

The Positive Contribution of Neurodivergence to Ancient Studies

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ABSTRACT — The recognition of natural differences in how the brain thinks, learns, and processes the world has been widely welcomed within education, but discussion has often concentrated on the difficulties neurodivergent students encounter and on strategies intended to compensate for them. Less attention has been paid to the strengths that neurodivergent learners and academics may bring to Ancient Studies, or to the ways those strengths can contribute to the learning of peers and the work of teachers. With particular reference to autism, this article examines the issue from three overlapping perspectives: student, tutor, and peer or colleague. Drawing on lived experience, teaching practice, ancient-language learning, and research in the ancient world, it considers the consequences of deficit-based framing and explores characteristics frequently identified by autistic people themselves, including attention to detail, clarity, empathy, flexibility of thought, creativity, honesty, and pattern recognition. The article also considers the difficulties that may accompany these characteristics, especially the challenge of selecting and communicating from a large field of perceived detail, and asks how teaching can support the development of such abilities without reducing individuals to diagnostic stereotypes. It argues that recognising neurodivergent strengths is not an alternative to accessibility or reasonable adjustment, but a necessary complement to them, and that those strengths can enrich Ancient Studies when they are valued within collaborative learning and research environments.

KEYWORDS — Neurodiversity, Autism, Ancient Studies, Strengths-based Pedagogy, Inclusive Education

A few words of introduction will be helpful to explain my interest and experience in neurodivergence and studies in the ancient world. I have been working in the field of Ancient Studies throughout my professional life, developing research into languages, alongside Jewish and Christian history around the turn of the era, principally through studying biblical manuscripts. My work has been in universities in the UK, as well as a guest lecturer in countries around the world – including Spain where I have a long-standing association with Catalan scholars and students going back over 30 years. While I no longer teach at a university, I continue to work in academic research into the ancient world, where languages, literature, history, culture and religion all intersect. I maintain teaching activity through public courses as well as private tuition especially, though not exclusively, to students who present some kind of neurodivergence. I was myself late diagnosed autistic, among other things, although I have worked for many years

with neurodivergent students and alongside neurodivergent colleagues, often advocating for them.

Figure 1 shows the image of a vibrating musical string, which is the logo of my website, Timeless Learning Support. The image has long been representative for me of contiguous diversity in many areas – specifically in relation to education, how we think, how we learn, how we relate to others and to our subject. The string vibrates when it makes a sound, and one musical note is made up of a whole range of frequencies, a collection of sounds, each corresponding to the reality experienced by different, individual people. If a steady image is preferred, to create a still picture, the string can be stopped from moving by placing a finger on it – but the result is silence.

