CHAPTER 16

THE ROMAN RECEPTION OF GREEK ART AND ARCHITECTURE

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The Romans used Greek art. They appropriated it as war booty, then shipped it to Italy to adorn their triumphs, their sanctuaries, and their villas. They collected Greek art in vast public and private displays, proud attestations to the wealth, the munificence, and the sophisticated judgment of their patrician patrons and objects of emulation by the aspiring nouveau riche. The Romans theorized Greek art, preserving, adapting, and transforming the historical accounts written in the Hellenistic era, then excerpting and applying them to their own areas of interest. And they commissioned new works in traditional styles, from artists with Greek names and pedigrees; they put their own portrait heads—awkward, wrinkled, middle-aged—on the peerless bodies of Greek gods and athletes (see chapter 13 above); they commemorated their dead with sarcophagi depicting Greek myths and using a familiar Greek visual repertoire.

In short, the Romans interacted with Greek art in a manner that was varied, pragmatic, and widespread. The objects they commissioned ranged from monumental public sculptures to brilliantly colored paintings and small-scale items of personal adornment such as gems and jewelry. Patrons included not only metropolitan connoisseurs but also wealthy freedmen in Rome, minor landowners in the provinces, and army veterans along the Empire's borders. And the chronological scope of their concern is impressive; a fascination with Greek models is visible already with the origins of monumental building projects in Rome in the fifth century BCE and continued well into Late Antiquity, as the Roman Empire became Christian. An examination of the Roman reception of Greek art and architecture thus has as its purview an Empire-wide selection of images built up over a millennium, along with the cultural practices associated with them; it is, potentially, a broad topic indeed.

This relation between Roman and Greek art and architecture has been a central topic of art history since the origins of the discipline. In the mid-eighteenth century, it was a concern for Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who emphasized Roman dependence on
Greek models; this allowed him—without ever traveling to Greece—to reconstruct the history of Greek art through literary sources and the numerous Greek-style monuments preserved in Rome (Borbein et al. 2002–2012).

Winckelmann’s example was influential though not universally accepted. The art historians of the late-nineteenth-century Vienna School, such as Franz Wickhoff and Alois Riegl, in many ways challenged Winckelmann. They gave a strong positive valuation to Roman art, emphasizing the ways in which it departed from Greek models and anticipated instead the developments of later medieval art (Riegl 1893 and 1901–1923; Wickhoff and Ritter von Hartel 1895; useful discussion in Brendel 1979, 35–37; see chapter 19 below). Concurrently, classical archaeologists such as Adolf Furtwängler made a close and careful study of Greek-style Roman monuments (Furtwängler 1893). Aided by plaster casts and photographic reproductions, they compared variants of the same sculptural types in a process known as Kopienkritik; the goal was to reconstruct the lost Greek originals on which these works were assumed to be based. The result of these efforts, combined with those of the Vienna School art historians, was to canonize a bifurcation of Roman visual culture. On the one hand, there were the innovative monuments prized by the Vienna School, such as the Fourth Style paintings of Pompeii and the Arch of Titus; these in many ways still form the basis of what is considered Roman art. And on the other hand, there were the works in Greek style analyzed by Furtwängler; these have been used above all to illustrate Greek art history, as survey books featuring the Esquiline Discobolus or Apollo Belvedere attest.

Creative efforts to move beyond this dichotomy began some forty years ago and have more recently become a major focus of scholarship on Roman art. Two early books have been particularly influential: Paul Zanker’s Klassizistische Statuen: Studien zur Veränderung des Kunstgeschmacks in der römischen Kaiserzeit and Tonio Hölscher’s Römische Bildsprache als semantisches System. Zanker’s book documented a variety of Roman works in a Polyclitan style, concentrating on formal analysis, dating, and categorization of the sculptures as precise copies, loose interpretations, or new creations in a familiar style (Zanker 1974). Hölscher’s work took a semiotic approach, correlating the Romans’ use of particular Greek artistic styles with specific subjects; for instance, he showed how a High Classical “Pheidias” style was often used for Olympian deities, a more expressive Hellenistic one for giants and animals (Hölscher 1987, 58).

Taken together, these two books had a powerful effect on the field of Roman art history. They opened up for consideration many monuments hitherto neglected, from large-scale works of Idealplastik (roughly, Greek-style sculptures of gods and mythological heroes) to the decorative objects dart populating luxury villas; they also offered fruitful methods of approach that highlighted Roman initiative without denying the monuments’ indebtedness to Greek precedent. The extent to which these ideas have by now become canonical may perhaps be gauged by recent survey texts in Roman art—most notably Jás Elsner’s Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph, with a chapter devoted to “Art and the Past: Antiquarian Eclecticism” (Elsner 1998)—and displays such as the Metropolitan Museum’s new Roman galleries, where Greek-style works such as the Hope Dionysus take center stage. And new scholarship that questions the assumptions
underlying Furtwängler’s Kopienkritik, and highlights the creative though "emulative" nature of Roman monuments in Greek formats, has sought to push these ideas even further, resulting at times in an emphasis on Roman originality similar to that of the Vienna School, albeit anchored in very different images (Marvin 2008; Gazda 2002; Perry 2005).

