

Ancient Greco-Roman Relations and the Adoption of Greek Culture by the Roman World

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Abstract

The Ancient Roman and Greek cultures display extensive overlap, a phenomenon rooted in Rome's engagement with and eventual conquest of the Greek-speaking world. This article reviews Roman perceptions of the Greeks and examines how those perceptions shaped the systemic incorporation of Greek cultural forms into Roman society. Concentrating on the period from the late third century BCE through the Roman conquest of Greece in 146 BCE, the review traces the transition from battle to hostility to cultural appropriation. During the era of conflict and war, Roman representations of the Greeks were usually marked by social and political anxiety and animosity; however, after the conquest, Romans maintained narratives of moral and political superiority while increasingly appropriating Greek traditions. Synthesizing research on art, architecture, education, science, literature, philosophy, mythology, and religion, this article argues that Greek culture operated as a dominant and resilient force, even under Roman rule. This review contends that Greco-Roman relations exemplify an early and extremely influential case of cultural appropriation in which the culture of the conquered not only endured but became foundational to the identity of the conqueror, standing in direct contrast to the typical patterns of cultural loss following domination.

Historical Context

The Greeks and Romans had a long history of battles and wars, which culminated in Greek defeat and eventually the appropriation, adoption, and theft of Greek culture. While it is true that the Romans physically defeated the Greeks in battle, it is the Greeks whose culture was the dominant force of that era, prevailing even under another nation, and remaining influential until the present.

There were two key battles against the Hellenistic Kingdom. The Battle of Heraclea in 282 BCE was critical, as it was when Rome and Pyrrhus of Epirus fought. Pyrrhus ended up winning, but the cost of war was so high that the term "Pyrrhic victory" was coined; essentially, a victory achieved at such a great cost, in this case fatalities, that the victory is considered nearly equivalent to a defeat. Similarly, the Battle of Asculum in 279 BCE was a Greek victory over the Romans; however, the cost of victory was extremely high as well, upwards of 3,000 soldiers dead. At this point in history, most battles were Greek victories, and the matches were relatively even, but as Rome continued evolving in military technology and training stronger veteran fighters, captains, and leaders, it began winning battles and even wars (Freeman). The Macedonian War also had two defining battles. The Battle of Cynoscephalae of 197 BCE was when the tables began to turn and favor the Romans, since the Romans decidedly defeated the Macedonian phalanx, demonstrating their military prowess and the evolution of their weapons. The final Macedonian defeat was at the Battle of Pydna in 168 BCE. The Romans annexed Macedonia and began establishing their control over part of the Greek world ("Macedonian Wars"). The Achaean League was the final Greek resistance force, and the Battle of Corinth of 146 BCE ended the Achaean War when Rome sacked Corinth, making Greece a Roman province. This, however, was not the end of the Greek struggle against the Romans since, for decades afterward, many Greek-speaking regions were combating Rome, typically for their independence. For example, the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BCE marked the point where Caesar

defeated his adversary, Pompey the Great, in Greece during Julius Caesar's civil war. Only a few years later, in 42 BCE, at the Battle of Philippi, Octavian and Mark Anthony's forces defeated Caesar's assassins' forces in Greece. Finally, and most notably, at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE, Octavian's forces defeated Mark Anthony and Cleopatra, effectively ending the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt and consolidating Roman control over the Greek-speaking world. To review, originally, the Greeks were winning most of the battles; however, the casualty counts for those were extremely high. Then, as the Romans started improving their military technology, strategies, and military training, many battles started moving in favor of the Romans, while the Greeks were unable to catch up. Eventually, the Romans took over the Greek-speaking world in its entirety (Jackson; Kane).

Roman Perspective

Like almost everything in history, the Roman perspective of the Greeks was incredibly nuanced and varied depending on socioeconomic classes, political power, gender, age, and so much more, but as a whole, the Roman perspective was two-fold.

On the more positive outlook, the Romans, mainly educated Romans, admired the Greek intellect and culture. The Romans' positive outlook was extremely tense, complex, and controversial. Romans recognized and adopted Greek contributions to philosophy, literature, science, art, architecture, education, mythology, and religion (Athanasiou). They truly believed they were morally superior and had intense moral disdain for the Greeks, especially after conquering them. Rich, revered, and educated Romans, like Scipio Africanus, even studied under Greek teachers and embraced Greek literature, language, and philosophy because of how accurate and important Greek knowledge and information had become. A lot of Roman writing and literature was based on successful Greek literature, poems, and even dramas that captivated Roman audiences (McCormack, "Roman Education"). Greek influence was so indispensable that it even reshaped some Roman political systems and laws to mirror what Greece originally had, leading to the creation of concepts like the Twelve Tables.

The Romans had various ways of demonstrating their admiration for Greek culture and traditions. Mostly, they would hire Greek tutors for children to ensure their understanding of Greek literature, philosophy, and rhetoric. The Romans had a Greek cultural adoption of various aspects to the point where many of the elite Romans were considered *Graecophiles*, admirers of Greece. This was especially common after the Roman conquest of Syracuse in 212 BCE because Syracuse was a very powerful and established Greek city-state where the Hellenistic culture was native and dominant; therefore, their siege of the area introduced the Romans to the luxuries of Greek culture, sparking Graecomania all around Rome. Many Greek city-states in Southern Italy, Magna Graecia, exerted this cultural influence on the Romans because of their nearby location, trade, diplomacy, and even direct and indirect contact, through conquest and the Etruscans, respectively (Jackson). Finally, the Romans' intellectual legacy was influenced by the foundation laid by Greek experts in themes like philosophy and education (Kosmo).

Unfortunately, many conservative Romans, like Cato the Elder, often described Greeks as untrustworthy, tricky, weak, lazy, debauched, petty, overly materialistic, and even backward, things that the Roman culture and identity went against (Petti). Although many Greeks were enslaved during their conquest, the Romans typically bought them for educational purposes or for non-menial tasks. Roman magistrates even refused to use Greek to conduct diplomacy with Greeks to demonstrate their superiority. Although many enslaved Greeks came to Rome and eventually got their citizenship, there were very few Greeks in the Senate, and dead Greeks

were regarded more highly than the ones living in Rome. One of the key reasons for Roman disdain was that they felt that, as captured slaves and even citizens, the Greeks were taking over Rome, and the Romans were essentially becoming just like the Greeks, this caused the Romans to want to create a harsh line differentiating the Roman and Greek moral and cultural superiority while still being able to adopt aspects of Greek culture (Henrichs; Petti). In summary, Romans often acknowledged their debt to Greek culture, since they knew they built on it. However, they looked down on the Greeks as a whole, especially after their conquest of Greece and the depreciation of Greek superiority.

