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Alexander Hamilton, the Classics as a Means of
Social Mobility, and the Importance of Translations

This paper will begin with a brief discussion of Alexander Hamilton's education at King's College, which was abbreviated by the Revolutionary War. Despite minimal formal training in the classical languages, Hamilton became deeply devoted to various translations of the classics, especially John Dryden's translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, from which he copied significant passages into his military pay book and from which he drew pseudonyms for important essays, pseudonyms carefully selected to suit his central argument. After discussing Hamilton's use of Plutarch, the paper will consider Hamilton's use of the classics in the deliberations concerning the U.S. Constitution, including his use of the mixed government theory of Aristotle and Cicero. Finally, the paper will discuss the "antimodels" Hamilton derived from the classics--those persons, societies, and government forms whose vices he wished to avoid.

The paper will demonstrate that even those founders who, like Hamilton, received little formal training in the classics often developed a considerable reverence and love for them. Through the use of translations, even Americans from poor backgrounds were able to acquire a considerable knowledge of the classical world, a resource that helped them climb to the very summit of American government.