



BEETHOVEN AND GRECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY

Jos van der Zanden



ROUTLEDGE

Beethoven and Greco-Roman Antiquity

Ludwig van Beethoven had a life beyond music. He considered it his duty to spend leisure-time improving his *Bildung* (sophistication). To this end he familiarised himself with tangible manifestations of Greco-Roman antiquity, for he perceived these cultures and their representatives as examples of intellectual, moral, and artistic perfection. He consumed such writers as Homer, Plutarch, Horace, Tacitus, Euripides, and Greek poets. These texts were morally uplifting for him, and advantageous for building character. They now hold a key to Beethoven's ideal of a steadfast, austere, and Stoic outlook, necessary for a 'great man' to carry out his duties. Jos van der Zanden demonstrates that Beethoven's engagement with Greco-Roman culture was deep and ongoing, and that it ventured beyond the non-committal. Drawing on a comprehensive investigation of primary sources (letters, conversation books, diaries, recollections of contemporaries) he examines what Beethoven knew of such topics like history, art, politics, and philosophy of antiquity. The book presents new information on the composer's republicanism, his familiarity with the works of Plato, his admiration of the elderly Brutus, his plan to utilize 'unresolved dissonances' in an unknown piece of music, and his decision to subscribe to a book about ancient Greek poetry. A hitherto unknown vocal piece based on lines by Euripides is revealed. The study concludes with a comprehensive survey of all compositions and sketches by Beethoven based on Greco-Roman subjects.

Jos van der Zanden for many years was a producer and director of broadcasting for Dutch Public Radio (the classical music radio station) and throughout this time published many articles on Beethoven, as well as books (also on Schubert and Mozart). In 2020, he completed his PhD at the University of Manchester.



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Abbreviations

- AMZ *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*
- BBS *Bonner Beethoven-Studien*
- BGA *Ludwig van Beethoven: Briefwechsel Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Sieghard Brandenburg, 7 vols (Munich: Henle, 1996–98), with references to letter numbers
- BIB *Bönnisches Intelligenz-Blatt*
- BKBe *Bericht über den internationalen Beethoven-Kongress 10–12 Dezember 1970 in Berlin*, edd. Heinz Alfred Brockhaus and Konrad Niemann (Berlin: Verlag neue Musik Berlin, 1971)
- BKh *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte*, edd. Karl-Heinz Köhler et al., 11 vols. (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1968–2001)
- BL *Beethoven liest*, edd. Bernhard R. Appel and Julia Ronge (Bonn: Verlag Beethoven- Haus, 2016)
- CD Peter Clive, *Beethoven and his World. A Biographical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)
- CP Caroline Pichler, *Denkwürdigkeiten aus meinem Leben* [1844] 2 vols (Munich: Müller, 1914)
- JAMS *Journal of the American Musicological Society*
- JGG *Jahrbuch der Grillparzer-Gesellschaft*
- JLM *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*
- JST *Josef Schreyvogels Tagebücher*, ed. Karl Glossy, 2 vols (Berlin: Verlag der Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte, 1903)
- JTW *The Beethoven Sketchbooks. History, Reconstruction, Inventory*, edd. Douglas Johnson, Alan Tyson and Robert Winter, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)
- KC *Beethoven aus der Sicht seiner Zeitgenossen in Tagebüchern, Briefen, Gedichten und Erinnerungen*, edd. Klaus Martin Kopitz and Rainer Cadenbach, 2 vols (Munich: Henle, 2009), with references to page numbers
- LvBWV *Ludwig van Beethoven: Thematisch-bibliographisches Werkverzeichnis*, edd. Kurt Dorf Müller et al., 2 vols. (Munich: Henle, 2014)

Mf	<i>Die Musikforschung</i>
MGS	<i>Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände</i>
ML	<i>Music & Letters</i>
MQ	<i>The Musical Quarterly</i>
MST	Maynard Solomon, <i>Beethovens Tagebuch</i> (Mainz: Hase & Koehler Verlag, 1990)
NCM	<i>19th-Century Music</i>
NGA	<i>Beethoven Werke: Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke</i> (Munich and Duisburg: Henle, 1961–)
Sch40	Anton Schindler, <i>Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven</i> (Münster: Aschendorff, 1840)
Sch45	Anton Schindler, <i>Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven</i> (Münster: Aschendorff, 1845)
Sch60	Anton Schindler, <i>Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven</i> , 2 vols. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1860)
SW	<i>Schillers sämtliche Werke</i> (Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta, 1838)
TDR	Alexander Wheelock Thayer, rev. Hermann Deiters and Hugo Riemann, <i>Ludwig van Beethovens Leben</i> , 5 vols (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1917–23)
WR(N)	Franz Wegeler and Ferdinand Ries, <i>Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven</i> (Coblenz: Rädeker, 1838); <i>Nachtrag</i> by Franz Wegeler (Coblenz: Rädeker, 1845)
WZ	<i>Wiener Zeitung</i>
ZEW	<i>Zeitung für die elegante Welt</i>

