Abstract: The reception of Greco-Roman antiquity in South Africa exhibits enormous variety. The current essay is an introduction to a proposed volume that explores as many aspects as possible. Several instances of South African classicism cluster around Cecil John Rhodes, but equally there is significant material involving people who have had little or no formal instruction in Latin or Greek.
On 12 February 1991 a meeting took place at Cape Town’s airport, then known as D. F. Malan Airport in memory of a previous prime minister, between leaders of the African National Congress and President F. W. de Klerk’s ruling National Party. One year earlier Nelson Mandela, the African National Congress (ANC) leader, had been released from lengthy imprisonment and the organisation itself unbanned. The purpose of the meeting was to clear the way for formal talks about the transition to democracy, talks which had at the time stalled as a result of violent exchanges involving both the black population and the security forces. The meeting ultimately produced the D. F. Malan Accord, an agreement on the terms of engagement that did much to make possible the first democratic election of April 1994. This was unchartered territory and the mood was tense. Skeptics on each side questioned the entire exercise of negotiating a democratic solution to the country’s political impasse, which had long since been marked by violence. There was no guarantee of a peaceful outcome.

During a tea-break, one member of the African National Congress delegation, Chris Hani, initiated a conversation with Gerrit Viljoen, who was at the time Minister of Constitutional Development and De Klerk’s right-hand man (Fig. 1.1). Hani was Chief of Staff of the ANC’s armed wing, umKonto we Sizwe. The subject of their conversation was Sophocles’ tragedy *Philoctetes*, about which Hani raised some detailed points of interpretation. Together with Dr. Pallo Jordan, also of the ANC delegation, Hani and Viljoen fell into deep discussion. According to De Klerk, Viljoen was ‘impressed’ by their ‘enthusiasm and depth of knowledge’.¹ The fact that an ancient, scholarly topic arose in a high-voltage political meeting certainly occasioned surprise at the time, all the more because it was initiated by a guerrilla who grew up among the country’s poorest. Indeed, Hani had spent his early years in the rural Eastern Cape, his parents minimally

¹ F. W. de Klerk, private communication 1 April 2010: for recollections of the incident I thank the former President, as well as former Minister Pallo Jordan (private communications, 19 and 21 August 2010).
educated. Despite the two leaders’ differences of allegiance and background, Sophocles’ play provided common ground and, in particular, an ice-breaker.

Gerrit Viljoen (1926-2009) was the son of a professor of Greek, and had had a stellar academic career: having studied initially at the University of Pretoria, he took the Classical Tripos (first class) at Cambridge and then a doctorate in classical philology at Leiden. He became professor of Greek at the University of South Africa (1957), then rector of the newly formed Rand Afrikaans University, now known as the University of Johannesburg (1967), before taking political office in 1978. His academic research focused on Greek lyric poetry, especially the Odes of Pindar. Viljoen was an establishment figure par excellence, and at one stage chaired the influential and partially secret Afrikaner organization, the Broederbond (1974-80). Having initially been the senior constitutional expert on de Klerk’s team, Viljoen resigned in 1992 for health reasons, and left politics completely. He died in 2009.

Hani (1942-93), on the other hand, had studied Latin and English at the historically black University of Fort Hare and then at Rhodes University, both in the Eastern Cape (Fig. 1.2). While fighting against apartheid in exile, he maintained scholarly habits, reading voraciously whenever possible. His original choice to study Latin was linked to the fact that it was a requirement for entry into the legal profession.

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5 I thank Mr. Steven Fourie, Registrar of Rhodes University, for making available Hani’s academic record, covering the years 1959-61 (copy dated 22 April 2010). See now Michael Lambert, The Classics and South African Identities (London: Duckworth, 2011), 110-15.
Hani’s popularity in South Africa was enormous following his return from exile in 1991. However, he would not live to see the first democratic election, since he was assassinated at his home near Johannesburg by a white right-winger in April 1993. As we shall see, the relation between classical antiquity and South Africa’s emerging elite did not end there, involving no less a figure than Mandela himself during his Robben Island imprisonment. Translated ancient texts were among the library books available to prisoners, even to political prisoners on Robben Island. Such ancient works, typically in Penguin translations, were considered by the authorities to be innocuous and innocent of the subversiveness they sought to quell (Fig. 1.3).  

In itself the airport episode amounts to little, and is hard to document following the deaths of the two main protagonists. Nonetheless, it should at the very least attune us to the element of surprise: whereas classical antiquity is very widely attested as a source of social hierarchy and division, its role as a bridge-builder – or, to put it differently, a safety-valve – is much less known. The Hani/Viljoen exchange is thus emblematic of the scope and nature of the current volume, which seeks to excavate distinctively South African contexts of classical antiquity, to explore the often surprising afterlives of ancient Greek and Roman texts, ideas, styles and artifacts. To be sure, classical antiquity has been part of the colonial legacy, during both the Dutch- and the British-ruled periods of South African history, roughly 1652-1806 and 1806-1910 respectively. Several of the contributions to the present volume make the colonial connection clear. Recent scholarship has shown the small but influential role classics played in the formation of the Indian Civil Service, both at the East India Company College at Haileybury (founded 1806) and later at Balliol College, Oxford. But clearly neither of these characterizations tells the whole story. For one, Hani’s undoubted attachment to ancient literature casts into question any assumption that classical antiquity has been merely the handmaid of

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colonialism or of apartheid. Classicism has been evident in some unexpected places, and it has been part of the lives not merely of those whose elite education enabled them to learn Latin at a young age. In the spectrum of South African interactions with ancient Greece and Rome presented below, it will be as important to show some familiar, mainstream instances of classicism alongside less expected and less canonical ones. What is more, the episode coincides with a critical period in South African history, namely the transition to democracy that started in earnest when, opening Parliament on 2 February 1990, De Klerk unexpectedly announced the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Mandela. In one sense the Viljoen/Hani moment looks forward to the post-1994 period of ANC-led majority government, and to a time when, amid the restructuring of school and university curricula, university departments of ancient studies have had to define and defend their turf anew in a changing landscape. Most departments have been reduced in the number of instructors, through attrition, redeployment and retrenchment, others closed down or amalgamated out of existence. Historically white universities face the challenge of how to appeal to the new student demographic. This is now much more racially diverse, containing a high percentage of non-native speakers of English or Afrikaans, the established languages for teaching Latin and Greek especially, and of first-generation university attenders, who gravitate naturally to the professional tracks rather than the humanities. In another sense the episode also looks back upon a time in which ancient Greece and Rome held a place of some prominence, if one thinks beyond the figure of Viljoen himself to the country’s Roman-Dutch juristic tradition and to some of its most prominent buildings, including the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Far from being a one-sided, unchanging set of material, classical antiquity has fulfilled very different social roles at different times. At that critical point in South Africa’s history, Sophocles played a minor but revealing role.

I THE MUSE IN AZANIA

The muse herself needs no introduction. As the collective symbols of artistic and other kinds of creativity, the muses go all the way back to the earliest Greek literature. Best known is the invocation of the muse that begins Homer’s *Odyssey*: ‘Tell me, Muse,
of the man of many turns …’ (1.1). They appear sometimes singly and sometimes in groups of different sizes, linked initially with Pieria and nearby Mount Olympus. These goddesses were a source of inspiration poets, intellectuals and others.  

In this volume the muse is a metaphor for classicism, namely the ideas, forms, artifacts and texts of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The notion of the classical is by no means without its complications, particularly as it relates to the intellectual and aesthetic histories of idealised forms. It has aesthetic and ethical implications. Another element at the edges of the current collection is the relative role of other traditions of antiquity, including Egyptian and Phoenician. For present purposes, however, we may take the term classical to denote the cultural productions of ancient Greece and Rome. Unless otherwise specified, the term ‘antiquity’ in the pages that follow refers to those particular ancient cultures. Their special status in western European civilisation is a large topic in its own right, involving the history of the Christian church, as well as the deployment of ancient symbols as a source of legitimacy on the part of several post-ancient polities. While this special status of ‘classical’ antiquity in Europe is well established, its role in Africa, including South Africa, is much less obvious. That role is explored in the current volume.

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10 There are special problems in comparing the reception of Egypt and Phoenicia in South Africa. Most significantly, both are better known through the Hebrew Bible, especially the Pentateuch, than in any more direct sense. To take a concrete example, obelisks may be considered a link with Egypt, for example in early twentieth-century commemorations of the Anglo-Boer War and of the Great Trek. But the link is an indirect one, since obelisks were first imported by Roman emperors and have since then been widely deployed a symbol of power. See further Izak Cornelius, ‘Egyptianizing motifs in South African architecture’, in Jean-Marcel Humbert and Clifford Price (eds.), Imhotep Today: Egyptianizing architecture (London: UCL Press, 2003), 247-55. Furthermore, scholarly accounts of the Phoenicians emphasise how little is known of them, e.g. Glenn E. Markoe, The Phoenicians (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
It is only recently that colonial and postcolonial receptions of antiquity have begun to receive attention. Some such studies have emphasised the role of classics in the scholarly background of metropolitan-trained colonial elite. Others have shown that, in its (post)colonial manifestations, antiquity has sometimes been a source of social power for upwardly mobile indigenous people; that it has been no monolith, with classical material deployed sometimes in subversive ways that challenge rather than reinforce the colonial establishment. Such themes will be apparent in the current collection.