The focus of this chapter, as signaled by its title, is on "reception," a semantically loaded term that highlights the active participation of the audience in a work of art and the "horizon of expectations" that such an audience brings to it (Jauss 1982; see chapter 29 below); this contrasts with the more passive role that might be indicated by a title such as "The Influence of Greek Art on Rome." My purpose here is to analyze the varied, ambivalent, and frequently contradictory ways in which the Romans interacted with Greek art and architecture. To do so, I look not only at the art objects that constituted the end results of such interactions but above all at the cultural practices that led to their creation. Among the most significant of these practices are the Roman looting, collecting, and theorizing of Greek art and the copying and adaptation of Greek styles and visual formats in new Roman works. Although these practices varied in their aims, in the individuals involved with them, and in the monuments produced, there are some important commonalities. Most significantly, all the cultural practices analyzed here resulted in a decontextualized view of the associated artworks; this allowed and indeed encouraged the Roman reinterpretation of Greek art and architecture. A further point about this approach is also worth noting. My emphasis on cultural practices demonstrates how the production of new Roman-period works of art is only part of the story; also significant are the repurposing and theorizing of much older Greek monuments. Such topics have received little attention in previous scholarship, whereas the creation of new "Roman originals" has loomed large; this essay redresses the balance to offer a broader, more comprehensive perspective on the Roman interaction with Greek art.

LOOTING

The looting of Greek cities and sanctuaries from the late third to the first centuries BCE was the Romans’ first extensive, direct, and transformative experience of Greek art. It is true that there were likely earlier contacts. Literary sources preserve the names of early Greek craftsmen who traveled to Rome, such as the painter Erphantes of Corinth (Pliny, HN 35.16). So, too, archaeological remains of major Roman monuments such as the late-sixth-century BCE Capitoline Temple to Jupiter show close connections to contemporary Archaic Ionic sanctuaries; the similarities in planning and in details of ornamentation suggest that architects with experience in Greek temple building came West to assist in their construction (Hopkins 2012). And through Rome's interactions with the Etruscans came further exposure to Greek art, both direct—through the latter's imports from Greece, especially of painted pottery—and indirect, as the Etruscans
adapted for their own purposes Greek models in sanctuary building and divine statuary (Tordi 2000).

Still, the Romans’ connection to Greece through looting was different. More individuals were involved, and their contact with Greek art was closer, as they conquered and plundered actual Greek works of art directly on Greek soil. In addition, the extraordinary wealth that flowed to Italy through war booty meant that the Romans had the means to commission new Greek-influenced monuments to highlight their acquisitions or, in some cases, to compete with them. In essence, looting was a powerful spur to the Roman reception of Greek art and architecture, and it also facilitated the integration of Greek forms with Roman cultural practices.

When analyzed in comparison with that of other ancient Mediterranean civilizations, the Romans’ looting had two particularly distinctive features (Miles 2008, 13–104). First, it was rationalized, that is, intentionally carried out in a manner that was safe (at least for the soldiers), organized, and militarily effective. Second, it was ritualized, connected to major religious institutions and the practices of state cult. These features were significant for the Romans’ experience of Greek art. The rationalization of Roman plundering practices meant that war booty was carefully acquired, apportioned, and deployed, with the most high-profile pieces going to the general in charge and shipped home for display in his triumph, if such was voted to him, or in monuments and ceremonies paid for ex mانibus (from the spoils). The ritualization of looting gave a sacràl aura to activities such as evocatio—when the statue of an enemy city’s patron god was removed and taken to Rome and a new cult established there (Versnel 2004)—and above all to the triumph; it is worth exploring this latter event in some detail, as it was the most significant occasion at which early Romans encountered Greek art.

The triumph was a key religious and political ceremony of the Roman Republic and a popular though less significant spectacle under the Empire (Beard 2005). It featured a victorious general, his army, and their prisoners and loot in a parade through the streets of Rome, culminating with a sacrifice at the Capitoline Temple to Jupiter. The triumphal route was designed to accommodate an enormous audience, and widespread attendance was encouraged; the goal was to make vivid for such viewers the military successes of the Roman army in far-off lands along with their direct benefits for the city’s population. For this, enormous quantities of war booty were extremely useful, and the literary sources are full of staggering descriptions of such material. While details of individual processions may be questioned, the overall impression of extravagant visual display remains and is corroborated both by the rich material culture of Late Republican Rome and (negatively) by the archaeologically attested impoverishment of Greece in the second and first centuries BCE (Alcock 1993; La Rocca, Parisi Presicce, and Lo Monaco 2010).