Preface

Beethoven had a life beyond his vocational activities. He was a studious man who exhibited an aspiration to achieving a higher level of *Bildung*. He considered it his duty to spend leisure time on self-cultivation and invested great effort on improving his erudition. A substantial part of his reading activities was focused on writings from Greco-Roman antiquity. These, for him, were sources of edification, providing spiritual sustenance. Studying this material was not only a pleasant pastime; it was also beneficial for achieving and maintaining a high-standing moral compass.

This book, originally a PhD thesis submitted to the University of Manchester, attempts to demonstrate that Beethoven's commitment to Greco-Roman culture was deep and ongoing, and that it ventured beyond the non-committal. Drawing on an investigation of primary sources it examines the extent to which the composer indulged his penchant for ancient writings and was introduced to history, art, politics, and philosophy pertaining to antiquity. It surveys what he learned about it in Bonn and in Vienna, cities where he resided and where the focus was very different. It expands on the various editions of German translations that he consulted and consumed, readily available to him through the shop of Franz Haas in Vienna, which was probably his most significant supplier. The editions he read were at least the works of Homer, Plutarch, Horace, Tacitus, Euripides, and a number of Greek poets.

It is argued that Beethoven construed Greco-Roman culture as the historical epitome of intellectual, moral, and artistic perfection. In his view it was an ethical ideal of impeccable integrity and authority, and he held deep appreciation of writings from this period, which were uplifting, of edifying value and salutary for character-building. The book inquires into the extent to which he adhered to premises, patterns of thought, and doctrinal postulates laid out by Hellenistic dogmatic philosophy, more specifically what was propagated by Platonism and Stoicism. This material informed Beethoven's thoughts, it is posited, and therefore his knowledge in this field holds a key to a proper appraisal of the steadfast and undaunted Beethoven so often revealed in portraits, the resilient 'great man' resolved to carry out his duty with nobility of soul.

The book includes a discussion of what reception history had to say about the theme, covering concepts that are commonly associated with antiquity such as heroism, humanism, brotherhood, republicanism, and freedom. It concludes with a comprehensive survey of compositions (including sketches and plans) about Greco-Roman subjects, the texts of which are more closely analysed. Finally, a hypothesis is promoted about why a projected oratorio about the decline of the ancient world, the ill-fated *Der Sieg des Kreuzes*, did not come to fruition, even though Beethoven accepted its commission.

1 Introduction

The attractiveness of Antiquity for powerful souls is probably the most sophisticated and imperceptible of all enticements.
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Fragmente* 1885 (34, 176)

In March 1827, when Beethoven was lying on his deathbed, the thirteen-year-old Gerhard von Breuning wrote in a conversation book: ‘Do you like to read about the artefacts of the Romans and the Greeks? If you do, I will bring illustrations of them tomorrow, together with the explanation, and also another more general book about these ancient artefacts’.¹ The boy had evidently overheard that Beethoven had requested his attendants to supply him with Classical literature. Anton Schindler had borrowed Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* from a library, but failed to obtain what the sick man had asked for, namely the writings of Tacitus and Plutarch.² The volumes that Beethoven needed were not readily available, which was why Gerhard offered to bring his schoolbooks on the Romans and the Greeks, as temporary replacements.

Schindler recollected in his biography, that the dying Beethoven was surrounded by ‘Plutarch and other Greek favourites’.³ He informed Ignaz Moscheles in London that ‘when alone, he entertains himself with reading the ancient Greeks’.⁴ Conversation books and letters corroborate this claim: sure enough, on his deathbed Beethoven had at his disposal at least Homer, Plutarch, Ovid, and Epictetus.⁵ One might say that he departed from the world while immersed in ancient wisdom, and this lends some credence to the story that one of his final utterings was: ‘Plaudite amici comoedia finita est’ – a Hellenistic life-trivializing expression reportedly used by Emperor Augustus.⁶ The upshot is, that very late in life Beethoven set much store by ancient writings. Late in life means at a time when enthusiasm for the ancients was no longer widely shared. It was no longer a focal point for a younger generation, or for society at large. Tellingly, when not very much later Franz Schubert was fatally ill, he entertained himself with rampantly consumed novels by James Fenimore Cooper.⁷ Allowing for crude Beethoven–Schubert dualisms and timeworn stereotypes in biographical

2 Introduction

writing, these divergent choices may well reflect a contrast between generations. The two composers were living cheek by jowl, but their interests differed totally.⁸

Beethoven's marked proclivity for ancient writings in his final months raises various questions. Was it restricted to the final years or a long-time engagement? What was the origin of his choices? What did he actually consume and when? What was the outcome of these activities? More generally: how significant was Greco-Roman antiquity for him, as a person and as a composer? These and related issues are broached in this book.