Greek Perspective

Greece consisted of various powerful city-states that were leaders in political, democratic, and artistic development. The Romans conquered the Greeks, and eventually, both cultures began to merge. Greek culture remained the same for the most part; however, the Romans incorporated a lot of Greek culture into their own daily life, heavily altering what is considered Roman tradition.

Similar to the Romans, not all Greeks felt the same about their opponents, but many Greeks admired and had positive perceptions of certain aspects of Roman life, tradition, and culture. By being conquered by the Romans, the Greeks fought against and experienced Roman military prowess. This experience led many Greek veterans and even citizens to admire the Roman military strength, discipline, and strategy. The Greeks had a structure of city-states, very different from the Roman political structure, which led many Greeks to respect Roman political stability. After being conquered, Greece was protected by Rome from threats like local rivals, which encouraged Greeks to see Rome as some sort of protector. Although some Greeks disliked how Rome imitated their culture and adopted it as their own, many Greeks enjoyed the fact that Rome depended on Greek intelligence and used Greek traditions to build up their empire (Jackson). The Greeks were very talented in art, philosophy, and education, which made the Greeks appreciate Rome's strengths in the fields of engineering, infrastructure, and practicality. Greeks enjoyed some liberties like access to trade, politics, citizenship, and alliances, even if they were not always respected to the fullest extent ("Cicero: Pro Archia"). Finally, they viewed many Romans as patrons of Greek culture, which built a connection between the two based on virtue, order, and reasoning (Hutchinson).

The Greeks, however, were not delighted that they had been conquered, which led to a lot of tension between the Greeks and the Romans that could be seen in many aspects of life. The Greeks prided themselves on having a very sophisticated and educated culture, and in their eyes, the Romans were the exact opposite: barbaric and uncivilized. Since the Greeks were leaders in philosophy and rationality, they believed the Romans lacked intelligence and knowledge in key fields such as literature, education, and philosophy. Even though the Romans protected the Greeks from local rivals, the Greeks still blamed the Romans for their loss of independence, often the main cause of tension between the two groups. Furthermore, although the Romans adopted parts of Greek culture, which some Greeks thought of as respectful and as a compliment, many criticized the Romans for not understanding the true ideas behind Greek traditions, which is frequently seen as one of the earliest examples of cultural appropriation on a massive scale. The Greeks also regularly called out the Romans' hypocrisy. The Romans believed that the Greeks' downfall came from the Greeks' indulgence and luxury, but while sacking Greek cities, the Roman soldiers stole wealth, jewels, Greek culture, traditions, and

women, going against what the Roman politicians and civilians condemned the Greeks for. This led the Greeks to see the Romans as greedy, power-hungry, materialistic, and simplistic. In brief, the Greeks admired Rome's power, strategy, and strength (McElduff). While the Romans were adopting Greek culture, some Greeks appreciated that their traditions would carry on, while others criticized the Romans for being unoriginal imitators. Moreover, many saw the Romans as crude, aggressive, and "less civilized" conquerors who eliminated centuries of critical history, culture, and traditions.

Art and Architecture

The Romans had five critical architectural orders they relied on: Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, Tuscan, and Composite columns. The Classical Orders, from Greece, were Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian. Doric columns were massive, sturdy, and plain. As the next step-up, the Ionic columns were taller, slender, and had scroll-like designs at the top. Finally, the Corinthian style was extremely ornate, slender, and portrayed acanthus leaves at the top. The Roman Orders included Tuscan and Composite designs. The Tuscan columns would be a simplified Doric design with smooth shafts and a simple top. Composite columns were a combination of the scroll-like Ionic design and the acanthus leaves from the Corinthian design (Netchev). Many Roman artists would incorporate *verism*, hyperrealistic sculptures characterized by unflattering portrayals that highlighted age and imperfections, into their art. Roman art also had a strong emphasis on narrative and realism. Narrative art typically consisted of reliefs and frescoes, often telling stories of mythology, history, and daily life (Henig). Throughout the years, Roman paintings changed drastically, as can be seen through the four main styles found in paintings in Pompeii and Herculaneum ("Art and Literature"). The First Pompeian Style imitated marble blocks, the Second Pompeian Style created illusionistic architectural scenes, the Third Pompeian Style included delicate and ornamental designs, while the Fourth Pompeian Style featured complex and fantastical compositions. Mosaics, frescoes, and reliefs were the most common artistic platforms used by the Romans. Mosaics were used to decorate floors and walls, and were created by assembling small, colored pieces of materials, mainly glass, stone, or ceramic, into designs. They evolved from being geometric to getting more complex with mythological and figural scenes (Cartwright, "Roman Mosaics"). Similarly, frescoes were used to decorate walls and ceilings. They were paintings done quickly in watercolor on wet plaster, so the colors would penetrate the plaster and remain solid as it dried. Romans were known for their frescoes, especially in ancient Rome and the Renaissance periods, and they can be found in many critical ancient Roman sites, like the Sistine Chapel. Reliefs were found on buildings like arches and columns. They were carved sculptures projected from a flat background depicting historical events, mythology, or daily life (Oliver). Beyond art, the Romans were known for being extremely innovative in architectural fields because of their creation of arches, vaults, concrete, and domes (Andrews). Roman arches spanned large openings, vaults covered large spaces, concrete allowed for the construction of massive and complicated architectural structures, and domes created vast interior areas within buildings (McLaughlin).

