



# Applied Classics

Alte Geschichte

HABES – Band 46

Franz Steiner Verlag

46

Comparisons, Constructs,  
Controversies

Edited by Angelos Chaniotis /  
Annika Kuhn / Christina Kuhn

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# HABES

Heidelberger Althistorische  
Beiträge und  
Epigraphische Studien

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Herausgegeben von  
Géza Alföldy,  
Angelos Chaniotis  
und Christian Witschel

BAND 46

# Applied Classics

Comparisons, Constructs, Controversies

Edited by Angelos Chaniotis /  
Annika Kuhn / Christina Kuhn



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## PREFACE

The present volume has its origin in a three-day workshop on the topic of ‘Klassische Bildung im Spannungsfeld von Elitisierung und Popularisierung’, which took place in Bad Honnef, Germany in June 2005. We are extremely grateful to the *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* (Bonn) for its generous financial support and its help with the organization of the workshop. Some articles published in this volume were given as papers on that occasion, and our gratitude is due to all speakers and participants for their thought-provoking ideas and comments.

In the following years many of the issues raised during the workshop were further pursued in a stimulating dialogue, first in Heidelberg and later in Oxford, with colleagues from Europe, Asia, and the U.S. We are immensely grateful for their willingness to contribute to the present volume, which reveals the great variety of approaches and aspects the topic of *Applied Classics* comprises.

Our thanks are also due to all our friends and colleagues from outside the field of Classics, who have shown great interest in the topic and encouraged us to make the debates available for the general public. In doing so, we hope that the articles will provide both the Classicist and the non-Classicist reader with an impetus for further reflection, discussion, and debate.

Finally, we would like to thank the *Römerstiftung Dr. René Clavel* (Augst) for its financial support and Benjamin Gray (All Souls College, Oxford) for his help in improving the English of several articles.

Oxford, May 2009

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## INTRODUCTION

*Angelos Chaniotis, Annika Kuhn, Christina Kuhn*

### 1. WHO NEEDS CLASSICS?

The Latin and Greek languages [...] offer an invaluable mental training, whose skills are easily applied in other areas, together with an enhanced understanding of how languages work, and a comprehensive database for the study of European languages in particular – our own being no exception.

Thus the Edinburgh Academy, an independent school, advertises its Classics curriculum on the web.<sup>1</sup> Its claims find unexpected support from *GCHQ*:<sup>2</sup>

*GCHQ*, a government department based in Cheltenham, is hoping to recruit graduates able to demonstrate an ability to learn foreign languages. This year candidates offering Ancient Greek or Latin, as well as modern linguists, are eligible to apply.

*GCHQ* may not be a familiar abbreviation to all the readers of this book: it is the UK's *Government Communications Headquarters*, the centre of *Her Majesty's Government's Signal Intelligence*.

Who needs Classics? British Intelligence apparently does. This is not new. Some of the most prominent British ancient historians of the twentieth century, such as Anthony Andrewes, Peter Fraser, and Nicholas Hammond, were engaged in British special operations in occupied Greece during the Second World War precisely because of their background in Classics, their linguistic skills, and knowledge of topography. Applied Classics, as it were.

According to the psychologist Cecilia Heyes, the presumed educational value of teaching classical languages can be the subject of experimental research:<sup>3</sup>

If the political will was there, it would not be hard or expensive to organise a trial – akin to a drug trial – examining whether education in Classics has a positive effect on cognition. The most important thing would be to ensure that young people were randomly assigned to a treatment group or to a control group. The assignment could not be based on their characteristics or preferences. Once the assignment had been made, those in the treatment group would receive a controlled dose of Classics – ideally of a conventional sort, but from a teacher or teachers who are known to be effective. The control group would spend an equal amount of time (class and homework) in-

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.edinburghacademy.org.uk/curriculum/classics> (accessed on 23 March 2009).

<sup>2</sup> The text was sent to the UK Classicists Mailing List (<http://listserv.liv.ac.uk/archives/classicists.html>) on 22 October 2007. We are grateful to Benjamin Gray, who pointed this out to us.

<sup>3</sup> Message sent by Cecilia Heyes (All Souls College, Oxford) to Angelos Chaniotis in May 2009.

volved in another educational or non-educational activity, but one that is not significantly more enjoyable. After the dose had been delivered, the members of both groups would be given a number of tests of cognitive function. For example, a reputable battery of IQ tests (such as the WISC or WAIS), assessing spatial, logical, mathematical and verbal functions, and, perhaps, some tailor-made tests designed to assess the functions that are thought specifically to be enhanced by training in Classics. One might also solicit teacher and parent ratings of the young people's mood and conduct during the trial. The more measures the better.

Until such studies are conducted the positive impact of the study of Greek and Latin on intelligence – signal and other – and its value as ‘mental training’ remain debatable. Whatever the case, we can rest assured that the decline of Greek and Latin in secondary education, and their disappearance from the curricula of secondary schools in many other countries,<sup>4</sup> does not constitute a threat to national security.

The phrase ‘applied Classics’ is most often used in connection with the teaching of classical languages,<sup>5</sup> but there is certainly more to it. From the early modern period onwards cultural historians, statesmen, artists, poets, dramatists, composers, scientists, propagandists, or advertising experts have turned to classical antiquity in order to find inspiration, paradigms, arguments, and parallels that could somehow be applied to other areas than Classics and Ancient History. Applied Classics beyond Classics, as it were.