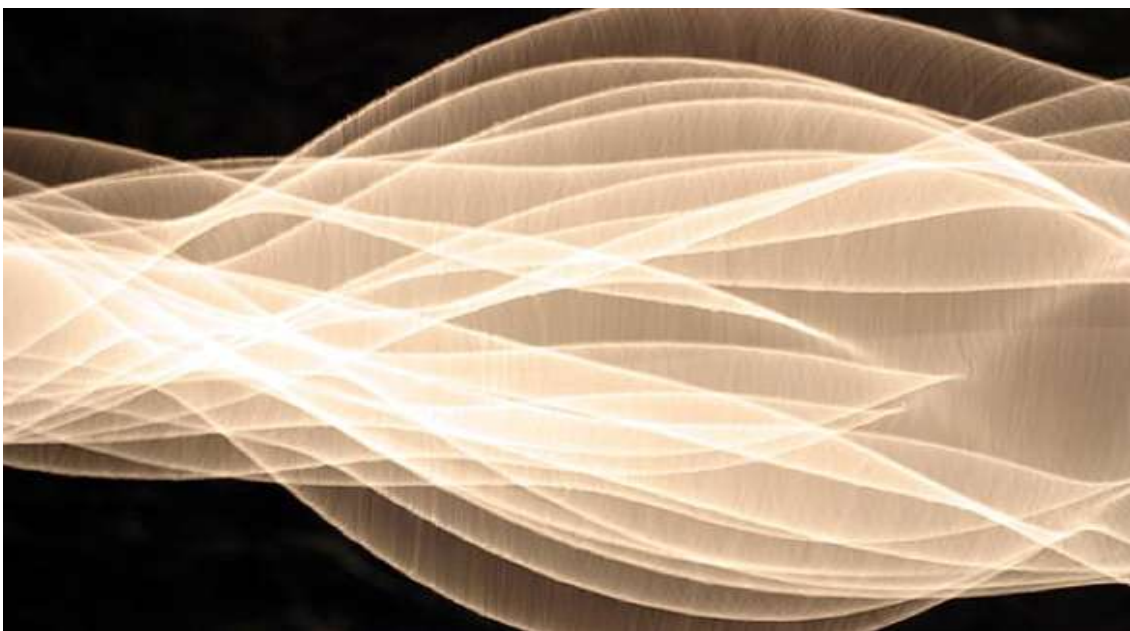


Figure 1. Vibrating string image, used in the Timeless Learning Support logo. Original source unknown.¹

In the context of my research, I was giving a talk at a meeting a few years ago where colleagues, past students and friends were present, and I mentioned that I tutored individual students with a range of neurodivergences. I talked afterwards to someone who I had taught Greek to some 30 years previously. He explained that his son had just been diagnosed with autism, and I shared that I had a recent diagnosis of autism. His immediate response was, “Oh that’s why...”. I asked him to explain, and he reminded me how, when he was an undergrad student, I had driven him in my car to a conference some distance away. And he said that he had never understood why I needed him to guide me through the road signs at all the junctions. He had not wanted to comment at the time, but he had found it incomprehensible that I could not find my way round road signs yet could be so proficient as a teacher of Greek. He was right – and yes, I do always end up with the

¹ Timeless Learning Support, www.timelesslearningsupport.co.uk

lorries in motorway service stations because I cannot process so much information while driving – but I did not feel he was criticizing me or disrespecting me in sharing his thoughts, because in the same breath he acknowledged my ability as a teacher.

I had received the autism diagnosis following the suggestion by a psychotherapist who I was seeing to manage issues of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When she gently pointed out what she saw as some indications of autism, I corrected her saying, “No, that’s PTSD”. She replied that she saw many people with PTSD, but no-one else insisted on being precise in the way I was, or became anxious that every small detail had to be clear and accurate. I set this out now to highlight that in whatever way any one person may be neurodivergent, there are liable to be a number of factors, not just in the divergence but in their context, their experience – just in who they are as a real person, like anyone else.

I particularly want to highlight some aspects that make an autistic person feel at ease in the presence of neurotypical people. It is, as much as anything, a matter of being valued. Professionals in the UK are no doubt familiar with the Equality Act of 2010, with its three distinct aspects:²

- Equality: providing equal opportunities in access and outcomes by recognizing different needs.
- Diversity: valuing and respecting differences in backgrounds, identities, experiences and perspectives.
- Inclusion: creating environments where everyone feels welcomed, respected and able to participate fully.

Societal attitudes to autism vary considerably from country to country, but even when the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are enshrined in law, this does not prevent a great deal of injustice and mistaken thinking about autism, not least within education. In some ways the confusion is perhaps not surprising given that an article prepared by a large international team and published in the journal *Nature* in October 2025³ suggested that clinical research is indicating that the notion of “autistic”, and specifically of a ‘spectrum’, needs to be rethought. While there are certainly clinical difficulties with the definition, in the minds of a fair range of educators in different countries, there seems to be little doubt about certain features.

A recent experience at a conference on ancient manuscripts illustrates the point. A speaker introduced his talk by referring to his handout – a page filled with a complex-looking table of figures and letters – and saying: “When you see my handout, you might think I’m on the spectrum, but I’m not, I’m a mathematician”. I took his comment up with him afterwards and pointed out how his words could be

² Cameron *et al* (2019).

