

## Rome and the Greeks

The Romans of course had a long relationship with the Greeks. The Greek cities of southern Italy provided valuable contacts to the Romans, and ultimately an alphabet via the Etruscans. The first history written by a Roman, Fabius Pictor was in Greek, and Alföldi argues it was probably intended to prove to the Greeks Rome was a truly civilized power. However, Rome didn't get involved in Greek affairs directly until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Punic War, when Philip V of Macedon made an alliance with Hannibal. A series of wars followed in Greece, culminating in 168 at the battle of Pydna. Afterwards, the Romans largely withdrew, leaving the Greeks to their own devices.

Until 150, when a certain Andriscus, claiming kinship with the Macedonian kings, rose up and quickly gained popularity throughout the Greek world. Rome was slow to intervene, but when it did Andriscus was crushed in 148. This marked a turning point, as Kallet-Marx has pointed out, and henceforth 148 was the start of a new era in Greece. Rome took things even further, leveling Corinth in 146. But even now there was a reluctance on the part of Rome to establish a lasting political order on the Greeks. Scholars have tried to explain this in different ways. Badian argued that Rome's relationships with the Greeks were based on patron-client relations, a very Roman custom. But Gruen has pointed out that the Greek cities basically shared the same relationship with Rome that they did with many a king before.

Rome's involvement in Greece was further advanced when King Attalus of Pergamum left his kingdom to the Roman People in 133. Even then, as Gruen points out, Rome was slow to take up the inheritance fully, taking several years to dispatch troops to secure Pergamum against its neighbors.

As Rome expanded into Greece, the Romans brought much of Greek culture back with them. Cato the Censor warned against the contamination of the Greeks on Roman mores, but his fellow aristocrats lapped it up. Tragedies and comedies were produced, drawn largely on Greek originals, but with Roman themes. Perhaps the contradiction is best summed up by the famous republican statue of a general – nude, physically perfect Greek body with a Roman head on top.

No doubt this engendered a backlash at times. McDonnell has pointed to a pair of temples, built by Catulus and Marius. One time partners, the two had a falling out. Marius, a popular politician, built a traditional Italic temple to Honos, a good Roman god. Catulus chose to build a round Greek style temple to Fortuna, an adaptation of Greek Tyche. Catulus stood for sophistication, Marius for good old Roman values.

Rome's expansion into the Greek world continued with a series of wars against Mithridates VI of Pontus. Sulla himself fought the first one, but had to return to Rome before he could bring it to completion. It was continued in the 70s by Lucullus, and finally in 66 Pompey the Great himself took over. Pompey's achievement was to defeat Mithridates and reorganize Asia minor

at his whim. He penetrated farther than any Roman army had before, in Judaea itself. When he returned to Rome he claimed many kings as his personal clients.

By the mid-50s a new poetic movement was under way. Call the neoteric school, it consisted of poets who rejected the older poets like Ennius, and drew heavily on the Alexandrian school for inspiration. Callimachus above all was their model, and instead of epic poetry the Epyllion became a preferred genre. This would be carried down into the Augustan age, when Virgil's debt to Homer, Apollonius, Callimachus, Theocritus, and the neoterics was great, and the Romans liked to claim that Virgil surpassed Homer. In the field of prose, Sallust turned to Thucydides for his model, and explored causation in his works.

The change from Republic to Empire brought somewhat more unity to Roman rule over Greece. But in spite of the great cultural debt Rome had to Greece, Greece itself was on the decline. The Greeks felt no need to assimilate Roman culture as did states in the west. They already had a superior civilization. Greek, not Latin, always remained the lingua franca east of Italy. And Greek remained the tongue of the educated classes throughout the empire. A student in the late second century was able to travel from one end of the empire to the other speaking Greek.

But economically, the region became depressed, as Goodman states. The lack of Roman legions meant a stimulus in state spending, and instead the Greeks witnessed a steady flow of currency to the west. The great cities became tourist traps. Athens set up monuments with a deliberately archaic flavor, and allowed rich people to donate monuments. Goodman argues that the apparent failure of Rome to follow through in building projects in Bithynia-Pontus, as shown in an exchange of letter between Pliny and Trajan, was part of a wider phenomena.

But Greece still had contributions to make. Romans had long embraced variations of different Greek philosophies. Cato Uticensis had been a strict Stoic, and Stoicism marked many of those who opposed the principate. The emperor Hadrian was such a love of all things Greek that he was nickname the Graeculus. He even wore the beard of Greek philosopher, a first for a Roman emperor, and spread Greek culture far and wide, establishing a new festival, the Panhellenion. Marcus Aurelius was as much a philosopher as an emperor and left an account of his thought.

And so as the high period of Empire came to an end, the Greeks were really still stuck in their own cultural past. The second sophistic movement that happened in the late second century is a good example of this, with its emphasis on rhetorical display it sought to recapture something of the glory days of the fifth century. Greece would rise again, but it would not be until after a period of chaos when a new religion and a new emperor would make their mark with the city of Constantinople and all the Byzantine emperors who followed.