This volume explores aspects of this role of Classics. It assembles essays – quite heterogeneous in subject matter, style, and views – which reflect on the diverse and changing ways in which themes and phenomena of classical antiquity were, have been, or should be, integrated into areas beyond Classics: in the study of political phenomena such as modern democracy and European integration; in the critical assessment of a historical period such as the Ancien Régime in France; in the shaping of a civil society in Germany at the time of the Enlightenment and in the formative phase of the United States; in the process of state formation in modern Greece and nineteenth-century Germany; in times of war and crisis; in education, science, or popular culture. It should be noted that it is not the aim of this volume to cover any single aspect of applied Classics in a comprehensive way: the volume will not present an extensive survey of the position classical studies have occupied and still occupy in education, culture, and research; it will not present a detailed history of classical studies or of the reception of classical antiquity from the Renaissance to our times,<sup>6</sup> nor will it present a comprehensive debate on the future position of Classics. Such studies do exist and have done a

<sup>4</sup> For the situation in the U.S. see Hanson and Heath 1998.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. Taylor 1946 (‘Classics Pure and Applied’); Macro 1981 (‘Applied Classics: Using Latin and Greek in the Modern World’).

<sup>6</sup> Groundbreaking for ancient history: Yavetz 1976; Christ 1982 and 1996. See more recently Rebenich 1997; Biddiss and Wyke (eds.) 1999; Hingley 2000; Hingley (ed.) 2001; Hardwick 2003; DeMaria and Brown 2006; Martindale and Thomas (eds.) 2006; Kallendorf 2007; Hardwick and Stray (eds.) 2008; Stray (ed.) 2007; Moog-Gruenewald (ed.) 2008; Morley 2008; Wyke 2008 (reception of Caesar); Richard 2009.

great deal in sharpening the critical view of ancient historians and classicists of their own subject, in increasing the awareness of students of classical antiquity of the variability of their subject and the heterogeneity of the approaches it employs, and in informing a more general audience about the significance and perspectives of classical studies as well as about the problems they are faced with in the modern world.<sup>7</sup> The aim of this volume is less ambitious. It intends to cast *spotlights* on some current debates and discourses about applied Classics, hoping to provide the reader with an impetus for further reflection, discussion, and debate. The following articles will provide such moments of reflection by classicists and ancient historians, revolving around four broad themes: comparisons, constructs, continuities and controversies.

## 2. COMPARISONS, CONSTRUCTS, CONTINUITIES, CONTROVERSIES

‘What have the Romans ever done for us?’ is the question asked by a member of the People’s Front of Judea in Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*. If we ask the same question – adding, of course, the Greeks –, the answers may be as diverse and debatable as those given by the other members of the People’s Front of Judea. There has always been a ‘utilitarian’ aspect in modern approaches to the classical world, ranging from improving our abilities to learn foreign languages and sharpening the intelligence of students of Greek and Latin, to learning from history and using the ancient world as a foundation for collective identities. In a recent book, provocatively entitled *How the Ancient Greeks and Romans Solved the Problems of Today* (2008), Peter Jones has discussed how the study of the past may contribute to the solution of modern problems – among others, life in mega-cities, taxation, justice, crime and punishment, education, war and religious intolerance. Similar claims concerning the instructive value of the Greek and Roman past, some more persuasive than others, are often made.<sup>8</sup> It is hard to overlook the analogies between some areas and periods of the classical world and modern phenomena (life in urban centres, economic and cultural networks, mobility, technology, multicultural contexts, etc.), and this certainly justifies an interest in the history of the Greeks and Romans. The Graeco-Roman world still offers paradigms for the understanding of an increasingly urban and globalised world, just as it offered paradigms to the Founding Fathers of the United States and to historians and statesmen who sought to understand the British Empire, the European world of the nineteenth century, the rise of the U.S. as a world power, or the formation of the Qin Empire in China.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Goldhill 2002 and 2004; Cartledge 2005; Settis 2006; Takahasi, Minamikawa, and Degushi (eds.) 2006; Hardwick and Gillespie (eds.) 2007.

<sup>8</sup> e.g. Sherman 2005; Göbel 2007.

<sup>9</sup> On the parallelism between the British Empire and ancient Rome see Brunt 1965; Vance 1997; Hingley 2000; Vasunia 2005. On the Roman Empire and the U.S. see Madden 2008; Malamud 2009; cf. Paul 2009. On China see Scheidel (ed.) 2009. On the reception of antiq-

Several articles in this volume explore, from different perspectives, how classical antiquity could and can be used as a reference point for comparison. Indeed, parallelisms between the ‘Ancients’ and the ‘Moderns’ have a long tradition. The volume opens with an article by FRANÇOIS HARTOG, who discusses early cases of turning to the past for comparisons sparked off in the *Querelles des Anciens et des Modernes* in France in the 1690s. His study of the different approaches of Charles Perrault, Joseph-Marie de Gérando, François-René de Chateaubriand and Benjamin Constant is an instructive demonstration of how the changing mentalities of the ‘Moderns’ in accordance with the changing historical context continually transformed the perception of classical antiquity, the possibilities to see parallels between past and present, and the legitimacy of comparisons.

