

**Felicity Loughlin, Alexandre Johnston (ed.),
Antiquity and Enlightenment Culture. New
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Historians have frequently argued that the 18th-century Enlightenment should be regarded as the cradle of modernity. It was, they have pointed out, an age in which great scientific progress was made and was seen to be made, in which secular ideals of societal amelioration began to flourish, and in which an obsessive interest in the normative value of the past increasingly gave way to an orientation towards the future. All of this is hard to deny. Yet it is certainly not the whole story, for with all its talk about scientific progress, social and political reform and a bright and hopeful future, the Age of Enlightenment at the same time evinced a deep veneration for the classical Greek and Roman past. Classical texts were widely read and remained prominently present in the 18th-century educational system, neoclassicism became the dominant esthetic ideal, and the idealization of ancient civic virtue informed many projects for political reform.

While some historians have simply tried to ignore this massive classical presence in the Age of Enlightenment, others have dismissed it as relatively marginal and unimportant. In his otherwise groundbreaking »The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution« (1967), the American historian Bernard Bailyn for instance insisted that the constant invocation of the classical past in 18th-century America was »illustrative, not determinative, of thought«. Other historians around the same time fortunately tried to come up with more serious attempts to account for the overwhelming classical presence in the Enlightenment. In his magisterial and still eminently readable »The Enlightenment: An Interpretation« (1966–1969), Peter Gay fully acknowledged the crucial role of classical antiquity in 18th-century enlightened thought. It was only by appealing to the ancients, he argued, that the philosophes managed to liberate themselves from the tenets of Christianity and subsequently succeeded in creating enlightened modernity. Gay's dialectic, however, was soon severely criticized. If the appeal to antiquity was of such overwhelming importance, Robert Darnton asked in a penetrating and justly famous review in the »Journal of Modern History« (1971), then why did the Enlightenment not begin during the Renaissance? It was a question of fundamental importance, but it was never really answered. Enlightenment historians of the final decades of the 20th century started to show themselves more interested in other and different matters, such as the identification of endless varieties of Enlightenment or the ways in which enlightened ideas spread



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through society. Yet the fundamental issue raised in the exchange between Gay and Darnton did not permanently disappear. Indeed it could not, since, as Dan Edelstein has observed, »antiquity is just there: it is an imposing presence in Enlightenment literature, political thought, and philosophy, as well as in its fashion, style, and art«.

It was therefore almost inevitable that at some point Enlightenment historians would return to the theme of classical antiquity and over the past decades they have done so with a vengeance. This has resulted in the publication of a great many substantive studies of major importance. Perhaps even more interesting, however, is the fact that the classical presence in 18th-century Enlightenment culture is now being studied in new and different ways. Current approaches to the topic clearly reflect broader changes in the humanities: scholars are no longer searching for the impact of the classical tradition and have become much more reluctant to indulge in grand narratives. They have also become more sensitive to the various historical contexts in which the heritage of classical antiquity was subsequently appropriated and adapted. The study of the fate of a unitary classical tradition, in short, has been replaced by the meticulous analysis of various and contextualized forms of classical reception. This new approach is embodied in book series such as Oxford's »Classical Presences« (since 2005), De Gruyter's »Transformationen der Antike« (since 2011) and Brill's »Metaforms. Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity« (since 2012), as well as in journals such as the »Classical Receptions Journal« (since 2009).

The volume under review here, »Antiquity and Enlightenment Culture. New Approaches and Perspectives«, is published in Brill's »Metaforms« series and in many ways conforms to the recent scholarly trends sketched in the above. It is based on a conference held in Edinburgh in 2016 and discusses a wide variety of topics related to the reception of the Greek and Roman classics in the age of Enlightenment. The editors – Felicity Loughlin and Alexandre Johnston – have assigned the various contributions to four major themes. The first part of the book, »Reading Ancient Literature«, contains a fine article by Anthony Ossa-Richardson on the 18th-century afterlife of the bizarre theories formulated by the Jesuit scholar Jean Hardouin, who maintained that almost all texts ascribed to ancient authors were in fact later forgeries. While very few people took this claim seriously, Ossa-Richardson shows how Hardouin's wild fantasies nonetheless inspired a rich vein of 18th-century satirical writing, for instance in the work of César de Missy. The second article in this part of the book is equally fascinating and deals with the 18th-century bestseller »Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce« by the antiquarian Jean-Jacques Barthélemy, an influential work that has been rather neglected in later scholarship. Maria Giulia Franzoni reveals that Barthélemy was among the first authors who discussed the pessimistic strands in Greek thought to which Burckhardt and Nietzsche would draw so much attention in the 19th century.



