A COMPANION TO ROMAN ART

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Barbara E. Borg

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CHAPTER 6

Adapting Greek Art

Rachel Kousser

The Romans came to power in a world dominated by Greek art. As their empire expanded throughout the western and eastern Mediterranean, they encountered a visual culture in which Greek forms, styles, and genres were pre-eminent; to these the Romans had access, together with an aesthetic tradition that had evolved over many centuries and that was, by the Hellenistic era, both extraordinarily flexible and of great expressive power. The Romans set about adapting it, pragmatically and selectively, for their own purposes, a process that can be analyzed in detail beginning in the second century BCE and that continued throughout the Empire.

This chapter examines that process of adaptation. It focuses on the questions of when, why, and how the Romans encountered Greek art; how they transformed it to suit their own needs and ideas; and how they moved away from it. I concentrate on three key periods: the second century BCE, when the Romans had their first substantial and direct exposure to Greek art; the Augustan era, when Hellenic forms, and especially classical styles, played a central role in the state-sponsored monuments of the new regime; and the Hadrianic-Antonine period, when to a greater extent than ever before, Greek types and styles were incorporated into the artistic koiné of the era and transmitted throughout the Empire. My argument is that the adaptation of Greek art was an ongoing process, driven by the social needs of the Romans, and occurring not only in the city of Rome itself, but throughout the vast expanse of Rome's territory.

Although the Roman adaptation of Greek art is a topic with broad implications, most scholarship on it has been narrowly focused. Debate has centered on questions of copying and originality, particularly in Roman sculpture. Beginning especially with Johann Joachim Winckelmann in the later eighteenth century, art historians have frequently identified many Roman sculptures as copies of Greek masterpieces, intentionally replicated due to their status as famous works of art (Furtwängler 1895; Winckelmann 1849–1873/1968). Even today, most handbooks of Greek art make extensive use of these “Roman copies” to illustrate lost works by celebrated sculptors such as Phidias and Polyclitus. However, some scholars have criticized “the modern copy myth,” and have suggested that many works identified as copies were instead new creations of the Roman era, albeit in historical styles (Marvin 2008, 120). This is likely true, but may not have mattered to Roman viewers as much as it does to us. Our modern value for originality—as well as the ready availability and low cost of mass-produced copies of famous works
of art, for instance the Mona Lisa—has prejudiced us against Roman sculptural "copies." Yet, these were high-quality, expensive monuments, commissioned by the elite and produced with intensive labor; they were also, clearly, valued by the Romans. The debate about copies and new creations thus seems to me ahistorical; it reflects modern concerns more than it does ancient realities.

Recently, scholars have broadened the debate, analyzing how Greek-style sculptures were used, and also considering questions of copying and originality in other artistic media, for example painting (Hallett 2005). This is the approach adopted for this chapter. In my view, what is most striking about Roman adaptations of Greek artworks is not so much the alterations to the monuments' visual appearance; indeed, many of these works were carefully fashioned to "look Greek," in order to highlight their connection to a revered tradition. Rather, it is the transformation of context that is most noteworthy, as Greek works were deployed to serve new Roman purposes; for example, Hellenic cult statue types were used to decorate baths, amphitheaters, and imperial fora, and grand triumphal monuments of Hellenistic rulers miniaturized to adorn private homes. A consideration of monuments within their original contexts is, in consequence, essential; only then will we see these Greek-style images as they were intended, as part of the rich visual culture of the Roman world.

A few words concerning the evidence for this topic are necessary here. Two sources of evidence are particularly significant: literary texts and archaeological remains. In terms of literary texts, it is important to note that the Romans never articulated in writing their approach to adapting Greek art. They did, however, comment extensively on an analogous subject: the adaptation and transformation of Greek texts in Latin literature (Hinds 1998). From these commentaries, it is clear that the Romans had a richer and more nuanced vocabulary concerning copying and originality than we do today. They did not denigrate copies and adaptations; rather, they saw such works as valuable due to their participation within a tradition stretching back centuries. Their literary comments suggest that the Romans would have appreciated the retrospective works examined here for precisely what modern scholars have found problematic about them: their self-conscious deployment of forms and styles taken from the repertoire of Greek art (Kousser 2008, 8–14). Such comments present a useful challenge to our modern critical sensibilities. They suggest that rather than proclaiming too insistently the "originality" of Greek-style Roman monuments, we should instead seek to appreciate them as the Romans did, as works deeply imbued with the power of the past.

With respect to archaeological remains, different problems arise, particularly concerning preservation. We are best informed about sculpture, since many Greek-style Roman statues were made of marble; sturdy and difficult to reuse, they have survived in great numbers. We know less about painting, an inherently more fragile medium and one preserved only in unusual circumstances (e.g., volcanic eruptions such as Pompeii, or burial underground). And for architecture, our view is perhaps skewed, since the most Greek-influenced parts of buildings— their marble columns and other ornamental details—have frequently been robbed out and reused, while their more Roman aspects (the unglamorous brick-faced concrete structures beneath) were left alone. It is consequently necessary to approach Roman monuments with a sensitivity toward what has been lost as well as what is preserved, in order to evaluate more accurately their connection to the legacy of Greece.