This triumphal display, by its nature, encouraged an appreciation of Greek art very different from our own. It was founded less on aesthetic or art historical qualities than on such factors as scale, quantity, material, and provenance. As works moved swiftly past a large audience, the Romans evaluated them based not on their fine details but on their overall visual magnificence; particularly effective were colossal images, for example, or
quantities of gold and silver. Also valuable was the knowledge that an object had been
taken from a prominent former owner: the Macedonian king Perseus’s dinner service,
the Pontic king Mithridates VI’s gem collection, and so on.

While such information about ownership was important to the Romans, they were
in other ways conditioned by the triumph to view Greek art in a strongly decontextual-
ized manner. They saw objects in isolation, far from the rich visual displays of which
they had originally formed a part; also absent were the cultural practices that had once
made them meaningful, for instance, the codified extravagance of the elite symposium
or the pious observances of the civic shrine. The monuments were instead integrated
into a pageant celebrating Roman power and military victory; their beauty and elabora-
tion showed the talents of the Greeks but even more the merits of the Romans who had
triumphed over them. And following the triumph, the objects were destined for new
settings very different from their original contexts. They were shown, particularly, in the
temples and great public porticoes funded by successful generals (Stamper 2005, 49-57); a
few select works might also grace the generals’ homes (Welch 2006). In such places,
they served the needs of elite in-group competition (proclaiming the achievements of
a specific individual as against his peers) and also helped to make Rome a fit city to vie
with the great Hellenistic capitals of the late first millennium BCE (Hölscher 1994). In
this way, the looted objects displayed in Roman public and private spaces served as per-
manent reminders of the triumph’s ephemeral glory and retained their association with
military victory long after the conclusion of the campaign.

The theater complex of Pompey—begun after his triumph over “Pontus, Armenia,
Cappadocia, Paphlagonia, Media, Colchis, Iberia, Albania, Syria, Cilicia, Mesopotamia,
Phoenicia and Palestine, Judaea, Arabia, and all the power of the pirates by sea and land”
in 65 BCE (Plutarch, Pomp. 45) and dedicated the following decade—demonstrates in
exemplary fashion how the wartime plundering of eastern lands both inspired and facil-
itated revolutionary developments in Roman art and architecture (figure 16.1). It is
famous above all as the first large-scale permanent theater constructed in Rome (Gros
1999a and 1999b). But the complex should also be appreciated for its integration of this
feature with several temples (most important is a shrine to Venus Victrix, Pompey’s
patron goddess) in a manner evocative of earlier Italian sanctuaries, such as at Gabii.
And it also had an elaborate garden portico; this looked back to the temple and por-
tico dedications of previous triumphant generals and also to the porticoed theaters
of Hellenistic kings. In this way, Pompey’s complex had strong ties to the Roman past,
combined with evocations of the Hellenistic world. According to our literary sources,
these evocations of Greece were quite self-conscious on the part of Pompey, who not
only took the title Magnus (the Great) in emulation of the Macedonian king Alexander
but also had a model made of the theater at Mytilene as an inspiration for his own com-
plex (Plutarch, Pomp. 42.3).

In its decoration as in its design, Pompey’s theater complex highlighted its connec-
tion to Greece. This was done particularly through looted Greek artworks. The com-
plex had purple and gold tapestries from Hellenistic Pergamum, panel paintings by
famous Classical masters, and large numbers of statues: Apollo and the Nine Muses,
Looting and collecting were distinct though allied processes, with the boundaries often blurred between them. Some collectors—for instance, the notorious Late Republican governor of Sicily, Gaius Verres—ransacked Greek towns and paid a pittance for their acquisitions; Verres operated in peacetime but was compared (unfavorably) by Cicero to conquering generals (Verr. 3.4.115–116). Other collectors were more restrained or perhaps less memorably and successfully prosecuted. Some paid extraordinary sums of money for Greek artworks; Augustus's associate Agrippa, for example, paid the town of Cyzicus 1.2 million sesterces for paintings of Ajax and Venus (Pliny, *HN* 35.9). Still, all Roman collectors benefited from their position of wealth and power relative to the
Greeks, and in this way, their activities were aligned with conquest and plundering—even when they failed to exploit their advantage to the extent practiced by Verres.