The Greeks placed a massive emphasis on harmony, symmetry, proportion, and balance in their architecture (Art Story). This is where the Greeks got their inspiration for creating the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian column styles. The columns were meant to support horizontal beams, and although the Romans used arches, Greek arches were very different from the Romans'. Their idealization was furthered in their sculptures since they focused on perfect bodies, balance, and athleticism. They wanted to give the people an example of what they should strive for their

bodies should look like. Education also played a role in this; Greeks used mathematical formulas and theories in their art and architecture, mainly through Polykleitos' "Canon" and the golden ratio. Many buildings were actually designed with mathematical precision to follow the ideal structural proportions. They used a lot of stone in their architecture to create long-lasting monuments. Many buildings were also decorated with sculptures and friezes. Greek artists spent hours perfecting realistic muscles, cloth draping, hair movement, and dynamic poses. Examples are found in hundreds of thousands of sculptures, especially through the portrayal of cloth flying in the wind; *contrapposto*, having weight shifted on one leg; and even being able to reflect how athletes looked in action. As time passed, Greek statues lost their original emotionless state and began demonstrating drama, pain, pride, fear, and realism. The Classical and Hellenistic periods were fundamentally different from Early Greek art. Hellenistic art was extreme and characterized by detail, emotion, realism, and violence. The art was dominated by gods, heroes, and moral athletes, showing the human body at peak form. Even the divine were presented in a human form, which was very different from other ancient art. Architects ensured that public spaces and buildings always served a purpose; most Greeks actually believed that architecture without purpose was wasting space that could have been used for something else. Architecture served civic life through temples, theaters, *stoas*, covered walkways for markets, gymnasiums, and government buildings. The Greeks put a lot of emphasis on public participation, community, and democracy. Greek architecture was not simplistic; many buildings included pediments, metopes, continuous friezes, and mythological scenes (Becker). The Greeks are also very well-known for their pottery, especially their Athenian Black-figure and Red-figure styles. The geometric pottery style was the earliest, and it is characterized by geometric patterns, simple human figures, and thin lines. Corinthian was used later on, featuring Oriental influences with detailed animals and mythological figures. The Athenian Black-figure was created next, painting in black on red clay, allowing for various details. Right after, through Red-figure, the style was reversed, where the figures were red on black clay, allowing for an even greater amount of detail. Finally, the White-ground was used where the figures were either red or black on a white slip. These styles would be found on various vessels, most commonly amphoras and kraters (Britannica, "Greek Pottery").

Both the Greeks and the Romans celebrated the human body at its highest form of beauty and vitality, but the Greeks aimed for ideal beauty while the Romans added realistic elements and portrait likeness (Gill). The Romans inherited the Greek attention to muscle, movement, drapery, facial features, and realistic anatomy. Both the Greeks and the Romans used gods, heroes, and legendary events in their art. This is because Roman mythology was highly based on Greek mythology and customs (Pahl). Both cultures usually had their public buildings and spaces decorated with sculptures and statues of gods, victory monuments, and relief carvings, but this idea was originally taken from the Greeks; the Romans simply expanded the scale of these things ("Ancient Rome's Respect"). Romans took Greek sculptural techniques and added more intense realism through wrinkles, aging, and scarring, and by adding in more historical figures, generals, and emperors (Hall). The original Greek columns were borrowed by the Romans, but they created two additional versions, the Tuscan and the Composite columns. The Corinthian columns became Rome's favorite, demonstrating the Romans' obsession with Greek culture. Roman temples and public buildings would follow Greek rules of construction with balanced layouts, mathematical harmonies, and symmetrical façades. Both used materials like marble and limestone, decorated temples with reliefs and pediments, and encouraged the construction of large open-air public spaces (Ricketts). The Greek architecture set up the blueprint for the

style, and Rome spread it across a vast empire (“Why Roman Architecture”). They both shared the ideas that art should reflect ideal and heroic characters, architecture should reflect harmony, order, and proportion, buildings and sculptures belong in the center of civic life, and mythology and religion inspire visual creation (“Roman Art and Architecture”). The Greeks focused on aesthetic perfection and proportion, while the Romans focused on engineering, scale, and new materials (“Greek and Roman Art”). The Romans crafted arches, concrete, domes, aqueducts, stadiums, baths, and cities using foundational Greek knowledge (“Traces of Ancient Rome”). Ultimately, Rome borrowed the language and ideals of Greek art; however, it used those ideas to build more massive, practical, and imperial architecture and art. Many Greek creations were adapted to better suit the Roman population, but when looking at and comparing the two styles, many very obvious similarities demonstrate the progression of adoption throughout the eras.

Education and Science

In Rome, education was used to encourage civilians to pursue practical and career-oriented fields like law, administration, politics, and the military. They also put a large emphasis on training effective public speakers, such as Cicero, Cato the Elder, and Quintilian, to ensure they did well in their political orations. Marcus Tullius Cicero came from a wealthy family, was educated in rhetoric, philosophy, music, and geometry, studied Roman law under his mentor, Scaevola, and received advanced training from Latin grammarians and rhetoricians like Crassus (Ferguson). Cato the Elder served extensively in the Roman army, built a strong and trustworthy public profile, was a very successful self-taught orator in the Roman senate, wrote on various subjects, and created an encyclopedia for his son (Wasson, “Cato the Elder”). Quintilian was born in Spain, was taught rhetoric by his father, studied under Domitius Afer, became head of the first public school of rhetoric, wrote a major work on rhetorical theory, taught Pliny the Younger, and had education from practical experience from his career as an educator and rhetorician (Lowther Clark). Education in Rome served the purpose of strengthening the state and the bureaucracy. They also employed a more structured and tiered educational system, which began with the Ludus, for primary education; then the Grammaticus, for secondary education; and finally, the Rhetor, for advanced education. Many successful and educated Romans were taught by Greek tutors, texts, and teaching methods, but they framed the education around Roman cultural values to reform the goal of education (McCormack, “Roman Education”). They used education and science to build architectural structures like their renowned roads, arches, domes, and aqueducts. Science was more practical as well, emphasizing engineering, medicine, law, surveying, and architecture (Cartwright, “Roman Science”). The Romans preserved, translated, and spread Greek scientific works across their empire to improve success and increase knowledge about scientific concepts. Romans wanted to create useful, loyal, and effective citizens who had the discipline of soldiers but could work in public settings like courts, imperial administration offices, and political settings. Education was seen as the biggest form of social mobility for low-income families, but this was a more modern idea, only really important after the conquest of Greece. Although the Greeks had many natural and technical sciences in which they excelled, the Romans were leaders in a few main areas. As engineers, the Romans stood out for their creation of things like aqueducts, roads, bridges, domes, and arches. Their architecture was also unique, since they created concrete and specialized in large-scale structures. The Roman architect, Vitruvius, wrote an extremely detailed and comprehensive guide on architecture that was utilized by many (“Vitruvius”). Although the Romans were not well-known for their understanding of advanced mathematics,