Azania needs rather more explanation. This is the ancient name for the Horn of Africa, attested first in the anonymous *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (sections 16-19), a captain’s manual of around A.D. 40-70. In ancient topography it denotes the land immediately adjacent to the north-west Indian Ocean, today’s Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania. Later the term would be found also in Claudius Ptolemy’s *Geography*, a second-century A.D. text representing both the culmination of ancient geography and also, as we shall see, an important point of departure for early modern European geography, following its translation into Latin in 1406. Much later, the name ‘Azania’ would be revived in the attempt to find an anti-colonial alternative to the term ‘South Africa’, which was officially used after the Act of Union in 1910. In practice, use of the name ‘Azania’ marked the split of an Africanist faction away from the African National Congress in 1959. This faction became the Pan Africanist Congress under the leadership of Robert Sobukwe (1924-78). A small number of political organizations continue to

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use the name Azania today, an act of continued defiance against the dominance of the ANC and its partners in government. Consequently, the ancient name is far from obscurantist and pedantic: for some, it signals the failure of the ANC since the 1950s to constitute a single, unified organization. This would be the only apparent explanation for the fact that the term continues to raise hackles in South Africa today, even though both the Pan Africanist Congress and AZAPO have had only negligible popular support, as reflected in the elections since 1994. Beyond this narrowly political use, the name has been a symbol of African pride, by implication invoking the glories of Egypt and Ethiopia as alternatives to the seeming monopoly of Greece and Rome. Other factors too might have determined its use: in general, the desire to make the point that South Africa is part of the African continent; and specifically to signal Kenyan and Tanzanian support for the struggle against apartheid. Nonetheless, the choice of the name is problematic if its main aim was to decolonize minds: as the chapters here show, the classical tradition in South Africa has been associated with colonialism in various forms. The name ‘Azania’ has been seen at particular moment; as will be very apparent, the reasons for invoking antiquity and circumstances in doing so have been remarkably different, and it is questionable whether the preference for ‘Azania’ over ‘South Africa’ as a name constitutes any meaningful stand against colonialism.

To gain some perspective on the range of South Africa’s classical traditions, it might have seemed obvious to focus on Greek and Latin pedagogy. Indeed some attempt will be made to do so in the paragraphs immediately following: at the very least, engagement with the languages themselves provides a basis of sorts and can be easily measured. The story has already been told.\(^\text{15}\) However, in the present volume as a whole pedagogy is more a matter of historical setting than a central focus. Here the emphasis

will be, rather, on cultural productions that have involved Greek and Roman antiquity in a central way. The book seeks variously to address the question, *How have ancient Greece and Rome intersected with South African histories?* The plural, ‘histories’ is advisedly used, to involve not only politics and cultural productions but also the more modest *petits récits* (‘small narratives’) of individuals rather than institutions. The overarching question of the book subsumes two related concepts, namely tradition and reception. As used here, both are conceived broadly. The question is also intended to emphasise that South African receptions of antiquity deserve to be explicitly located in that country’s history, particularly of the 19th and 20th centuries. Several smaller questions follow, for example: Who has been involved in classical reception, and to what ends? Is it possible to identify instances in which classical pasts have displaced other pasts? Between these covers we canvass a broad range of artifacts, styles, texts and ideas. While the case-study format is well suited to such diversity and breadth, the present essay seeks to identify some unifying themes and phenomena.

II AUTHORITY OF ANTIQUITY, AUTHORITY AND ANTIQUITY

It is already evident that Greco-Roman antiquity has been implicated in various kinds of authority. As a next step it will be necessary to consider the educational role classical antiquity has played, particularly in an institutional sense.

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17 Some classicists have argued for the concept of reception as preferable to that of tradition, on the grounds that tradition tends to involve uncritical celebration: e.g. Lorna Hardwick, *Reception Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). However, since Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), this is not the case: it has become axiomatic, at least in the historical disciplines generally, that the notion of tradition deserves some measure of skepsis, and that the term has lost its supposed innocence.
In classical antiquity the extent of Africa was not known, and there was no awareness of the southern end of the African continent. Herodotus is pointedly vague when, in the course of describing Nilotic geography, he comes to the area south of Elephantine. The question of Africa’s southern extent is, for Herodotus and later Greek and Roman geographers, tied up with that of the source of the Nile, and in some cases also the causes of the Nile’s annual inundation. Later ancient writers would also be concerned with this set of questions. In antiquity and well beyond, the southern part of Africa would remain quite literally Europe’s ‘terra incognita’. It is in these circumstances that Pliny the Elder, composing his Natural History in the second half of the first century A.D., could refer to a Greek proverb according to which Africa always produces something new.

One factor in the persistence of this idea is the ongoing authority of ancient maps, particularly Claudius Ptolemy’s Geography (second century A.D.): apart from some theoretical discussion, the bulk of the work (books 2-7) comprises a list of some 8100 toponyms, together with their latitude and longitude. This work, written in ordinary koine Greek and translated into Latin only in 1406, was the point of departure for western map-making from around that time well into the fifteenth century, amid many exploratory voyages. The Ptolemaic schema played an important role in the evolution of western cartography in this so-called Age of Discovery. One important divergence that would

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18 Elephantine is located at the first cataract, in an area that roughly coincides with the southern border of the modern state of Egypt.
19 Herodotus offers a series of competing theories on the inundation, of which he clearly states his favourite, namely that the sun is driven by storms from its original path, onto the inland regions of Africa (‘Libya’): Histories 2.24, cf. 2.25-27.
emerge was that the Indian Ocean proved to be not an inland sea, which Ptolemy had indicated, and that meant that it was in fact possible to reach India from western Europe by rounding the Cape. A key point in the history of cartography was the publication of Martin Waldseemüller’s *Universalis Cosmographia* (1507, Fig. 1.4): this was not only the first map to represent the Americas but also the first to show that Africa had a southern limit. In both respects Waldseemüller was responding to voyages undertaken by Iberian explorers, yet the tradition of Claudius Ptolemy constituted this basis.

The southern end of Africa was less significant to European science in itself than it was as a key point on the sea-route to India. In this context Portuguese explorers were the first Europeans to round the Cape: first Bartholomew Dias in 1487 and later Vasco da Gama in 1497-98. The inscriptions the early Portuguese seafarers left behind in southern Africa were in vernacular Portuguese rather than scholarly Latin. A telling contrast emerges here, which may be considered emblematic of the limited role of ancient Greece and Rome in early colonialism: on the one hand, maps produced in the European metropolis reveal a classicising tendency, with their use of a Ptolemaic paradigm and sometimes Latin, whereas on the other hand the travellers themselves show a preference for the vernacular, in part by virtue of the limits of their education.

The classical framework had dimensions beyond the science of maps. In the sixteenth century classical mythology was creatively amended to accommodate a new figure: Adamastor. This character, invented by Camões as a personification of the ‘Cape of Storms’ (‘Cabo tormentoso’ by its Portuguese name), is carefully aligned with classical mythology as ‘one of those rugged Titans’ (Canto V.51). Having fallen in love

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23 Dias’ contribution was to show how it was possible to round the Cape, and thus reach the Indian Ocean by sea: Eric Axelson, ‘Prince Henry the Navigator and the discovery of the sea route to India’, *Geographical Journal* 127.2 (1961), 145-55.

with the nymph Thetis, he is thwarted by her mother Doris. Adamastor’s curse threatens all Europeans who round the Cape, Dias having been the first victim. The curse, with its prophecy of the fate that Portuguese seafarers can expect, marks the Cape of Storms as forbidden territory and in a dire prophecy warns potential travellers that nature’s secrets are not to be desecrated without retribution:

I am the vast, secret promontory
you Portuguese call the Cape of Storms,
which neither Ptolemy, Pompey, Strabo,
Pliny, nor any authors knew of.
Here Africa ends. Here its coast
concludes in this, my vast inviolate
plateau, extending southwards to the Pole
and, by your daring, struck to my very soul.25

The figure of Adamastor is thus a created in a classical frame, even if that frame had to be specifically enlarged to accommodate it. Subsequent to Camões, many different literary and visual artists have taken up this mythical figure, so that Adamastor has even become a symbol of the violence accompanying the colonial project. This is seen, for example, in Cyril Coetzee’s large mural, T’kama Adamastor (1999) as well as literary works of Roy Campbell, André P. Brink and Douglas Livingstone (see Fig. 1.5 and Coleman, this volume).26

Furthermore, some of the earliest European descriptions of the southwestern Cape and its hinterland are in Latin. This is not surprising, given the status of Latin as a scholarly language of early modern Europe. The first such writer, Willem ten Rhyne (1647-1700), spent only a few weeks at the Cape on his way to Java in 1673, yet his ‘Short account of the Cape of Good Hope’ (1686) initially reveals his keen interest in botanical matters, elsewhere in evidence, whereas the final two-thirds are devoted to a description of the indigenous Khoi people (‘Hottentotti’). By contrast, Jan Willem van Grevenbroek (1644-1725) arrived at the age of forty, and then spent the rest of his long life at the Cape, the first ten years as a senior administrator under Governor Simon van der Stel. His lengthy letter on the Cape of Good Hope was composed in highly wrought literary Latin, with many poetic touches. The Neolatin tradition from and about the Cape is not especially substantial, but its products are historically significant in themselves as early accounts of the South African hinterland. Whereas these works stemmed mostly from Europeans writing about the Cape, there is in one instance a Cape-born writer. From the later eighteenth century two works survive from Gysbert Hemmy, born at the Cape to a German merchant family, and they both deserve attention: one is a legal treatise on the admissability of slaves’ evidence against their masters and a speech, ‘On the testimony of Aethiopians, Chinese and other pagans’, whereas the other is a speech, ‘On the Cape of Good Hope’, delivered in 1767 at the Johanneum, a school in Hamburg whose humanistic tradition goes back to the time of Martin Luther.27 It is in this period that the Cloete Cellar of Groot Constantia Estate received an elaborate classicizing pediment, depicting the mythological scene (Fig. 1.6).