1.1 Aims and objectives

This opening chapter charts the various areas of investigation. It first defines aims and objectives and, following a conspectus of current scholarship in the field, the methodology that is applied for answering the basic questions.

The primary objectives are these: to build up a picture of the extent to which Beethoven was conversant with Greco-Roman culture, in the broadest sense; to investigate which steps he took to broaden his purview on the matter; to inquire into the motives behind his setting his sights upon familiarizing himself with ancient writings; to elaborate in detail how the information that he gathered had a bearing on his thoughts and world views; finally, to enumerate and elucidate his musical output insofar as bound up with antiquity. The justification of these investigations, with all types of evidence being brought to bear on the central question of how to estimate the extent of Beethoven's knowledge, lies in the composer's towering and canonical status in Western culture. The unravelling of Beethoven's psychic configuration, stretching to what went beyond his vocational activities, may contribute to the understanding of his singular achievements. This understanding is constantly in flux, and every time frame has its own angle on the material.

The described objectives bring with them the danger that they stretch in remote directions – biographically, historically, and musically. To this extent, in order to place useful constraints on the research and to define the ends to which investigations are conducted, a limited number of priorities and targets is set. This book is confined to exploring the following fields of inquiry. It aims to build up as coherent as possible a picture of:

- 1 the cultural-historical background of Beethoven's involvement with antiquity, part of which is historically contingent and can be subsumed under the generic. Throughout Beethoven's life, assuredly in the earlier part, broad sections of society lavished a fresh attention on the Greco-Roman world. This was more or less anchored in the culture of the time and the ancients were regarded as the birthplace of modern civilization. A cultural perspective is needed for an appraisal as to whether Beethoven's interest extended beyond this flow, and to gauge the particular

and idiosyncratic. Since Beethoven was resident in Bonn and Vienna, where conditions were dissimilar, these periods of his life are treated separately.

- 2 publications that Beethoven consulted, acquired, or meant to acquire about and from antiquity. As will be seen, he imputed significance to the works of several ancient writers in German translation. Except for Homer's *Odyssey*, scholarly research into the books he had at his disposal is rather unsatisfactory. Since editions contained prefaces, elucidations, notes, and, in some cases, evaluative interpretations, it is prudent to scrutinize which of these went through his hands. Moreover, some were of considerable literary quality, approaching the artistic, and it may have been the language proficiency of an individual translator that laid claim on his interest. This category also covers novels and educational material, like textbooks or historical commentaries on antiquity. Some were provenly studied by Beethoven; others were designated by him as worthy of acquiring.
- 3 memoranda and excerpts made by Beethoven about and from antiquity, the identification and evaluation of which may furnish insight into how Greco-Roman wisdom affected him. In his *Tagebuch* Beethoven spotlighted sayings and aphorisms that purportedly impressed him. An analysis may shed light on what he expected to find here. A special case is his personal copy of Homer's *Odyssey*, which contains dozens of underlinings and other notations in pencil. These are here categorized, evaluated, and commented upon – a complete overview is added as an appendix to Chapter 4.
- 4 the role for Beethoven of ancient philosophy. Since ancient writers, as a rule, committed themselves to one or other philosophical school (such as Platonism, Stoicism, Epicurism, the Peripatetics), Beethoven must have come across specific preferences for one school or another. It may be worthwhile to explore how these preferences affected Beethoven, to interrogate the extent to which he was indebted to them, and how they may have been of service to him in everyday life.
- 5 compositions, sketches, and plans that have a bearing on antiquity. Throughout his life, Beethoven encountered Greco-Roman antiquity by virtue of his profession. This led to a series of works related to it, from brief canons to large-scale stage music. Since he scrupulously explored the literary merit of texts before commencing a work, plumbing their depths to grasp central ideas, the textual choices he made invite enquiry: what exactly fascinated him about them? This also applies to unfinished projects, and even to vague plans.

If explored in a thoughtful and cautious manner, with sufficient supply of background material, it may realistically be assumed that the combined results of the interrogations yield insight into, and a better understanding of, Beethoven's intellectual powers in this field. Related topics must necessarily

4 Introduction

be omitted, falling beyond the scope, for instance, Beethoven's interest in Indian culture, or in a genre called *Schicksalstragödie*.⁹ Discussed rather cursorily as well is the delicate topic of his religious convictions, which is briefly touched upon in Chapter 8. Nor can the issue be broached here of aesthetic considerations: first-period works embody a style with drama and expression defined by the tension between key regions and by carefully designed features of weight and proportion, and therefore a comparison with Winckelmannian views on aesthetics suggests itself. Did the Classical world's ideals (neoclassical proportion and equipoise, structural cohesion, the application of ornaments, etcetera) had a bearing on his artistic choices? The topic is touched upon fleetingly in Chapter 3, but cannot be further evaluated. These and similar themes mandate separate and more firmly investigations than will be fruitful to pursue for present purposes.

