

SPRING 2007 WINNER

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INSTRUCTOR'S FOREWORD

HISTORY IS MORE THAN THE MEMORIZATION of names and events; history is something that we do, a practice. This practice requires research, and close, critical readings. Through this research we identify those questions that interest us the most, and we pursue the answers by accumulating and evaluating evidence, and by following our own avenue of inquiry.

What the student of history is often horrified to discover is that the tidy textbook descriptions of influential people and the associated significant events typically conceal a confused and confusing reality. History is complex, with multiple perspectives providing competing lenses through which we can approach any given historical question. Many students, hoping to report their hard-won answers and solutions, find this complexity frustrating and disappointing.

However, some students—Alex Krimkevich, for example—embrace history's ambiguity. For his research paper, Alex was interested in how Greek people and culture were perceived within ancient Rome. The answers he found were seemingly inconsistent, with some aspects of Greek culture and character revered, whereas others were reviled. What makes this paper extraordinary is that Alex doesn't just describe what, at first glance, appears to be an inconsistency of attitude. He asks how and why these apparently competing attitudes are able to coexist. Alex pursues his question through the primary texts, and he proposes and argues his own explanation, one that reflects a subtle understanding of historical context based on extensive reading and research. His essay is an excellent demonstration of the historian at work; this is how history is done.

—ALICE PETTY

# Saving the State: Roman Resistance to Greek Influence

*Alex Krimkevich*

The Greek colonies of Magna Graecia sat at Rome's doorstep since that city's founding in the ninth century BCE. As the Roman city-state rose from its humble origins, it increasingly came into contact with these Hellenic settlements, initiating an ongoing cultural exchange that lasted over eight hundred years. Contacts continued to expand over the centuries that followed as the Roman republic pushed first into southern Italy and later into Greece proper. This brought an unprecedented influx of Greek culture and ideas to Rome, especially among the elite. Buildings were constructed in the Greek architectural style; young Romans were often sent to Greece to study rhetoric and philosophy; Greek slaves were imported to be used as skilled laborers or teachers. Indeed, the Roman state had "assimilated and made its own" a vast amount of "Greek gods, literary conventions, artistic forms, philosophical ideas, and social customs" (Momigliano 10).

However, the Hellenization of the Roman state did not at all meet with universal approval, especially in the mid- to late-republican period. The process was viewed with deep ambivalence by some who saw Greek culture as a degenerative force that threatened to subvert the foundations of the Roman state. For many, expansion brought Rome into contact with dangerous forces, for "the state, unable to keep its purity by reason of its greatness, and having so many affairs, and people from all parts under its government, was fain to admit many mixed customers and new examples of living" (Plutarch 414). Greece played a huge role in this cultural importation and was thus viewed with a great deal of wariness. The Romans counted among their own virtues good faith, constancy, frugality, and military strength, qualities they found critical to the welfare and glory of the Republic (Momigliano 16). Conversely, to the Greeks they attributed dishonesty, irresponsibility, excess, and lack of courage; Hellenistic values formed a troubling antithesis

to those of the Romans. That Greece had a significant cultural impact on Rome is indisputable (Gruen 250). However, where Romans felt threatened, they attempted to temper, if not counter, Hellenic influence on the state. Resistance to Hellenization during the late Roman republic focused on countering the perceived corrupting effects of Greek culture. However, resistance failed to stamp out the strong desire for Greek sophistication. Rome's interest in the integrity of the Republic, on the one hand, and its desire for acculturation, on the other, led to a dualistic approach to the Greeks where the people and their virtues were scorned, yet the trappings of civilization were largely tolerated.

Rome's initial debt to Greek civilization came originally from the Etruscans. Monarchic Rome was strongly influenced by the far more civilized and wealthy Etruscans to the north, who in turn owed their development to the export of goods from the colonies of Magna Graecia. Numerous archaeological discoveries testify to these links between the Greeks and Etruscans in the sixth century (Momigliano 12). The connection between Greece and Rome soon began to expand from trade to religion. In 493 BC the city dedicated a temple to the Greek goddess Demeter. A cult of Apollo was in place by 435 BC. Religious ties soon turned to physical contact between the two civilizations, as it is clear that Romans traveled to the Greek mainland. Before the sack of Veii in 396 BC, the mysterious rise of the Alban lake caused the Romans to send a commission to the oracle at Delphi. A tenth of the spoils of Veii were later dedicated to the Delphian priesthood (Livy 5.15, Plutarch 160). The disastrous Roman defeat at Cannae in 216 BC similarly caused the Romans to send a delegation to Delphi led by Q. Fabius Pictor. This episode also shows that Hellenic peoples had at least some presence in Rome, for the religious observances after Cannae included an unusual human sacrifice of two Carthaginians and two Greeks (Livy 22.57, 33.11). Indeed, diplomatic relations had commenced by the fourth century, as evidenced by a diplomatic treaty with Alexander the Molossian in 333 BC (Momigliano 7).