they were very good at teaching simple geometry and arithmetic that was required for architecture and engineering. In the fields of agriculture and practical sciences, the Romans had two key people who really set them apart. Columella was a Roman soldier, farmer, and author who created a comprehensive agricultural manual to encourage love for farming ("Lucius Junius Moderatus Columella"). Similarly, Pliny the Elder was a Roman author, naturalist, and military officer who wrote an encyclopedia about natural subjects (Stannard). Practical and experimental testing was the Roman Scientific Method, where whether the object reached its goal was more important than the ways the goal was met. The Romans cared less about scientific laws and more about efficient and effective solutions, demonstrating the side effects of a military-based society (Pearce Williams).

Education in Greece was centered on the concepts of philosophy, reasoning, debate, and inference rather than practicality. Schools were led by extremely qualified philosophers, like Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. Plato, a student of Socrates, founded the Academy northwest of Athens. The Academy operated for many centuries until it was shut down by Emperor Justinian I, and unlike a modern university, it had a flexible syllabus focused on dialogue and critical thinking. The Academy mainly provided instruction on philosophy, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and natural sciences. It was meant to cultivate a love for wisdom and truth through education and understanding, rather than useless memorization (Trelawny-Cassity). Aristotle even studied at the Academy before founding his Lyceum in Athens. Aristotle was one of Plato's students, and he was known for an extremely holistic approach, combining both intellect and physical exercise. He organized research across philosophy, ethics, and natural sciences, housed one of the first great libraries, influenced Western thought and education, and encouraged systematic research. The Lyceum itself was one of Athens' three great philosophical institutions, was a prototype for later universities, and functioned after the death of Aristotle until the Roman general Sulla destroyed it (Morison). The Greeks preferred focusing on subjects like mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and natural sciences. Greece was also the home of many scientific thinkers who changed the approach to education and the knowledge of our natural world. Plato was one of those thinkers. He was one of Socrates' students, laid the foundation for Western philosophy, created the Theory of Forms to prove that the physical world is an imperfect copy of a higher realm of perfect, eternal Forms, and the belief that knowledge is a form of recollection, explored the concept of an ideal society, and advocated for "philosopher-kings" (Meinwald). Aristotle was another. He focused more on logic, ethics, politics, and natural sciences. He even developed the first formal system of logic called Syllogistic reasoning. By covering metaphysics, biology, poetry, and rhetoric, he set himself apart as a multifaceted thinker. He heavily influenced Western thought, and his classification of species was so groundbreaking that it was not replaced until the nineteenth century. Additionally, he explored the nature of virtue, conditions for a good life, and what makes a just society. The theories he wrote about *hylomorphism*, the combination of matter and form, and *teleology*, the idea that all natural things have a purpose or end goal, were critical to the study of those subjects by other revered thinkers. Finally, he served as Alexander the Great's tutor (Amadio; "Aristotle"). Archimedes, the "Father of Mathematics and Mathematical Physics," was a mathematician, inventor, and scientist from Sicily, and is considered one of the greatest thinkers of all time (Toomer). He was incredibly innovative and talented as he discovered buoyancy, invented the Archimedes screw, developed formulas to calculate area and volume, bridged the gap between pure mathematics and practical applications in engineering, developed the lever and pulley system, created the center of gravity, calculated an extremely accurate

approximation of pi, and developed exponentiation (“Archimedes”). Hippocrates, the “Father of Medicine,” was a physician and philosopher. He separated medicine from superstition and established rational reasoning for medical practices, emphasized the importance of clinical observation and ethicality in the medical field, believed that diseases had natural causes, founded the Hippocratic School of Medicine, proposed the humoral theory, and established the foundation of specialties within the medical field. The humoral theory consisted of thinking that the body contains four humors (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile), and illness results from an imbalance between the four (Smith). Euclid, the “Father of Geometry,” was a mathematician who compiled a treatise of systematized geometric knowledge utilizing axioms and postulates, which was the cornerstone of mathematical education, studied at Plato’s Academy, established a school in Alexandria, presented theorems and proofs using the axiomatic method, and proved there are an infinite number of prime numbers (Wardhaugh). The Axiomatic method of proof builds a logical structure from basic assumptions. Euclid based his work on five postulates, but he was best known for his parallel postulate, which explained that only one parallel line can be drawn through a point not on a given line. He also used five general common notions, the most famous of which was that things which are equal to the same thing are also equal (O’Connor, “Euclid”). Science was based on theoretical reasoning, abstract ideas, and observation of surroundings, therefore encouraging self-reflection and analysis. Intellectual schools in Greece were incredibly diverse, ranging from the Stoics to the Cynics; each school taught different key values and instilled different ideals into its students. The Stoics believed that virtue is the only good, a flourishing life is achieved by focusing on what is within one’s control, and that there are four core principles to life: courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom. Their goals were to find peace and fulfillment by mastering the internal worlds, regardless of external circumstances. The Epicureans, founded by Epicurus, however, believed that it is necessary to seek happiness through moderate pleasure; *ataraxia*, tranquility; and *aponia*, the absence of pain. They thought the highest good is a state of lasting happiness achieved by living a simple and self-sufficient life focused on friendship, knowledge, and minimizing detrimental desires. The Epicureans wanted to overcome the fear of gods and death by understanding that death is simply the end of consciousness. Unlike most philosophies of the time, they believed that gods were indifferent to human affairs in their entirety. Their goal was to acquire pleasure through the absence of pain, but not through excessive indulgence. A common misconception is that Epicureanism is the same as Hedonism; however, unlike Hedonists, Epicureans do not shun luxury, but rather, it is seen as a potential source of future pain and a deviation from the true path to happiness (Sedley). Cynics, founded by figures like Diogenes of Sinope, rejected societal conventions to live a virtuous life in accordance with nature. They also advocated for self-sufficiency, condemned materialism, supported simple living, demonstrated disdain for societal norms, and were known for having unconventional lifestyles (Platanakis). They believed in living by *asceticism*, self-discipline coupled with self-denial by living in poverty, begging for food, and sleeping outdoors, and *cosmopolitanism*, thinking they were citizens of the world by rejecting nationalities and local alliances (Piering). The scientific method followed in Greece was also based thoroughly on philosophy and hypotheses rather than experiments. Greece wanted well-rounded citizens who could debate, think, and actively participate in civic life. To ensure balance, the Greeks emphasized philosophy, logic, music, physical training, and intellectual curiosity in equal proportions as they believed it was key to a strong population. Education was not intended to be solely in the protection of the state, but rather to develop mind, character, and rationality among citizens in an effort to create a resistant and self-reliant population (Pahl). The