1.2 The quest for *Bildung*

The general context of this book is defined by Beethoven's quest for *Bildung*, or rather *Geistesbildung*, man's intellectual, spiritual, and emotional self-cultivation through the acquisition of knowledge.¹⁰ Beethoven left scarce information about what he deemed necessary to achieve this, but an oft-quoted passage from an 1809 letter to publisher Breitkopf & Härtel offers at least a glimpse:

There exists no text that should all too soon be called too learned for me. Without attempting in any way to claim to be erudite, I can say that ever since childhood I strove to comprehend what good and wise people of every age have meant to express. It is a disgrace if an artist does not consider it his duty to achieve at least the same in such matters.¹¹

He was addressing a sensitive issue here. As a rule, musicians and composers were deemed to have been poorly educated; they were regarded as being unsophisticated and of limited erudition. The AMZ regularly advised musicians to educate themselves in order to avoid demonstrating 'lack of *Bildung*'.¹² The bias was widespread. Caroline Pichler (1768–1843), a Viennese contemporary of Beethoven who had personally met Mozart, Haydn, Paisiello, Cherubini, Schubert, and other composers, noted in her memoirs that persons active in the field of music were 'individuals who beside this gift from heaven [music] exhibited few intellectual capacities, or in any case little *Bildung*'.¹³ She was particularly critical of Mozart and Haydn, who in her view had shown 'no erudition whatsoever'.¹⁴ According to the AMZ, Mozart had 'not exactly been born for science and philosophy'.¹⁵ The meagre education of Haydn was discussed by Beethoven himself, given a remark in his conversation books: 'Haydn didn't have much culture'.¹⁶

Within this context, it should not surprise that Beethoven set great store by the improvement of his education, which had been fairly poor during

his childhood. The formative gymnasium period, which had been allowed to the lion's share of his juvenile friends, had been denied to him.¹⁷ Therefore, he saw the need of perfecting himself later in life and to forestall the impression of being illiterate. As he articulated in the letter to Breitkopf, it was an artist's duty to be intellectually curious. He exhibited a particular concern for maintaining a mental vigilance at a time when he started to enjoy international renown: in 1809, he had reached a pinnacle of acclaim and was widely recognized as the guiding light among Europe's composers. His repute having accumulated, it must have occurred to him that he was becoming a role model in his profession, what invested him with responsibilities. It impelled him, in order to live up to his reputation, to further his intellectual skills to an acceptable degree. By the same token, he regarded Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as 'one of the foremost teachers of the nation'.¹⁸ Accordingly, Beethoven subsumed the task of self-educating by studying and reading. He ended up becoming more self-conscious, occasionally even tilting the balance a little by displaying a false erudition.¹⁹

It was within these self-imposed obligations that he made strenuous efforts to enhance his knowledge about the ancients. Perhaps not coincidentally, 1809 was the year when he commenced studying Euripides, as will be seen in Chapter 5. His literary idols Schiller, Goethe, Wieland, Herder, and Voss taught him that antiquity had been the domain par excellence of wisdom, high-standing morals, and artistic perfection. Contact with these writings was conducive to a harmonious development of a person's outlook and taste. Beethoven expressed this himself when he used phrases like 'the venerable intellectual treasures of the Romans and the Greeks' and 'the rich domains of Greekness'.²⁰ His esteem for these cultures was sincere. When a tutor was found for the education of nephew Karl, for instance, he preferred the course 'to start with the ancients'.²¹ Other examples of his deferential reverence will follow in subsequent chapters. For present purposes, it suffices to ascertain that for Beethoven, knowledge of Classical antiquity was a portal to an advanced level of culture, a means of becoming an accomplished person.