Even before Cannae, however, contacts and similarities were significant, enough for Heraclides Ponticus to mistakenly refer to Rome in the mid-fourth century as a Greek city (Plutarch 168). Greek religious figures were assimilated throughout the Mediterranean, but this syncretism was especially pronounced in Rome (Momigliano 7). Greek language and learning also became increasingly prominent in the Roman state and were particularly notable among the elite. After Titus Flamininus, father of the Gracchi, defeated Philip V in Thessaly, the Aetolians and Achaeans were pleased to find that he was essentially "a Greek in his sound and language" (Plutarch 452). Other prominent Greek speakers included Aemilius Paullus, conqueror

of Greece, and according to Plutarch, even the ostensibly anti-Hellenic Marcus Porcius Cato. P. Lucimius Mucianes was apparently fluent in five dialects (Momigliano 8). Still, Romans' lingual attempts were not always adept. In fact, L. Postumius Megellus was so insulted by the Greeks of Tarentum after his attempt to address them in their native tongue that the incident led to war (Appian 7.2). The significant extent of language diffusion can be seen by the late-third century, when Q. Fabius Pictor wrote his history of Rome, a work intended for Roman readership, in Greek.

To be sure, Pictor was forced to write in Greek simply because no Roman tradition existed for historiography (Gruen 255). However, during the period from 240 to 200 BC in which Pictor wrote, a literary blending began that would define the Latin style (254). During this time, writers, playwrights, and poets like Livius Andronicus and Ennius established Latin plays and poetry along Greek lines (Momigliano 17). Greek learning in general came to be highly valued. After his defeat of the Macedonians, Aemilius Paullus gave Perseus's library to his sons and requested a philosopher from Athens (Gruen 257). Aristocratic young men were often sent to Greece to study under the Greek philosophers; Aulus Gellius was apparently part of such company in his time at Athens (Rolfe ii–iv). Greek philosophical lectures in the Roman capital were eagerly attended, as evidenced by the crowds who flocked to hear Carneades speak in 155 BC (Plutarch 428).

Finally, the Romans developed a strong predilection for Greek luxury goods. The conquests of the advanced civilizations to the east of Italy brought massive amounts of wealth to the state. M. Marcellus's capture of Syracuse famously exposed the Romans to Greek goods for the first time on a large scale. His spoils included captured bronze and silver furniture, priceless artwork, and celebrated statuary. After the triumph over the Aetolians, M. Fulvius Nobilior likewise carried a fortune in Greek loot (Livy 25.40, 26.21, 29.5). When L. Aemilius Paullus conquered Macedon, the spoils were sufficient to permanently do away with the property tax in Rome, and Lucius Mummius's utter destruction and plunder of the wealthy Corinth supplied all of Italy with the finest Greek art (Cicero 1.1, 2.76). There was more at work here than victorious pillaging; the sheer volume of importation and its private display suggest that the interest in Greek art was genuine (Gruen 252). Strikingly, the interest was not limited to art. Around 230 BC, the Greek historian Strabo reported that Eratosthenes included the Romans among the most "refined" barbarian groups; refined meaning, of course, closest in culture to the Greeks (Strabo 1.4.9). From the third century onward there existed a "Latin Hellenism, never identical to the Greek, but never separable from it" (Momigliano 11).

The creation of this “Latin Hellenism,” however, was far from seamless. While the Romans absorbed a significant amount of Greek goods and culture, a large body of it fundamentally clashed with Roman views of the world. The Romans managed, on their own, to develop and preserve a unique political culture centered around the ideas of republicanism and civic virtue, but it was Hellenic encroachment on this system that led to resistance (Burt 23–26). Roman legend saw the republic emerge after the expulsion of the Tarquins by Brutus in 509 BC (Livy 1.60). Though the truth of this story is doubtful, Roman republicanism became synonymous with the absence of a king. For Cicero, liberty meant having “no master at all,” and he denied the possibility of a republic unless the people held power (Cicero 2.23, Sellers 11). Hence, the burden of maintaining the state, and in particular defending it, shifted to its people.

To this end, the citizen army was one of the most important institutions of the Roman republic, and prowess in arms one of its most fundamental skills. The militaristic character of the state was apparent from its inception. The late Republican writer Livy records that Romulus’s last words were a prophecy of Roman power: “it is the will of heaven that my Rome should be the head of all the world. Let [my people] henceforth cultivate the arts of war, and let them know...that no human might can withstand the arms of Rome” (Livy 1.16). Even the Greeks, famed for their defeat of the Persians, proved completely incapable of matching the Romans on the battlefield. Rome fully subjugated the Greek states in the second century BCE (Momigliano 1). Military superiority won glory for the state, but by turning the Romans into rulers and administrators, it exposed them to other ways of life. This was an important ramification for Greek relations.