Greeks were very successful in many scientific and educational fields. Pythagoras was known for his immense contribution to mathematics. He founded the Pythagorean school, created a religious movement that combined math, philosophy, and mysticism, invented the Pythagorean theorem, proposed that Earth was a sphere, and influenced Plato ("Pythagoras"). Thales, the "Father of Western Philosophy," was best known for the arche. The arche was a theory that water is the fundamental substance of all matter, and everything originated from and will return to water. He also developed several geometric theorems, including the observation that opposite angles formed by intersecting lines are equal, the idea that an angle inscribed in a semicircle is a right angle, and the prediction of a solar eclipse in 585 BCE ("Thales of Miletus"). The Greeks were known for their developments in geometry, specifically the systematic axioms and theorems that created foundations for modern mathematics. Astronomy was also largely studied in Ancient Greece. Eratosthenes, the "Father of Geography," was the first to calculate the circumference of the Earth accurately, created the "Sieve of Eratosthenes" algorithm to find prime numbers, became chief librarian at the Library of Alexandria, created one of the first maps with longitude and latitude, calculated the tilt of Earth's axis, and wrote about poetry, astronomy, and various other subjects ("Eratosthenes of Cyrene"). Aristarchus was an astronomer and mathematician who proposed the first known heliocentric model, suggested that Earth rotates on an axis, and calculated the sizes and distances of the sun and moon ("Aristarchus of Samos"). Hipparchus was also an astronomer and mathematician, but he was considered the "Father of Trigonometry." He discovered the precession of the equinoxes, created the first comprehensive star catalogue, developed a table of chords to solve problems of triangles, introduced the division of a circle into 360 degrees, created mathematical models for the movements of the sun and moon, used eclipses to calculate the moon's distance from earth, and discovered a new star (O'Conner, "Hipparchus"). Apart from Hippocrates, Galen was the biggest name in the study of medicine. He was considered the "Father of Anatomy." He was born in Pergamon, in modern-day Turkey, but he studied in Alexandria until he dominated European medicine while becoming a physician, surgeon, and philosopher. Furthermore, he became the personal physician for Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. After his education, he gained experience as a surgeon for gladiators by performing dissections on animals to understand human anatomy. His research led to the discovery of the function of the recurrent laryngeal nerve; essentially, arteries carry blood rather than air. His animal dissections caused him to make mistakes about human anatomy, since the animal and human body compositions were different. Finally, he managed to prove that the brain and not the heart controlled the body and expanded on Hippocrates' humoral theory, all of which influenced modern science, anatomy, and research (Pearcy; West). Archimedes was known for his work in the fields of physics and mechanics, and Aristotle was considered an expert in biology and natural sciences. The Greek Scientific Method had a very strong emphasis on true understanding of causes and principles rather than just the result, which directly contrasted the Roman method. The Romans took the Greeks' emphasis on valuing literacy, rhetoric, and public speaking, instilling it within their own schools; however, they ensured the goals of education and the values taught were very different from the Greeks'. As in most ancient cultures, the main subjects of formal education were upper-class young men. If women wanted an education, they would have very limited options. If they were wealthy, their families could rent a private tutor (McCormack, "Roman Education"). Usually, they could be homeschooled in a very informal, domestic setting. Ancient Greece had very limited formal education for women and mostly relied on domestic education. Spartan girls were a very big exception; they received a more robust

education in fields like music, art, dance, and athletics because the men were often away at war. Ancient Rome had home-based learning, where women would learn practical skills for the home. Wealthy elite Roman and Greek women could access a similar education to men through basic literature, mathematics, and even rhetoric (McCormack, "Education for Girls"). The Romans admired Greek intellectual advancements and achievements, so they adopted many Greek educational models and methods. Both the Greeks and the Romans heavily studied literature, poetry, and history as the forefront of their education. Tutors for wealthy Romans were almost always Greek slaves or freedmen. Education was seen as a sign of status for elites, and even though the Greeks were looked down upon, their language was seen as a privilege and a sign of intellect. Classic texts were regarded highly in both societies, and they were used as the basis for education throughout most of their history. Greece and Rome produced scientific writing and research; however, the Greeks were better known for it, had more experience, and had a larger quantity of scientific writings. The most obvious adoption of Greek education systems was the way the Roman secondary and higher education systems were identical to the Greek structures, not to mention that the curriculum itself at those levels was almost verbatim what it was in Greece. The Romans even used Greek scientific knowledge to directly advance their own intellect and superiority in the field of education (Pahl). Essentially, Greek science was the foundation for the entirety of Roman scientific investigations and advancements. Roman public speaking was based on Greek rhetoric, persuasion, logic, and style. The Romans spent centuries growing their military prowess and political power, while the Greeks strengthened their society's intellect and advancements, so when Rome conquered Greece, they realized how far behind they were in education. The newfound Roman scholarly culture was based on the symbols of learning from Greece since Greek learning was considered the "gold standard," and many elite Romans believed that to be truly educated, one had to know Greek culture. Greek knowledge was seen as elite, prestigious, and essential (Taub). Romans adopted many key educational aspects, such as Homeric literature, Greek myths, Greek grammar and composition, Greek philosophy, and rhetorical theory. Romans embraced various concepts heavily because of the benefits they had on Roman society, but more importantly because of what influential Romans supported the philosophies. Stoicism was supported by Marcus Aurelius and Seneca. Epicureanism was supported by Lucretius and Horace. Platonism was supported by Apuleius and Plutarch. Aristotelian logic was supported by Cicero and Quintilian. In sum, Rome had originally poured all of their energy into training their people to become obedient, intelligent, but most importantly, ruthless and strong. Greece, while still battling Rome, improved its education, public services, theories, and advancements, which made many Greek philosophers household names across the region. Once Greece was conquered, Rome defeated one of its biggest threats, and they realized that they were very behind when it came to science and education, so they adopted the culture, knowledge, traditions, and structures from the society they had just conquered.