³ Zhang *et al* (2025).

offensive to people in the audience who are ‘on the spectrum’, and that at any academic conference there was liable to be at least one autistic person in the audience. His reply is wearily familiar: “Oh, I get lost in all this business about neurodivergence nowadays. And anyway, we’re all on the spectrum, aren’t we?” The comment may have been intended to minimise any sense an autistic person may have of feeling different. But this kind of response undermines autistic experience, authenticity and identity. From my angle, the speaker was himself displaying a ‘lack of empathy’ in not seeing the potential offence of his words – apart from the fact that his response was dishonest.

In January this year, the toy manufacturers Mattel introduced a new Barbie doll, the Autistic Barbie, to join the “Type 1 diabetes Barbie”, and the “Barbie with Down syndrome”, intended by the company to reflect their inclusive policy and to “expand what inclusion looks like in the toy aisle” (Mattel, 2026). While some have interpreted it as a positive social move, there has also been a fear of it causing a backlash about overdiagnosis.⁴ Complaints from other directions point out that the representation was stereotyping – with the headphones, the fidget toy and the tablet. In fact, it is difficult to know how an autistic person could be represented without stereotyping. The word ‘stigma’ is a recurring term in complaints, underlining the social harm and with all the negative implications of the literal Greek meaning of stigma of “branding”, putting a stamp on someone to mark them as a social outcast.

By the very way autism is referred to, the stigma is there: it is a “disorder”, implying a departure from order, or at least the usual or typical order. However much it may be fought against, dis-order implies an equivalence with dis-ability, with the idea of some kind of function or ability that is absent. The sound of the Latin prefix, in popular thought at least, echoes the Greek prefix dys- with all the various types of dysfunction that it is applied to: dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and so on. While dis- from Latin signifies ‘absence, without’ and dys- from Greek refers more to a function that is impaired or operates in a non-standard way, whatever the sense behind any kind of “dis/dys”, all mean that something is lacking or reduced, less than standard, an impairment. However, as a research psychologist and self-described autistic activist comments: “... disability results not from autism itself but instead from living in a society which tends to be physically, socially and emotionally inhospitable towards autistic people” (den Houting [2019]).

The language used to refer to neurodiversity points to a problem in the field of teaching, namely that in our desire to be supportive and not discriminate, to be inclusive, the focus tends to be on the weaknesses, even (or especially) in

⁴ Hare (2026).

university “disability support units”.⁵ The result is, in part, infantilisation; it is, in any case, frequently a matter of underestimating competence.

It is “deficit-based” framing that I am wanting to protest against. Such a challenge is not new. A survey well over a decade ago already proposed “a deficit-as-difference conception of autism wherein neurological conditions may represent equally valid pathways within human diversity”.⁶ The lumping together and confusion of non-standard functioning and absence of ability is demonstrated in France by all coming under the umbrella of the *Maison Départementale des Personnes Handicapées* (MDPH). An illustration: I have hyperacusis, which means my ears do not discriminate sounds very well, I hear too much all at once. So, at a concert of classical music, I hear a lot better if I can see all the instruments close up, when my eyes can support my ears in distinguishing the sounds.⁷ At the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam recently, without any further questions I was allowed to sit directly behind the orchestra, where I heard Mahler’s 5th in a way I had never heard it before. For a concert last year in France, though, they told me if I was autistic I had to apply for a ‘disability certificate’ from the MDPH. I am too uncomfortable at being classed as ‘handicapped’ to do that. My hyperacusis is in many ways an advantage, and the “handicapped” label takes that away from me.

I was working with an archaeology student who was struggling with issues around autism in order to comply with her course requirements. During one of our early meetings, I asked her what were her strengths. Her response was one of surprise, she was so used to everyone concentrating on what she could not do that she had never thought about her strengths. Even when she took time to think about them, she found it uncomfortable – “Doesn’t that look like showing off?” she said.