Initial Encounters: Greeks and Romans in the Second Century BCE

The Romans first encountered Greek art primarily through war. Early in their history, they established the largest manpower reserves and most effective fighting force in peninsular Italy; at the same time, their political structure, with a competitive military aristocracy, encouraged
martial conquest and the extension of the empire. In consequence, the Romans of the fourth and third centuries BCE fought and won a series of wars against their neighbors, beginning with Etruscan tribes to the north and Greek cities to the south, and moving on to the conquest of Spain and the Carthaginian empire of North Africa, before turning their attention to the eastern Mediterranean. Subsequently, over the course of the second and first centuries BCE, the Romans fought, defeated, and looted the kingdoms of the major Hellenistic powers; they also extended their political governance to new territories: Macedonia in 167 BCE, southern Greece in 146, Pergamon (peacefully) in 133, the Seleucid kingdom of western Asia in 64, and Egypt—ruled by Greco-Macedonian monarchs for three centuries, and including the cultural capital of the Hellenistic Greek world, Alexandria—in 31.

These wars had important implications for the Roman encounter with Greek art. To begin with, they meant that large numbers of Romans, from generals to foot soldiers, became familiar with Greek material culture as they fought their way across the eastern Mediterranean. And those back home in Italy gained exposure as well, due to loot brought back and displayed in triumphal processions, in temples built ex manubiiis (from the spoils of war), and on the walls of elite homes. In addition, the Romans’ acquisition of the immensely rich territories of the former Hellenistic monarchies gave them the means, as well as the inclination, to acquire expensive Greek-style works of art; the luxurious new homes that they built during the second century BCE testify to the wealth that accrued from their conquests. Finally, as the Romans added Greek lands to their empire, they opened up new opportunities for cultural exchange. Italian traders and tax farmers moved east, where they frequently acquired a taste for Greek art; at the same time, many Hellenic artists traveled west to expanding Roman markets. The result was a transformation of Roman visual culture into something new, a world of images inspired by Greek art but expressive of Roman values.

Among these images, triumphal monuments in Rome were pre-eminent, due to their high cost, prominent placement, and celebrated commissioners. Indeed, the triumph itself played a key role in conditioning the Roman response to Greek art. It featured a successful general parading through the streets of Rome with his army and the spoils of war, cheered on by the urban populace. In consequence, Romans began to see the looted Hellenic artworks displayed in the triumph as valuable and desirable objects, whose possession was a source of pride for the Roman state. Triumphs were also significant in that they encouraged the viewing of Greek art in a decontextualized fashion, juxtaposing cult statues ripped from their temples with luxury dinner services far from the princely tables that they once adorned. Jumbled together and organized by medium or materials, the looted artworks were meant to be appreciated as objects for display, rather than as functional creations for a particular setting, as they had been in Greece. Triumphs thus encouraged the viewing of Greek monuments as isolated works of art; by divorcing the objects from their original contexts, they also allowed the Romans freedom to reinterpret and alter them in accordance with their own, purely Roman, cultural predispositions.

These alterations are particularly visible in manubial temples, which were commissioned by successful generals, set up along the triumphal route, and funded by the proceeds of war (Stamper 2005, 49–67). The temples were created in considerable numbers; as literary sources testify, at least 21 of them were dedicated between 200 BCE and 133 BCE alone. Often set up in fulfillment of a vow made on the eve of battle, they advertised the piety as well as the military prowess of their patrons, powerful members of the Roman ruling class. The temples thus served to commemorate martial victory, as is well demonstrated by the names of their presiding deities: Hercules Victor, Mars Invictus, Fortuna. They were solid and enduring memorials of war, permanent counterparts of the more ephemeral triumphs. As a successful general rode in his chariot along the triumphal route, the manubial temples decorated his path and connected his victories to earlier battles; they gave divine sanction to Roman military power and imperial rule.
Like the triumphs, the manubial temples were also prominent showcases for Greek art. Some featured looted Greek masterpieces: the portico surrounding the temple of Jupiter Stator, for example, was adorned with a group of statues now known as the Granikos Monument, which depicted Alexander the Great and his soldiers and was executed by the famous fourth-century BCE sculptor Lysippus (Velleius Paterculus 1.11.3–4; Pliny, *Natural History* 34.64). The portico was dedicated by Q. Caecilius Metellus, victor in Macedonia, c.146–143 BCE. Its sculptures had originally been set up at the religious center of Dion in northern Greece, where they were juxtaposed with other monuments celebrating the military and political achievements of the Macedonian royal family. In Rome, the temple sculptures testified instead to Metellus’ Greek victories, and drew implicit analogies between his success and that of Alexander, the paradigmatic military leader of the Hellenistic world. In this way, the looted statues took on a new, thoroughly Roman significance, even though their context (a sanctuary dedication) was only slightly altered.