One area in which Latin had particular purchase in early South African history is law. Whereas civil law replaced Roman-Dutch law in many parts of the world around the time of Napoleon, Roman-Dutch law would prove a lasting legacy of the Dutch occupation. It endures to the present day, even though in effect much attenuated by the

use of case law. Along with Roman-Dutch law came Latin as the medium of legal discourse. Slavery was practised at the Cape from the early Dutch settlement, from the 1660s up to abolition in 1834, and the law governing it used Roman precedent in one important respect: that slaves were property, and therefore unable to enter into legal contracts such as marriage. From a recent study it emerges that the reception of Roman law at the Cape reveals detailed knowledge, including chapter-and-verse citation, with the original Latin used more than translations. It seems impossible to say whether, in the context of slavery, Roman law had an ameliorative or pejorative effect, given that it was used in both prosecution and defence, by both slaves and their masters.  

Beyond texts there was also a different kind of use of antiquity visible when, for example, a brass bell installed by governor Simon van der Stel at the Castle of Good Hope, South Africa’s oldest building complex still standing (Fig. 1.7), carried a Latin inscription: ‘With the blessing of the Lord of the earth exalted on high, Claudius Fremy’s foundry produced me in Amsterdam in the year 1697.’ In this very literal sense, there was Latin at the Cape from the end of the seventeenth century, and it remains in evidence at the present time.

During the Dutch occupation there was very little organized education of any kind in the colony, but the situation changed substantially with the arrival of the British around the time of the Napoleonic Wars. Whereas the first British Occupation lasted for only the years 1795-1803, the second was more enduring and had greater impact. Having begun with the Battle of Blaauwberg in 1806, it lasted in its full political sense until the Act of Union in 1910. Under British rule the introduction of church-run schools brought instruction in Latin for the first time. Over the decades this would be largely restricted to the colonial elite, the most significant exceptions being the Lovedale and later Fort Hare, where Mandela, Hani and others studied (see Claassen, this volume).

When institutions were established to provide education for the sons, and later daughters, of the colonists, Latin had a place of some significance. This is in keeping with European traditions of the period. The British astronomer John Herschel (1792-1871) spent the years 1834-38 at the Cape for the purpose of observing the skies, and during that period he was visited by Charles Darwin. Herschel’s sojourn catalysed educational reform at the Cape, and was subsequently marked with the erection of a small obelisk at his former Cape home, where now a school is named in his memory.31

The discovery of diamonds in the Hopetown/Kimberley area along the Orange River (1866-71), followed by gold farther inland on the Reef (1886), precipitated drastic changes at levels of the region’s society and economy. Those who emerged as the mineral magnates, namely Cecil John Rhodes, Alfred Beit and other ‘Randlords’, in the late nineteenth century started converting their financial gains into cultural capital. They did so in style. Johannesburg, the centre of the gold industry, was a brand new city, and in that environment the occasional but visible use of classical motifs asserted a past that was not necessarily otherwise apparent. In this way Johannesburg, perhaps even more than older cities such as Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban, acquired many noble buildings in the classical or Palladian styles. (See Freschi, this volume.)

Rhodes’ engagement with antiquity had many facets (see Hilton, this volume), including the commissioning of an ambitious series of translations from Greek and Latin texts (see Wardle, this volume). In a sense this is ironic, given that he was no great scholar in his own right, and his command of Greek and Latin was only barely adequate for the purposes of his Oxford degree. His close association with the architect Herbert Baker (1862-1946) resulted in significant architectural activity, both in Cape Town and on the Reef (Fig. 1.8). After Rhodes’ death in 1902 Baker designed the Union Building, which marked the establishment of the Union of South Africa, amalgamating the four provinces (1910, Fig. 1.9). Baker’s classical designs may be considered a link with not only Britain but also with other colonies such as India and New Zealand.

31 Herschel’s prominence in science was such that his activities elicited an extended satire by the American naturalist John Locke, composed in the style of Lucian (second century A.D.): see John L. Hilton, ‘Lucian and the Great Moon Hoax of 1835’, *Akroterion* 50 (2005), 87-108.
Latin became a prerequisite for certain positions in the legal profession, and consequently for legal training. This stipulation did not necessarily represent a conscious effort to exclude blacks, very few of whom had access to Latin in high school, but it did largely have that effect. The Latin requirement for law was dropped in 1994, very soon after the ANC’s accession, and by that point most South African departments of classics enrolled the largest number of their students via the juristic route. In Dutch Reformed and other seminaries, Greek was part of the theological curriculum. In 1958 the Classical Association of South Africa was founded, providing a forum for discussion about classical material. Its activities, in research, teaching and community outreach, are visible in the Association’s journal, *Acta Classica.*

### III THE STRUGGLE, WITH GREEK AND LATIN

Some of the contexts in which elements of antiquity present themselves are surprising, to say the least. For one, many of the names of the slaves from the later seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries were classical. Explanations for this practice differ: one scholar has seen this custom as degrading, consistent with the naming of pets, whereas another sees a direct connection with ancient Roman naming practice. Either way, the legacy of slave names is very evident in the Cape Town telephone directory today, with names such as Cupido, Hector and Adonis abundantly in evidence (Fig. 1.10).

Further, apart from the episode with which this introduction began, there are three poignant moments in the struggle against apartheid, all of them located in prisons and known through the memoirs of leading political figures. The most famous episode involves Mandela himself, who participated in a production of *Antigone* in December

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1974, ten years into what would be a 27-year-long imprisonment. The production took place on Robben Island, in B Section Hall. Some thirty prisoners of B Section attended the performance, along with a handful of warders. Copies were obtained through the prison library, and the performances themselves were sanctioned by the prison authorities. Frank Anthony was another of the prisoners taking part.

In his memoir Mandela writes of this in the context of his admiration for ancient Greek plays, which he found ‘enormously elevating’ (441). Mandela was especially interested in, and even inspired by the heroic temperament of Greek tragic heroes:

What I took out of them was that character was measured by facing up to difficult situations and that a hero was a man who would not break down even under the most trying circumstances. (441)

The sentiment is not as narrowly gendered as it seems, for it applies to Antigone, a heroine ‘who symbolized our struggle; … a freedom fighter … [who] defied the law on the ground that was unjust’. (442) When Mandela offered to take part in the production, he was asked to play the part of Creon. Mandela’s subsequent reflection on the play focuses on his role in the ANC and the struggle against apartheid: he says of Creon that ‘his inflexibility and blindness ill become a leader, for a leader must temper justice with mercy.’ (442) In this way Mandela distances himself from Creon’s self-righteous inflexibility in the play. Not surprisingly given the nature of the memoir, Mandela’s comment is made very much under the spotlight of historical evaluation. The self-criticism it conveys is certainly characteristic of *Long Walk to Freedom*. From the play he quotes lines 194-97:

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34 These are the recollections of fellow inmate Ahmed Kathrada, who attended the performance (personal correspondence May 2007 and telephonic interview 17 August 2010). In his memoir Kathrada attributes this version of *Antigone* to Jean Anouilh (p. 259); nonetheless, there is no question about the presence on Robben Island of English translations of Sophocles’ Greek.

Of course you cannot know a man completely, his character, his principles, sense of judgment, not till he’s shown his colours, ruling the people, making laws. Experience, there’s the test.\textsuperscript{36}

Mandela’s status seems to hinge more on the struggle against apartheid and the democratic transition, whereas his presidency (1994-99) came towards the end of a distinguished political career. The memoir was thus published around his accession; presumably much of it was written down between his release from prison and the first democratic election (26-29 April 1994), and thus reflects his concerns about the prospect of taking power for the first time. Given the time at which \textit{Long Walk to Freedom} was composed, Mandela’s leadership was certainly under scrutiny: to a degree that is hard to conceive in retrospect, members of the liberation movement and indeed of the ANC were suspicious of the process of negotiations which led to his release.