This was a view widely shared in his time. The above-mentioned memoirs by Caroline Pichler, written in the 1830s, have the contemplation: 'What happened to the unbridled admiration for Classical antiquity, nurtured by cultivated society twenty years ago?'²² Evidently, times had changed for the worse. The author missed the time-honoured reverence that had once been exhibited, and she looked back with nostalgia on earlier decades when Germany had indulged a cultural and artistic glorification of it: the time when Wilhelm von Humboldt had boldly formulated a university curriculum predicated on the knowledge of the ancients (1808).²³ It was this turn-of-the-century enthusiasm that Beethoven shared with his generation. One person in his immediate environment shared the fascination, Josef Schreyvogel, one of the founders of the Kunst- und Industrie-Comptoir that published many of Beethoven's works (later he was a theatre agent and writer; see Figure 1.1).²⁴ During many years, Schreyvogel kept a diary, which will be regularly



Figure 1.1 Josef Schreyvogel (1768–1832), as depicted in the ZEW from 29 September 1818.

invoked in the chapters to come, for he was reasonably close to Beethoven and he assiduously devoured the whole gamut of Classical literature within a relatively short period (1811–14, a limbo period when he was between jobs). He did this with the avowed aim of ‘becoming a better person’,²⁵ and the more he read, the more his adulation grew. In a flush of enthusiastic incentive, he concluded:

What you yourself can learn from the Greeks and Romans, privately? (...) That with wisdom, virtue, courage, prudence and perseverance all hindrances can be tackled, and that only these guarantee freedom and happiness. (...) Be firm, moderate, wise! In your private surroundings, confined as they may be, you must exercise the virtues of great historical models! Your house, your dwelling, is your own Athens, Sparta, and Rome.²⁶

For Schreyvogel, the redemptive power inherent in ancient literature led to introspection, deliverance, and in the end catharsis, to the point that he was ashamed of everything he had done and published earlier, because of a wrong attitude towards things: ‘What are we in comparison to the ancients? It was not so much talent, but character that gave them this supremacy’.²⁷

Schreyvogel’s ruminations provide a useful context to appreciations and expectations by Beethoven, who himself left rather scant information about what he experienced when reading and studying. This is all the more so because, as will be shown, both focused on the same texts, occasionally from identical editions, as if they had a spiritual liaison.²⁸

1.3 Scholarly writing

The topic under discussion has been researched on a modest scale. In rounded biographies, it is touched upon only peripherally, as a side-issue. Sporadic insights decidedly exist – some of which will be discussed below – but, more often, the theme is mentioned only casually, as a passing reference, and not seldom within the context of Beethoven's alleged political ideas, values, and principles. In some cases, tangential correlations are suggested between ancient figures that were known to Beethoven – as appearing in letters – and such themes as German idealism (the realm of love, freedom, and beauty), heroism, republicanism, rebelliousness, etc. As will be seen, many of these themes had their actual roots not so much in Beethoven's time, but in the later nineteenth century, predominantly in the second-half.

Startlingly, the earliest biographers – Schlosser, Seyfried, Wegeler, Ries, Czerny – had virtually nothing to say on the subject, except for some random remarks. According to Ferdinand Ries, Beethoven saw Bonaparte as the resurgence of respectable Roman (republican) consuls, but he was disappointed about his political aspirations as an emperor. Ries also claimed that Beethoven composed the funeral march from the Piano Sonata Opus 26 with Fernando Paër's opera *Achille* in mind.²⁹ Franz Wegeler whimsically referred to Livy³⁰ and Carl Czerny made the well-known suggestion that the second movement of the Fourth Piano Concerto depicted 'an ancient tragic scene'.³¹ Johann Aloys Schlosser was silent about antiquity, but he did mention, even repeatedly, that Beethoven had exhibited a marked proclivity for the study of 'history', which he practised himself.³²

The first to elaborate on reading activities was Anton Schindler, who in 1840 emphasized that Beethoven enjoyed reading Greek and Roman classics, 'which he possessed in the best translations (...) He was as conversant with many of the Greek authors as he was with his own scores'.³³ When composing the 'Eroica' Symphony he had been thinking of Plato's *Republic*, Schindler claimed,³⁴ and he had been an admirer of Lucius Junius Brutus; he also read Plutarch.³⁵ In his 1845 edition, Schindler added that he himself had discussed Aristotle with Beethoven.³⁶ Only in the extended 1860 edition he expounded on the subject. Beethoven, he now posited, had possessed statuettes of ancient Greek and Roman heroes; he had Homer's epics on shelf; he had studied ancient art; he had been acquainted with Aristotle's *Politics*; he could cite from memory passages from Horace's *On the Art of Poetry*; and his friend the philologist Karl Pinterics had summarized for him the writings of Aristotle, Lucian, Quintilian, and Boethius; 'Plutarch, Homer, Plato, Aristotle, and other such guests' had been his oldest friends and teachers.³⁷ These claims have been brought to bear on discussions of Beethoven's sophistication and they impacted biography to no small degree³⁸ – much still lingers in biographical writing today – irrespective of Schindler's by now well-established lack of credibility and his tendency to fabricate.³⁹ Much of what he claimed is provenly vitiated by errors or irregularities, or by downright fraud.