The architectural form of these sanctuaries was likewise a melding of Greek and Roman. Earlier Roman temples, influenced by those of Etruria, were squatly proportioned buildings with wide spreading roofs, terracotta decorations, and stairs and columns concentrated at the front. The new manubial sanctuaries departed from these prototypes with Greek-influenced details such as more upright proportions, exterior colonnades, and imported marble façades and sculptures (Figure 6.1). Over the course of the second century, they became increasingly lavish and Hellenic in character, as successful generals competed to erect the most up-to-date

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**Figure 6.1** Round temple in the Forum Boarium, Rome, Republican. Photo: Pufacz/Wikimedia Commons.
Greek-style monuments. Yet, although the inspiration was Greek, and the architects and craftsmen came likewise from the eastern Mediterranean, the new temples also retained some key Roman features. Despite their exterior colonnades, they remained oriented toward the front; they often had a "skin" of marble, but an interior of traditional Roman building materials such as tuff and travertine. And they generally kept their imposing high podium, instead of the more modest platforms characteristic of Greek temples.

In the second century BCE, temples like these were the central public medium for the display and adaptation of Greek art in Rome. Other key artistic genres remained resolutely traditional, or demonstrated their familiarity with Greek art primarily through their rejection of it: Republican portraits, for example, are unsparing depictions of older men with wrinkles, warts, and bald patches, as opposed to the suave and charismatic images of youthful Hellenistic rulers. Only in this way could the Romans assert their difference from the powerful and impressively cultured Greeks whose wealth and territories they coveted, and whose kings they sought to conquer; only thus could they highlight their ties to the past, in a society that prided itself on reverence for tradition. In public, therefore, the Romans remained adamantly Roman; Greek-influenced temples were acceptable only because their Hellenic aspects could be understood as references to military conquest and loot, rather than cultural emulation.

The private space of the Roman villa was very different. By the end of the third century BCE, elite Roman military leaders had already begun to decorate their homes with spoils from their victorious campaigns; in this way they could remind visitors of their martial accomplishments while also enjoying the attractively fashioned productions of Greek artists. Over time, their tastes spread, and Greek-style objects were manufactured specifically for the Italian market; they were embraced not only by the political elite of Rome, but also by wealthy landowners and businessmen throughout Italy. These patrons had eclectic tastes and a broad appreciation for Greek-style artworks, including not only statues but paintings, mosaics, jewelry, tableware, furniture, and garden ornaments. And they deployed these objects to decorate their increasingly luxurious, Greek-style homes, which featured colonnaded interior courtyards, elaborate dining rooms, and belvederes carefully positioned to direct the viewer's attention out to the lovely Italian countryside. While the urban townhouses of the metropolitan elite remained austere, ever more lavish country villas were constructed throughout the second century BCE. In them, wealthy landowners enjoyed the pleasurable leisure summed up by the Latin word otium, and generated by an elegant Hellenic ambiance (Zanker 1998b, 135–203).

While Romans of the second century BCE had broad-ranging tastes in Greek-style art, in their homes they preferred above all to emulate the palaces of Hellenistic kings. In the House of the Faun in Pompeii, we have a well-excavated example of this practice, in a building dating to the early second century and preserved due to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE (Figure 6.2; Cohen 1997, 176–182). Here the owner constructed two immense colonnaded courtyards, which were very similar to those of Hellenistic palaces at Vergina and Pergamon. He also adorned a particularly elegant room between the courtyards with a complex, technically brilliant floor mosaic depicting Alexander the Great and the Persian king Darius III in battle; the artwork, with its dramatic martial imagery and emotionally charged portraits, was likely based on a monumental Greek painting from the late fourth century BCE. Like the Lysippian sculptures appropriated by Metellus, the Alexander Mosaic in the House of the Faun praised the Roman patron by comparing him to the great Hellenistic king; the artwork also trumpeted his cultivated taste and the wealth needed to commission a technical marvel—a mosaic so detailed that it used millions of tesserae. Elsewhere in the house as well, the patron further revealed his taste for Hellenistic court art. He had mosaics with Nile landscape scenes, likely first popularized by the Ptolemaic dynasty in Alexandria, as well as a bronze statuette of a faun in the baroque style associated with the rulers of Pergamon. In this way, the Italian
homeowner could imagine himself living like a king, in a house that was, indeed, larger than the royal palaces on the Pergamene citadel.