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The second part of the book, »Antiquity on Display« is devoted to matters broadly related to the Grand Tour and is somewhat less surprising than the first part. Thomas Hopkinson uses a series of descriptions of the famous fountain of Arethusa in Syracuse to discuss the well-known shift in travel writing from an extreme reliance on classical texts as the lens through which everything in Italy was viewed, to a more open and individualistic approach. His conclusion that the texts which he has studied »demonstrate the culturally relative character of travel writing« (p. 79) is unfortunately rather flat. The two other articles in this part deal with artistic aspects of the culture of the Grand Tour. Maeve O'Dwyer argues that the classical sculptures to be seen in many of the portraits of Grand Tourists painted by Pompeo Batoni were not just meant as a general indication of the sitter's erudition, but that the choice of particular sculptures to be included in the painting can also reveal much about the individual sitter. She makes a rather convincing case for this claim through the example of the Batoni portrait of Charles John Crowle. Yet the fact that Batoni frequently used the same statues (or buildings) with different sitters and that many of his portraits were highly standardized leaves room for some doubt about the extent to which individuality could be expressed in his paintings. Miriam AlJamil takes the perhaps most iconic Grand Tour related painting as her subject: John Zoffany's »Charles Townley and Friends in his Library at Park Street«. Much has been written about this painting, which Martin Postle has felicitously described as »a ›conversation piece‹ to surpass all others«. AlJamil adds yet another layer to existing interpretations by drawing attention to the ways in which Townley's bachelor status is reflected in the painting. That may very well be true, but it is not entirely clear how this finding relates to or is relevant for the main theme of the volume.

The third part of the volume is devoted to a highly complex topic: the relationship between antiquity and national identity. It contains three case studies, two about Scotland and one about Greece. Kelsey Jackson Williams successfully rehabilitates George Mackenzie as a significant Enlightenment thinker and shows how he used patristic writing, and in particular the work of Pelagius, in constructing an 18th-century identity for Scotland. Alan Montgomery's article on 18th-century interpretations of Scotland's ancient history is highly significant because it draws attention to the fact that various types of antiquity could clash in the construction of national identity. Scottish pride in being among the nations that had valiantly resisted Roman domination in ancient times made it impossible, despite the efforts of a considerable number of 18th-century antiquarians, to construct a viable Roman heritage for Scotland. The same scenario, one could add, unfolded in the 18th-century Dutch Republic. Marta Dieli, finally, demonstrates how many constructions of national identity were in fact transnational: the Greek Enlightenment attempted to revive the ancient heritage through a renewed study of the ancient Greek language, but did so by adopting the methods of German *Altertumswissenschaften*.



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The fourth and last part of the book, »Antiquity in Moral Philosophy and Political Thought«, investigates the work of two giants of Enlightenment thought: David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Tim Stuart-Buttle focuses on the role of Cicero, who soon after the 18th century would completely lose his status as a significant philosopher, in British Enlightenment thought and points out how diametrically opposed insights could be drawn from his work. Whereas for John Locke Cicero's thought demonstrated that a complete theory of moral obligation could only be provided by Christian revelation, David Hume argued for the opposite position: by deliberately and successfully limiting himself to the utile and dulce in constructing his theories on moral obligation, Cicero had made all moral theology superfluous and irrelevant. The volume closes with a convincing article by Flora Champy on the role of antiquity in Rousseau's political thought – a topic about which a great deal has already been written. Champy, however, succeeds in making an original contribution to the debate by arguing that the way in which Rousseau used classical (and in particular Roman) history was not, as has often been maintained, utopian, but served pragmatic purposes and was intended as a guide for 18th-century political reform.

»Antiquity and Enlightenment Culture«, it will hopefully be evident from the above, is an attractive collection of essays, well worth the attention of anyone interested in the fate of various aspects of the classical heritage during the 18th century. It would of course be possible to list a great many relevant topics that are left undiscussed, but that would be less than generous given the inevitable selectivity of publications of this nature. It must, however, be pointed out that the introduction to the volume makes what seem to be unjustifiably large claims about its innovative nature. Loughlin and Johnston insist that this collection of essays is pioneering in abandoning the restrictive focus on the »Querelle des anciens et des modernes«, which according to them has been dominant in most recent accounts of the 18th-century preoccupation with the classics. This claim seems to be an untenable simplification of recent scholarship. For while the »Querelle« has undeniably been a prominent presence in discussions of the 18th-century appropriation of the classics, it has been no more than one among a great many other topics. It is not the exclusive or even dominant focus in such pathbreaking relatively recent works as Chantal Grell's »Le Dix-huitième Siècle et l'Antiquité en France 1680–1789« (1995) or Carl J. Richard's »The Founders and the Classics« (1994), nor in Vicky Coltman's »Fabricating the Antique« (2006) or Marlene Meuer's »Polarisierungen der Antike« (2017) – to give but a few examples. In the light of this, perhaps the editors should have been a little more modest. Their claim to be fundamentally changing our overall perspective on the Enlightenment's manifold relations to antiquity is unconvincing. It is also superfluous, since no one needs such overblown claims to justify the publication of what is a fine volume of specialized essays on the 18th-century reception of the classics.



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