

"Romanization" and Greek culture⁹

Greek influences at Rome were nearly coeval with its foundation; in the earliest periods much of this influence was indirect, via Etruria. Romans owed much of their thought, their arts, and their general culture to the Greeks. One of their debts was historiography itself (the first Roman historian, Fabius Pictor, wrote his work in Greek ca. 200 BCE). Yet Rome had con-

quered this people who had produced such an awesome cultural legacy. Consequently, the Romans exhibited a kind of love/hate relationship, an approach/avoidance conflict, with Hellenism. In the end, however, as Horace's famous lines below suggest, Greece won out culturally; and we may legitimately speak of Graeco-Roman civilization, at least from ca. 150 BCE onwards.

Captive Greece seized its ferocious conqueror and brought the arts into rustic Latium.

Horace, *Epistles*, 2.1.156–7 [ca. 15 BCE]

If it had been your lot to go off to govern wild and barbarous tribes in Africa or Spain or Gaul, you would still be bound as a civilized man to consider their interests and concentrate on their needs and well-being. But we are governing a civilized people, in fact the people from whom civilization is believed to have passed to other peoples, and certainly we must give its benefits most of all to those from whom we have received it. . . . Everything that I have attained I owe to what the literature and teachings of Greece has offered. Consequently, we owe a special duty to the Greeks, beyond our common obligation to mankind; schooled in their teachings, we must want to demonstrate what we have learned before the eyes of our teachers.

Cicero, *Letters to Brother Quintus*, 1.1.27 [60/59 BCE]

Greece is a witness to [what I have said]; Greece, which was kindled with a passion for eloquence, and for long has excelled all other states in this regard. And yet [Greece] had discovered all the other arts, and had even brought them to perfection before this art of effective and eloquent speaking was developed.

Cicero, *Brutus*, 26 [46 BCE]

This is what I have been able to find out about Roman origins from diligent reading of Greek and Roman authors. Let the reader therefore deny any views that make Rome a barbarian retreat, full of castaways and fugitives, and let him confidently assert Rome to be a Greek city. This is easy to see when he demonstrates that it is the most hospitable of all cities, and when he remembers that the Aborigines were Oenotrians, and these in turn Arcadians, and recalls those who settled with them, the Pelasgians who were Argives by descent and came from Thessaly; and when he recalls, moreover, the arrival of Evander and the Arcadians, who settled around the Palatine hill, after the Aborigines had made room for them there; and also the Peloponnesians who came with Heracles, settled on the Saturnian hill; and, last of all, those who left the Troad and intermingled with the earlier settlers.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 1.89 [ca. 10 BCE]¹⁰

Roman senators charged opponents in the Senate with devotion to Greek culture, brought against P. Cornelianus, as he was preparing

The senators charged them in this manner. His appearance in Greek cloak and sandals, his devotion to Greek books and his indulgence his army

Cato did not [desire to go] as quickly as possible] but rather as people think, but rather on principle, and because of his Greek education.¹² In Greek culture, he made a statement announced with the solemnity with Greek literature, it was not confined to philosophers residing in Rome. He summoned to attend them would never give his son. He asserted that all Greek people his son to distrust them.

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Roman distrust of Greek culture?

Roman senators charged their political op-
ponents in the Senate with an excessive de-
votion to Greek culture. This charge was
brought against P. Cornelius Scipio Africa-
nus, as he was preparing for the African

campaign that ultimately would defeat
Hannibal (at the Battle of Zama, 202
BCE) and bring the Second Romano-
Carthaginian War to an end.

The senators charged that Scipio did not even maintain the appearance of a com-
mander. His appearance, they alleged, was un-soldierly and un-Roman. He wore a
Greek cloak and sandals and strolled about in the gymnasium, giving attention
to Greek books and physical exercise. And with the same indolence and self-
indulgence his army stationed in Sicily was enjoying the charms of Syracuse.

Livy, *History of Rome*, 29.19.11–13 [ca. 25 BCE]¹¹

Cato did not [desire to get an embassy of eloquent Greek philosophers out of Rome
as quickly as possible] because of personal hatred of [the Greek] Carneades, as some
people think, but rather because he was opposed to the study of philosophy in
principle, and because his patriotic zeal made him contemptuous of Greek culture
and Greek education.¹² ... And in his attempt to turn his son away from Greek
culture, he made a statement which I think was ridiculously rash for an old man: he
announced with the solemnity of a prophet that if Rome should ever become infected
with Greek literature, it would lose its empire. ... But Cato's aversion to the Greeks
was not confined to philosophers: he was also greatly apprehensive of Greek phys-
icians residing in Rome. He knew of Hippocrates' famous reply, when he was
summoned to attend the Persian King for an enormous fee, and stated that he
would never give his services to barbarians who were enemies of the Greeks. Cato
asserted that all Greek physicians had taken an oath along these lines, and exhorted
his son to distrust them.

Plutarch, *Life of Cato the Elder*, 23.1–5 [ca. 115 CE]

It was necessary for me to shed light on that branch of wisdom comprised by
philosophy in a work in the Latin language; it is true that philosophy can be learned
from the Greek writers and teachers, but I have always been certain that our coun-
trymen have demonstrated more wisdom everywhere than the Greeks, either in
making their own discoveries or in improving what they have received from Greece
– at least in those subjects they have deemed worthy of their efforts.

Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 1.1 [45 BCE]

But in Greece every state is run by irresponsible seated assemblies. Not to consider
this later Greece, stirred up and troubled by its own making, let us consider the older
Greece, once so renowned for its resources, its power, its glory, but ruined because of
this defect alone – the unwarranted freedom and irresponsibility of its assemblies.
Untested men, ignorant and inexperienced, participated in the assemblies and then
undertook useless wars, then they put turbulent men in charge of the state, and

then they banished the most worthy of the citizens. But if such things happened in Athens when that state was preeminent, not only in Greece but in almost the whole world, what chance was there of responsible action in assemblies in Phrygia or in Mysia?

Cicero, *In Defense of Flaccus*, 7.16–17 [59 BCE]

And now I shall speak of a people dear to the hearts of the rich, and one which I avoid like a plague; and I am not reluctant to say it. I cannot tolerate Romans, a Rome of Greeks. And yet what a large part of our dregs comes from Greece! The Syrian Orontes has for a long time now poured into the Tiber, bringing with it its language and its manners; its flutes and its slanted harp strings; bringing also the tambourines of that breed, and the pimps who ply their trade at the Circus.

Juvenal, *Satires*, 3.58–65 [ca. 120 CE]

Provocation and resistance to Roman power

Words cannot express, gentlemen, how bitterly foreign nations hate us because of the wanton and outrageous conduct of the men whom we recently have sent to govern them. For in those countries what temple do you suppose has been held sacred by our officers, what state inviolable, what home sufficiently guarded by its closed doors? Why, they look about for rich and flourishing cities that they may find an occasion of a war against them to satisfy their lust for plunder.

Cicero, *On the Manilian Law*, 22.65–6 [66 BCE]

M'. Acilius Glabrio and the Aetolians (191 BCE)

[Phaenias] interrupted the Roman commander, "We have not handed ourselves over to slavery, but rather we have entrusted ourselves to your good faith, and I am certain that you are acting out of ignorance in giving us these orders which are contrary to Greek custom." The consul answered, "And I do not care very much, by Hercules, what the Aetolians think is the proper custom of the Greeks, since I, in the Roman way, am issuing an order to men who have just now surrendered by their own resolution and who have been conquered by force; therefore, if my command is not immediately obeyed I shall at once order you to be thrown into chains."

Livy, *History of Rome*, 36.28.4–6 [ca. 25 BCE]

C. Popillius Laenas and King Antiochus IV of Syria (168 BCE)

Caius Popillius Laenas, the Roman general, when Antiochus greeted him from a distance and then held out his hand, gave to the king, as he had it with him, the copy of the senatorial decree, and said he should read it first, not thinking it right, I think, to show any conventional signs of friendship before he knew Antiochus' intentions, friendly or hostile. But after the king read it and said he would like to discuss it with his aides, Popillius acted in a way thought to be offensive and exceedingly arrogant.

He had a stick with him and said he must stay astonished at this impetuous said he would carry out

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Mithridates VI King of Pontus most persistent and dangerous the first century BCE. In the Mithridatic War (89–85 BCE), he invaded Asia and massacred Roman and Italian businessmen great support in the Greek

Shortly thereafter [Mithridates] the foremost agitator for this cause, and proclaimed himself king. Mithridates poured molten After setting up governors in and Mitylene, all of which refused far as to overthrow Roman they paid the price not long

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He had a stick with him cut from a vine, and he drew with it a circle around Antiochus and said he must stay inside this circle until he gave an answer. The king was astonished at this imperious behavior, but after hesitating for a few moments, he said he would carry out Rome's will.

Polybius, *Histories*, 29.27.1–6 [ca. 150 BCE]

When this report reached Cirta [112 BCE], the Italians, on whose courage the town's defense depended, were certain that in the event of surrender they would be spared because of the prestige of Rome. Therefore they advised Adherbal to give himself and the town over to Jugurtha, demanding only that his life should be spared and the rest left to the Roman Senate. But Adherbal, even though he thought that nothing could be worse than trusting Jugurtha, yet since the Italians were in a position of strength and could compel him if he opposed them, surrendered on the terms they had recommended. Then Jugurtha first tortured Adherbal to death and then made a wholesale slaughter of all the adult Numidians and the [Roman and Italian] traders whom he found bearing arms.

Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, 26.1–3 [ca. 40 BCE]

Mithridates VI against Rome

Mithridates VI King of Pontus was Rome's most persistent and dangerous enemy in the first century BCE. In the First Mithridatic War (89–85 BCE), Mithridates invaded Asia and massacred some 80,000 Roman and Italian businessmen, with great support in the Greek world (Athens

went over to the king). He remained a bitter enemy of Rome until his death in 63 BCE. The following passage describes his treatment of a Roman commander, and reflects the level of hostility against Rome in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Shortly thereafter [Mithridates] captured Manius Aquillius [88 BCE], who was the foremost agitator for this embassy and this war. Mithridates led him around tied to an ass, and proclaimed himself Manius to everyone who saw him. Finally, at Pergamum, Mithridates poured molten gold down his throat as a rebuke against Roman avarice. After setting up governors over the various regions he went on to Magnesia, Ephesus, and Mitylene, all of which received him warmly. The people of Ephesus even went so far as to overthrow Roman statues which had been erected in their city – for which they paid the price not long afterwards.¹³

Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, 21 [ca. 160 CE]

Don't you realize that the Romans turned eastward militarily only after the ocean had blocked their westward advance? That since the beginning they have possessed nothing that they have not stolen: home, wives, lands, empire? Once wanderers without a homeland, without parents, the scourge of the entire world, no laws, human or divine, keep them from seizing and destroying their friends and allies, those who are near and those who are far, weak or strong, and from thinking that every government which does not serve them, especially monarchy, is their enemy. . . . The Romans have weapons against all, the sharpest where victory yields the