The owner of the House of the Faun at Pompeii was not unusual in his taste for Hellenistic court art, although other options were also available. Roman patrons of the second century BCE could choose from an extensive repertoire of Greek-style objects, including “antiques,” copies of famous artworks, and new creations in Archaic, Classical, or Hellenistic styles; all of these appear in Republican Roman homes, and can be found as well in ancient shipwrecks of boats carrying Greek artworks to Italian markets. Nonetheless, the prevailing taste was for Hellenistic court art, and this is not surprising: it was the defining style of the contemporary Greek world. Furthermore, it linked the Romans closely to the Hellenistic monarchs who posed the greatest political challenge to their expanding empire, and whose defeat was their most cherished military accomplishment. By adopting kingly styles, in public and especially in private, the Romans advertised their intention to rival the great dynasties of the Greek world; Hellenistic art was the visual language of their aspirations, and also of their achievements.

From Republic to Principate: Greek Art in the New Imperial System

The latter years of the Republic were riven by civil strife, as aspiring generals fought to dominate the state in a series of increasingly brutal internecine wars. Visually, the era was also marked by competition, with political rivals sponsoring ever more elaborate monuments and embracing divergent artistic styles (Zanker 1988a, 5–31). Political and artistic competition
both came to an end with the ascension of Augustus to sole rule in 31 BCE. Although he avoided taking the title of king (preferring princeps, first man), Augustus effectively ruled the state, due to his control of the army and the major levers of political power as well as an immense personal fortune.

Augustus was in consequence the dominant patron of the period. He used his power and wealth for what the historian Ronald Syme has termed “the organization of opinion,” creating attractive images of the new political system, and disseminating them to a broad popular audience (Syme 1960, 459–475). He did so by deploying a visual language based above all on Greek art. For the first time, Hellenic styles and visual formats were deployed extensively in Roman public monuments; they were used not only for temples, but also for government and entertainment buildings, for portraits, and for historical reliefs; that is, sculpted narrative images depicting important contemporary individuals along with gods and personifications. Also new was the predominance in these monuments of Greek classical art, with fifth- and fourth-century BCE styles taking precedence over those of the archaic or hellenistic eras (Zanker 1988a, 239–263). When compared to the Roman Republic, the age of Augustus thus looked very different. Augustan Rome was no longer simply a (regionally distinctive) center of hellenistic art; rather, it was the driving force behind the formation of a new classicizing visual culture.

This classicizing visual culture was hybrid in nature, eclectic in style, and strikingly programmatic in intention. It is apparent, for example, in the copies and new works of classicizing art that gave an impressive air to Augustan state monuments. Copies permeated the emperor’s new forum: caryatids modeled on those of the Erechtheum in Athens adorned the porticoes, while Ionic capitals echoed those from the same building, and column bases copied those of the Propylaea, nearly on the Athenian Acropolis. New creations were also present, for instance an imposing bearded figure of Mars Ultor (Mars the Avenger) and portraits of the imperial house (Figure 3.7). For such works no specific Greek prototypes were available, and an array of classical styles was eclectically deployed to make new, yet traditional images; Mars, for example, had the exalted look of an Athenian general in the high classical style (Figure 6.3). These new creations, as well as the copies, depended for their effect on viewers recognizing the references to classical art, and appreciating the nuanced manner in which such references were used (Hölscher 2004). They were thus meant to appeal to connoisseurs, and their Greek styles were used expressively to reinforce the emperor’s programmatic message: that of a Golden Age, in which the greatest achievements of Greece were revived in Augustan Rome (Zanker 1988a, 167–192).

It is precisely this appeal to the connoisseur that constitutes the greatest difference between the Greek-style monuments of the Augustan regime and those of the mid-Republic. In the second century BCE, Greek art was, first and foremost, loot, the material reward of Roman military conquest. And the most attractive form of Greek art was that of the Hellenistic kings; its appearance in triumphs and manubial temples proclaimed, in clear and incontrovertible form, the kings’ defeat and the new hegemony of Rome. By the Augustan era, by contrast, the Hellenic world had long been part of the Roman empire, and looting Greek art was considered gauche, if not in fact criminal. Augustus did, however, encourage the formation of publicly accessible collections, for instance those of M. Vipsanius Agrippa and C. Asinius Pollio; in such settings, Greek monuments could be enjoyed by the citizenry at large, rather than wealthy private patrons, and could be appreciated as art treasures instead of war booty. Moreover, the princeps embraced the classical style that was lauded by contemporary connoisseurs such as the artist and theoretician Pasiteles, whose five-volume treatise on Greek masterpieces likely focused on that era; the classicizing productions of his sculpture workshop certainly did (Pliny, Natural History 33.130, 35.156, 36.39–40). In this way, Augustus promoted a different kind of Greek art, and a new approach to it; the move from looting to collecting Greek art was a critical step in the development of Roman visual culture.
The same connoisseurial impulse also animated private patrons. It is evident, for example, in luxury villas such as the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum (Figure 20.5 and Neudecker, Chapter 20, this volume) and that of Oplontis (Figure 26.3), both seaside homes along the Bay of Naples with lavish Greek-style sculpture collections. It is also visible in Augustan wall paintings from both Rome and Pompeii. While earlier homeowners had decorated their rooms to evoke Hellenistic palaces and sanctuaries, those of the early principate referenced instead the contemporary Roman pinacotheca (picture gallery). They especially appreciated virtuoso trompe l’oeil renderings of framed panels and statues on pedestals, arranged within ornate fictive architectural settings. These decorative schemes had playful, even fantastical elements—candelabra sprouting vegetation, composite human–animal monsters, and so on—yet they had as their model real public and private picture galleries such as those described in Petronius’s Satyricon. The wall paintings offered a less costly and more convenient decorative effect, but were actuated, no less than their models, by a reverence for Greek art.

