

Centering on Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema's painting titled *A Reading from Homer* (1885, Philadelphia Museum of Art), this paper raises the joint issues of cultural appropriation as vehicle of, and prompt to, imperialist expansion. It argues that the iconography of the painting hovers ambiguously between the evocation of Greek antiquity and allusions to Victorian modernity fired by imperialist aspirations in the Mediterranean and beyond. Its visual message parallels the political discourse, in Britain of the 1880s, which employed classical models, and especially the Homeric epics then resurrected in public consciousness as a result of Heinrich Schliemann's excavations in Troy and Mycenae, as models and metaphors for British foreign and civic policy.