While this revival of an ancient Greek play was significant, it is also somewhat isolated. It is clear that Shakespeare was pre-eminently the ‘common culture and text’ of Robben Islanders, more so than the Bible or any other text.\textsuperscript{37} In this context the many references among prisoners to Julius Caesar should be seen: it was in his Shakespearean form that he was known.

Second, Albie Sachs, then an ANC cadre and later a Constitutional Court justice, recollects a period in 1963 when he was arrested under State of Emergency legislation, and held in solitary confinement in various Cape Town prisons. Among these was the Caledon Square Police Station in the city centre. Sachs recalls with vividness and gentle self-mocking the point at which he contemplates his cell, which even at the time seemed to him a ‘mere temporary staging-post’:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} \textit{Long Walk}, 441, quoting lines 194-97 in the translation by B. M. W. Knox, \textit{Sophocles: the three Theban plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus} (New York: Penguin, 1982), page 67. This corresponds to Sophocles, \textit{Antigone}, lines 175-77 in the original Greek. Knox’ version, though quoted in Mandela’s memoir, actually postdates the Robben Island performance by nearly a decade.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Anthony Sampson, \textit{Mandela: the authorized biography} (London: HarperCollins, 1999), 231.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
On the walls are the names of others who have been here as political prisoners. Someone has written up slogans in Latin: must be a teacher – who could it be? Yes, of course, here is his name, Achmat Osman. He was here for one day only. SIC TRANSIT NOX DOLORIS. Not very spirited that – ‘Thus passes a night of sorrow.’ I think I will add a bit, though it is not easy to write on the wall with a ballpoint. I scratch the words SED SIC ADVINIT NOVA DIES – ‘But thus arrives a new day.’ Or should it be ‘advenit’ and not ‘advinit’? I am sure Achmat will not mind my making the addition, even if my grammar is weak. Here he has written another one: VAE TYRANNIS and there VAE TYRANNIBUS. Obviously he too was not sure which was the right word. Well, no inspector [of education] will tick him off for poor work here, ‘Cursed by the tyrants’ – I think that is what it means. VITAS LIBERTAS. ‘Long live liberty.’ That is more like it. Trust old Achmat to hurl defiance at them – in Latin.\(^{38}\)

Latin plays a curious role here: it is a source of bonding and even conversation between prisoners occupying the cell at different times. Whereas graffiti are very common in jail cells, here the status of Latin makes for comic relief, in Sachs’ retelling. There is a pointed contrast between Sachs’ attentiveness to his friend’s feelings (‘I am sure Achmat will not mind’) with the bullying ways or kragdadigheid of the apartheid state. A lawyer, Sachs, gently pokes fun at himself and also at his comrade, a teacher, Osman, for they both fumble for the correct form of the inflected ancient language. Sachs includes an incorrect translation of his own: ‘Vae tyrannis’ means ‘Woe to the tyrants’, ‘Long live liberty’ would be ‘Vivat libertas’ in Latin. Both of these he would certainly have been able to check in the process of publishing his book. Rather, Sachs prefers to play along in a game of faltering Latin. If this a correct characterization of Sachs’ own attitudes in the quotation above, how to explain Osman’s use of Latin in his graffiti? Presumably it was a source of pride in the fact that he knew Latin, whereas his jailors did not. That simple assertion, even if it was not understood by its immediate target, could provide an affirmation of self-worth on the part of Osman, a mixed-race person (a

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‘coloured’ in the still prevalent terminology of apartheid) in the face of racial segregation governing all possible spheres of life.

Third, the dynamics of power around Latin emerge in the memoir and notebooks of Ahmed Kathrada (1929-), particularly when he writes of the stark social relations of Robben Island. Along with Mandela, Kathrada was one of the accused at the Rivonia Trial (1963-64), and would share his incarceration in B Section a close quarters: sentenced to life imprisonment at the Rivonia Trial, he was released in 1989. He attended the 1974 performance of Antigone. Kathrada writes thus about a third political prisoner, Don Davids, who had recently been moved to B Section because of perceived insolence towards one of the warders. Nonetheless Davids used the privilege of being able to pursue studies by correspondence.

When the officer in charge of our studies came to announce the results of the final exams, no one was more surprised than Don to learn that his credits included Latin, a subject he had not taken.

Don pointed out the error, but the warders were having none of it, insisting that the results were accurate. Don stood his ground. Finally, quite exasperated by this reluctant student, the study officer blurted out in Afrikaans: ‘Don Davids, do you want the Latin, or do you not want the Latin?’

Don sheepishly whispered, ‘I’ll take the Latin’, and walked away.

To ‘take the Latin’ in this instance is the line of least resistance, conformity to an authoritarian state. The scholarly activities of Robben Island prisoners are a theme in all accounts, often (as here) contrasting with the lack of education or sophistication on the part of some of the warders. A number of the prisoners will have taken Latin as part of a law degree. Despite the offputting aspect of authoritarianism revealed in the anecdote, there are several references to ancient authors in Kathrada’s memoir: all of them epigraphs to chapters and exhibit timeless wisdom that offsets the pettiness and humiliation of day-to-day life on Robben Island. This applies also at a stylistic level, where the epigraphs vary the texture when seen against the specificities of Kathrada’s life and career. Thus Sophocles, Horace and Marcus Aurelius are quoted, as are Confucius,
Yeats, Lenin, Emerson, Einstein and others. Most quoted is Howard Fast’s *Spartacus*, which was initially self-published by its author in 1951 but would become a major success both as a novel and as film (1960). Kathrada himself took courses in ancient history via the University of South Africa, beginning during Gerrit Viljoen’s last years as head of Classics there (1957-67).

IV PRACTICES OF CLASSICISM

From this rich array a number of aspects of the classical deserve to be brought out, so as to illustrate particular ways in which South Africans have engaged with antiquity.

First, and perhaps most obviously, antiquity has been invoked as a political symbol and source of authority: Greece and Rome have been fundamental elements of the social order. This is well indicated by the Supreme Court of Appeal at Bloemfontein, for it combines the architectural and the juristic aspects of the social order. There is a classical element in both private and public architecture, involving the British Empire’s most prominent architects: Edward Lutyens and especially Sir Herbert Baker. Whereas Baker’s Union Buildings in Pretoria are best known, Johannesburg has a number of grandiose private homes in its northern suburbs (see Freschi, this volume). In the post-apartheid era, a monument to the police was set up on the hill just below the Union Buildings. It contains a Latin inscription honouring the police (Fig. 1.9). Here at the country’s single most important locus of political power the two different media – monumental writing and architecture – share a classical connection and it is striking that that they date from different phases of South African history. It is in such a public context that we find the most obvious connection between classics and political power.

That said, it is equally true that classical antiquity has not been the mere handmaid of power. Rather, a small but significant number of cases reveals that ancient

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39 *Ahmed Kathrada’s Notebook from Robben Island*, ed. Sahm Venter (Cape Town: Jacana, 2006).
Greece and Rome have provided some space for critique. The deployment of classical themes in political cartoons may be considered a late manifestation of this phenomenon (figs. 1.11-12). More significantly for current purposes, recent scholarship on South African adaptations of Greek drama clearly illustrate the trend. Antigone has proven one of the most frequent and politically significant myths taken up by South African dramatists. This is not surprising, given the overt clash between human and divine authority in the play, and its valorisation of a protagonist who speaks truth to power, even at the cost of her own life. Antigone on Robben Island is in a sense consistent with a long tradition of Antigones, as is Fugard’s play, *The Island* (1973). In Mandela’s case there appears to be a self-critical element as well.

Whereas the late apartheid and post-apartheid periods provide obvious evidence on this score, one less obvious but no less interesting figure is the Afrikaans author N. P. van Wyk Louw (1906-70). On the one hand he embodied the Afrikaner establishment, as one of the most distinguished Afrikaans authors of his time and the holder of a university chair in Afrikaans and Nederlands. He was a member of the Broederbond, and was quoted in an inscription on the Afrikaans Taalmonument (language monument) at Paarl. Yet he was also a decidedly moderate voice within Afrikanerdon, and clashed publicly with the then prime minister, H. F. Verwoerd, in the early 1960s. His play *Germanicus* (1957), drawing on Tacitus’ *Annals*, clearly explores alternatives to autocracy, was undoubtedly a critique of the hard-line nationalism of his time. It is true that his creative use of antiquity might have contributed to his status as ‘obscure and elitist in the eyes of the masses’. Nonetheless, it offers an instructive contrast with his older contemporary, Gerard Moerdijk (1890-1958), who, in keeping with his training and travels, was deeply indebted to classical forms even though he chose not to acknowledge those debts explicitly (see Rankin and Schneider, this volume).