In ensuing years, Wilhelm von Lenz and Adolf Bernhard Marx echoed Schindler at face value, Lenz parenthetically adding that Beethoven read ancient Greek tragedies⁴⁰ and that in the *Eroica* Beethoven had pictured the tragic fate of Caesar,⁴¹ Marx transforming Czerny's Fourth Piano Concerto story into the Orpheus and Euridice myth; Marx also went out of his way to promote the little-known work *Die Ruinen von Athen*.⁴² Alexander Wheelock Thayer and Ludwig Nohl, in the 1860s, launched a new era of serious scholarship, but they held opposing views. Thayer saw Beethoven's affinity for antiquity as mere 'romantic-sentimental worship' and he linked it to the Frenchified region in which he grew up.⁴³ Critical of Beethoven's lack of *Bildung*, which was the cause of the composer's raffish manners, erratic behaviour, and deficient equanimity, Thayer saw little added value in this worship.⁴⁴ Nohl querulously reproached his American colleague for his 'narrow-minded ethical convictions' and misapprehension of Beethoven's 'truly German' spirit.⁴⁵ For him, Beethoven's occupation with the Classics (he specified Lucian, Cicero, Horace, Isocrates, Xenophon, Aristophanes, and Euripides, most in Christoph Martin Wieland's translations) reflected a not atypical German disposition.⁴⁶ While sometimes fundamentally wrong in his assertions, Nohl was also the first to delve deeply into the topics of Beethoven's interest: he specified and closely interrogated his markings in his copy of Homer's *Odyssey* (see Chapter 4) and identified his edition of Plutarch (see Chapter 6).⁴⁷

Concomitant with Thayer and Nohl a study by Edward Dannreuther from 1876 appeared,⁴⁸ whose observations had a marked impact on Anglo-American writing. Elements of Dannreuther's text found resonance in the works by Donald Francis Tovey, and some can still be detected in those by such modern authors as Scott Burnham and Charles Rosen.⁴⁹ According to Dannreuther, Beethoven was introduced to Plato, Quintilian, Plotinus, Pliny, and Ovid – but he gave no sources.

Biographical writing from around the turn of the century – Paul Bekker, Thomas San-Galli, Leopold Schmidt, and August Halm – added little on the subject and references to antiquity were in fact limited to name-dropping.⁵⁰ Bekker claimed that Beethoven was 'ever again enthused about Plutarch and Xenophon'⁵¹ and Schmidt mentioned an aborted opera 'about Alexander the Great' (which was actually *Vestas Feuer*).⁵² Somewhat more detailed was Ludwig Schiedermair, who in *Der junge Beethoven* (1925) made the sweeping claim that it had been at Bonn University that the young Beethoven had first learned about antiquity:

'This was the place where he came into contact with the ancients, where Plutarch taught him 'Resignation', and Homer joy and wisdom – 'like the wise Odysseus I also know how to help myself' – where he heard about Plato, Tacitus, Cicero and others, and where he developed an understanding of the 'rich writings of the Greeks'.⁵³

Although unfounded, these assertions gained a firm foothold in academic circles. Other writers took them as a vantage point for further interpretative appraisals, and despite the fact that Schiedermaier had not ventured beyond speculation they are still echoed today.⁵⁴

The centenary of 1927 called Beethoven's greatness to vivid recollection and heralded a new phase, provoking a burgeoning of literature. More attention was now lavished on the primary sources, and the systematic examination of these yielded new insights. Walther Nohl scrutinized the conversation books and he listed Beethoven's excerpts from magazines and newspapers.⁵⁵ The diligent Jacques-Gabriel Prod'homme studied Beethoven's intellectual education, devoting several pages to the Classics and inferring that 'he [Beethoven] had acquired a total sum of knowledge very superior to that possessed by musicians of the day'.⁵⁶ He argued plausibly that loose citations were no proof that whole books were consumed, but he took it for granted that Beethoven had read Plato. This was also true for an overseas colleague, John Sullivan,⁵⁷ who argued that

the names of Bacchus, Hercules, and the rest of them, had not for him the flat, trite, artificial associations they have for the ordinary sophisticated reader. To Beethoven these names stood for vivid and energetic embodiment of life's fundamental forces and principles.⁵⁸

These views were given sympathetic consideration later by another English author, Martin Cooper, who was the first to take Beethoven's commitment to Stoicism seriously.⁵⁹ Another original contributor to the topic was Arnold Schmitz, who provided valuable insights into how Beethoven appreciated the concept of 'virtue' (Tugend), relating this to themes like resignation, vice, humanism, fate, suffering, etc.⁶⁰

A first all-encompassing approach of Beethoven's dealings with antiquity followed in 1971. In a well-conceived essay, Günther Fleischhauer provided a wide-ranging and generously referenced overview, deftly navigating conversation book topics, aphorisms, and citations in the *Tagebuch*, reading materials, references in letters, recollections by contemporaries, and supplying a survey of antiquity-related compositions.⁶¹ This was the first encyclopaedic approach to the issue. It was frustratingly concise and much might have been more meaningfully pursued, but it was a breath of fresh air that Fleischhauer exhibited sufficient critical distance to Schindler. This makes his painstaking overview still valuable today as an auxiliary tool.