It is interesting to observe that even in settings where the strengths of neurodiversity are to the fore, discussion can gravitate back towards the need for support and accommodation. A contemporary institutional example where this kind of tension was demonstrated is the July 2026 Church of England Synod debate “All Kinds of Minds: Affirming Neurodiversity in the Life of the Church”. The official motion began from a strengths-based position, with an opening contribution by an autistic person (alongside ADHD and Tourette syndrome), who argued that the Church should “allow ourselves to be blessed by” people who think differently. Several contributions to the live debate followed, highlighting the strengths that neurodivergent members can bring to church congregations and their leadership. Subsequent speeches, however, focused on the need for tolerance and support to be shown, as specifically Christian values. The final motion retains the

⁵ The following welcome statement is typical of most higher education disability support units: “Disability Advisers work alongside you to identify how your disability or condition impacts your teaching, learning, assessment and access to physical and digital resources, and to help coordinate support and adjustments.” (University of Huddersfield, n.d.).

⁶ Kapp *et al* (2013).

⁷ Keane *et al* (2010) supports the general idea that an autistic person can use visual information to reinforce or interpret auditory information.

strengths-based language (“a blessing to the church and wider society”) but most of its practical provisions concern training, removing barriers and challenging discrimination.⁸

It is important to recognize, as much of the Synod debate underlined, that in society all have a responsibility to find harmony and positivity, and one important way to do that is to recognize the strengths of neurodivergent people.⁹ When I asked around a range of people who identify as “autistic”, these are the strengths that were mentioned repeatedly:

- Detail-focused;
- Clarity;
- Empathy;
- Thought flexibility;
- Creativity;
- Honesty.

Thinking back to the past student’s response to my disclosure that I am autistic, it is instructive to compare it with that of a family member when I told her about my diagnosis. The response was again, “Oh, that’s why...”, but her comment was: “That’s why you’re so good at languages”, which is true even though actually, I am only good at analysing grammar and remembering vocabulary.

I mentioned above that my psychotherapist had highlighted my attention to detail. It made me think back to an experience as a 6th form student, so age 16. With a gifted English teacher, I discovered I loved analysing literature, and exploring characters from all sides and angles. There was one lesson when I had been asking a lot of questions: “Why did they say that? How is it possible to...? Who did she mean? Is that because...?” until the teacher stopped me: “Oh, shut up, Jenny, we need to get on”. I pointed out to him afterwards that he had been rude. “I suppose I was”, he said, “but the thing is, I hate teaching you, because it’s only a matter of time before you’re better than I am.” I appreciated that I could talk to him openly, and the honesty of his answer.

The problem with being “detail-oriented” is that we see so much that it can be difficult to select the most relevant or the most useful information, or to put it in an order that can be communicated to someone else. There is a nice illustration for this mass of detail in the staging from a 2023 Greek theatre production of Euripides’ *The Trojan Women*, where a phone box on the stage was a visual device to make ancient tragedy feel urgent and relevant today (Figure 2).

⁸ Church of England (2026).

⁹ Similar strengths among others are identified by den Houting (2019); Grant & Kara (2021).



Figure 2. Still from *The Trojan Women* (Δημοτικό Περιφερειακό Θέατρο Καβάλας, 2023).

Initially, the audience is presented with a scattered assortment of women, seen from different angles, all heading in different directions, not related to one another, where the setting illustrates how responses to a situation might be multiple and diverse. This is the kind of multi-faceted detail an autistic person may see, and the problem then is how to give the details some kind of order to communicate them effectively, how to give them focus. Simone Weil, the early 20th c. French philosopher, identified something that lay behind the difficulty for many students, even professional scholars, in giving focus to their ideas. In this translation, I have slightly adjusted what she said in a 1942 essay:

“All faulty translations, all absurdities in solutions to geometry problems, all clumsiness of style and all disconnection of ideas in essays, are due to the fact that thought has rushed upon some idea too hastily and, being already satisfied, has no room left to grasp it properly” (Weil, 1942, my adaptation).¹⁰

A PhD student was working on a topic of textual criticism, comparing Greek manuscripts of a biblical book. As is typical in working with ancient texts, he had found a huge amount and variety of information and was thrilled with everything he had unearthed after months of intensive analysis. But he struggled with successive attempts at expressing it and I had a hard time understanding what he had written. So, he stopped and went back until he was sure that he had properly grasped everything; then, he was able to write not only clearly, with a logical line of reasoning, but also in a way that was engaging.