At the same time, collecting began with looting. Successful generals acquired a not insubstantial portion of the Roman army’s plunder. Upon completion of their tours of duty, they returned to Rome and were expected to deploy it for the public good, broadly construed. They might, however, display particularly noteworthy objects they had plundered in their homes; if conscientious, they might even pay the treasury for them (Churchill 1999, especially 96–97). As the taste for Greek art spread, its purchase could also be initiated by those whose conquests were in less artistically fashionable areas—for instance, Gaul, whose technically brilliant and strikingly abstract Celtic artworks never found a Roman following—or by those who had no major martial successes to their names; it is perhaps not coincidental that the Republican collector whose tastes and purchases we know best is Cicero, an accomplished orator rather than a military expert (Marvin 1989).

Over time, collecting became a more widespread practice. Under the Empire, it was popular among equites and wealthy freedmen in Rome and the comfortably well-off elites throughout the provinces; most familiar are the collections in the rich homes of the Bay of Naples, but recent studies have documented similar private accumulations of Greek-style artworks in, for example, Gaul, Cyprus, and North Africa (Italy: Döl and Zanker 1984; Gaul: Stirling 2005; Cyprus: Daszewski 1985, 284–285; North Africa: Leveau 1982). And unlike the plundering of Greek art—which concluded with the final conquest of Greek lands, essentially pacified by the end of the Republic—collecting continued throughout the Empire and in some ways intensified as the opportunities for wartime acquisitions dried up. Indeed, the culmination of the Roman collecting of Greek-style art came in the Late Antique era, with the immense troves seen, for example, in Chiragan, Aphrodisias, and Constantinople (Bergmann 1999); this was perhaps a result of the ever more emphatic concentration of wealth in the hands of a few powerful individuals and the growth of private properties that emulated and supplemented public spaces. So, too, with the advent of Christianity, the closing of pagan temples permitted rich individuals to acquire Greek artworks never before in private hands; the Constantinopolitan courtier Lausus, for example, in the fifth century CE amassed a collection that included Phidias’s Olympian Zeus, Praxiteles’s Aphrodite of Cnidus, and the Kairos of Lysippus (Bassett 2004: 232–238).

Unlike looting, which was largely dependent on the fortunes of war, the collecting of Greek art and architecture had a broader scope. Among the objects collected were panel paintings, religious statues, portraits, votives, funerary reliefs, gems, tableware, and architectural materials; these last, although little studied, were extremely significant because of their scale and the technological difficulties of transporting them and should be better known (the Mahdia shipwreck, for example, had in its cargo seventy architectural members, whose bulk and weight were far greater than those of the sculptures, although they have received the lion’s share of attention; see Hesberg 1994). From literary sources, especially Pliny’s Natural History, it seems as though opus nobile by the master artists of the fourth century BCE were particularly valued; Rome had fourteen
statues by Praxiteles, eight by Scopas, four by Lysippus, three by Euphranor, and two each by Myron, Phidias, and Polyclitus (Pollitt 1986, 161). From shipwrecks and from archaeological remains such as those in houses around the Bay of Naples, we can, however, see how the artworks in collections were more varied than the literary sources suggest (Hellenkemper Salles 1994; Bol 1972; Neudecker 1988); their selection and display were also more dependent on the taste of the individual collector. Particularly popular were artworks depicting mythological scenes of pleasure and good living (Dionysus and Aphrodite, satyrs, maenads, Cupids); these constituted a kind of “default option” for Pompeian home decor and also appeared in lavish villas such as that of Early Imperial Oplontis, home of Nero’s wife Poppea and her family (Döhl and Zanker 1984, 208; De Caro 1987). Other patrons had different preferences. The owners of the Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum had a special interest in Hellenistic ruler portraits (Dillon 2000); the emperor Hadrian in his villa at Tivoli quoted a number of major Athenian monuments and also evoked both Pharaonic and Ptolemaic styles from Egypt (Raeder 1983). In public collections, we also see variety rather than uniformity, with the Augustan aristocrat Asinius Pollio displaying a preference for Late Hellenistic rococo sculptures and his younger contemporary, the emperor Tiberius, preferring works of the fourth century BCE (Zanker 1988, 141; Bounia 2004; on the collection of Asinius Pollio, see Pliny, HN 35.33-34).