The oscillation between parallel and comparison which François Hartog’s essay sets in motion is taken up in the two articles which follow. ‘Can we learn from the past?’ is the question underlying the essay of ANGELOS CHANIOTIS, who turns to the subject of European identity. The foundation of the European Union is certainly one of the most significant political and institutional developments of post-war history; quite naturally, this has inspired comparisons between the European Union and ancient institutions.<sup>10</sup> A very recent example is Boris Johnson’s effort to support Euroscepticism through a study of governance in the Roman Empire and a comparison between Roman success and European failure.<sup>11</sup> Chaniotis’ article poses the question of whether anything can be learnt from the construction of identities in ancient Greece. On the basis of two case studies (Crete and Aphrodisias), which show the existence of overlapping identities and their continual transformation, it is argued that the Europeans should not copy ancient models, nor should they establish a European identity on the fake fundament of a common cultural heritage. Rather, they should focus on shared values: democracy, sensitivity towards human rights and civil liberties, tolerance of diversity, commitment to unprejudiced advance in knowledge, and protection of the environment.<sup>12</sup>

The European Union is also the subject of GÉZA ALFÖLDY’s article, which provides a comparison between the Roman Empire and the European Union.<sup>13</sup> He shows that Rome, in her efforts to create the *Imperium Romanum*, was confronted with similar central problems as the European Union is today. Asking whether one can learn from history, he examines how Rome dealt with these problems and argues that the success of the *Imperium Romanum* was mainly based on the attractiveness of Rome’s culture and her ability to integrate the different peoples and

uity in economic, political, and philosophical thought in the nineteenth century see Morley 2008.

<sup>10</sup> e.g. Strobel 2007 (economy and legal practice in the Roman Empire and in the European Union).

<sup>11</sup> Johnson 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Two other articles in this volume address aspects of identity, in nineteenth and twentieth century Greece and in modern Japan (see below).

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that the Roman Empire has often inspired comparisons with other supra-state institutions, e.g. with the British Empire in the nineteenth century and with the modern U.S. (see note 9).

regions into the Roman state. To him, the comparison with Rome makes it evident that today's economic unity and common currency is just the starting point of the project 'Europe': much more emphasis needs to be placed in future on the cultural integration of the peoples by raising their awareness of the advantages of the political unification and the significance of a shared culture as the basis for a European identity.

Ancient history has often been the object of ideological exploitation, whether by the National Socialists,<sup>14</sup> the agents of British colonial rule,<sup>15</sup> the political and intellectual elite that shaped modern Greek identity (see below and pp. 135-150), the feminist movement, or other global movements.<sup>16</sup> Spartacus, for instance, whom unhistorical approaches have turned into a symbol of unremitting love of freedom and determined struggle against slavery, lent his name not only to the German revolutionaries of 1916-1919, but also to the 'New Spartakists' of the Global Movement.<sup>17</sup> Five articles in this volume study different ways of ideologically exploiting classical studies and ancient paradigms in radically diverse contexts: in the formative phase of the United States of America; in the process of ethnogenesis in twentieth-century Greece, and in Germany during the nineteenth century and the First World War.

ALEXANDER DEMANDT gives an overview of the many different means by which classical antiquity shaped the United States of America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and became part of American identity.<sup>18</sup> The article reveals that this influence ranges from the 'discovery' of America by the ancient world to the role of Greek and Roman state philosophy during the American Revolution thanks to the profound classical education of the Founding Fathers, who eagerly drew on examples from antiquity when shaping the new nation and its constitution. Even today, classical antiquity has a pervasive influence in America – be it in place names, architecture, literature, theatre or state symbolism, as the essay demonstrates extensively.

The nexus between elite and classical education is highlighted by STEFAN REBENICH, who focuses on the emergence of a new definition of German bourgeois education during the nineteenth century, which was based on Wilhelm von Humboldt's idealisation of Greek antiquity. It viewed education as a permanent process towards self-perfection. The article demonstrates that for Humboldt this new

<sup>14</sup> See Christ 1982 and 1996; Malitz 1998; Lorenz 2000; Näf 2001; Ungern-Sternberg 2001; Chaniotis and Thaler 2006. Ancient History: Losemann 1997. Archaeology: Schnapp 1977 and 1980; Junker 1997; Haßmann 2000; Leube (ed.) 2002.

<sup>15</sup> e.g. Goff (ed.) 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Myth, drama and women's movement: Zajko and Leonard (eds.) 2006; Bitá 2007; cf. Winterer 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Spartacus in revolutionary imagination: Hunnings 2007 (nineteenth-century England). German Spartakus-Bund: Epstein 2003, 18-21. 'New Spartakists': [http://www.sindominio.net/~pablo/papers\\_propios/The-New\\_Spartakists.pdf](http://www.sindominio.net/~pablo/papers_propios/The-New_Spartakists.pdf) (written by Iñigo Errejón Galván & Pablo Iglesias Turrión; accessed on 13 April 2009).

<sup>18</sup> For the significance of Greece and Rome in American intellectual life see also Dyson 2001; Winterer 2002 and 2007.



educational idea had both a political and cultural dimension: Greece served as a model onto which one could project, idealise and propagate the idea of the political liberty of the individual and his active role within the state. The constructed cultural relationship between the Greeks and the Germans became an integral part in the formation of the idea of a superior German national culture and identity.