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The classical scholar, Afrikaans poet and public intellectual, T. J. Haarhoff presents a compelling case: a solid supporter of General Smuts, he was a prolific classical scholar who exhibited an ongoing concern with the question of cross-cultural encounter and was quite explicit about the links between antiquity and modernity.\textsuperscript{45} Thus his work, \textit{The Stranger at the Gate: aspects of exclusiveness and co-operation in ancient Greece and Rome, with some reference to modern times} (1934), was dedicated ‘to the spirit of racial co-operation’. In such a case it is a moot point whether the deep impetus to publish scholarly writing is related to the social issues of the day, or alternatively to antiquity per se. Indeed, any glimpse at Haarhoff’s output over some four decades suggests that Roman antiquity and South African modernity were mutually constitutive interests, at the very least in the way in which he presented them. Haarhoff merits comparison with two contemporaries, the statesman Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr and the philosopher Martin Versfeld, in so far as they deployed antiquity as moderate critiques of imperialism and nationalism (see Allen, this volume). Haarhoff was in some senses ahead of his time; but it is clear that his purview was limited to Anglo-Afrikaner relations, to the effective exclusion of other races.\textsuperscript{46}

The same principle of encoding the present is visible in the different context of the novelist, Mary Challans, who published very successfully under the name of Mary Renault. Born in Britain, she emigrated to South Africa in 1948. Antiquity provided the setting for the majority of her works, and as such – like the very South African


\textsuperscript{46} As it happens, Haarhoff’s two successors as head of Classics at the University of the Witwatersrand provide divergent points of comparison. Simon Davis, in whose appointment Haarhoff played a direct part, followed his senior colleague’s footsteps in the theme of one of his books. The book was not well received: Bruce K. Murray, \textit{Wits, the ’Open’ Years: a history of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1939-1959} (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1997), 250-51. By contrast to such cross-cultural topics, Davis’ successor M. T. W. Arnheim published two books focusing squarely on the aristocracy: \textit{The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire} (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), and \textit{Aristocracy in Greek Society} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977). Like Haarhoff but with different leanings, Arnheim also wrote on the politics of the day, and it is impossible to overlook a connection between his scholarly and popular works.
environment she chose to inhabit – was a safe haven in which she and her partner, Julia Mullard, could pursue an alternative lifestyle, or was at least an environment freer from the homophobic prejudices that characterised her British origins (see Endres, this volume). On this view, Cape Town especially had a Mediterranean climate, and with it offered ‘Mediterranean’ freedom from sexual restraint (see Merrington, this volume).

The political freedoms offered by antiquity have often fallen into the category of liberal humanism. Several figures discussed here are heirs to this tradition. Hofmeyr, Haarhoff, Mandela and Hani have all, in different ways, been dialogic figures in South African history. Albeit merely in fleeting moments, and perhaps never fully realised, antiquity has seemed to offer the possibility of intergroup dialogue on equal terms.

Again, this concept was vaguely in play during the Hani/Viljoen conversation at Cape Town airport. Hani, in a brief autobiographical essay dated April 1991, reflected that his early Catholicism was the driving force behind his ‘fascination with Latin studies and English literature’:

> These studies … were gobbled up by me and I became an ardent lover of English, Latin and Greek literature, both modern and classical. My studies of literature further strengthened my hatred of all forms of oppression, persecution and obscurantism. The action of tyrants as portrayed in various literary works also made me hate tyranny and institutionalised oppression.\(^{47}\)

In Hani’s conception here, antiquity stands next to English literature, more broadly than specifically linked with liberal humanism. One might compare Anthony Sampson’s point with regard to Robben Island, namely that the common frame of reference was in the first instance Shakespeare, rather than classical antiquity or, for that matter, the Christian Bible. In this regard *Julius Caesar* might be considered a point of intersection between ancient pasts and English literature, and indeed this play was itself a favourite in the prison.

Since its foundation in 1912 the ANC has had three major strands: liberal humanist (linked to Christianity, and seen for example in Chief Albert Luthuli); Africanist (Mbeki) and Communist (Hani and Zuma).\textsuperscript{48} Mandela had ties with all three, but his engagement with Sophocles points most directly to the liberal humanist tradition, which also included Hani (though not in any exclusive way). The Lovedale/ Fort Hare missionary tradition of education provided a strong link between liberal humanism and Christianity, one that was displaced by Bantu Education.

More generally, it needs to be said – now with Michael Lambert – that ancient Greece and Rome have had a particular role in the making of colonial identities.\textsuperscript{49} Classical education has been the badge of privilege in a context of unequal access. In such a case, classical studies on the part of South Africans within the country has resonated with the older tradition of colonial image making – the lens through which Africa and other seemingly exotic parts were represented on European maps. Consistent with this, classics has also been a source of upward mobility. Just as fourth-century CE Latin poet, Ausonius of Bordeaux, could rise from obscure provincial origins to some of Rome’s highest political offices as a result of his eloquence and his teaching of rhetoric,\textsuperscript{50} so did antiquity offer some South Africans the possibility of raising their social station. The critical social division in the South Africa is a racial one: the Lovedale School was run by missionaries for African children, and for a substantial period offered Latin and Greek in its curriculum. Lovedale and the nearby and closely related institution, the University of Fort Hare, trained the generation of Southern African leaders who began to make their mark around the middle of the twentieth century: among them Mandela, Oliver Tambo, A. C. Jordan (writer, scholar and father of Pallo Jordan), Seretse Khama and Robert Mugabe (leaders of Botswana and Zimbabwe respectively). For all of them, Latin was part of the curriculum of legal studies. Later on, the pernicious effects of Bantu

\textsuperscript{48} Peter Walshe, \textit{The Rise of Nationalism in South Africa: the African National Congress, 1912-1952} (London: Hurst, 1970), e.g. 339-49. The implications of this diverse legacy for the ANC’s present and future are apparent in the essays contained in Ben Turok (ed.), \textit{The Historical Roots of the ANC} (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2010).


\textsuperscript{50} John Matthews, \textit{Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364-425} (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 56-87.
Education were sorely felt, so that academic standards dropped and studies were subject to disruption. Nonetheless, Chris Hani later began his classical studies at Lovedale and Fort Hare: though he began his university education there after the implementation of the highly restrictive Bantu Education Act of 1953 (no. 47), the Latin part of his curriculum reflects the missionary origins of the institutions.\(^5\)

The strong connection of antiquity with political power has given antiquity a role, not necessarily a large one, in popular culture: a number of public symbols may ultimately connote political power, but are linked only in the loosest sense. Many are no more than a name, but even in such cases it is worth considering what image of antiquity emerges. Some are whole cloth imports from the consumer culture of Europe or the United States, such as ‘Caesar’s Palace’ – first a nightclub, then a hotel and most recently an extensive casino complex in Johannesburg, this is named and inspired by the Las Vegas hotel which opened in the 1960s. In the Johannesburg version, there is palpable invocation of ancient Rome as a symbol of decadence, an association that is as old as antiquity itself and is today extremely widespread.\(^5\) Such popular instances of classicism are at the furthest remove from pedagogy, and have only the most indirect link with antiquity.

Other symbols have a distinctively South African history. On 15 August 1985, at a time when the National Party government was under strong domestic and international pressure to relent in its segregation policies, the then President P. W. Botha gave a speech which was advertised in advance as the decisive crossing of the Rubicon. This speech was delivered at a National Party conference in Durban. Expectations ran high that Botha, who had come to power in 1978 as a reformist, would announce a decisive break with apartheid’s more oppressive measures. Media agencies organized live broadcasts

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\(^5\) In 1954 H. F. Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs and later Prime Minister, notoriously warned against ‘blindly producing pupils trained on a European model. … [I]t is of no avail for [an aspirant black teacher] to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed.’ Quoted by Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: the rise and fall of apartheid* (Pearson: Harlow, 2004), 51.

\(^5\) Classical forms and decorative elements are part of a stylistic mix that is focused on Tuscany. The complex as a whole draws variously on international heritage stereotypes: Martin Hall and Pia Bombardella, ‘Las Vegas in Africa’, *Journal of Social Archaeology* 5.1 (2005), 5-24.
domestically and overseas. But when the time came for the press conference, Botha was in an uncompromising mood, defiantly warning critics not to dictate terms to his government. He would continue with his programme of reform, but not bow to external pressure. When the speech was delivered the phrase ‘crossing the Rubicon’ was indeed deployed, as promised, but Botha had chosen to forego the crucial foregoing paragraph, so that its meaning was much attenuated. It later emerged that the omitted paragraph had been drafted by the Foreign Minister, Pik Botha (no relation). It was Pik Botha who had done much to arouse expectations of reform, particularly in conversations with foreign governments. So, far from making a decisive move towards domestic reform, P. W. Botha in this speech displayed the ebullience and intransigence for which he had become famous. His action, or lack of thereof, at this critical moment would undoubtedly catalyze further developments: the sharpening of economic sanctions on the part of the international community, and also of domestic dissent, with the result that Botha in 1986 declared the State of Emergency which conferred additional powers to the armed forces. By an historical irony, a particular wine from Meerlust, a distinguished estate outside of Stellenbosch, is also called Rubicon. This predates P. W. Botha’s speech and was never intended to contain any reference to it. The continuity of South Africa’s wine culture from apartheid to the post-apartheid age, and its lack of explicit party-politics, may itself be considered symptomatic of the consumerism that has escalated in South Africa since the 1980s, and especially since the end of apartheid.