Emphasis on military ability was simply part of a larger system of values. The Roman experience with the Tarquins gave laws great importance. Society was to be conducted by a code of justice, not by the caprice of individual rulers. In his writings, Livy demanded *imperia legume*, an empire of laws, not of men (Sellers 14). This meant that Rome was also a strongly *principled* society. Values and beliefs were not an abstract conception; they were codified ideas to live by, each contributing to the security and stability of the Republic. Militarism was one of these ideas. It was partially encapsulated by the Roman concept of *virtus*, which included strength and courage. “Poverty and frugality, so highly and continuously honored,” were also important insofar as they precluded greed, traditionally considered a major destructive force. *Fides*, *constantia*, and *dignitas* were crucial qualities in public life. Individuals like Cincinnatus, the famed farmer-soldier who saved the state of Rome from the Sabines, were held up as exemplars of these ideals. However,

these ideals must be examined not in the context of individual glory, but in that of relevance to the state. Indeed, the above qualities were prized because of their usefulness to the vitality of civic and military institutions; Cincinnatus, Brutus, and others were respected insofar as their qualities contributed to public services rendered. Civic virtue, then, was a set of expectations placed on citizens to act in the interests of the state. It is civic virtue that “enabled the people to receive liberty and resist the urge to collaborate with kings” (Sellers 16). Thus the welfare of the Roman Republic depended on the virtue of its people.

Greek culture was perceived as a threat by some precisely because it threatened to undermine the very virtues that sustained the state. Tellingly, the most common Roman prejudices about the Greeks were based on features directly antagonistic toward Roman values. The Hellenes were often cast as cowardly, uncourageous, and effeminate. Livy describes them as a “race more magnanimous in words than in actions” (Livy 8.2). Aulus Postumius was criticized for avoiding the Battle of Phocis, an act symptomatic of his adoption of the “worst vices of the Greeks” (Polybius 39.1). These qualities were believed to be contagious. As Scipio idled about in Syracuse during the Second Punic War, exposure to Greeks caused in his soldiers a lack of discipline and morale (Livy 29.19). The scorn for the Greek people is evident. However, this Greek trait was not one for the Romans to dispassionately disdain, for its perceived spread was seen to destroy the military strength and order that was a cornerstone of the glory of the Republic. Active intervention was needed. Indeed, the Romans, not wishing the Italians to “become effeminate” because of a long peace after the defeat of Perseus, undertook a war with Dalmatia to maintain military hardihood (Livy 32.13). The corruption of the soldiers was perhaps less an issue than it might have been, for the Romans were constantly on the offensive. The campaigning nature of the military prevented it from slipping into so-called Greek degeneracy, though the state was required to step in at times. In this way, war proved to be a tool of resistance to Hellenic influence among the men of the republic.

The Greek penchant to talk and philosophize was another major point of contempt for the Romans. Plautus poked fun at this stereotype in his plays (Plutarch, *Captivi* 283–84, *Pseudolus*, 686–88). His works were intended for lower-class audiences, so the typecast was recognizable at all levels of society. The story of Professor Phormio, a Greek philosopher who had the nerve to lecture Hannibal on military matters, was often cited as an example of Hellenic loquaciousness (Cicero 2.75–6). This in itself may have been more a source of amusement than worry, but the Romans further believed that this

talkativeness ran counter to practical matters and principles. Quintallian described the situation by establishing that “[t]he Greeks claim precedence in teaching [while] the Romans in action” (Quintallian 12.2). The Romans could see no good coming out of a state of affairs where words were allowed precedence over deeds (Gellius 18.7). The story of Carneades, an eloquent Greek philosopher, serves as an apt illustration of this. Carneades’ arrival in Rome in 155 BC and subsequent speeches “impressed so strange a love upon the young men, that quitting all their pleasures and pastimes, they ran mad, as it were, after philosophy.” When this “passion for words” flowed into Rome upon Carneades’ entrance, Cato immediately feared that the youth of the city “should prefer the glory of speaking well before that of arms and doing well” (Plutarch 428). The Romans prided themselves on active participation and discharge of duties, a societal paradigm threatened by the Greek emphasis on language.