KAI BRODERSEN also turns his attention to Germany in the nineteenth century and shows how the topic of the *clades Variana* and the figure of Arminius were adopted in times of revolution and nation building by delineating the history of the popular German folk song ‘Als die Römer frech geworden’.<sup>19</sup> He discusses the different versions of Joseph Victor von Scheffel’s poem, on which the song is based, and outlines the historical contexts in which these versions emerged. The historical circumstances, he shows, shaped the tone, text, and tune of the poem: between 1848 and 1875 it developed from a humorous, critical poem to a national-patriotic and military one – a change which nicely reflects not only the personal development of its author but also the political changes and the *zeitgeist* of the period.

As in the U.S. and Germany, classical antiquity has been instrumental in the construction of identity in those modern countries which lay claim to the direct heritage of antiquity: Greece and Italy.<sup>20</sup> Greece is a very interesting case of ethnogenesis founded on ancient tradition, and recent research has explored various facets of this process in the nineteenth century and the continual, powerful presence of classical Greece in modern Greek identity. CONSTANZE GÜTHENKE sheds light on the institutional context of classical scholarship and the history of ‘classical philology’ in twentieth-century Greece. She explores how three discourses – the issue of ‘continuity’ in national historiography, the politically charged ‘Language Question’ over what kind of Greek was to be used as the official language of the state, and the crucial role of Archaeology as a discipline – has shaped the profession of Classics and its institutions, the development of learning and the production of knowledge since the foundation of the nation state in the 1820s; they clearly left their mark on today’s organisation and visibility of classical scholarship in Greece.

While the abuses of classical antiquity in Nazi Germany have attracted a lot of interest in modern scholarship (see note 14), THOMAS SCHMITZ is concerned with a rather neglected chapter in German history: examining the contributions of classicists to academic classical journals published between 1914 and 1918, he explores how antiquity was used during the First World War as a means of making propaganda not only for the war but also for Classics as a discipline. His article provides insight into the historical situation of classical education at the beginning of the twentieth century in Germany, from which he draws lessons as regards the issue of how classicists can cope with an ever increasing pressure to justify their discipline in times of difficulties.

<sup>19</sup> On Arminius and German identity see also Struck 2001.

<sup>20</sup> For Italy see e.g. Terrenato 2001. For Greece see most recently Hamilakis 2007; Damaskos and Plantzos (eds.) 2008.

The issue of justifying Classics, which Thomas Schmitz touches upon towards the end of his article, is followed up in the last six contributions of the volume. In the case of Classics the very name of the discipline implies that the significance of its subject is undisputed and lasting. Indeed, for a long time the study of classical literature, drama, philosophy, oratory, and to some extent historiography, was given a privileged position in public education. Yet, this favourable situation has not always been undisputed in history. There have been times in which the necessity of classical education was questioned and in which attempts were made to banish ancient languages from the curricula of secondary schools and to abolish Greek and Latin chairs at universities. How great this danger is was recently made clear in the United Kingdom, when it was announced in March 2007 that Ancient History was no longer to be among the subjects taken by school-leavers for their qualification for higher education. In a rather autobiographical essay, THOMAS HARRISON narrates the history of a heated dispute between school boards and the community of classicists. A very interesting aspect of his contribution is the lively view behind the scenes, which gives a rather shocking picture of unjustified policies in their making. The great support that the campaign in favour of Ancient History received in the UK is one side of the story; the political and ideological background – with the explicit association of Classics with elite education – another.

If classicists do not want to battle for their existence in the future, they have to explore new paths which their discipline can follow. When we refer to the ‘Classics’ we usually have a few ‘usual suspects’ in mind – Homer, Plato, Aristotle, the tragic poets, Thucydides, Virgil, Cicero, Seneca and Tacitus. Ancient medical writers, in contrast, though their importance cannot be denied, are not among those who first come to mind – neither with the general public nor, alas, with many classicists themselves (and members of research committees for academic posts). In her study of the Hippocratic Corpus, ELIZABETH CRAIK explores the influence which Hippocratic medicine and ethics have had on modern eastern and western medicine. Given their lasting significance (as is evident from today’s ‘alternative’ medicine, for example), she argues that the Hippocratic writings deserve the same significance as ‘classics’ as Homer and Co.

SALLY HUMPHREYS is equally looking for ways of re-thinking the study of Classics. In her article she explores to what extent ‘classical antiquity’ has become a construction of modernity shaped by historicism and culturism, and she poses the provocative question of what it would be like for classicists to think without these constructed modern boundaries. She ardently advocates the view of making Classics less ‘museumised’ and ‘touristic’, encouraging schools and universities to foster riskier thinking, to question traditional boundaries, and to promote cross-disciplinary dialogue.

