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978-0-521-12172-9 — Forever Young: Why Cambridge has a
Professor of Greek Culture

Paul Cartledge

Excerpt

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FOREVER YOUNG: WHY CAMBRIDGE HAS A PROFESSOR OF GREEK CULTURE



The text of this inaugural lecture, delivered in the University of Cambridge on 16 February 2009, proposes that the newly established A. G. Leventis Professorship of Greek Culture is a new kind of chair: a chair not only for research but also for outreach, for the advancement of the public understanding of ancient Greek (pre-Byzantine) culture.

After explaining the Chair's origins and causes, and pondering the possible meanings of the Professorship's title, it seeks to explore and explode four 'myths' about the ancient Greeks and their culture (or cultures), myths deliberately chosen to illustrate the huge and diverse range of the Hellenic tradition that is still actively at work in our own contemporary culture. The four, in order of discussion, not necessarily of importance, are: (i) that there was an entity called 'Ancient Greece'; (ii) that the ancient Greeks were technologically backward; (iii) that the ancient Greeks really were (or looked) anything like they are depicted in such Hollywood movies as *300*; and (iv) that the Greeks invented democracy in anything like the form and sense in which we understand that institution today.

PAUL CARTLEDGE is the inaugural A. G. Leventis Professor of Greek Culture in the University of Cambridge. His many publications include *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Ancient Greece* (1997, rev. 2002), *The Greeks. A Portrait of Self and Others* (2002), *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice* (2009), and *Ancient Greece. A History in Eleven Cities* (2009). He holds the Gold Cross of the Order of Honour (Greece) and is an Honorary Citizen of Sparta, Greece.

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An A. G. Leventis Inaugural Lecture given in the
University of Cambridge
16 February 2009



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