Worse still, Romans felt that the Greeks used philosophy and language for disingenuous, if not necessarily dishonest, ends. Cato professed that “the words of the Greeks came only from their lips, whilst those of the Romans came from their hearts” (Cato 420). Carneades again served as a target of attacks against this Greek trait. Cicero said of him: “He was a Greek and accustomed to propound any view that suited his purpose” (Cicero 3.8–9). This flexibility of viewpoint was a fundamental problem for the Romans, as Greek philosophy “raised doubts about every principle of conduct” (Astin 178). There could be no absolute principles when any belief could be put forth and controverted at will, and the philosophers used their eloquence for this very purpose (Cicero 3.1). *Graeca fides* came to mean an egregious lack of sincerity and integrity (Momigliano 5). To protect Roman principles, in 173 and 161 BC the Senate voted to expel all rhetoricians and philosophers from Rome. In 155, at the behest of Cato, the Senate forced Carneades and his delegation out of Rome, and again in 92, the Senate acted to curb the growth of Latin rhetorical schools, which were constructed on the Greek model (Suetonius I, Plutarch 428, Gellius 15.11). Ultimately, the esteem with which Romans held civic values brought them into conflict with the “cynicism” and philosophy of the Greeks. To protect these values, state administrators acted as needed to remove the more “subversive” Greek elements from society, even at the expense of culture and education.

Romans further saw a moral laxity and excessive love of luxury in the Greeks. Polybius marveled at the uprightness of Roman administrators and was equally shocked at the greed and corruption of the Greek ones (Polybius 4.56). The Romans certainly saw an inverse relationship between the greatness of a civilization and the luxuries it allowed itself. Polybius felt the

Romans to have hugely erred in bringing luxury goods back from Greece, for they had done so well without them, while the conquered had done so poorly. “A city is not adorned by external splendors, but by the virtue of its inhabitants,” he argued (Polybius 9.10). The conquest of Greece had “speedily infected” the Roman with “Greek laxity” regarding morality and lavishness, supposedly since the defeat of Perseus. Pederasty and extravagant banqueting appeared in Rome where there had been none before. Cato lamented that “it was the surest sign of deterioration...when pretty boys fetch more than fields, and jars of caviar more than ploughmen” (Cato 31.25). To this end, Cato firmly supported the Lex Oppia, passed in 215 BC, attempting to limit luxury, especially the display of gold (Astin 174). For the Romans, the epitome of Greek laxity and hedonism was found in the pernicious cults that began afflicting the state in the early second century. Participants in the Bacchic mysteries, reportedly initiated by a Greek, were accused of gluttony, sexual orgies, vandalism, and murder. Men defiled by the Bacchanalian cult were considered completely unfit to defend the Republic. In 186 BC, the Senate moved to suppress the cult, before it had “strength enough to destroy the commonwealth” (Livy 39.8–18). Similarly, in 181 BC the state burned several Pythagorean volumes, ostensibly written by Numa in Greek, after it was perceived that “most of them would lead to the break-up of the national religion” (Livy 40.29).

Resistance to luxury, however, was far less pronounced than the aversions to other Greek “vices,” and Romans’ words were often not matched by action. Romans could, and would often, publicly disdain Greeks and their excess, but the spoils of war and Hellenic learning continued to flow into the Republic, even into the homes of the more vigorous anti-Hellenic individuals such as Cato and Cicero (Gruen 268–72). It is here that the dualistic treatment of the Greeks is most clear. Greek influence could be condemned and acted against in hopes of preventing the disintegration of traditional Roman republican value. However, the allures of Hellenic culture, more mature and urbane than the Roman, were not at all weak, and the Greek conquest proved an opportunity for the enrichment and cultural advancement of many Romans (268–72). This desire for civilization clashed somewhat with the traditional suspicion toward luxury. The two were not wholly incompatible, though Romans were careful to distinguish between “private predilection and...state policy,” and where a serious Greek threat was seen, they were sure to act (267). The threats were simply seen to come from the Greek people more than from their goods. Resistance toward Greek influence *did* still exist where Roman leaders perceived danger.

The Romans had conquered Greece, and yet their affinity for Greek



things caused some to fear that the Romans were becoming the captives of the Greeks rather than the Greeks captives of them (Livy 34.4). To some, Greek influence was “subversive of principles and standards of conduct, of public diligence and martial qualities” upon which Rome relied (Astin 178). The State took action where it could—initiating wars, driving out seditious thinkers, and stamping out dangerous practices. However, it failed to stem the tide of Greek culture, for Hellenic ideas and goods had permanently penetrated Italy (181). Nonetheless, the state had made clear that “in Rome Hellenization implied respect for the ruling order” (Momigliano 20). Romans could endorse Greek learning and culture and still reject what were seen to be the more detrimental characteristics of the Greek race. It was under such a system that Plutarch felt the Romans reached their zenith (Plutarch 428). This fact reconciles the bifold wariness and welcome of Hellenization. Where the state was not in danger, culture could be welcomed with open arms. ♦

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