As telling as such preferences is a consideration of what was not collected. Quality was not the determinative factor; we have both spectacular works of Greek art found on Roman soil and also decidedly mediocre ones, such as small-scale votives and grave reliefs (Kuntz 1994). Nor was antiquity required. It was perhaps an advantage, as the mediocre reliefs show, along with works such as the painting on marble of the “Knucklebone Players” from Herculaneum, in which a worn image of the third century BCE was improved by a restorer of the first century BCE (Bergmann 1995, 103). But even very wealthy and powerful collectors made use of copies and new creations in traditional styles; Hadrian, for instance, had a copy of Praxiteles’s fourth-century BCE Aphrodite of Cnidus, the proprietors of the Villa dei Papiri had a bust of Polyclitus’s High Classical Doryphorus, proudly signed by the first-century BCE copyist, Apollonius of Athens (Raeder 1983, 95 no. 197; Mattusch 2005, 276–277, 279–282). Thus, the Romans’ criteria for collecting were very different from, for example, those of art museums today; their acquisitions were guided above all by considerations of style and subject matter (both dependent on the individual preferences of the collector) and appropriateness for context. By this last, I mean not only decor in the Roman sense—the integration of a place’s artworks with its function, for instance, an intellectual deity such as Athena in a library or the fertility god Priapus in a garden—but also the convenience of an object for its display setting. For private collectors, small-scale reliefs, statues, and panel paintings were best; only enormous public spaces could properly accommodate larger-than-life-size works, such as the colossal Hercules Farnese in the Baths of Caracalla (Marvin 1983). And there were few contexts suitable for architectural sculpture or monumental wall painting, two important Greek artistic genres that were in consequence rarely collected by Romans. In this way, what was and was not collected was dependent less on what was
available in Greece than on what Romans found a use for; there was a broad consensus on some items (e.g., less-than-life-size Dionysiac subjects), a generalized rejection of others (e.g., architectural sculpture), and an extensive middle ground, with works favored or dismissed depending on price, availability, and personal taste.

The Villa dei Papi at Herculaneum is one of the largest and best-documented of these Roman collections and also one of the most individually particularized (see figure 16.2 for a view of the Getty Villa, intended as a free replication of the Villa of the Papyri). It boasted more than seventy-five preserved sculptures in bronze and marble and thus was small relative to the imperial villa at Tivoli (with more than five hundred objects) but impressive by the standards of private collecting on the Bay of Naples; the nearby villa at Oplontis, with its beautifully executed Second Style wall paintings, had only forty-five. The Herculaneum villa did include among its statues some works characteristic of the "default option," such as lounging satyrs imaginatively integrated into its long reflecting pool. It also had copies of the sort of opera nobilia favored by the cognoscenti, for instance, a bronze Polyclitan female, made as a pair with the Doryphoros, and a marble Panathenaic Athena (Mattusch 2005, 147–151 [Athena], 278–282 [Polyclitan female]).

But the villa also had an unparalleled selection of copies of Hellenistic ruler and philosopher portraits (some thirty-four all told), including many singletons. This part of the collection likely reflects the interests of the villa's owners, who also had works.
Theorizing Greek art—which I would construe very broadly as the formulation of a set of approved questions or approaches to the topic—began with the Greeks (Tanner 2006; see chapter 3 above). In the Classical era, artists themselves authored treatises, setting forth the rules and theoretical underpinnings of their craft. By Hellenistic times, scholars constructed the first histories of art, focusing on chronological development and the construction of a canon of major artists and works. The Romans used these Classical and Hellenistic texts to articulate their own approaches to Greek art and architecture. Theorists also integrated them into a broader cultural discourse, so that references to Greek art became an identifying feature of an educated individual. And they applied them to illuminate new, characteristically Roman topics, above all rhetoric (Hölscher 1987). Thus, the minute, characteristically Roman topics, above all rhetoric (Hölscher 1987). Thus, the minute, characteristically Roman topics, above all rhetoric (Hölscher 1987). Thus, the minute, characteristically Roman topics, above all rhetoric. In the Roman period, no preserved stand-alone histories of Greek art and architecture are known. The only one, the De architectura of Vitruvius, references to famous Greek artists and masterpieces permeated Roman literature and were found in, for example, Pliny the Elder’s Natural History, the travel guide of Pausanias, the medical writings of Galen, Cicero’s forensic speeches, and Quintilian’s handbook of rhetoric.

Within these extremely varied Roman discussions of Greek art, two themes were central. The first was the progress of the field, above all toward naturalism. The second was the contribution of individual master artists to this progress, with close analysis of their distinctive styles, their strengths and weaknesses, and so on; this was relayed through critical judgments, especially comparisons, and through
biographical anecdotes. Pliny the Elder's discussion (HN 35.36) of the major Classical painter Parrhasius is broadly typical: "Parrhasius of Ephesus also contributed greatly to the progress of painting, being the first to give symmetry to his figures, the first to give play and expression to the features, elegance to the hair, and gracefulness to the mouth; indeed, for contour, it is universally admitted by artists that he bore away the palm" (translation by J. Bostock and H. T. Riley). Pliny also offered anecdotes about the rivalry between Parrhasius and his contemporary Zeuxis, whose contests had as their goal trompe l'oeil naturalism. And Pliny concluded with a list of paintings by the artist, in Rome and elsewhere, along with succinct descriptions of their subject matter and particular merits. Quintilian (Inst. 12.10) likewise highlighted the rivalry of Zeuxis and Parrhasius, singling out the former's mastery of line, the latter's of light and shadow. Thus, for the rhetorician as for the natural historian, comparison was critical; it served to bring into focus the distinctive features of each artist and to articulate individual contributions to the broader development of Greek art.