How fruitful such an interdisciplinary approach to the ancient world can be is shown by JOSIAH OBER, who addresses the prominent example of the Athenian democracy. His review of recent scholarship on Athenian democracy, its limitations and achievements, and the parameters which determined its success and its

failure, demonstrates how an ancient institution can be incorporated into modern debates of political and social sciences. If this subject continues to attract attention it is not only because of the ideological exploitation of Athenian democracy but also because of the continual progress in understanding its history and its function, often in a fruitful dialogue with concepts developed by contemporary political theory and sociology.<sup>21</sup>

Impetus for new ways of exploring classical antiquity comes not only from the dialogue with other disciplines but also from the dialogue with other cultures. Within this context the interest in classical antiquity outside Europe and the U.S. is an issue that has only recently attracted attention.<sup>22</sup> Japan with its ambiguous attitude towards the Western world is an extremely interesting case, and one of the most prominent representatives of Ancient History in Japan, TAKASHI MINAMI-KAWA, turns to the question of what particular contribution Japanese scholars can make to the study of Greek and Roman antiquity. His article argues that, apart from comparative studies, the value of Japanese research in Classics lies in the scholars' non-European historical viewpoint, that is, in the power of their Asian identity. It is this more detached, outside perspective on the European Classics, unshaped by European identity itself, that allows Asian scholars to shed new light on various topics in ancient history.

Whereas the position of Classics in the field of education may be disputed and threatened from time to time, *beyond* the field of education Classics easily holds its ground: classical myth and drama have inspired artists, opera composers<sup>23</sup> and playwrights from the European Renaissance to the present, and they continue to do so, whether through the frequent performances of ancient plays<sup>24</sup> or their impact on modern drama in Europe, North America and beyond (see notes 22 and 24). Ancient philosophy, traditionally a cornerstone not only of specialised philosophical training but also of a more general education, has not lost its value and finds unexpected application, for instance, in military studies.<sup>25</sup> Themes from Greek and Roman myth and history have never ceased to fascinate pop culture – from comics and children books to video games and the inspiration provided by classical antiquity for the creation of TV heroes (*Xena, the Warrior Princess*; *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*).<sup>26</sup> Archaeological tourism has not suffered from the

<sup>21</sup> See also Hansen 2005; Leonard 2005 (post-war France); Woodruff 2005; Nippel 2008.

<sup>22</sup> e.g. classical drama in modern Africa: Budelmann 2005; van Zyl Smit 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Ewans 2008.

<sup>24</sup> The study of modern performances of ancient drama has become an important subject of interdisciplinary research, of which the *Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama* at the University of Oxford, founded in 1996 by Edith Hall and Oliver Taplin, and the *European Network of Research and Documentation of Performances of Ancient Greek Drama* (Arc-Net) are good examples; see e.g. Sideris 1976; Flashar 1991; McDonald 1992; Hartigan 1995; Hall, Macintosh, and Taplin (eds.) 2000; Hall and Macintosh 2005; Macintosh, Michelakis, Hall, and Taplin (eds.) 2005; Hall and Wrigley (eds.) 2007; Šipová and Sarkisian (eds.) 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Sherman 2005 (military applications of ancient Stoicism).

<sup>26</sup> An excellent overview in Lowe and Shahabudin (eds.) 2009; see also Joshel, Malamud, and McGuire Jr. (eds.) 2001; Nisbet 2007. On the classical background of TV series, see Potter



decline of classical education in schools.<sup>27</sup> Commercials are unthinkable without the use of ‘icons’ from the classical world, and ancient themes continue to attract the interest of the most influential modern expression of pop culture: the cinema.<sup>28</sup> In the last article of this volume ROBIN LANE FOX deals with the issue of ‘popularising Classics’. As one of the few classical scholars who have had personal experience with the making of a movie inspired by ancient history, he not only gives a personal account of his consulting role in Oliver Stone’s *Alexander* but also fervently advocates the use of this medium. He draws attention to the importance of a firmly established ‘popularised’ interest in the Classics for its position in society, as it manifests itself in France and Britain (to a lesser extent, however, in Germany). While he is aware of the concessions to historical accuracy that film adaptations require, it is the moving picture’s special strength in visualising history and provoking new (or neglected) questions about the classical world and its reception, which, apart from its great outreach, has turned it into a major platform of ‘popularising’ the Classics – a platform which should not be neglected nor belittled by classicists as a means of raising the general public’s interest in classical studies.

### 3. ENVOIS

Reflection on and discussion about a discipline, its history and its application usually occur in times of crisis. Yet, the condition of Classics today is not wholly desperate: Classics and Ancient History remain firmly established subjects at most universities; classical subjects are an integral part of many interdisciplinary projects in the humanities and social sciences; the number of journals dedicated to the ancient world is steadily increasing – due not only to the impact of ‘research assessment exercises’, but also to the productivity of classical scholars and the inexhaustible potential of ancient studies. All major publishing houses continue to profit from series dedicated to classical literature and ancient history, museums attract the masses with exhibitions on the ancient world, publishers of popular fiction top the bestseller lists with books on antiquity, and Hollywood heavily draws on the myth and history of ancient Greece and Rome to make the cash tills ring. Documentaries dedicated to classical antiquity, with extensive and often successful application of digital technologies, and internet newsgroups are good examples

2009 (*Charmed; Xena, the Warrior Princess*); James 2009 (*Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*). On Asterix see Amalvi 1984; King 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Melotti 2007.