It soon launched follow-ups, like Eleanor Selfridge-Field's 'Beethoven and Greek Classicism' (1972)⁶² and Renate Reschke's exploration of Beethoven's 'visions' of antiquity (1976).⁶³ Both emphasized the composer's 'Humanität', a term traditionally correlated by literary contemporaries (notably Herder) to the Greek pursuit of glorious actions and splendid virtues by ancient heroes, which were conceived as the highest standards of behaviour and

beneficial to the young to develop character and personality. Belonging to the same category was Martin Geck/Peter Schlenning's position that Beethoven's neo-humanistic ideals were basic features in the 'Eroica' symphony, which the authors perceived as a 'Prometheus symphony celebrating ancient greatness and virtue rather than the political ideology of Napoleon'.⁶⁴ More recent interpretations of the Third (and Ninth) deserve to be mentioned in this respect: according to Scott Burnham, the listener perceives the 'Eroica' music as a 'personal victory',⁶⁵ while Robert Pascall and Lawrence Kramer argue that the Ninth blends or dovetails the pagan-antique and Christian-modern,⁶⁶ as a conjoining of 'Dionysian ecstasy and Christian enthusiasm'.⁶⁷ Both 'heroism' and 'the Dionysian' are obvious allusions to antiquity.

Research of a more phenomenological nature has focused on the origins and analysis of antiquity-related compositions. Beethoven's aborted opera *Vestas Feuer*, set in Roman republican times, was discussed by Willy Hess and later by Lewis Lockwood, editor of the sketchbook Landsberg 6 that carries sketches for the work⁶⁸ – both building upon investigations by Raoul Biberhofer from 1930.⁶⁹ The overture *Coriolan*, featuring one of the forty-eight heroes from Plutarch's *Lives*, was analysed from a postmodern perspective by Lawrence Kramer, who also supplied elements of its reception history.⁷⁰ Egon Voss delivered an in-depth study of the *Prometheus* ballet.⁷¹ The successive stages of a never-written work, the oratorio *Der Sieg des Kreuzes*, were outlined by Michael Ladenburger on the basis of material in the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna.⁷² Finally, new factual information on the theatre music *Die Ruinen von Athen* was furnished by Helmut Hell, in a contribution to NGA.⁷³

Among more recent approaches to the theme of antiquity in Beethoven is Maynard Solomon's study of what was lifted by the composer in his *Tagebuch* from Pliny, Homer, Ovid, Plutarch (possibly) Seneca and some unidentified sources.⁷⁴ These quotations were perceived by him against the backdrop of freemasonry ideology, of which a split-off section (the Illuminati) was active in Bonn in the 1780s (see Chapter 2). In the same year (2000) appeared Elisabeth Brisson's adapted dissertation *Le Sacre du Musicien*. Although a felicitous initiative, covering much pertinent material, it overlooks a substantial part of Anglo-American scholarship, and it is less than adequate by not treating the editions that Beethoven consulted.⁷⁵ Reinhard Witte's 'Beethoven, Homer und die Antike' (2003) is a thorough study of Beethoven's *Odyssey* copy, preserved in Berlin.⁷⁶ It received a sequel with Friederike Grigat's more general exploration of Beethoven's enthusiasm for Homer (2016), a cogently argued study that incorporates an unfinished libretto written (for Beethoven) by Theodor Körner, *Ulysses Wiederkehr*.⁷⁷ Worth mentioning as well here, despite a number of hyperbolic views, is John Clubbe's article 'Beethoven and Brutus' (2010).⁷⁸

Taking stock, there is a recognizable thread of continuity in Beethoven scholarship. The corpus of literature is not vast, but rich enough to ensure

a reasonably adequate picture. At the same time, many imponderables and loose ends remain. What more than anything else remains underexposed, is what material about antiquity went through Beethoven's hands. What continues to be troubling is which authors were known to him. With time, the list of names has mushroomed profusely (Quintilian, Lucian, Aeschylus, Aristotle, Pliny, Plato, Sophocles, Virgil, Aristophanes, and Boethius can be found), but nearly always without references to sources.⁷⁹