It is important to emphasize that Pliny and Quintilian—and, indeed, the many other Romans who commented on Greek art and architecture—had a perspective on the subject that could never have been shared by the Greeks. They had an awareness of the trajectory of Greek art from its rather abstract Archaic origins to the idealized naturalism characteristic of the Classical era and the baroque and classicizing styles of the Hellenistic period. For Roman art theorists, Greek art thus had, as it were, a narrative arc, effectively brought out by eclectic juxtapositions of stylistically varied images. This understanding of Greek art history is familiar; through writers such as Pliny, it has profoundly affected our own. It is also, emphatically, selective, because it left out much of what made the monuments meaningful to their first viewers, above all, the contexts and practices that integrated the images into Greek lived experience. The Romans instead saw the works in question as autonomous art objects, which could be excerpted, recombined, and analyzed as new patrons and viewers chose.

This interest in recombination and analysis is illuminating given the display settings in which the Romans viewed Greek art. These settings included not only colonnaded gardens such as those of Pompey's theater complex or the Villa dei Papiri but also the pinacothecae (picture galleries) that became popular in Italy from the Augustan era onward (Bergmann 1995, 98–107). These had their origins in Roman collections of Greek panel paintings—often private, occasionally open for public viewing—but are most familiar from their less costly reflections in Pompeian domestic frescoes. Such fictive pinacothecae appeared regularly in Third and Fourth Style painting, for instance, in the House of the Menander and the House of the Vettii at Pompeii (Archer 1981). In the latter, created between 63 and 79 CE, we see an elaborate and fantastical architectural framework with columns, pediments, and acroterial sculptures; within it were set large-scale mythological panel paintings along with smaller floating figures and renderings of statues (figure 16.3). The walls of this moderate-sized room were thus crammed with images, in a manner that facilitated their juxtaposition and comparison—the carefully contoured (perhaps Parrhasian) heroes on the large panels, for instance, contrasting with the more sketchily drawn amorous couples floating nearby. The appropriate
response to such images is suggested in an episode of Petronius’s Satyricon (83), when
the protagonist Encolpius visited a picture gallery, identified the paintings by artist, and
commented on their various styles (Elsner 1993).

As Encolpius’s behavior demonstrates, the Romans’ theorization of Greek art,
together with their preference for display settings such as the pinacothecae, encouraged
a distinctive mode of viewing. The focus was on the connoisseurial evaluation of images
based on criteria such as naturalism, chronology, and personal style; the result was a
highly selective understanding of Greek artists’ aims and achievements. This mode of
viewing was also significant because of the types of new Roman images whose making
encouraged, most significantly copies of famous Greek masterpieces, adaptations, and
novel creations in traditional Greek styles.

COPYING AND ADAPTING

Greek-style works of art and architecture permeated Roman visual culture. Adaptations
and transformations of Greek images and buildings were among the earliest Roman
artistic productions; by the Late Republic, there were also precise copies of celebrated works and careful, convincing "takes" (Fuchs 1997a; Pollitt 1986, 150–163). With the accession of Augustus, classicizing sculptures, paintings, and buildings attained a new centrality in Rome as a result of their deployment in the princeps's public commissions; they also became popular in the private art of the metropolitan elite (Zanker 1988, 239–261). The High Empire saw the apogee of Greek-style artistic production in Rome, along with the adoption of Greek styles and visual formats in monuments throughout the Empire, from Spain to the Euphrates and from Britain to North Africa (Kousser 2001, 81–103). And there was continued production of Greek-style artworks into Late Antiquity, in private luxury arts such as mosaics and silver throughout the Empire and major public monuments in Constantinople, the New Rome (Constantinople: Bassett 2004; Mosaics: Muth 1998; silver: Cameron 1992; Painter 1993).

These Greek-style works varied in their character as in their chronology and geographical spread. Some were copies of famous Greek masterpieces and meant to be recognized as such; Polyclitus's Doryphorus (figure 29.2), Phidias's Athena Parthenos (figure 30.1), and Praxiteles's Aphrodite of Cnidus (figure 24.2) are among the best-known examples of this phenomenon. But these monuments functioned very differently from the copies we see today, such as the cheap knockoff versions of the Venus de Milo sold outside the Louvre. The Roman copies were, to begin with, generally created individually rather than mass-produced. From casts found in a sculptor's cache at Baiae in South Italy, it is clear that the Romans had the capacity to replicate Greek masterworks precisely (Landwehr 1985). But to judge from these casts and from instances where we have both the Greek original and Roman versions of it, it is likewise clear that this was rarely done (Hallett 1995, 123). In most cases, comparison of the many copies demonstrates that a generalized rendering of the pose, dress, and gesture was enough; this constituted, as it were, the visual signature of the piece, while precise details and the overall style could be more freely handled.