Among the most exquisitely detailed and art-historically sophisticated of these painted pinacothecae are those of the Villa Farnesina (Figure 6.4; cf. Hallett 2005, 433–435). This suburban pleasure villa, situated just across the Tiber from the civic center of Rome, had a decorative program dating to the late first century BCE; it was a top-level commission, associated by some scholars with the imperial family. In the villa, three bedrooms had well-preserved examples of painted art collections, with framed panels and statues set against white and red
backgrounds. The images were intended to evoke works of Greek art from chronologically disparate periods; for example, in Cubiculum B we see a central panel executed in the atmospheric painterly style of the later fourth century BCE, flanked by two smaller ones in the clear linear manner of the high classical era. Above them are projecting caryatid statues in the rich style of the late fifth century, and cult images in fictive niches, whose closed forms and stiff, static postures evoke archaic precedents. Taken together, the images provided a condensed history of Greek art, with objects juxtaposed for maximum stylistic contrast, yet all incorporated within an orderly and balanced architectural framework. Thus here too, as in state monuments, the images presupposed a cultivated viewer, able to appreciate the varied references to the Hellenic past. And at the same time, they documented the visual subordination of that past to a contemporary Roman present, as choice elements of it were collected and displayed for the delectation of the domestic spectator.

In the private sphere, then, we see the same connoisseurial appreciation for Greek art as was observed for the major public commissions of the princeps. At the same time, we should note as well some important distinctions in the way in which Hellenic models were adapted in public and private settings during the Augustan era. First, one might stress the continuity observable in Greek-style works from the private sphere, where they had been deployed from the mid-Republic onwards for every conceivable decorative purpose. In public monuments, by contrast, there is a sense of rupture, as a new Hellenic style was used to highlight the change from the past, and the formation of the principate.
So, too, Augustan private monuments remained extremely wide-ranging in style, with a continued fondness for Hellenistic art; classical imagery never predominated, as it did in the public sphere. This should not, on reflection, come as a surprise. In private, Hellenistic styles were particularly well suited to depict Aphrodite, Dionysos, and their followers, whose images were extremely popular in Roman domestic spaces; they were in effect the presiding deities of otium. In public, by contrast, Hellenistic styles were associated above all with Greek monarchs and their powerfully ambitious Roman emulators; these were models to be avoided by a princeps who carefully refused the title of king. Augustus instead sought out works of art in the classical style: their idealized naturalism gave precisely the exalted air that he considered appropriate to the dignity of the emperor, his family, and his gods. At the same time, the beauty inherent in the classical style suggested, metaphorically, the attractions of the principate; this helps to explain the continued popularity of the style and its diffusion throughout the empire.

The Hadrianic–Antonine Era: Adapting Greek Art in the Roman Provinces

Romans of the second century CE inhabited a wealthy, politically stable, and globally interconnected world. Their empire encompassed most of Europe, with borders in northern Britain and along the Rhine and Danube rivers; a large part of the Middle East, including modern Turkey, Syria, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, the Arabian peninsula, and Iraq as far as the Euphrates river; and all of coastal North Africa, from Morocco in the west to Egypt in the east. The inhabitants of these diverse regions were united by a centralized government in Rome, a limited but sufficient provincial bureaucracy, common languages (Greek in the east and Latin in the west), and a large army, which discouraged both invasion from outside and widespread civil insurrection. Due to such safeguards, their empire was increasingly prosperous, its borders comparatively secure, and its core free from major contests for imperial power between the accession of Trajan in 96 CE and the death of Commodus a century later.

Peace and stability encouraged the movement of goods and people throughout the Roman empire. Sculptures from Turkey, cut glass from Germany, and mold-made terracotta bowls from France made their way to the great ports around the Mediterranean, and often penetrated, via riverine passages, far into the continental interior. So, too, for major building projects, materials could travel far: granite from Egypt, pavonazzetto marble from eastern Turkey, and cipollino from Euboea in Greece were used on imperial benefactions throughout the Empire, and on occasion by private patrons as well. Itinerant craftsmen of all sorts were a characteristic feature of Roman society; architects, sculptors, smiths, glassblowers, and leatherworkers moved about, either on their own initiative or at the behest of major institutions such as the army. In this way, the Roman Empire in the second century CE enjoyed an increasingly cosmopolitan visual culture, one especially extensive at elite levels but discernable as well lower down the social scale.