In older material, names were sometimes adduced for political reasons. Not seldom attempts were made to enlist Beethoven in one or other ideological service. French writers from the beginning of the twentieth century were driven by a desire to promote their own republican views by praising in 'republican' Beethoven the overly masculine, determined, French-revolutionary great man who seized fate by the throat. Romain Rolland took it as a fact that he had paid homage to Napoleon and that the motto 'joy through suffering' was the voice of republican Plutarchian heroes. Marxist scholars, who could impossibly write from neutral ideological territory, celebrated Beethoven's alleged proto-socialist ideas, enhancing his supposed dislike of bourgeois and nonconformist attitudes and according weight (undue, as will be seen) on his engagement with Plato, as reported by Schindler.⁸⁰ The essays by Fleischhauer, Köhler, and Reschke appeared in communist-oriented journals and congress reports, one of which prefaced by a Minister of State condemning the 'abominable crimes of American imperialism'.⁸¹ Accordingly, Fleischhauer gave extensive quotes from Marx, and Reschke also from Hegel.⁸² All this had a marked effect on myth making, and if any theme is mandated as a vital avenue of enquiry in the present study, it is the proliferation in the literature of Beethoven's familiarity with Plato (the topic will be addressed in Chapter 5).⁸³ Reference should also be made, incidentally, to Western-liberal attempts to claim Beethoven. As one commentator put it: 'Beethoven can evidently accommodate a range of competing political ideologies at any given time'.⁸⁴

1.4 Method and structure

This book undertakes to accomplish a comprehensive overview of Beethoven's involvement with antiquity – with special focus on what he read – while mobilizing evidence to cement claims. Following this introductory chapter, it starts with an interrogatory orientation. In order to progress systematically, Chapters 2 and 3 proceed chronologically: the former investigates Beethoven's surroundings in Bonn with respect to antiquity, the other those in Vienna, predominantly the 1790s and early 1800s, when interest was most widely shared. The nature of the influence that affected Beethoven in Bonn and Vienna was not the same, which is why the approaches vary considerably in scope: from a survey of the Bonn University curriculum to an inventory of a statue gallery in Vienna.

The ensuing Chapters 4–6 constitute identifications and descriptions of German translations that were provenly studied by Beethoven, with special emphasis on Homer’s *Odyssey*. Chapter 7 deals with the conundrum of which strands of ancient philosophical thinking may have had a bearing on Beethoven’s outlook and mindset. Chapter 8 outlines antiquity-related compositions, including sketches and plans, with a discussion of the origin and background of some selected works. A closing Chapter 9 summarizes previous observations, with concluding remarks about myths in biographical tradition that should better not be perpetuated.

From Chapter 3 on, the focus is exclusively on the primary sources. The setup of the research rests on an omnibus approach: it is based solely on original data accumulated from such documents as letters, conversation books, diaries, autographs, sketchbooks, recollections of contemporaries, and a few minor others. These data are the actual linchpin of the investigation. They result, first, from scanning the collected correspondence (consisting of 2292 letters from and to Beethoven, as published in 1996–98, BGA) and, second, of scouring the conversation books – the notebooks that convey what Beethoven’s interlocutors – friends and visitors – would normally have spoken to him had he not been deaf (published in their entirety from 1968 to 2001, so that it is readily accessible now in a scholarly edition, BKh).⁸⁵ Conversation books were predominantly used by Beethoven in a relaxed environment, mostly at home, which is why they tend to reflect leisure, when he did not feel the obligation to be creative. Sometimes he made entries in them himself, for instance jotting down adverts from newspapers – which were not seldom about the availability of second-hand books on antiquity. As is well known, Schindler has tampered with these texts, which necessitates a check and double-check of their authenticity. In case of a forgery, an appraisal is needed of what may have been Schindler’s motivation.⁸⁶

The data also comprise references from recollections by Beethoven’s friends, acquaintances, and visitors, culled primarily from KC, but also from the writings by Gottfried Fischer, Franz Wegeler, Ferdinand Ries, Ignaz von Seyfried, Anton Schindler, and Gerhard von Breuning.⁸⁷ Recollections carry considerable weight, for occasionally Beethoven shared with friends and guests what made claim on his interest. They cannot, however, be taken at face value, and require verification with a view to the person involved.⁸⁸ In addition, various other unrelated source materials were consulted, such as Beethoven’s diaries, family albums, a *Stammbuch* (made by friends for his departure for Vienna in 1792), books found in his estate when he died, and loose memoranda. Beethoven kept a diary twice, first during his early Vienna years (1792–94) and again in 1812–18, for collecting notes, citations, soliloquies, and memoranda. The latter diary, commonly referred to as the *Tagebuch*, is integral to the present investigation, by virtue of the containment of elaborate references to various writings from and about antiquity. Also crucial is Beethoven’s personal library, even though the list made up after his death renders only what was present when he died – he