<sup>28</sup> In recent years the study of the position of classical subjects in movies has advanced to a respectable subject of serious research. A small selection of recent studies: Wyke 1997 and 2002; Fabro (ed.) 2004 (classical myths in Pasolini’s work); Junkelmann 2004; Nisbet 2006; Lindner 2007; Berti and García Morillo (eds.) 2008; Hardwick and Stray (eds.) 2008, 303–341 (articles by J. Paul, H.M. Roismann, and M. McDonald); Pomeroy 2008; Lowe and Sahabudin (eds.) 2009 (articles by S. Turner, G. Nisbet, and K. Shahabudin).

of how technological innovation is applied by those interested in classical subjects.<sup>29</sup>

Until recently a dissertation dedicated to the reception of classical antiquity was a ‘kiss of death’ for many a young scholar looking for an academic appointment – in many universities it still is. Yet, the reception of antiquity has established itself as an integral part of Classics in most countries and as a worthy and serious research object. When the *Classical Reception Studies Network* was established in the United Kingdom (2004) to promote collaboration between six universities (Bristol, Durham, Nottingham, The Open, Oxford and Reading) with a strong interest in this subject, there must have been classicists who viewed such an activity with scepticism or even contempt. The British initiative was followed by the establishment of an analogous *Australian Classical Reception Studies Network* in 2006.<sup>30</sup> In the meantime, thanks to a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (2007-2008), the *Classical Reception Studies Network* has organised a series of workshops and conferences, which have provided guidance to students interested in this subject; the Department of Greek and Latin at University College in London has launched an ‘MA in Reception of the Classical World’;<sup>31</sup> and a *Classical Receptions Journal* was founded in 2009.

Prophecies about the disappearance of Classics as a discipline or the fear of a decline in the interest of the general public in the ancient world in the near future are certainly unjustified. But this is not reason enough for classicists and ancient historians to settle back and believe that their discipline – as any other discipline – does not need to justify its existence by pointing to its general appeal or to any practical, material or other gains. Even if classicists and ancient historians should not feel obliged to justify their existence to taxpayers or governments more than any other representatives of fundamental research, this does not relieve them from the need to reflect critically on the position of Classics and to explore new paths their discipline can take in a dialogue with other disciplines and with contemporary society and culture.<sup>32</sup>

Reception studies in Classics have started primarily as surveys of the impact of classical literature and myth on world literature and culture. As this volume suggests, they should also entail reflections on the position Classics and Ancient History may occupy in contemporary education, research, and general culture; on their dialogue with other disciplines; and on the paradigms that classical antiquity may offer. One does not need a specific inducement such as the release of a new film inspired by classical antiquity, the anniversary of an organisation of classical studies, the beginning of a new millennium, or a crisis in order to reflect on this

<sup>29</sup> See Hughes 2009 (TV documentaries); Fisher and Langlands 2009 (internet).

<sup>30</sup> *Classical Reception Studies Network*: <http://www2.open.ac.uk/ClassicalStudies/GreekPlays/crsn/index.shtml>; *Australian Classical Reception Studies Network*: <http://www.acrsn.org>.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the ‘MA in Reception of the Classical World’ at the UCL Department of Greek and Latin (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/GrandLat/reception-studies/mainreceptionstudies>).

<sup>32</sup> In recent years several such reflective studies have appeared, e.g. Salvatore Settis’ thought-provoking book on the ‘Classical’ (2006) and Simon Goldhill’s books on the continuing value of classical education (2002 and 2004).

field, its past and its perspectives. Rather, reflection on Classics can be fruitful at any time because of its very diversity. Often used, abused and, in the process, bruised, Classics, nevertheless, remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration, disputation, and investigation.

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## FROM PARALLEL TO COMPARISON (OR LIFE AND DEATH OF PARALLEL)

*François Hartog*

### 1. AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE PARALLEL

Recognised by ancient rhetoric as a form of comparison, the establishment of a Parallel essentially belongs to the apparatus of *historia magistra*. Antiquity formulated it and used it.<sup>1</sup> Plutarch illustrated it and transmitted it to the Moderns who in their turn used it, before giving it up. For the Parallel to lose its pertinence, the Ancients had to be distanced irremediably from the Moderns and become truly ‘inimitable’. The experience of time had to be changed and one had to enter the modern regime of historicity. In fact, the ‘time’ of modern comparison is one ‘that marches on’, a time of progress and evolution. It is this moment of transition, when the parallel loses its heuristic capacity, when it is called into question, that it is worth investigating a little further: the period ‘in between’.

What is the origin of the Parallel? A passage from Isocrates gives us a first clue. In the context of crisis which, at the beginning of the fourth century BCE, followed the defeat of Athens by Sparta, Isocrates acknowledged that ‘changes’ had taken place and proposed yet another change, this time conceived intentionally as a ‘return’. The self-satisfaction of the Athenian ‘present’, as stated in the opening pages of Thucydides, was no longer valid: on the contrary it was towards the past that one had to turn, the past that should be imitated:<sup>2</sup>

We must thus change our system in such a way that the system that existed for our ancestors should exist for us: for inevitably from the same policy will result similar or analogous acts. We should place in parallel the most important among them and examine which of them should be chosen.