Exactly two months after P. W. Botha’s ‘Rubicon’ speech, on 15 October 1985, one of the most notorious instances of premeditated state violence took place in Athlone, a ‘coloured’ or mixed-race suburb of Cape Town. In an area that had witnessed regular anti-apartheid protests on the part of schoolchildren, security police intervened with lethal force. On the back of a South African Railways truck several security policemen hid between large metal crates. Once the truck had driven close to the gathering, armed police emerged from above the crates and opened fire on the protesters. Three were killed: Jonathan Claasen (aged 21), Shaun Magmoed (15), and Michael Miranda (11).

54 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qxwDJoZ1v0 (accessed 9 January 2012).
Because of the strategy adopted by the security forces this episode became known as the ‘Trojan Horse’ incident (Fig. 1.13). It gained notoriety both because the video footage, captured by the American CBS network, was widely broadcast outside South Africa, and because the police involved were found, in an official inquiry, to have acted in an unreasonable way, but the Attorney General of the Cape declined to prosecute them. When this episode subsequently came before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, one of the Commissioners, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, claimed in the public hearing that the term Trojan Horse ‘conceals rather than reveals what it was all about’.  

One of the peculiarly South African inflections of Greece and Rome has been linked with the notion of a ‘Mediterranean’ climate. Since the widespread adoption of the Köppen climate classification system in the early decades of the twentieth century, the region’s ‘Mediterranean’ identity has been defined by its distinctive vegetation. Receiving winter rainfall it supports the ‘Mediterranean triad’ (wheat, grapes and olives) as well as fruit and vegetable crops. Dominated by the Cape Floristic Region with its characteristic *fynbos*, the huge number of species thereof out of keeping its small size. Yet the susceptibility of the area to wine and other crops was evident from early Dutch colonial times, particularly since the arrival of the French Huguenots in 1688 and with them viticulture. In 1910, when the Union of South Africa was formed following the Anglo-Boer War, new factors were brought to bear in this asserted connection (see Merrington, this volume). For one thing, it was linked with Rhodes’ vision of a Cape-to-Cairo rail, road and telegraph route. The Southwestern Cape, as opposed to the rest of the new country, was thus marked out as comprehensible, and inviting, for British tourists. In the postwar age of mass air transport, the Mediterranean-ness of the Cape has again received prominence in the Club Med chain of international resorts. At Langebaan, about 120 km north of Cape Town on the Atlantic coast, is the resort Club Mykonos, evoking in its name at least the idea of Mediterranean leisure. The ‘Mediterranean’

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55 http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/trojan/rasool.htm accessed 9 January 2012 (near end, following testimony from Ebrahim Rasool, who had been a leader in the struggle against apartheid).

56 See the classic article by Peter Merrington, ‘A staggered Orientalism: the Cape-to-Cairo imaginary’, *Poetics Today* 22.2 (2001), 323-64.
identity of the southwestern Cape is today part and parcel of its tourist branding.\textsuperscript{57} The significance of this detail is apparent in the fact that international tourism has risen sharply since the end of apartheid.

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\textsuperscript{57} In the case of Cape Town, see Vivian Bickford-Smith, ‘Creating a city of the tourist imagination: “The fairest Cape of them all”’, \textit{Urban Studies} 46.9 (2009), 1763-85.

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Finally, it is necessary to take account of the variety of aspects involved in classical antiquity. Consider J. M. Coetzee, one of the most distinguished creative artists South Africa has produced, and one who has vigourously resisted attempts to characterize him as a South African writer. In 2002 he emigrated to Adelaide, later taking Australian citizenship. Yet Coetzee was born and grew up in South Africa, and that the country’s social relations have long provided the setting for his novels, whether explicitly or implicitly. In the wide range of themes and approaches Coetzee has deployed, classical antiquity plays an important part, with perhaps only Van Wyk Louw coming remotely close in this respect.

The point to note here is that antiquity, as invoked by Coetzee, has many different forms. A few examples will suffice. *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) conjures a discourse about civilization and barbarism, spurred by Cavafy’s poem of the same title,

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60 See the classic article by Peter Merrington, ‘A staggered Orientalism: the Cape-to-Cairo imaginary’, *Poetics Today* 22.2 (2001), 323-64.
61 In the case of Cape Town, see Vivian Bickford-Smith, ‘Creating a city of the tourist imagination: “The fairest Cape of them all”’, *Urban Studies* 46.9 (2009), 1763-85.
only to question it. While the novel defies any attempt to situate it historically, there are
signs that it invokes both the fall of the Roman empire in the west in the fifth century CE
and the sack of Rome by the Gauls under Brennus around 387 B.C. Antiquity thus
provides a horizon of historical expectation. Readers are invited to supply concrete points
of comparison from worlds with which they are more familiar, not only apartheid South
Africa but potentially any setting where intergroup conflict is rife. It is perhaps this
openness to historical recontextualisation that accounts for the success of the novella over
three decades.

By contrast, two other novels bring out the pedagogical side of classical antiquity.
In *Age of Iron* (1990) the protagonist, Mrs Curren, is a Latin teacher in Cape Town
during the apartheid years – a fact that is not disclosed until the final stages of the novel.
Having long opposed to apartheid in the abstract, her sympathies are reconfigured and
even reinvented when she witnesses the killing of her black servant’s son, as well as other
violenc, and she becomes host to the homeless man who had been living in her driveway.
It emerges towards the end of the novel that she is dying of cancer. The teaching of Latin
comes to symbolize the vulnerability of white liberalism in South Africa, the liberal
tradition embodied in Mrs Curren. More recently *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), particularly
the essay/chapter entitled ‘The humanities in Africa’, brings to bear the aesthetic and
political questions surrounding the place of European (including ancient European) texts
in an African setting. Typically of Coetzee, any hint of dogmatic utterance is quashed by
the interplay of voices within the text. The very questions addressed by Coetzee are ones
that have been considered by an official commission of inquiry recently undertaken by
the South African Department of Education.62

The more philosophical dimensions of antiquity emerge in *Diary of a Bad Year*
(2007). An aging writer, Senor C, falls in love with a young neighbour, Anya, whom he
employs as a typist. The novel is an amalgam of Senor C’s musings on the most varied of
subjects, with diary at the bottom of each page documenting the emerging and ultimately

62 Ari Sitas et al., *Charter for the Humanities and Social Sciences: report commissioned by the Minister of
Higher Education* (Pretoria: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011); cf. Jonathan Jansen and
Peter Vale (eds.), *Consensus Study on the Study of the Humanities in South Africa: status, prospects and
disastrous relationship that develops between the two. Here we sense in the background Plato’s *Phaedrus*, which explores the timeless character of beauty, a highly idealized quality that seems at some points to offer the possibility of withstanding the decline and fall of empires, and thus defying historical time. The philosophical side of antiquity is balanced, indeed marred, by a rather less admirable professorial one.

While these various kinds of ancient presence emerge from the novels, with their play of narrative voices, Coetzee has addressed the question of the classical more directly in his essay, ‘What is a classic?’ 63 Given the subtlety of Coetzee’s art, it is all the more tempting to seek his own opinions in the essay, which started life as a public lecture. At the same time this scholarly voice seems to compete with the voices heard in his novels, where several of his later fictional characters are aging white males who, as creative writers or scholars, invite comparison with the author himself. Coetzee’s antiquity thus has many forms, and this alone should caution us to recognize the wide variety of South Africa’s classical engagements. 64

V TOWARDS A BALANCE SHEET

To stand back from the aspects raised above is to have the chance to think somewhat more abstractly about classical receptions in South Africa, and in particular how classical antiquity may be compared with other pasts. Here the task is not so much as to identify aspects of antiquity but to evaluate their place in the South African milieu, to the degree that this is possible.

In the most obvious sense, the phenomenon of translation needs to be considered from various points of view. Given that the postwar boom in South African classical studies coincided with the coming to power of Afrikaner nationalism, it is not surprising that the postwar decades witnessed a number of translations of ancient works in Afrikaans. Virgil’s foundational epic was translated twice, both into verse and prose. Other poems by Virgil and Catullus were also translated into Afrikaans, apparently

beginning with T. J. Haarhoff’s *Die Liefde van Catullus* in 1933. This is no ordinary translation in that actual translations are interspersed with original poems, so as to tell a story of the love affair between the poet/lover and Lesbia. Afrikaans had not become an official language until 1925, at which point its divergences from the Dutch language were recognized. This is a complicated story in itself, given that the slaves of the Dutch played a substantial role in the evolution of the language, as a patois reflecting the fact that they came from far-flung parts of the Indian Ocean basin. However, when the Afrikaans language became a focal point of emerging Afrikaner identity, its slave origins were conveniently suppressed so it could become a symbol of colonial nation-building.