This visual culture took particular inspiration from Greek art. By the Hadrianic–Antonine era, Hellenic forms and styles constituted a critical part of the Roman Empire’s artistic koine—the common visual language that made possible communication among a vast and diverse populace. Together with more paradigmatically Roman components (for example, descriptive portraiture and concrete architecture), we see much throughout the Empire that is distinctively Greek: columns and pediments, idealized yet naturalistic divine statues, complex mythological narratives. The popularity of these Hellenic forms in the Hadrianic–Antonine period owes something to the Second Sophistic, a retrospective movement focused on the cultural achievements of classical Greece. It is indebted as well to the contemporary wealth and political
prominence of the Greek East, site of an economic revival in the second century CE and home to many members of the senatorial and equestrian orders. Yet the Empire-wide popularity of Greek art in the Hadrianic–Antonine era was first and foremost an indigenous Roman development; it was the transmission of the visual culture of the metropolis to an ever-increasing audience.

Among the most striking manifestations of this culture were the Greek-inspired monumental building façades that marked the architectural landscapes of ambitious cities (Yegül 1982). A good example is the Library of Celsus at Ephesus, a visually stunning work erected in the provincial capital of Asia Minor during late Trajanic and early Hadrianic times (Figure 24.9; cf. Smith 1998, 73–75). The library’s two-story façade was adorned with a riotous array of colored marble; the projecting columns were purple-veined pavonazzetto, the capitals, arches, and pediments of white Ephesian stone. The façade was pierced by three doorways and six windows; there were also four niches for sculpture on the lower story, along with four corresponding statues on projecting pedestals above. The overall effect was one of rich color and rhythmic movement, an almost undulating surface with vivid contrasts of light and shadow. With its grandiloquent inscriptions and elaborately detailed ornamentation, the façade offered a glamorous introduction to the library inside; its combination of traditional Greek elements with an up-to-date Roman manner served appropriately to commemorate Ti. Iulius Celsus Polemaeus—Greek by birth, but also a Roman army officer, consul, and proconsul.

Similar monumental façades adorned a host of other buildings as well during the Hadrianic–Antonine period. They were particularly popular in the marble-rich provinces of Greece and Turkey; examples include the Market Gate of Miletus, the Nymphaeum of Herodes Atticus at Olympia, and the aediculated façades, often known as Kaisersäule or imperial cult halls, that decorated bath–gymnasium complexes in the Greek East. However, they also occurred in the western provinces, above all as scene buildings in theaters; their usefulness was due to their flexibility, as they served to lend a grand air to public buildings of all sorts. The monumental façades were paradigmatic works of Roman “display architecture,” showcasing the wealth and ambition of their patrons as well as familiarity with Greek forms. By no means structurally necessary to the buildings they adorned, they had nonetheless a serious and important function for their commissioners and viewers. Their aim was visibly to represent humanitas, civilization—inspired by ancient Greece, but in its contemporary manifestations made possible by the peace and prosperity of the Roman Empire.

The same humanitas could likewise be demonstrated by Greek-style images of gods and mythological figures deployed in Roman public spaces. Such images frequently adorned monumental building façades, and appeared as well in Roman fora, temples, baths, and amphitheaters. These works of ideal sculpture—generally over-life-size statues, technically adept, and highly impressive en masse—had styles and visual formats inspired by Greek art, and were indeed often modeled on well-known classical types. Yet they had a distinctly un-Hellenic effect when grouped in heterogeneous sculpture programs, inserted into Roman architectural complexes, and juxtaposed with portraits of contemporary benefactors or the imperial family. In their new settings, these retrospective images connected viewers with the grand cultural traditions of the empire, as though Greece and Rome, once fiercely opposed rivals, were now part of a seamless and enduring continuum (Kousser 2008, 100–106). They also served to give elegant visual form to the ambitions and identities of their patrons; Celsus, for example, had personifications of Wisdom, Virtue, Knowledge, and Intelligence adorning his library, along with portraits of himself and his son.

This was no less true in the Latin West than in the eastern Mediterranean. Along the German border, for instance, we see a host of monuments known as Jupiter columns, which featured a crowning statue of the sky god atop a tall column, and a base with inscriptions and smaller images
of divinities in relief (Figures 6.5, 25.10). Commissioned by the region’s governing elite, the Jupiter columns were, in their iconography, resolutely cosmopolitan, with sculptural types that were Hellenic in origin and popularized by Rome (Kousser 2008, 91–100). A Jupiter column from the Saarburg region near the provincial capital of Trier, for instance, had a crowning group of Jupiter on horseback trampling a snaky-legged giant; the basic composition goes back to classical grave stelai such as the famous Athenian monument of Dexileos, was adopted for Roman emperors on historical reliefs like the Great Trajanic Frieze, and was frequently used for the funerary commemoration of soldiers on the German frontier. For the Jupiter column, it was translated into three dimensions and given greater cosmological resonances, as the king of gods triumphed over a bestial figure of disorder. However, it was rendered in a bravura version of Hellenistic style—note the bulging muscles of the giant, his agitated hair, and his anguished facial expression—that was all the more impressive given the soft, friable sandstone in which it was executed. Such images gave recognizable Greco-Roman form to gods and religious practices that were intimately connected to local traditions; very often on the columns, Jupiter held a wheel associating him with the Celtic sky god Taranis, and the columnar form itself may hearken back to regional customs of tree worship. In this way, the Jupiter columns allowed local members of the wealthy ruling class to assert their sophisticated knowledge of Greco-Roman culture, while at the same time adhering to and indeed enhancing age-old traditions of religious practice.