Literature and Philosophy

Roman literature began centuries after Greek literature. Like in most sectors, Rome was deeply influenced by the Greek versions, but they were adapted to serve Roman morals and values. Under the category of Epic Poetry, the Romans actually modeled their writing to match the Greeks'. For example, Virgil's *Aeneid* was a Roman epic based on Greek models ("Greek and Roman Epics"). It strengthened the concept of duty, Rome's divine destiny, and the founding of Rome through Aeneas. *The Aeneid* was modeled after Homer's writing, but was reformed to

further Roman political propaganda (“Socratica”). Various Romans took up lyric and elegiac poetry and became huge successes (“Greek Poetry”; “Roman Poetry”). Catullus was known for his emotional lyric poems, Horace for his odes, satires, and moral reflections, and Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid were all very well-known for their love elegy, which was a personal and emotive poetic genre, many of which subverted Roman themes (Gill, “Poets of Latin”; Grant; Havelock). As for tragedy, Seneca was the master of intense tragedies with psychological and violent tinges (“Didaskalia”; Dudley; Nagy). Comparatively, Plautus and Terrence wrote comedies almost completely based on Greek originals, marking the beginning of the new comedy subgenre (“Didaskalia”; Manuwald; “New Comedy”). As the Romans were very fond of keeping in touch with their history, Historiography was extremely important. Authors like Livy, Tacitus, and Caesar would write about Rome’s early history, morality and political corruption, and war, respectively (Vann). Satire was one of the few uniquely Roman genres that did not come from any other region of the world. The main themes would consist of corruption, urban life, hypocrisy, and moral decline, all of which fascinated the Roman populace (Green). Finally, rhetorical and philosophical literature was extremely popular among educated and upper-class individuals. Three authors overtook the rest within this genre: Cicero would write essays, speeches, and philosophical theses; Seneca would focus on Stoicism; and Marcus Aurelius wrote about Stoicism and, more importantly, meditation. Roman philosophy was meant to be more practical, moral, and politically charged than its Greek counterpart. Philosophy and literature are one of the biggest sectors in which the Romans completely adopted Greek traditions and redesigned them to fit Roman virtues. The Romans mainly prioritized ethics, personal conduct, political morality, civic duty, and emotional self-control. The Greeks always had more emphasis on metaphysics or cosmology than the Romans did. Moreover, the Romans had a prominent presence in the philosophical sectors. The most influential philosophy in Rome was Stoicism, with key figures like Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius furthering the cause (Wasson, “Roman Philosophy”). Stoicism emphasized virtue, duty, endurance, and reason more than emotion (Weaver). Epicureanism can be considered the second most influential philosophy in Rome during that time period. Originally, it was introduced by Lucretius in *De Rerum Natura*, advocating for simple pleasures, tranquility, and rejecting fear of gods and death. Cicero’s Eclecticism managed to gain a fair amount of traction as well since it blended Stoic, Academic, and Aristotelian thought, even managing to influence many later Western writers (Mitchell). Conversely, the late Roman Empire actually managed to have the philosophy of Neoplatonism overtake the major philosophies that had been pervasive throughout Rome in the many centuries prior. Neoplatonism was a philosophical school founded by Plotinus to interpret Plato’s teachings to suggest that gods are perfect entities in a state of eternal bliss, which directly contradicted what many people thought in the decades leading up to the third century CE. Greek literature is the foundation of Western literary tradition and style. The writing always explored themes like human nature, heroism, ethics, fate, religion, and the true meaning of life, not only as a method of exploring alternative interpretations, but also to entertain audiences while educating on subjects deemed important for any Greek citizen to comprehend. A vivid tone in writing and poetry shaped the identity of many critical Greek authors, even to the point where Homer was considered a cultural textbook for the younger generations. Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were the first major works of Western literature, and they fell under the genre of epic poetry (Kamalanathan; Yoshida). They explored various concepts; for example, honor, heroism, fate, mortality, human flaws and emotional depth, and the fragility of the peace among mortals and gods (“Introducing Virgil’s *Aeneid*”). Poets like Sappho, Pindar, and Alcaeus

specialized in lyric poetry. Lyric poetry was unique as it was meant to be more personal, emotional, and intimate, performed with a musical instrument called a lyre, and honed in on themes such as love, politics, friendship, desire, and immense struggle (Lucas). Although the Romans also had a big emphasis on tragedy, it was actually invented in Athens, exploring subjects like morality, suffering, fate, free will, and flawed leadership. The major playwrights were Aeschylus, writing through a lofty, moral, and religiously inclined lens; Sophocles, focusing on psychology and character-driven writing; and Euripides, fueled by realism and radical thought. The most satirical, political, and raunchy genre was comedy plays. The two key playwrights were Aristophanes, known for old comedy, political parody, and social commentary; and Menander, known for new comedy, domestic plots, and mistaken identities (Bohannon). Philosophical works and literary masterpieces often overlapped. For example, many of Plato's dialogues were philosophically driven, but were literary masterpieces in the eyes of the public and of history. Similarly, Aristotle's treatises and logic, Xenophon's speeches and dialogues, Herodotus and Thucydides' histories written in literary format, and Hesiod's cosmogony and ethical debates all gained a lot of public attention (Browning). The Pre-Socratic Philosophers, Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides, sought to find a natural explanation for the universe and its functions. The Classical Philosophers were the most well-known. Socrates would challenge pre-made assumptions, argue for ethicality within philosophy, and invented the Socratic Method for questioning. Plato theorized about ideal forms, ethics, metaphysics, and political theory, and he founded the Academy. Finally, Aristotle focused on scientific observation, logic, physics, metaphysics, politics, and ethics, and he created a classification system for plants and animals while also founding the Lyceum. The main Hellenistic philosophies were Stoicism, Epicureanism, Skepticism, and Neoplatonism (Graham). Stoicism focused on rationality, virtue, and emotional discipline. Epicureanism believed that pleasure was the same as the absence of pain, and aimed for simple living. Skepticism doubted knowledge claims. Neoplatonism was more mystical and believed in a hierarchical system of the cosmos. Greek philosophy was meant to reflect abstract ideas, theoretical conclusions, and universal truths (Messerly; Wildberg).