Roman copies were different from modern ones in other ways, too. While small-scale marble and terracotta replicas were familiar components of Roman domestic and funerary assemblages, there were also public monuments that were extremely expensive and visually impressive; sculpted from the heavy, unyielding medium of marble, they were carved with technical finesse, vividly painted, and larger-than-life-size (Kousser 2002, 12–14). The creators of such images were talented and often, it seems, proud of their handiwork; predominantly Greek, they happily signed their pieces, even when they copied a well-known Greek original (e.g., that of Apollonius of Athens, discussed above; see Mattusch 2005, 276–277). And these monuments were set up in high-profile locations in Rome and throughout the Empire; while the originals were created primarily for Greek sanctuaries, the copies were in Roman times deployed in widely different surroundings such as fora, baths, theaters, and gladiatorial arenas (Fuchs 1987; Manderscheid 1998).

All of this suggests that—despite the modern deprecation of "mechanical copying"—these images were valued by the Romans. And literary texts concerning these images, along with writings on the analogous topic of emulation in literature, suggest that these Roman copies did not hide their retrospective character; rather, they were
valued precisely for their effective evocation of the originals on which they were based (Kousner 2008, 8–12). In this way, discussions of Greek-inspired Roman artworks that highlight originality at the level of visual detail are not so much incorrect as misguided; what is most Roman about these images is not their iconography or style but their context, that is, their deployment in radically innovative settings (Kousner 2008, 149–151; contra Perry 2005).

In addition to the clearly identifiable copies, we also have replica series of Greek-style images in painting and sculpture that cannot be definitively traced back to a famous original: statues of the nude Aphrodite taking off her sandal, for example, or paintings of Narcissus by the pool (Künzl 1970; Elsner 1996). These images were still clearly meant to "look Greek" and to take on the authority and allure that references to Greek art offered; however, a generalized Greek character rather than an association with a particular master or work of art may have been their central goal (Landwehr 1998). Such images could flexibly be adapted to particular circumstances. They might be duplicated and mirror-reversed to frame a doorway or given new attributes if another god or mythological hero were called for. So too, they could be miniaturized, executed in a new medium, or grouped with other, radically different images; the patron's taste and the artist's talent were key determinants here (Bartman 1991). Their flexibility made such replicated images extremely useful, and they are even more popular than the recognizable copies, at least to judge from what is preserved in the archaeological record; they have a broader chronological and geographical range and a more extensive penetration into various media, including lamps, gems, coins, and statuettes in addition to monumental painting and sculpture.

A languid Apollo from the Baths of Faustina Minor at Miletus in western Turkey offers a visually striking and well-provenanced example of such images (figure 16.4) (Schneider 1999, 168–174). In this less-than-life-size marble statue, the god stands in a sensuous, seemingly casual hip-shot pose, with one arm raised and bent behind his head, the other cradling a cithara in token of his musical accomplishments. His gesture and attributes connect him to an extensive replica series in many media, including not only monumental statuary but also lamps, paintings, and relief sculpture (Simon and Bauchhens 1984, 383–384, no. 61). At Miletus, the Apollo was surrounded by other familiar statue types, most prominently a group of Muses likely originating in the Hellenistic era; these were juxtaposed in the baths with other divine images—such as the gods of health, Asclepius and Hygieia—along with contemporary imperial and private portraits (Manderscheid 1981, 93–96). As an ensemble, the statues highlighted the baths' association with both physical pleasure and mental stimulation; they also helped to create an attractive setting for visitors. And they offered implicit testimony to the benefactions of the Romans and particularly the imperial family, who not only paid for the baths themselves but maintained the complicated water systems they required (DeLaine 1999). Given this context, it is likely that what was most important about the Apollo for Roman-era viewers was not his resemblance to a famous Greek masterpiece (broadly Hellenistic in style, he cannot be securely attributed to a particular sculptor). Rather, what counted was his contribution to the atmosphere of elegant, rather learned
but also sensual pleasure prevailing in the baths; this was what gave his Greek-inspired form its meaning for the inhabitants of Miletus in the Antonine age.

Along with recognizable copies and works such as the Apollo that were flexibly adapted from replica series, we also have new Roman creations in various Greek styles. These images included "one-offs" in addition to artworks so highly particularized—for instance, through the insertion of portrait heads or the incorporation into a larger whole—that their originality can seem to us more striking than their relation to previous art. Such Greek-style imagery permeated many familiar and quintessentially "Roman" artistic genres; it appeared, for example, in historical reliefs, sarcophagi, mythological wall paintings, portraiture, and architectural ornament. It also had a broad chronological and geographical scope; it characterized Roman architecture and architectural sculpture as early as the Archaic period, spread throughout Italy by the Late Republic, was selectively adopted in the provinces by the High Empire, and survived (with careful adaptations) into Late Antiquity. In this way, Greek-style imagery, broadly construed, was essential to innovative Roman art making.