Translations into English are far less evident, for the obvious reason that it reflects no equivalent nation-building impulse; it is only recently, in the post-apartheid age, that vernacular South African English has acquired a major translation of its own. Drama is a slightly different matter in that many South African versions take great liberties with the original, so that the term translation is not necessarily appropriate. Indeed, flexibility on many fronts, including the possibility of freedom from an original text, accounts for the long-standing and ongoing use of classical myth in South Africa. Of a different order is a translation of Homer’s epics into isiZulu – ‘would be’ is the strictly correct term to use here, given that the task of translating has been contemplated rather than undertaken at the current juncture. In the absence of existing African language translations of classical works, it is imperative to consider the linguistic and cultural preconditions that might make such an exercise possible. A discussion of this kind serves as a reminder that acts of translation are also acts of comparison. The isiZulu word that

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denotes translation, *humusha*, has primary meanings of deceit and seduction, and is highly charged compared to its Greek and Latin equivalents.

More generally speaking, the relation between classical and other pasts is not easy to pin-point. Greco-Roman antiquity has seldom, if ever, been part of the same conversations as African archaeology. There are institutional reasons for this, in that in South Africa the academic disciplines of archaeology and classics have overlapped little in practice. Institutional practice can only go so far as a means of explanation, for it is itself the result of ideas and attitudes. The exception that proves the rule is not South African but lies immediately to the north of the Limpopo River, namely Great Zimbabwe. Today it is widely agreed that the complex was built in the period roughly 1200 to 1450, by indigenous people. However, when it became known to Europeans at the end of the nineteenth century some propagated the view that Great Zimbabwe was built instead by Phoenicians, or perhaps Arabs. This view, expressly denying African agency, was promoted by the government of Ian Smith at one point. An early proponent was J. Theodore Bent, whose book, *The Ruined Cities of Mashonaland*, appeared in 1891, following a season of excavation that had been sponsored by Cecil John Rhodes. Bent had excavated previously in Asia Minor and the Persian Gulf, and had travelled extensively in Italy and Greece. By contrast, the first excavation of a scientific nature was performed in 1905-6 by David Randall-MacIver, and from this point the African element was recognized. However, this new insight did not necessarily affect popular opinion among white Rhodesians, hence the scope for the Smith government to promote a different view. The Phoenicians in this popular conception are not fully classical in the sense of ancient Greece and Rome, but perhaps the telling point, for purposes of the time, was that the Phoenicians were not sub-Saharan African. With this partial exception and

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68 The special status of ancient Egyptians and Phoenicians has briefly been touched on already.  
69 According to an influential article, the classical background of some major British archaeologists helped foster an essentialist approach to ethnic identity, in keeping with Herodotus, Caesar and Tacitus. ‘Such classical authors had a tribal perception of society, with the result that archaeologists reared on these texts were at home with the social concepts of the ethnographers of Africa.’ Martin Hall, ‘The burden of tribalism: the social context of Southern African iron Age studies’, *American Antiquity* 49.3 (1984), 455-67 at 461.
another, the question of the relation of classical antiquity to other antiquities has been largely moot.\textsuperscript{70}

The other exception concerns the collection and display of antiquities in South African museums. Like Rhodes, the ‘Randlord’ Alfred Beit associated his legacy with classical art, as is seen in the collection of plaster casts bequeathed to the city of Cape Town upon his death. The Beit Collection did not find a permanent home, however, and was quietly dispersed, so that very few pieces are today still known (see Tietze, this volume). Cape Town’s major museums reflect a particularly haphazard approach to collecting antiquities: they certainly formed a significant part of the early history of the South African Museum, resulting in large measure from private donations of varied character and quality. There was a strong tendency to the collection of everyday items, many of them obtained in South African elite in the course of Mediterranean travels. The antiquities were later moved to what was known since 1966 as the South African Cultural History Museum (SACHM), now the Slave Lodge. When in 2000 the SACHM and other Cape Town museums underwent incorporation under the umbrella of Iziko Museums, most ancient Greek and Roman artifacts were withdrawn from display, and made available to the Sasol Museum of Stellenbosch University on temporary loan. Some ancient Egyptian artifacts were allowed to remain in the Slave Lodge. The status of the entire display on the second floor of the Slave Lodge was undergoing review at the time of writing – a direct, if somewhat belated, response to sea-change in South African society over recent decades. There is much at stake in the choice of what to exhibit, and how, given the history of the extraordinarily varied history of the Slave Lodge since it was first built in 1679.\textsuperscript{71} The fact that the Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities


\textsuperscript{71} One of the country’s oldest buildings, it was built by the Dutch as a residence for urban slaves (in which capacity it also functioned as a brothel) and later as an insane asylum. In the 19th and 20th centuries it had a series of roles in governmental service, including as parliament, supreme court, post office and library. Its role as a museum began in 1960 when it became the SACHM and continued as the Slave Lodge from 2000 under the umbrella of Iziko Museums of Cape Town. A ‘site of memory’ par excellence, the changing
originally stood on prominent display in the ground floor is all the more pointed, given that in its new form, the museum now uses the very same rooms for its presentation of slavery at the Cape.

At a more abstract level, it is interesting to note that ancient Greece and Rome have been involved a number of comparisons with other pasts. It is worth asking, however briefly, what is at stake with such comparisons. For one thing, it is clear that antiquity has frequently been invoked in the sense of cultural capital. In *An African Athens*, Philippe-Joseph Salazar describes South Africa’s democratic formation in a classical Greek frame.\(^2\) The ancient Greeks are invoked in terms of their democratic political system and particularly its deployment of rhetoric as an instrument of democracy. On the whole, Salazar compares South Africa’s relation to the African continent with that of ancient Greece to modern Europe. South Africa, by this reckoning, has much to offer a new postcolonial order, in the best sense fulfilling the trends of decolonisation that began after World War II; whereas Athens was the ‘school of Hellas’, South Africa is in effect presented by Salazar as the ‘school of Africa’. This is an unusual book, out of the Anglo-Saxon mainstream (Salazar trained at the Sorbonne and returned there after a South African spell in the 1980s and 90s). The book is the exception that proves the rule: little reference was made to the ancient Greeks in South Africa’s political transition of the 1990s, at a time when there was much debate about the nature of democracy.\(^3\)

It is not entirely obvious how to account for such an omission. It could be that, whereas Latin had been part of the school curriculum of several of the participants (more

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\(^3\) In a speech, ‘The effective of great changes and the role of leadership in social conditions’ (Athens, 19 May 2005), F. W. de Klerk cited Heraclitus on the inevitability of change, and quoted Pericles’s funeral oration on the nature of participatory democracy. However, this is not much of an exception to the general silence concerning antiquity because it was heard by a Greek rather than a South African audience, and well after the first democratic election. The speech is archived at http://www.fwdeklerk.org/cause_data/images/2137/ACEO_Athens_S.pdf
on the National Party side) and commentators, the Greeks had played a much smaller role. It could also be that the Victorian tradition of comparative anthropology, most readily associated with James Frazer, was considered tainted. In any case, one such Frazerian gesture sees Spartan and Zulu warfare compared.\footnote{W. S. Ferguson, ‘The Zulus and the Spartans’, *Harvard African Studies* 2 (1918), 197-234, recently reprinted in Everett L. Wheeler (ed.), *The Armies of Classical Greece* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); cf. M. Gluckman, ‘The kingdom of the Zulu of South Africa’, in M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African Political Systems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 25-55. And most floridly, A. T. Bryant, *The Zulu people as they were before the white man came* (2nd edn., Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1967): ‘Blest with such unhampered freedom and unruffled peace, the Zulu gloried in the fullness of the joie de vivre, in a lovely climate and a beautiful land. Was this Utopia in actual being? Was it not Arcady refound?’ (175)}

Finally, it is clear that much of what has been adduced here as evidence of South African classicism is indirect. Whereas in the eighteenth century northern European visitors to Italy and other Mediterranean lands encountered antiquity via its ruins, artifacts and historic locations,\footnote{Ilaria Bignamini and Clare Hornsby, *Digging and Dealing in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).} there has been little or no South African equivalent. Only much later did a handful of travellers visit ancient sites and return with artifacts, which informed private collections and in some cases museums (see Masters, this volume). The post-apartheid period has seen heightened overseas air travel and thus greater ease of access: but by this time antiquity has lost much of its earlier prominence, and the law considerably limits the international acquisition of antiquities. By far the most of the contact South Africans have had with ancient Greece and Rome has been indirect, whether through translations, distinctive forms or other intermediaries. To take one highly visible example, the frieze of the Voortrekker Monument may have been conceived in South Africa but it was realized in Italy by Italian stonemasons. It is in this context that one should understand Gerard Moerdijk’s public disavowal of classical influence, even when in practice antiquity did much to shape his architectural training and never ceased to provide a point of departure. The writer and artist Breyten Breytenbach (1939-), a dissident first in relation to apartheid and latterly in relation to the ANC-led government, has likewise had no truck with classical antiquity over the
decades; yet his experimental theatre piece *Boklied* (‘goat song’) revisits ancient Greek dramatic tradition.76 All its characters are poets, and the dialogue concerns the composition of poetry. Greek antiquity thus provides a point of reflection. Indeed, as recent scholarship has richly shown, theatrical deployment of classical mythology has been plentiful and varied, but few productions have taken the original Greek texts into account. It would have been unreasonable to expect anything else.