For Plutarch, in his *Parallel Lives of Famous Men*, the parallel, which paired a Greek and a Roman, was first of all presented as a tool of knowledge and of self-improvement. From the lives of the two heroes only ‘the more important’ and ‘the finer’ was retained. Each diptych ended with a comparison of their strong and weak points and the naming of the victor – Theseus or Romulus, Lycurgus or Numa. Conceived by Plutarch as a basis for imitation, the Parallel is a mirror which should reflect to the reader the image of what is expected of him or what he is expected to be. It is thus a variety of *exemplum*: a doubled example. It goes from the past to the reader’s present. But the Parallel is, with Plutarch, something

<sup>1</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium* IV, 59. For a broader perspective, see Hartog 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Isocrates, *Areopagiticus* 78-79.

more: not only an instrument of training, apprenticeship or self-improvement, but also an expression of a cultural policy. It presupposes and it demonstrates that the Greeks and the Romans belonged to the same world of the city, sharing the same nature (that is, essential qualities) and the same values in a Graeco-Roman world.

Beside this canonical form of the Parallel, there exists another one, of which the second term is constituted by 'us'. A and B then form a couple, of the type 'The Ancients *and* the Moderns'. Previous to B, A occupied an eminent position making it a model to be imitated, to which one turns in search for lessons or, at least, inspiration and a guide to present action. Even if the two elements of the pair are, or have become, far distant from each other, they nonetheless come from the same universe of reference. Whether the Modern should try and draw near to the Ancient or to raise himself to his level, or whether, on the contrary, he should try and distinguish himself and distance himself from him, it is with reference to the Ancient that the decisions are made. But what happens when the Parallel is used to justify a strategy aiming at proving the radical superiority of the second term? What happens, when it becomes, as with Charles Perrault, a war machine against the Ancients and an element of quarrel between the partisans of the Ancients and those of the Moderns? Is there not a risk of rupture? Because, from that moment onwards, anteriority becomes inferiority not only in fact but also in principle. And the model of the *historia magistra*, even though it is formally retained, runs the risk, so to speak, of 'walking on its head'.

A variation of the preceding case could be that of the prospective parallel (looking towards the future), even if one remains in the universe of the preceding case, not far from Thucydides and still in Isocrates. But here the parallel tries to provide something more, to be used as an instrument of forecast, following the general law that the same causes produce the same effects. This prospective parallel is also the one that Chateaubriand used when he launched himself into his *Essai historique sur les révolutions anciennes et modernes* (*Historical essay on ancient and modern revolutions*; 1797). The declared goal was not only to explain the French Revolution in the light of ancient parallels but, above all, to forecast its outcome. This type of parallel, between prophecy and prediction, was used in times of crisis at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> This was to mobilise the past while feeling even more that the future promises to be different from all that has gone before, because of a very disturbing experience of an acceleration of time.

## 2. CHARLES PERRAULT'S PARALLEL: THE SWANSONG (1688-1697)

With Charles Perrault the parallel, apparently, triumphs. However, if one takes a closer look at it, the glorious ship seems to have sailed into troubled waters: the model seems to have sprung a leak. In 1687, Perrault read before the *Académie Française* his famous poem *Le siècle de Louis le Grand*. From the very beginning the setting of the debate was fixed.

<sup>3</sup> Christophoros 1960, 82-87.



La belle antiquité fut toujours admirable;  
 Mais je ne crus jamais qu'elle fût adorable [...]  
 Et l'on peut comparer sans craindre d'être injuste,  
 Le siècle de Louis au beau siècle d'Auguste [...]  
 De Louis des grands Roys le plus parfait modèle.

Fine antiquity was always admirable  
 But I never believed that it was adorable [...]  
 And if one can compare without fearing to be unjust,  
 The Age of Louis with the fine age of Augustus [...]  
 Of Louis of the great Kings, the most perfect model.

One is certainly here in the world of laudatory rhetoric, even of courtly flattery, but something else can be discerned. A year later, in 1688, the first dialogue of the *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* appeared.<sup>4</sup> Perrault turns very naturally towards the parallel, which offers him a set form – obvious, and in addition, polemically very satisfying: the goal of every operation is to put the Moderns in the place of the Ancients, finally by putting the Ancients in their place. But, more interesting, seems to be the fact that, in the successive discourses, the Parallel, as such, as an epistemological instrument, was to show weaknesses and encounter difficulties. Perrault, however, was not to renounce it. He probably did not want to, first of all for the simple reason of opportunity and also, because he could not, for he did not have the intellectual capacity to think outside and beyond this framework: that is, to be able to leave the Parallel and enter what was, in fact, the Comparison. If the Parallel was questioned, it could not be doubted as a form, let alone revoked as an instrument. Nothing was to be solved, but the adversaries in the *Querelle* (those he used to meet at the *Académie Française*) were to find an apparent reconciliation.

A sensitive and complex issue was that of what constituted perfection. First of all understood within a Christian framework, perfection was later 'to become more human'. Thus, for Fontenelle, 'in all things man should aim at a point of perfection even beyond his reach', even for false ideas. And if not exactly within our reach, perfection could from then on be inserted within our human horizon.