¹⁰ “Tous les contresens dans les versions, toutes les absurdités dans la solution des problèmes de géométrie, toutes les gaucheries du style et toutes les défauts de l'enchaînement des idées dans les devoirs de français, tout cela vient de ce que la pensée s'est précipitée hâtivement sur quelque chose, et étant ainsi prématurément remplie n'a plus été disponible pour la vérité.” (Weil, 1942).

Going back to the stage set of *The Trojan Women*, it is interesting to compare this initial arrangement with the later staging, once the phone box fulfils its purpose as the visual instrument of communication and the action becomes focused upon it (**Figure 3**). The way the stage has been organised and transformed from a chaotic, random-looking display of people into a coherent and comprehensible scene by focusing on the phone-box illustrates how someone who sees a situation or a problem with an enormous amount of detail can learn to communicate their ideas and insights in a clear and logical way. For some, this may have to be a learnt compensatory skill, but once learned, clarity is liable to be a skill they excel at. In other words, compensation becomes a strength.



Figure 3. Still from *The Trojan Women* (Δημοτικό Περιφερειακό Θέατρο Καβάλας, 2023).

Much of the study of the ancient world is communicated through the written word which, within the education system, takes the form of an essay as a means of assessment. A lecturer may want to instruct the class that they have to adopt a certain structure for an essay, thinking to be helpful. It may well be helpful for some students, but the autistic person will often want to find their own organisation of ideas, and not be forced to conform to a pre-determined structure. Above all, in my experience – which may be no more than that – it is especially not helpful to suggest an autistic person makes use of AI to give focus or structure to their ideas. It is particularly crucial to allow them to maintain control both in the generation and the expression of their thought.

In terms of pre-conceptions, a lack of empathy has become so much a feature of the autistic stereotype that I want to bust the myth. As an autistic nurse explained it to me, he feels so much for/with another person that it is overwhelming and he

blocks the feeling, so it looks as if they do not feel; and that the numbing reaction can be in response to negative or positive emotions. The nurse related how, as a student, he had been sent one morning into a small ward of six beds to wake the patients up. He quietly went to the bedside of each one, taking their hand and gently speaking to them. When he came back to the work station, the charge nurse told him that was not the right way to wake patients up. "Watch me", she said, "this is how it's done!" and she marched into the room, flung open the curtains, calling, "Good morning, everyone, how are we today?" My nurse friend told me that he simply could not do that. Many people who have been in hospital would agree that they do not like it, either. It may seem quicker, but actually the patients take longer to fully wake up.

There is, in fact, a two-way issue, a double empathy problem. As long ago as 2012, Damian Milton¹¹ used this term to explain communication breakdowns between autistic and non-autistic people, claiming that they are not one-sided deficits but mutual failures in understanding due to differing worldviews and communication styles, making empathy difficult for both groups.

In the Belgian-produced TV series *Astrid et Raphaëlle*,¹² Astrid who is autistic – played convincingly by a non-autistic actress – works in criminal archives. The attitude of colleagues in the police department is generally uncomprehending, even hostile, except for the chief detective inspector, Raphaëlle, who befriends her. When Astrid is invited to Raphaëlle birthday party early on in the friendship, she asks her support group for advice as to what to take as a gift. One person suggests, "Something that represents your friend for you". She goes but does not stay long because she feels so uncomfortable. When the other colleagues see the present she has bought Raphaëlle, a silver thimble, they make fun of her tiny, apparently insignificant gift. The next day, Raphaëlle asks her, first, why did she go to the party since she does not like noisy crowded events, to which Astrid replied, "Because it's protocol" – note the effort she has made to fit in; and then Raphaëlle asked, "Why the thimble?", because she hates sewing. Astrid's answer was "Because you are my thimble, you protect me from getting hurt". Typically, autistics are not meant to understand figurative language. In fact, what that means is that we do not necessarily understand fixed expressions. On the other hand, autistic people often excel at creating new, powerful comparisons, especially visual metaphors, perhaps because of the rich, multi-faceted vision they have of reality.