This last point is well illustrated by the analysis of one final work, a Late Antique mosaic pavement found in a Romano-British villa at Hinton St. Mary (figure 16.1).
The mosaic of approximately 8.5 by 6 meters had a complex ornamental design; it included large-scale busts, smaller hunting scenes, and a mythological tableau of Bellerophon and the Chimera, all set in highly decorative roundels. The scene with Bellerophon had a long history. In its basic visual format—with a rider on horseback spearing an enemy below—it derived from Classical prototypes such as the Athenian funerary relief of Dexileus; the image was subsequently adapted for Roman imperial monuments such as the Great Trajanic Frieze and also for provincial works such as military gravestones of Roman Germany. In Britain, it appeared in a number of depictions of Bellerophon and the Chimera at this time, its rendering of the heroic slaying of a famous mythological monster clearly resonated with members of the Late Antique provincial elite, just as did the more mundane hunting scenes with which the Bellerophon image was juxtaposed (Pearce 2008, 208–211). And the mosaic’s large corner busts likewise attested to the patron’s interest in the classical mythological heritage; men depicted with long, vigorous, windswept hair are likely to be identified as the Four Winds (Pearce 2008, 208). At the same time, the owner of the Hinton St. Mary villa clearly also had other interests. The mosaic’s central roundel had a large bust of a beardless young man with straight bangs, long curling locks in the back, and a tunic and...
pallium; behind him, like a crown, projected the Christian symbol of the chi rho. This young man has been variously identified as Christ himself or as a Christianized emperor of the Constantinian dynasty (Pearce 2008, 193–194). In either case, what is noteworthy in the Hinton St. Mary mosaic is the seamless integration of pagan, mythological art with Christian images and, presumably, practices on the part of the mosaic’s owner. This imbued Classical images such as the Bellerophon with some new resonances, eliminated others that were traditional, and resulted in an appreciation of the mosaic that was up-to-date and thoroughly Late Antique in character.

Conclusions

This chapter has surveyed a range of cultural practices whose broader implications have not been sufficiently recognized; through them, the Romans turned Greek images into art. By this I mean that the Romans removed Greek monuments from their original contexts, gave them new settings and functions, and in so doing transformed them into autonomous works of painting, sculpture, and so on. It is true that this kind of aesthetic appreciation did not originate in Roman times. The Greeks themselves had initiated the process, starting in the Classical era with treatises intended to rationalize and dignify the making of buildings, paintings, and statues. And in the Hellenistic period, we see not only the creation of the first scholarly histories of art but also the beginnings of an art market, the development of art collecting by wealthy and powerful royal dynasties, and the deployment of at least some works as objets d’art, put on display for their aesthetic appeal in civic spaces and private homes. Still, the Roman efforts were different in their scale, in their degree of popularity throughout the social spectrum, in their geographical spread, and in the extent to which the artworks were alienated from their original functions and settings and given new roles and identities on Roman soil.

This development has had important implications for later eras. To begin with, it has given us the phenomenon of classicism, that is, the transformation of what had once been a period and regional style (roughly, that of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE in Greece) into a semiotic one, evocative of high culture and the authority of the past. It was because of the Romans that classicism became the style for official public art—for the idealized representation of the princeps, for the evocative and aspirational depiction of the advantages of his rule, for the imposing rendering of his gods and favored mythological heroes, for the elegant and impressive decoration of his palaces and temples. Through the Romans, this conservative yet highly effective visual language was transmitted to the Renaissance and later eras. Indeed, it is still powerful today, as testified by the adornment of everything from banks and universities to ranch-style suburban houses with Corinthian columns.

A further outgrowth of the Roman reception of Greek art and architecture is likewise significant. This is its influence on our own reverential but highly selective view of Greek image making. Because the Romans’ understanding of Greek art was predicated
on its decontextualization, together with its tremendous benefits for their free and transformative use of Greek monuments came a very limited curiosity regarding the original functions and meanings of such images. This has encouraged in later periods a similarly limited view of Greek art, with an emphasis on questions of chronology and attribution that we—with scant access to the original works of painting, sculpture, and architecture on which the Romans based their histories—are ill prepared to answer. And at the same time, it has discouraged inquiry into other issues (e.g., the use and abuse of images, Greek visuality, aniconism) that might be very fruitful for our understanding of what Greek artists and architects actually set out to do. In this way, investigating the Roman reception of Greek art can illuminate Rome, Greece, and the history of art history.

REFERENCES