By the second century CE, Roman public art throughout the empire was thus permeated by Hellenic forms and styles; the same was no less true of artwork from the private sphere.
Particularly striking in this regard are funerary monuments, which had previously adhered more closely to local traditions. In the Hadrianic–Antonine era, these were replaced by an international taste for sarcophagi: large-scale, intricately carved coffins of marble, frequently decorated with scenes from Greek mythology (Figure 15.4). They commemorated the wealthy deceased in a somewhat oblique fashion, using myths to suggest the pain of separation, the virtues of the departed, or the pleasures of the afterlife. A number of sarcophagi even featured portraits of the deceased joined to the bodies of the mythological protagonists, making explicit the relevance of Hellenic tradition for contemporary Roman life. In this way they were similar to the portraits in formam deorum (in the form of gods), likewise popular at the time, which showed successful businessmen as the mercantile divinity Mercury, or wives in the guise of the beautiful love goddess Venus. Both the sarcophagi and the funerary portraits encouraged their Roman patrons to make sense of their world through the medium of Greek myth and art; they gave an elevated and traditional visual form to contemporary aspirations, emotions, and desires (Kousser 2007). Thus, in private funerary commemoration as in the public monuments considered above, Greek art served as the vehicle for Roman self-representation: it gave a visually compelling and culturally sophisticated aura to a broad range of patrons, including slaves and freedmen as well as the established aristocracy.

A final sphere in which Greek art dominated was that of the private home, and in particular the wealthy country villa (cf. Neudecker, Chapter 20, this volume). The emperor Hadrian’s complex at Tivoli, 17 miles outside Rome, constitutes the most imaginative and extensive example of this, with recreations of such paradigmatically Hellenic sites as the temple of Aphrodite on Knidos, the Painted Stoa in Athens, and the Serapeum near Alexandria (Opper 2008, 130–165; Figure 20.6). There the emperor, a famous traveler, could enjoy visiting some of the most famous tourist destinations in the ancient world and re-creating the activities practiced in them: boating down the Nile to the Serapeum, say, or conversing on philosophical subjects while strolling in the Stoa. The Tivoli villa thus gave Hadrian and his guests access to Greek art through the medium of bodily experience, allowing for a more intense and profound connection than that created by mere visual contemplation. Other villa owners likewise aimed for the same effect, albeit with the more limited means at their disposal; they excerpted and miniaturized, or selected a particularly desirable Hellenic feature for emulation. Yet they were united in aiming for a Greek ambiance, however far they lived from the source of Hellenic culture; we see villa sculpture collections in France, elaborate mythological mosaics in North Africa, and marble-veneered walls in Britain. Indeed, there is no more impressive testimony to the attractions of Greco-Roman villa culture than its spread throughout the Empire, not only within the Mediterranean region but even to northern Europe—where villa gardens must have been damp and muddy much of the year, and the rooms around the peristyle uncomfortably drafty in winter. Despite these inconveniences, the villa remained a paradigm for luxurious country living; it made manifest the pleasures of Greco-Roman civilization for an ethnically diverse but culturally unified group of wealthy homeowners.

As this brief discussion of the Hadrianic–Antonine period suggests, Greek art had a continued importance for Romans in the second century CE. No longer a novelty in state monuments or private spaces, Hellenic forms and styles were central throughout Roman visual culture. In addition to the manifestations detailed here, Greek art also influenced important high imperial genres such as mosaics and gem carving; Hellenic images and myths were also critical to pantomime, the song-and-dance spectacle that was the most popular form of entertainment at this time. Indeed, it is difficult to discern an artistic genre of the period that is not in some manner tied to Greek art; utilitarian buildings are perhaps a partial exception, yet even the warehouses at the important port of Ostia are adorned with Greek-style capitals and pilasters, carefully fashioned out of brick.
What distinguishes the Hadrianic–Antonine era is the geographical extent, stylistic diversity, and personal appeal of the Greek forms and styles that the Romans chose to deploy. By the end of the second century CE, Hellenic imagery appeared throughout the Empire, from London to Damascus, and from the straits of Gibraltar to the Euphrates. So, too, it was embraced in all its diverse manifestations; the classical repertoire was perhaps pre-eminent, but archaic and especially Hellenistic styles were popular as well. And finally, Greek forms were connected more closely than ever before with individual Roman patrons, who set their public portraits within monumental Greek-style building façades, or “dressed up” as gods and mythological heroes on their tombs. In this way, the second century CE marks not so much the end as the high point of the Roman adaptation of Greek art.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is worth considering why Roman adaptations of Greek art were both so extensive and so long-lasting in their popularity, and then, briefly, addressing the questions of when and how they ceased to be so. Individual cases will of course vary, but my sense is that Hellenic images were useful to the Romans because they were exalted, distanced, and metaphorical; that is, symbolic rather than literal in their meaning. Divorced from the constraints of everyday life, these images could express powerful aspirations and desires—for example, a Republican general’s monarchical ambitions, or the passionate love of a respectable materfamilias for her husband. Greek art offered a vehicle for the safe articulation of such emotions, while its idealization of forms, mythological dramatis personae, and antique flavor prevented them from being interpreted too literally. In essence, the Romans dreamed in Greek; Hellenic art gave them a pleasurable form of release from the limits placed on quotidian existence.