Again, Robben Island presents vestigial but fascinating material. Mission-educated prisoners in the early 1960s sometimes honoured fallen comrades with the following lines:

And how can man die better
than facing fearful odds
for the ashes of his fathers
and the temples of his gods?

This comes from ‘Horatius’ in George Macauley’s very popular ballad, the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, composed in India in 1842.77 The poem became a staple of British colonial education. In this, the first ballad, Horatius Cocles and his two companions heroically and successfully defend Rome by holding a bridge against Lars Porsenna’s invading army of Etruscans.78

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78 In the canonical account by Livy (*Ab Urbe condita* 2.10.2-11), Horatius had already become a paradigm (*exemplum*) of ancient Roman courage (*virtus*). According to Roman tradition, this episode took place around 510 B.C.
In all, popular manifestations of antiquity deserve some prominence in this account of classicism in South Africa. Though the term ‘vernacular classicism’ seems like an oxymoron, it is on the whole well suited to the dynamics of the country’s classical engagements. It accords well with James Porter’s recent reassessment of the very notion of the classical, in which mediated contact receives emphasis.\(^{79}\) There can be no doubt that the mediated quality of classicism, the phenomenon of ‘identifying with a prior identification’,\(^{80}\) is starkly seen in South Africa.

VI REMEMBER DIDO

What if Aeneas had stayed in Africa? What if Carthage instead of Rome had become the centre of the new empire? Would the African roots of this empire have made a difference to history’s development? Would all transcultural communication possibly be less difficult, had Aeneas not shunned this encounter in the first place?\(^{81}\)

With these bold questions the South African musician Hans Huyssen introduces a compact disc that combines Henry Purcell’s seventeenth-century music with contemporary compositions from various parts of Africa, all arranged for small string ensemble. Following several African-composed pieces, the collection culminates with a suite comprising music from *Dido and Aeneas* (1688) and *The Fairy Queen* (1692). The final piece is a setting of Dido’s lament – a landmark in western music, famous for its pathos. With this unusual combination Huyssen ‘explores the common ground as well as characteristic differences’ of particular kinds of African and European music, challenging the usual divisions into categories such as commercial, classical, modern and serious. All pieces are performed on period instruments of the European baroque period, a choice made so that its less smooth sound might invite comparison with traditional African

\(^{79}\) Porter, ‘What is classical?’, esp. 44, 59-64.  
\(^{80}\) ibid., 57.  
\(^{81}\) *Remember Dido*, recorded by così facciamo, Ensemble für alte und neue Musik, text by Hans Huyssen, Mucavi Records, 2006, page 4 of the booklet.
instruments. The attempt to engender dialogue between African and European musical forms is not new, and has particular point in South Africa, where many ‘classical’ musicians have found the need to assert their role in the post-apartheid milieu. Of relevance here is Huyssen’s ‘hypothesis of an alternative ending to the chronicle of Dido and Aeneas’. Whereas the Aeneas story has typically been seen as one of the establishment of western power, here Huyssen opens a space for counter-factual history, inviting readers and listeners to consider alternatives to the grand narrative of western ascendancy. The experiment has several dimensions, artistic and political. The ‘Rainbow nation’ concept of South African society was already somewhat discredited by the time of Mbeki’s accession in 1999 and with its demise came the end of the ANC’s honeymoon period in government. Nonetheless, Huyssen’s project expresses a comparable hankering for greater dialogue between the many cultural traditions present in South Africa, and more generally in the African continent.

As a rereading of Virgil, Remember Dido invokes at least two moments of twentieth-century history. As early as the 1920s T. J. Haarhoff, the Virgilian scholar, poet and public intellectual, sought a South African setting for the Georgics: Haarhoff’s concern was the Afrikaners’ connection with the land, in which respect Haarhoff invoked the yeoman farmer of the ancient Roman world. The comparison underlies his Oxford BLitt thesis, which appeared first as Vergil in the Experience of South Africa and later Vergil the Universal. Virgil’s poem, the Aeneid, is the only major classical work to have received two South African translations, both into Afrikaans. Closer to Huyssen’s time, and perhaps also to his outlook, Nelson Mandela was in Tunis when, in June 1994, as newly elected president of South Africa, he addressed the Organization of African Unity. In his speech Mandela heralded the end of apartheid and the decades-long struggle against it.\(^2\) He did this by recalling the elder Cato’s well-known determination to destroy Carthage, a goal that was realized in 146 B.C.:

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\begin{align*}
\text{And Carthage was destroyed. Today we wander among its ruins, (and) only our imagination and historical records enable us to experience its magnificence. Only}
\end{align*}
\]

our African being makes it possible for us to hear the piteous cries of the victims of the vengeance of the Roman Empire…

It is this very defeat which, in the light of South Africa’s ending of apartheid, should give hope to African nations to shake off the shackles of colonialism. Mandela thus ends on an optimistic note:

We are certain that you will prevail over the currents that originate from the past, and ensure that the interregnum of humiliation symbolised by, among others, the destruction of Carthage, is indeed consigned to the past, never to return.

On the same lines former president Thabo Mbeki in September 2010 addressed a summit meeting of African student leaders at the University of Cape Town, beginning with the injunction, ‘Carthage must be rebuilt!’ Ideology apart, the underlying political reality is that nearby Algeria had provided a template and material support for the armed struggle against apartheid; Algeria, like other north African states, had supported the ANC in exile. Both Mandela and Mbeki’s speeches were made in a framework of pan-Africanism, spearheaded by the Organization of African Unity. Central to Mbeki’s presidency (1999-2008) was the so-called ‘African Renaissance’, the goal of African renewal from out of the shadow of colonialism – renewal in all its economic, cultural and scientific dimensions. Even after the departure of Mbeki from the political scene the notion of an ‘African Renaissance’ remains an attractive one: a recent report suggests that it be used so as to engender a more dialogic and less essentialist definition of Africa, recognising that ‘Africa has never been a bounded unit in ancient or more recent

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The very term ‘African Renaissance’ remains a problematic one: from an Africanist point of view the notion of ‘Renaissance’ retains an ultimately European frame of reference. Whereas the European Renaissance involved, in an important way, the rediscovery of ancient Greece, the ancient Greek element does not seem to have featured in the African Renaissance. Nonetheless, Carthage constitutes a variant on Rhodes’ dream of a ‘Cape-to-Cairo’ corridor, adapted for the post-apartheid age. In each case, a Mediterranean city (an ancient one, in the case of Carthage) helped assert South Africa’s place in the wider world.

The impetus to rebuild Carthage, or to remember Dido, is thus that to retell colonial history’s grand narrative from the perspective of the victims and in so doing to challenge the worst excesses of colonialism. In the current context it serves as a reminder of the variety of South African receptions of antiquity, and of the indirect nature of those receptions. At the same time it provides articulates a counter-factual possibility, as we have seen with Huyssen. It is thus impossible to write about the classical tradition in South Africa without a sense of what might have been, particularly the power of a liberal humanistic tradition to prevail with greater force against intolerance, nor to feel concern for its future.

Classicism has been an index, much more than might have been obvious, to South Africa’s history and in particular to its cross-cultural encounters (Fig. 1.14). This is, in part, a matter of colonial identity-formation, as Lambert has shown. But it is more than that too. In the earlier period of colonialism, Greek and Latin scientific discourse were part of the mapping of sub-Saharan Africa: this is true both of European cartography of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as Waldseemüller’s world map, and of the earliest descriptions. The scientific tradition, especially of the Netherlands, did much to locate Southern Africa in European thoughtworlds, particularly within the schema of Claudius Ptolemy. This did not mean that classical antiquity would play a large part in the Dutch colony, and it was not until British nineteenth century, and especially the imperial impulse of Rhodes and others, that Greece and Rome acquired a significant role in public symbols. While such symbols have tended to connote colonial authority and

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85 Sitas et al., Charter for the Humanities, 19.
86 Sitas et al., Charter for the Humanities.
thus been largely the preserve of white South Africans, a small number of significant exceptions deserve notice, particularly those of the black elite who, like Nelson Mandela, were educated in the Lovedale/Fort Hare missionary tradition. Chris Hani was the most eminent representative thereof in the late apartheid era.

Beyond any narrower notion of classicism, South African popular culture has thus produced a wide variety of engagements with Greco-Roman antiquity. It is in this sense that we might consider, for example, the deployment of Greek myths in plays, in so many cases produced by and for people who have had no overt classical learning whatever. The point is not that playwrights and audiences have largely lacked Greek and Latin, but that knowledge of those languages has not been necessary for a varied and complex range of classical engagements. It is debatable how significant such exceptions are in the overall scheme of things, but there can be no doubt that they reflect the multivalence of classical antiquity, and its openness to varied deployment.

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87 Lambert’s view is generally minimalist and pessimistic: The Classics, esp. 125-32.