I heard the other day about an autistic colleague who the office staff had been complaining about because he did not go into the office to chat with them. They thought he was being aloof and disrespectful. They omitted to acknowledge that if another colleague was sick, he was the first to visit them, quietly arrange to cover

¹¹ Milton (2012).

¹² Also developed for the UK by Channel 4 as *Astrid in Paris*.

their classes and keep them updated about any information they needed.¹³ It reminded me of a young autistic boy who is meant to not have empathy, he failed the ‘theory of mind’ test. His father pointed out that in a room full of people, he will instinctively know the one person who is struggling and go to sit beside them.

Focusing on strengths reframes autism as a different way of experiencing the world, a ‘different way of being’ instead of as a deficiency or disability. It highlights that both neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals struggle to grasp each other’s perspectives. Exploring the strengths and difficulties of young autistic people was the subject of a study published in February just this year. It was found that the most frequently endorsed strengths included interpersonal skills (e.g., kindness, empathy), cognitive traits (e.g., intelligence, creativity), and resilience, pointing to strengths in autistic individuals that are typically underrecognized.¹⁴

The characteristics of empathy and creativity in particular have implications for the studies in the ancient world, especially when coupled with an autistic person’s readiness (even preference) not to accept received opinion. Obviously, challenging received opinion is the hallmark of good scholarship, but it is something that usually has to be learnt. It was therefore striking when I asked a group of 1st year undergrads at a Catholic faculty to find out about the 4th c. Emperor Julian, known as the ‘Apostate’. When they reported back, the general opinion was that the Church’s ruling about him was entirely justified because he had been brought up as a Christian but had turned to paganism. An autistic student had thought outside the box and taken an analytic stance. Her conclusion was that the label was unjustified because until Julian, it was only used of Christians who had renounced their faith under duress and it was seen as a sign of weakness. The label was given to Julian after his death, he was a strong not a weak ruler, and he did not renounce his faith because of persecution but because of his intellectual curiosity.

You do not have to be autistic to arrive at that kind of conclusion – but it may help. The other students had gone along with the orthodox position of the Church, and they found this student’s observations not insightful but ‘odd’ (although it is a view common enough nowadays in the literature). Someone might want to point out that the other students’ conforming to received opinion was to be expected in a Catholic faculty, that it would not have happened in a secular university. And that, anyway, it is autistic people who are usually described as having “rigid” or “black and white” thinking. I would like to quote from a LinkedIn discussion thread, no longer accessible to the author, where autistic professionals were commenting on exactly those things that had been said about them:

¹³ A recent survey of autistic staff working in higher education (Kenny et al., 2026) confirmed how often their strengths, such as thoroughness and problem-solving, are undervalued through misunderstanding.

¹⁴ Ferraiolo *et al.*, 2026.

- Labels such as “rigid” can be quite misleading, and sometimes rooted in ableist assumptions.
- If you think about it... group opinions can be just as “rigid”.
- The difference is they’re often shaped by social pressure - wanting to fit in
- And sometimes those shared opinions rely on assumptions, stereotypes, or prejudice that go unchallenged.

These comments reflect how autism can feel threatening to others, and close down a response of wanting to learn from another perspective. I believe that if we work at identifying and encouraging the positive strengths of an autistic person, an environment that feels harmonious and safe can be fostered. Rather than underestimating their skills, we should be pushing them and at the same time, encouraging peers and colleagues not to feel daunted or threatened by them. The pay-back is that it is a lot easier to adjust to neurotypical ways of behaviour if we feel valued, if we are valued and treated with empathy.

Another powerful TV drama, this time originating in Korea, which draws attention to the position of an autistic professional in society, is *The Good Doctor*, re-worked for American TV (ABC). The lead character, Shaun, is an autistic medical student with remarkable skills of memorisation and making unusual but valid connections. His outstanding ability to link cause and effect allows him to visualise patterns and find solutions to complex problems.¹⁵ Watching Shaun at work reminded me of a class who had an assignment on the causes of the Fall of Rome. An autistic student was concerned that he only had fifteen minutes to explain his web of ideas, until he decided to create a visual representation of those relationships instead (Figure 4).

