people with a rather different set of attitudes, who are much less obsessed with drawing distinctions between themselves and others, who regulate their behaviour as much through bodily reactions as through the letter of the law, and whose take on the world is deeply embedded in their theology.

The four lectures focus in turn on the citizen body, foreign bodies, dirty bodies and godsbodies, and show

why the definition of citizenship has been a problem for analysts from Aristotle to the present day;

- how the 'us' and 'them' world which seems to be advertised by declaring all non-Greeks 'barbarians' was in fact a world in which elements of foreign identity were adopted in a wide range of circumstances to carve out a particular role within the citizen body;
- why notions of pollution should not be thought of as primitive survivals but as sophisticated ways of reaching and regulating the places which law cannot easily regulate: and
- how a religion in which gods looked, and behaved, like men compelled men to review how their own appearance and behaviour might relate to gods whose appearance was subject to repeated scrutiny and re-evaluation.

The lectures aim not simply to make the audience think again, and differently, about the ancient Greeks, and about themselves, but all historians to think about the ways in which their choice of materials determines both their questions and their answers.