A CLASSICAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA IN 1908

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Until now, I, like other classical scholars, believed that a national Classical Association of South Africa (CASA) was founded for the first time in 1927. However, new evidence requires that we backdate the existence of CASA, in some form at least, by twenty years, to mid-1908.

Very recently, I was scrolling through a microfilmed copy of the Cape Times for Wednesday June 17 1908, doing background research for a novel I am writing, set in Cape Town in that year. To my astonishment there in the newspaper, among reports on ‘Alleged Hotel-Breaking’, ‘Amusements’ and an advertisement for ‘Pomeroy Liquid Powder’ (‘Protects the Face from Sunburn and Wind’), I discovered the following item:

3 The received view is that, having first appeared in 1927, CASA then became defunct, and was revived in 1956. See Henderson 2004:90, with n. 4; the same information appears anonymously in the first volume of CASA’s journal, Acta Classica 1958:164.
Cape Times, Wed. 17 June 1908
[The note of the date at the top is my own addition.]

Classical Association of South Africa.

THE First General Meeting will be at the South African College on MONDAY, June 22nd, at 8 p.m.

Presidential Address: Professor W. Ritchie.

Papers by Professor G. Robertson (Bloemfontein) and Miss A. S. Bleby (Rondebosch).

Dr. Cillie (Frenchhoek) and Advocate J. A. Grier, LL.D., M.L.A., will speak.

J. G. R. Lewis
Mowbray,
Hon. Sec.

This brief newspaper item talks of a ‘First’, not an ‘Annual’ General Meeting, presumably because the Association had not formally met before. The notice, then, seems to mark the very beginning of CASA in South Africa.

Most remarkable in the notice is the fact that the Association announces itself not as a ‘Cape Town’ or ‘Cape Colony’ (in 1908, we are, of course, still pre-Union) body, but as the ‘Classical Association of South Africa’ (my emphasis).

This title strongly suggests that discussion must already, before mid-June 1908, have taken place between various institutions in the Colonies about the Association’s establishment. So do several other details in the notice. Not only do we have the announced presence of Professor G. Robertson from Bloemfontein (at this date in the Orange River Colony), but the fledgling association already has a designated ‘President’, Professor William Ritchie (Professor of Classics at the South African College, later to evolve into the University of Cape Town), and an Honorary Secretary.

The notion of ‘Closer Union’ between the four separate British colonies – Cape, Orange River, Transvaal and Natal – that made up South Africa was very much under discussion at this time. The National Convention to discuss Union was to meet in Durban in October 1908, then in Cape
Town in November of the same year and again in early 1909. It may be that these moves towards Union inspired the idea of a national association for the Classics. One hopes that further research may throw more light on this, the very first, Classical Association of South Africa.

Bibliography


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Acta Classica

Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: http://www.casa-kvs.org.za/acta_classica.htm