He produced a detailed flowchart connecting the factors leading to the fall of Rome. It initially looks complex and too intricate to be useful, and it is not perfect but, taking the separate aspects and looking at the connections between them, generated enthusiastic class discussion. The example illustrates how the facility to carry out systematic analysis and to unravel complex layers of data can be highly beneficial for academic studies.

¹⁵ The empirical evidence is supported by the theoretical study of Baron-Cohen (2008). He describes the detection of patterns by people with autism as ‘hypersystemitization’, and accounts for it as driven by a powerful need to find the ‘truth’, defined as ‘lawful patterns in data’.

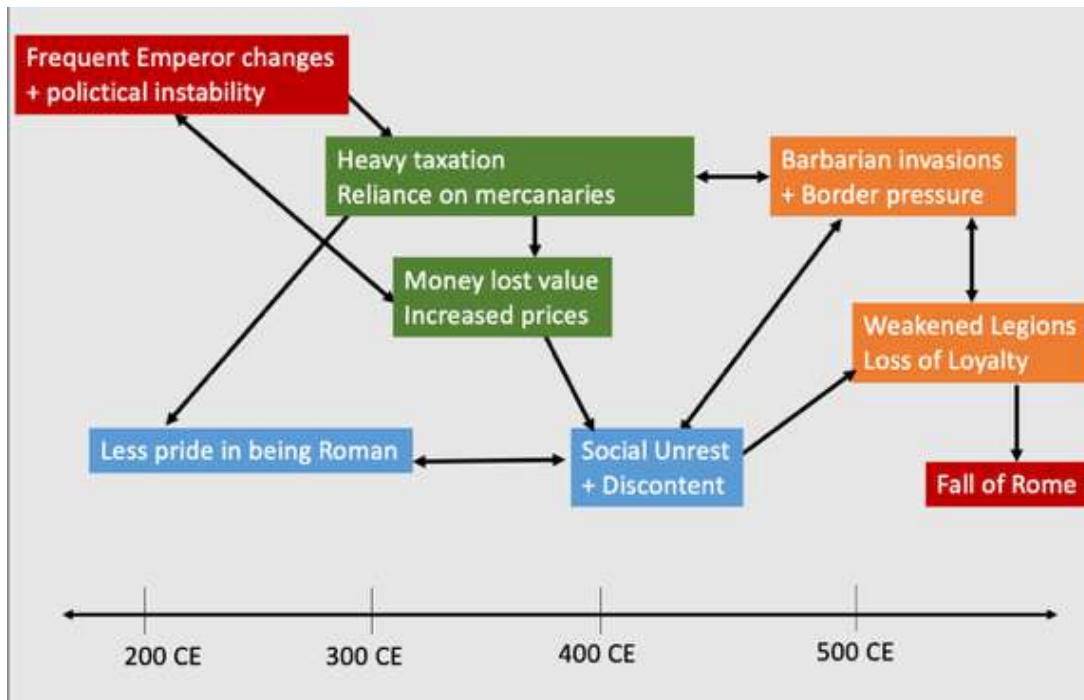


Figure 4. Concept map of the Fall of the Roman Empire (adapted by the author for illustrative purposes).

The student patently enjoyed constructing and discussing the chart, and his pleasure is very different from a sense of superiority, as it could have been construed; it is simply “I like being able to do this”. It is crucially important to allow the autistic person pleasure in doing what they are good at, not as some kind of sop to compensate for their weaknesses but as a genuine sharing in their ability, and a willingness to learn from it. The enjoyment might be why the autistic student sits at the front of the class – not because they want to be teacher’s pet, but it is easier at the front to engage, even mentally, with the lecturer. In any case, it is away from all the clicks and shuffles and sniffs and whisperings that can be so overwhelming when sitting in the middle of the class.