As a starting point, Perrault took the opposite view from the one that he attributed to the advocates of the Ancients and which maintained that perfection (in the strong, religious, meaning of the term) could be found among the Ancients.<sup>5</sup> That was objected to in vain by the president. On the contrary, the chevalier and the abbé (who was Perrault's spokesman) stated that *we* are the true Ancients (a familiar thesis since Bacon, Descartes, Pascal, Fontenelle).<sup>6</sup> But how, in that case, should this still glorious old-age be apprehended? An old-age which never becomes completely old? They also estimated, in agreement with Fontenelle, that Nature is always the same: a Virgil today would be quite possible. Even more, the

<sup>4</sup> Charles Perrault, *Le siècle de Louis le Grand* (in Perrault 1971 [1692], 79).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

abbé emphasised further on that there is nothing that ‘cannot be perfected by time’, so well that a Virgil today would be better than the Virgil of antiquity. It follows that ‘all things being equal, it is an advantage for a century to have come after the others’.<sup>7</sup>

Once these points have been settled, how can perfection be defined? Two representations seem to be at work. The first one takes the image of degrees of perfection: the century is considered as having attained ‘the highest degree of perfection’ or ‘in a certain way to be at the summit of its perfection’. Perfection is described as a straight line moving upwards, vectorised, measurable. The second uses the expression ‘point of perfection’, which suggests the movement of a curve, certainly moving upwards, although, by definition, the point of perfection is something which cannot last. Once attained, it is passed and one can only move downwards. Perrault, however, navigates from one formula to another as if they were equivalent: from the ‘degrees’ to the ‘point’, from the straight line to the curve, from the summit to the ancient cyclical scheme. He thus avoids the difficulty, but at the same time underlines it, using an astronomical metaphor:<sup>8</sup>

And as, for the last few years, progress has marched at a much slower rate, almost imperceptibly, just as our days seem not to increase any longer when they approach the solstice; I still have the joy of thinking that we have probably not many things to envy of those who will come after us.

We have almost arrived at the solstice. If, in the preceding centuries, one can see ‘birth and progress in all things’, one can see nothing that has not benefited from ‘a new growth and a new lustre in the time in which we live’.

Nonetheless, Perrault had to acknowledge that it is not enough for a century to come afterwards in order to be automatically superior to the preceding: ‘This should be understood under the condition of all things being equal’, he had already noted. Peace and prosperity were necessary, that is, the reign of great monarchs, ‘so that the century may have the time to rise by degrees to final perfection’.<sup>9</sup>

I would thus say in order to explain myself in a more just and equitable manner, that the Ancients and Moderns excelled equally, the Ancients as much as the Ancients were able to, and the Moderns as much as the Moderns can.<sup>10</sup>

To each one his perfection, he seems finally to admit. But it would be wrong to draw from this wording the idea that the perfection of the Moderns is only relative. It is that of the Ancients that is relativised: they did what they could and could not go beyond a certain point (to be precise, their own point of perfection). These considerations on perfection damage the idea of a Parallel: the points of comparison between the Ancients and Moderns disappear.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 40f. and 288.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 164.

How can we explain Perrault's oscillation between the two models of perfection that he juxtaposes or superposes? Or, in other words, why does this unfinished and incomplete historicisation obviously not work in the present, although it works in the past – perhaps through the relay of the cyclical model? The answer is: by blocking the present. As if Perrault, more profoundly than the obligatory praise of a reigning monarch, could not go beyond the present, beyond the age of Louis XIV, which translated in fact a formidable operation of valorisation of the present: of presentism.

The attitude towards the present is twofold. From a Christian perspective, marked by St. Augustine, the present is valid as the only point allowing man to give God a place and as a passage giving access to God's eternity. Hence its value. On the contrary, if one is attached to the present for itself, for the present moment, and thus without God, one is in the world and the mundane, in the mere fashion.<sup>11</sup> This is the misery of godless man. Here one finds the etymology of *modernus*. In the same way as in the system of absolute power the monarch occupies the place of God, something of the possible relationship between present and eternity is reflected on the royal present, because it is the role of the king, day after day, to be the creator of fashion. The king incarnates the present in two ways, as God's lieutenant and as an arbiter of elegance. The centrality of the present is reinforced by making it a frontier difficult to transgress. To pretend to see beyond would border on sacrilege, something that should be forbidden. In such a configuration, the present tends to become the point of view from which one regards the past, imposing itself as reference and pattern. And it becomes banal for a courtier to declare that from then on the king has no models. He has, himself, become the perfect model for all kings, just as Perrault had announced. By the same reversal, *historia magistra* means that from now on it is the present that measures the past and, in a certain way, judges it.

Perrault was also the author of a book published shortly after the *Parallèle*. Illustrated with engravings, it was entitled *Les hommes illustres qui ont paru en France pendant ce siècle* (*Famous men who appeared in France during this century*; 1697-1700). By *this* century, one should, of course, understand Louis XIV's century. The title is revealing by its very banality. Perrault did nothing more, in fact, than improvise on Plutarch. In 1736, Voltaire was to write *Le Mondain* (*The Man of the World*), with its famous line 'earthly paradise is where I am', before concentrating on *Le siècle de Louis XIV*, which was published in 1738 and in which he endeavoured to show 'the history of the human mind taken from the most glorious century of the human mind'. He is once again part of this presentist configuration that wants to see in Louis XIV the model of history, except that he, obviously, writes 'I'. In his *Correspondance* he mentions 'a history of this century that should be a model for the following ones'.<sup>12</sup>

The parallel, thus treated by Perrault, can only lead to a misunderstanding of imitation. Imitation had to be presented or denounced as a simple copy. The 'An-

<sup>11</sup> Fumaroli 1990/91, 515-532.

<sup>12</sup> Voltaire, *Correspondance*, 1739, lettre n° 1259; 1740, lettre n° 1372.