

Homeric Voices at Gallipoli: A New Zealand Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The heroic romantic myth that is the Gallipoli Campaign is constructed in part through classical allusions. The geographic, cultural and historical setting connects the endeavours, stories and sacrifices of the soldiers who attempted to seize the Dardanelles with campaigns and warriors throughout history, not least to Troy and Homer in whose shadow the region sits and whose influence reaches across the centuries. Classical allusions are now identified in WWI poetry (Vandiver, 2007, 2010); Australian remembrance (Bean, 1916; Macleod, 2004; Midford, 2011); British propaganda and remembrance (Macleod, 2004); as well as the works of combatants and commentators of the time (Bean, 1916; Hamilton, 1920; Masefield, 1916). What is missing from these investigations is how the ancient world is also integrated into New Zealand's remembrance of the Gallipoli campaign.

In newspaper articles, war memorials, plays, poetry and literature we find references to antiquity. It is clear that these allusions are an important component of New Zealand's war narrative. It is a tradition that is shared with both the British and Australian accounts, but New Zealand's story is also distinct. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect in the narrative are the classical allusions that appear in the war diaries of combatants, in particular that of Col. Hugh Stewart who proves a fascinating case study. In this paper, different classical references in the New Zealand story are revealed, providing another perspective through which to view WWI and to remember those who served at Gallipoli.