The Romans borrowed many aspects of Greek philosophy because they were relatively new to that field when they conquered Greece and gained access to their advancements and knowledge. The Romans adopted almost all of their literary forms from the Greeks ("Essential Insights"). Notably, the epic structure from Homer, tragedy and comedy models, lyric meters and styles, rhetorical structures, and philosophical dialogues. The same things happened with the styles and techniques used in philosophy and literature. Rome adopted the Greek poetic meters of iambics and dactylic hexameter, character archetypes, theatrical conventions, and narrative structures. Unfortunately, yet again, the same thing occurred with the Greek themes and content material. The Romans adopted mythological subjects, heroic themes prevalent in Greece, philosophical concerns, and dramatic tropes. Plato's teachings suddenly turned into Roman Platonism, Aristotle's research was cherry-picked to only include logic, politics, and natural sciences, Stoicism became central to the Roman identity, and Epicureanism was popular among Roman elites and intellectuals. Furthermore, Greek writing was influential among Roman authors. Virgil wrote under Homer's influence, Cicero modeled his style after the great Greek orators, Seneca absorbed Greek Stoicism, and the Roman historians followed Greek narrative traditions (Pahl). Although the Romans looked down on the Greeks, Greek education was used as a literary foundation in Rome. Roman boys were educated in genres like Homeric writings, Greek tragedies, Greek philosophy, and Greek rhetoric ("How the Romans Learned"). However,

it was not until they demonstrated their understanding of Greek literature that they could begin to study Roman authors. Greek literacy was actually seen as a mark of elite status (McCormack, "Roman Education"). Greek literature set the standard for all Roman and Western literature by providing inspiration, crafting literary tools, and creating a blueprint for the subsequent generations to follow (Rajadhyaksha; Razzaq).

In essence, the Romans were very behind in literature and philosophy in comparison to the Greeks. The Greeks are the foundation of Western and Roman literature, setting in stone the different possible styles seen in various genres of writing ("Art and Literature").

Religion and Mythology

Religion in Ancient Rome was heavily tied to the state, law, and public duty in Ancient Rome. During ceremonies, the Romans heavily emphasized ritualistic aspects, oaths, and *orthopraxy*, the correct performance of ritual practice ("The Gods and Goddesses"). In cases of tensions within the empire, religion was used as a method of unifying the empire and legitimizing the current ruler's political power. Instead of focusing on mythological storytelling, myths were meant to give clearer lessons on morality and propriety. Gods were seen as more serious, disciplined, goal-oriented, and duty-focused. The Romans adopted the Greek gods but renamed them and repurposed their functions to better fit with the societal goals and expectations of Rome.

Worship was oriented towards maintaining a contract with the gods and maintaining peace with them through *pax deorum*, peace of the gods, which described the mutually beneficial state in Rome between the civilians and the deities, where there was peace and concord. Emperor worship was central to Roman life through the Imperial Cult, often overshadowing their relationship with the gods. This led emperors to be seen as divine and worshiped as such, regardless of whether they were alive or dead (Grant). The Romans had a very structured system for the priesthood, with many critical roles. The Pontifex Maximus was the highest-ranking priest in the College of Pontiffs, originally only open to patricians until 254 BCE. The Rex Sacrorum was king of the sacred rites, a symbolic position, responsible for announcing festivals, overseeing the Vestals, and supervising regal and state rituals. The Epulones were responsible for organizing and overseeing public feasts and banquets. The Fetiales were dedicated to Jupiter, patron of good faith, and played a role in foreign relations, treaties, and diplomacy. The Pontifices were a college of priests, the highest-ranking religious body, that oversaw the state religion and proper performance of rituals. The Vestal Virgins were six priestesses dedicated to Vesta, chosen prepubescently, and were supervised by the Vestalis Maxima but governed by the Pontifex Maximus. The Augurs were powerful officials specializing in *augury*, the practice of interpreting the will of the gods through observation of natural phenomena, and they provided guidance on decisions relating to war, commerce, and religion. Haruspices were priests who practiced *haruspicy*, the inspection of animal entrails for religious signs, and guided by ensuring the favor of the gods. Flamines were a group of high priests dedicated to specific deities, drawn from patrician families, and were subject to strict rules of ritual purity. This was not the absolute extent by any means; many cults, positions, priests, and roles are extremely underexplored ("Roman Priesthoods"). Many Roman myths were borrowed from the Etruscans and the Greeks, then readapted (Pahl). The Romans adopted religion from most of their conquered regions, like Egypt and Persia, not just Greece. They believed that to get divine favor, rituals had to be done precisely, reverently, and correctly. There was a much larger emphasis on *orthopraxy*, ritualistic correctness, over *orthodoxy*, genuine belief ("Explore the Difference"). A large motivating factor for people to be reverent and religious was that

religious failure was often seen as a precursor of future political danger. Fear of religious failure caused the Early Roman religion to be concentrated in the house. Every Roman household had protective spirits, and at dinner, families would throw a portion of every meal for the fire as an offering to the spirits ("The Roman Empire"). Priests would read bird signs and animal organs to offer the politicians religious suggestions based on upcoming decisions over things like law and public projects.