These dreams did not, however, continue uninterrupted into late antiquity. It is true that Hellenic images still appeared at times in Roman art, particularly in the private sphere: Greek-style mythological statuettes, mosaics, and silver adorned the grandiose villas of the landed aristocracy, while Hellenic forms and myths decorated the sarcophagi and catacombs of wealthy metropolitan citizens. The continued deployment of such images is not surprising given their longstanding popularity and broad acceptance throughout the empire, as well as the conservatism of their Roman elite patrons. Yet even these private monuments bear witness to a highly selective attitude toward Greek tradition. Nudity was covered up, eroticism toned down, and the vast mythological repertoire contracted to a limited number of approved themes. Such changes were necessary accommodations to a society that was sharply divided and rapidly transforming; they helped to render acceptable and inoffensive these references to the classical—and pagan—past as the Roman Empire became Christian (Kousser 2008, 122–135).

In public monuments, further accommodations were required. Images of the old gods and scenes of pagan religious ritual were replaced, albeit slowly, with Christian symbols: the fish, the cross, the Chi Rho. New lavish churches were built, and traditional sanctuaries saw their funds dry up, their most prominent worshippers depart, and their sacrifices draw to a close. Triumphal monuments were still dedicated, and retained some of their conventional divine apparatus, but they were adorned as well with Christian symbols in an uneasy coexistence of old and new. Where Greek images did appear was in art collections; celebrated monuments of the ancient world, such as the Aphrodisite of Knidos, were taken from their traditional sanctuary homes and brought to adorn Constantinople, the Empire’s new capital (cf. Bravi, Chapter 7, this volume). In some ways, this can be understood as a continuation of long-standing Roman practices; for the late antique emperors, as for their Republican and Augustan predecessors, the Hellenic antiques had a value as both loot and art. However, the desacralization of cult statues was also part of a broader effort to discourage, and eventually eradicate, pagan worship. This also encompassed restrictions
on animal sacrifice; the abolition of priesthoods; the destruction of temples, or their conversion into churches; and attacks on pagan religious images. The Aphrodite of Knidos was unusually fortunate in the circumstances of her preservation, while other works of art were smashed into thousands of pieces, or buried, pre-emptively, by their beleaguered worshippers. There is perhaps no more powerful attestation to the allure of Greek art for the Romans than the frequently violent circumstances of its demise in late antiquity; only what desperately mattered would be so vehemently and irrevocably destroyed.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Given the limited space and textbook format of this chapter, references have necessarily been kept to an absolute minimum. I have selected those that seemed to me essential due to their importance to my argument, their influence on the field, their accessibility to students, and their utility as guides to further reading on the topic.

The Roman copying of Greek art has long been a central subject of scholarly discussion, while the adaptation by the Romans of Hellenic forms and styles has in contrast been neglected. Significant treatments of the former topic began in the eighteenth century with Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s *History of Ancient Art* (1849–1873). Adolf Furtwängler’s *Masterpieces of Greek Sculpture* (1895) codified the practice of using classicizing Roman sculptures to reconstruct the history of Greek art, and both his methods and his conclusions remain influential. From the 1970s onwards, however, scholars have increasingly questioned the assumptions underlying such works. Among the most extensive recent treatments of the question have been Marvin (2008), examining the historiography of “Roman copies,” and Perry (2005), focusing on the ancient literary sources.

For the broader topic of adaptation, less has been done, but there are some promising avenues of research. Hölscher (2004) analyzes the Roman use of Greek styles from a semiotic perspective, correlating particular Hellenic styles with different types of Roman subject matter. A related approach is taken in Zanker (1988a), which highlights the programmatic use of classical styles in the state monuments of the new imperial regime. The essays collected in Gazda (2002) give a good sense of the range of approaches to artistic retrospection current in the scholarly literature today; Hallett (2005) offers a thoughtful and balanced review of this work and Perry’s book, and poses useful questions for further research.

REFERENCES