Within the field of ancient studies, the archaeologist Penny Spikins identifies the contribution made to cognitive and social evolution by hyper-precision and systematizing thinking, as seen in Palaeolithic material culture, thus reinforcing the benefits of autistic traits from the deep past into the academic present.¹⁶

The ready identification of patterns has a particular application to the study of languages, and notably to ancient Greek where the verb endings present a complex diversity that looks nothing short of bewildering in most student manuals. By noting similarities across the tenses and voices, it is possible to reduce the regular endings to a table that fits across one A4 page in landscape format. With the active voice at the top and the middle/passive voice underneath, a column is devoted to

¹⁶ Spikins (2009). Her interpretation is debated by Pickard et al (2011), especially the inference that particular archaeological evidence can be attributed to autistic cognition. However, in more recent interdisciplinary investigation, Spikins and colleagues develop the relationship between autism and material culture (Wright *et al.*, 2022).

each tense with specific markers noted next to the heading. Shared endings are grouped together (e.g. present and future; imperfect and 2nd aorist), and similar endings are placed in columns adjacent to each other. Thus, the indicative passive columns should be at the end of the top part of the chart, since its endings are more similar to active endings than the middle or other middle/passive endings and, in particular, follow a similar pattern to the pluperfect active. Additional rows can display the appropriate imperatival, participial and infinitival forms where they exist. Colour-coding can be applied to distinguish the voices and/or moods. In this way, a concise but complete visual chart is created that serves as a ready tool when deciphering a passage of ancient Greek. The greatest benefit is perhaps derived from the student compiling the chart themselves, after being given an initial organisational framework such as that shown in Table 1.

Indicative Active				Indicative Passive	
Present = Future + σ	Imperfect = 2 nd aorist	1 st aorist + σ	C ² + Perfect + κ	C ² + Pluperfect	1 st aorist = 2 nd aorist

Table 1. Initial headings for a chart of regular verb endings

Once the regular forms can be mastered simply by consulting their chart, a student is less likely to be overwhelmed by the intricacies of irregular forms, especially if a list of recurring phonological changes in contiguous consonants is also presented, because these account for many of the apparent irregularities.

On the topic of teaching ancient languages, some thoughts may be useful on how autistic strengths might be integrated positively into the teaching group, taking an example from my own experience again. It comes from a year-long Welsh class that I attended when I was living in Wales. We were a mixture of Welsh native speakers, who were fluent but had little knowledge of the grammar, and Welsh learners who already had a good grounding in Welsh but wanted to extend their vocabulary and develop their fluency. I remember an occasion when the tutor got us to work in pairs, and how he played to our strengths. He put me, with my strong mental grasp of grammar but poor ability to find the expressions to attach it to, with a very confident native speaker who could not get her head round grammar. Between us, we had to translate an English document into Welsh and then explain our translation. We were initially both terrified of each other, but as we worked together, I was able to produce the grammar for our sentences, and she refined the translation into elegant prose.

This approach is at its most workable when the tutor models the endorsement of strengths. It could well be applied to learning the classical languages of Latin and Greek, and indeed other languages of the ancient world.

In conclusion, the aim throughout this paper has been to highlight, on the one hand, a mis-placed focus, specifically in the academic world, on the ways in which neurodivergent people lack the capabilities of the neurotypical population, and the resultant attention that is directed to supporting what are perceived as weaknesses. On the other hand, the intention has been to underline some of the exceptional strengths, especially of autistic individuals, that both enrich and facilitate the study of the ancient world: the ability to capture detail, the recognition of intricate patterns, the willingness to challenge received opinion and to follow unexplored paths, the acute sensitivity to sharing the experience of another however distant in time and culture. The contention is that not only are such strengths a source of intellectual fulfilment for the individual but, just as importantly, they can make a powerful contribution to the work of neurotypical peers and colleagues when they are welcomed in a spirit of positive collaboration. Recent, in-depth investigations into the lived experience of autistic people are evidence of the attention that is increasingly being paid to the sound of the autistic voice. It can be hoped that educators in all sectors, and specifically in Ancient Studies, will welcome the findings, not only for the benefit of their students but also for themselves and their peers, as the reality and value of neurodiversity becomes increasingly accepted.

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