The Greeks, on the other hand, had distinct traditions that set them apart from the Romans; however, most of the ideas would overlap, as the Romans adopted a large majority of their religious and mythological practices from the Greeks. In Greek religion, gods were *anthropomorphic*, having human-like qualities like emotions, flaws, jealousy, love, desperation, and rivalry (Pollard). Mythology was based on storytelling, epic poetry, theater, and philosophy. There wasn't one key text that the entirety of Greece relied on, but rather, each region had its own myths and interpretations. Myths were meant to incentivize the exploration of human nature, ethics, and philosophy (Adkins). Mystery cults throughout Ancient Greece emphasized spiritual rebirths. The Orphic cult was a mystery religion based on the myths and teachings of Orpheus, and they believed in the immortality of the soul, reincarnation, and the goal of achieving a blessed afterlife ("Orphic Religion"). The Eleusinian cult was a major mystery cult centered at Eleusis, honored Demeter and Persephone, promised a better afterlife after the initiation rituals, was highly influential, and promoted fertility, agriculture, and cyclical life and death (Tareen). Greek religion aimed to explain the world through myths, natural forces, and human behavior. Religion was woven into daily life, but it was not as strongly centralized as it was in Rome. A key part of the religion in Greece was the concept of city-state patron gods, which led to many myths about how gods and goddesses became patrons for cities. For example, Athena was the patron goddess of Athens, while Apollo was the patron god of Delphi. Oracles were an extremely significant aspect of Greek religion as they were sacred individuals acting like intermediaries between gods and humans by delivering divine messages (Johnson). Greece had many significant religious festivals that occurred throughout the year and brought in numerous supporters. Panathenaea was an ancient festival in honor of Athena featuring athletic and musical contests, a grand procession, and a feast (Atsma). Dionysia was a series of festivals honoring Dionysus featuring dramatic competitions, processions, and plays ("Great Dionysia"). Funeral rites were also very important to the Greeks as they were the basis of their afterlife beliefs.

The similarities, overlap, and adoption found between the Greek and Roman versions of mythology and religion are extensive, but it mainly revolves around how both nations accepted polytheism, and following gods with personalities, domains, and duties that varied. Gods interacted with humans through interventionist methods to get their way, mainly through punishments, miracles, and heroism (Pahl). Temples, sacrifices, festivals, and priesthoods were key tenets of both religious followings in Greece and Rome. Religion was seen as a part of daily life, and it wasn't considered separate from politics, culture, or civic identity (Saller). When it came to making big decisions that affected large populations, politicians relied on oracles, omens, and divination. Religious buildings like temples had the same structures in both Greece and Rome, mainly through columns, altars, and open-air spaces. Mythology was used to explain history and natural phenomena to not only engage audiences but also to justify inexplicable coincidences, actions, or situations. Romans adopted almost the entirety of Greek mythology, from stories to gods, with only minor changes in things like names or purpose. The Romans even imported key legends to serve Roman culture. For example, the Trojan War was used to

explain how Aeneas became the founder of Rome. Similarly, Hercules was a myth in Greece, but it was taken by the Romans. It resonated with the Roman population and became incredibly popular, gaining more traction. Moreover, the Olympians, Titans, and various other creation myths were altered to best fit the Roman population while still keeping the Greek aspects of the myths authentic. Roman statues depicting gods copied the Greek style almost identically. Greek myth scenes began appearing in Roman mosaics, wall paintings, and reliefs as they were accepted easily by the Roman population, contrary to other things that the Greeks brought with them (Pahl). Many Romans also embraced Greek-based philosophies like Stoicism and Epicureanism. Rome adopted various elements of religious practices and traditions; for example, Dionysian and Bacchic rituals, mystery cults, and the use of theater in religious ceremonies.

Overall, Rome borrowed virtually the entirety of Greek religion and mythology for their own use. Rome used religion as a unifying, threatening, and propelling force. Greece used religion as an ethical and philosophical tool, extending opportunity for curiosity.

Relevance to the Modern Era

Longtime Classics professor at Harvard, Albert Henrichs, indicates in his *Graecia Capta: Roman Views of Greek Culture* that although the Romans showed great disdain for the Greek population, they still incorporated massive amounts of Greek culture into their daily life. This indicates that even though the Romans thought of themselves as superior, they still recognized Greek intellectual capabilities and the benefits that adopting Greek culture and traditions could bring to Rome (Carter, 258-265).

As for the Greco-Roman relationship's impact on cultural influence, Modern societies influence each other constantly in ways that encourage the adoption, recreation, and reinterpretation of ideas and traditions, perpetually propelling history. Specifically, the Greco-Roman cultural exchange helps explain how innovation spreads and how ideas get rebranded.

The term cultural appropriation has come to the forefront of many people's minds, and the Greek and Roman cultural exchange is truly one of the first examples of widespread cultural appropriation. It helps contextualize the very gray area between cultural boundaries, the frequency with which societies borrow from each other, and how power dynamics influence the way history is recorded.

Ancient Rome is now well-known for their adoption and claiming of Greek culture, which mirrors similarly powerful cultures in the modern era that overshadow and absorb the contributions of others. The strongest nation gets to dictate the light in which they are portrayed, what they get credit for, and the cultural memory.

Much of what we consider innately Roman actually has incredibly obvious Greek roots, which helps trace the origins of many Western concepts in the modern era. This idea is supported by physiologist John B. West in his *Galen and the Beginnings of Western Physiology*, as he writes about the impact of Greek thinkers on modern Western science. Similarly, in researcher Dane Carter's *The Influence of Ancient Greece: A Historical and Cultural Analysis*, he explains how Ancient Greece impacted the development of Western civilization, shaping modern thought and culture through historical events, prominent figures, and cultural achievements.

Conclusion

When considering ancient Greco-Roman relations and the adoption of Greek culture by Rome, it is critical to look at the history between the Greeks and the Romans. The Greeks had originally

been on par with the Romans in military skill, until the Romans continued to improve at an extremely rapid pace. Eventually, the Romans overtook the Greeks in military prowess, leading to the conquest of Greece. Once Greece was conquered, the Romans acknowledged the benefits of adopting the incredibly rich Greek culture, which led to a lot of cultural appropriation and adoption in many aspects of Greek life, from art to philosophy and from education to mythology. The Romans despised the Greeks as people and saw them as worthless, often denying them rights. The paradoxical and complex nature of the Greeks and the Romans has been thoroughly explored, and one thing is extremely clear: neither Rome nor the West would be the same without Greek influence.

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