Greek Influence On The Roman Empire

Ancient Greece has long been considered as the cradle of civilization. Its ideas of architecture, literature, art, and even religion, all played significant roles in the development of future civilizations, especially in the development of the Roman Empire. From their expanded boundaries, Greece was the center for new ideas and enabled the Hellenistic culture to spread within the Mediterranean, even to India and Asia. However, this did not last as Greece was soon invaded by the Roman Empire. The Battle of Corinth was just the beginning of Roman domination and their first victory led to more opportunities for the Roman Empire to conquer the rest of the Greek peninsula and by the time of 27 BC, the entire Greek peninsula had come under the Roman Empire's rule. Although defeated, Greek culture and civilization still continued to heavily influence the Roman Empire in many ways. The Roman Empire could be seen employing Greek knowledge extensively especially with their education, philosophy, and literature.

Education of the early Roman Republic inculcated a sense of tradition and rudimentary education, 'consisted almost entirely in daily familiar intercourse with his parents and in the close imitation of his father's conduct" (Cicero, 14). Education from the early centuries of the Roman Republic progressed from fathers passing tradition and skills to their sons to a school-based system. Before Greek influence, after reaching adulthood, their sons would "be taken to some distinguished citizens and bidden learn from him the lessons of ... oratory and statecraft," skills necessary as a member of the Republic (Cicero, 16). At the height of the Roman Empire, formal education evolved and gradually developed into its final semblance. The Romans adopted numerous Greek educational doctrines to their own system, with Greek philosophy and literature being the primary influence in Roman education; and these ideals were highly sought after within the Roman Empire, especially within the upper class. The invasion of Greece aided the development of Roman education by producing Greek slaves, who were in high demand as tutors and teachers. Greek slaves, who were more educated than their Roman counterparts, were brought to Rome to teach Roman children. Roman children are tutored by a Greek slave in simple reading until they went to elementary school and are taught arithmetic, reading, and writing. The upper-class males of the Roman Empire were prepared for leadership roles in society and in the military through a combination of Greek and Roman education, often called Greco-Roman. Greco-Roman education focused on heavily on rhetoric, a skill which taught how to speak publicly and command with charisma. The Roman Empire took advantage of the Greek's knowledge in the art of oratory. The Greek language was an international language, spoken by many of the Roman Empire's adversaries and was a widespread language in the Mediterranean, so upper class Romans had to learn Greek and Latin, in order to prosper as a member of the Roman Empire.

Greece's most influential idea adopted and implemented by the Romans can be seen with their literature. Philosophy was distinctly Greek and popular in Athens, but became popular among many Roman students, who traveled to the center of philosophy where many great philosophers gathered, to learn. Stoicism, the most importantly philosophy in the Roman Empire, originated from Hellenistic Greece. Stoicism was interchangeable with the Roman world view and was amendable to the Roman culture of virtuous and manliness. Stoicism appeared in one of Roman's greatest works, Vergil's Aeneid and Cicero, a leading political figure and orator, also

drew inspiration from this philosophy. Vergil studied Epicurean for a brief time but turned to Stoic and “incorporated it in the twelve books of the Aeneid” (Smiley, 652). Marcus Tullius Cicero wanted to use philosophy to aid his political goals, but it was still an activity that Romans were not as interested in. Cicero was taught by many famous Greek philosophers and rhetoricians which led to the start of his political career. To use philosophy to his advantage, Cicero “freely translated [Greek philosophical works] into Latin” (Smiley, 650). Cicero also popularized primary Greek philosophical schools at the time: Academic Skeptics, Stoics, and Epicureans, but his works was mostly derived from the Academy, established by Plato. A well-known Greek philosopher, Socrates, can be placed at the origin of skepticism while Plato and Aristotle expanded upon it, giving new vigor to skepticism, “arguing against the opinions of all men” (Cicero, 30). Cicero embraced this philosophy, seeing as he was a lawyer, he needed to see both sides of an argument without bias to argue effectively. Also, as a politician, Cicero would need a degree of flexibility to speak and act on behalf of the people he is representing. Cicero also urges the upper-class Romans to adopt stoicism, as he understood it had the most virtuous and divine reason for how Romans should live. Cicero did not fully agree with the Epicurean philosophy as he thought it taught a “shameless pursuit of superficial pleasure” (Cicero, 33). However, the philosophy advocates for pleasure by withdrawing from public life and politics, although which is the opposite of what Cicero wants Roman citizens to do. Cicero’s contemporary, Titus Lucretius Carus, author of the philosophical epic De Rerum Natura, was heavily influenced by the philosophy of the Epicurean world view. The theme falls in “some form of contemplation as the true path to enlightenment” (Lucretius, 106). Greek philosophy gave the Roman something to think about during the turmoil and wars that broke out. The philosophical ideas gave the Romans peace of mind and comfort, due to what the philosophies embody.

Another one of Greece’s influential ideas adopted by the Roman Empire is their drama literature, and music. Greek literature served as an example for the Roman Empire, which “suggested themes for treatment... inspired new desires” within the Roman Empire (Wedeck, 195). Roman writers easily copied Greek classical themes, even translating many notable Greek plays into Latin. Plautus and Terence, well known Roman writers, used many Hellenistic aspects in their work and plays. In addition, Publius Vergilius Maro’s literary works heavily relied on Hellenistic influence as well. Virgil’s most famous work, the Aeneid, took inspiration from Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, copying the poetic lines consisting of six metrical feet, with two syllables each foot; twelve book division; and the use of epithets. Virgil’s Aeneid, tells the founding story of Rome from the city of Troy, following the battle of Troy, whereas described to be fallen in Homer’s Iliad. Virgil also employs similar symbolism as Homer did in his books as well. The Aeneid was meant as a work to rival the Iliad. Roman drama and music were also influenced by Greek aspects. Dramas drew up themes from both Greek and Roman history. Theatre was usually dedicated to their gods, the Roman Empire for example, dedicated their first plays and festivals to Jupiter. Greeks also influenced Roman theatre through a Greek traveling art, miming, using masked performers that danced and joked through improvisation. The Romans also incorporated Greek comedy and perfected to fit large audiences in places like the Amphitheatre or the Colosseum. The Romans also added their own forms of musical accompaniment to dialogues, which added complication and depth to the plot. Greek art, in the forms of statues and paintings influenced the Romans as well. During the time of war in Greece, sculptors grew out of the Hellenistic style that the Romans encountered during their invasion. Hellenistic style statues commissioned afterwards are copies of the Greek original made by Romans and placed in public building or even private homes. In early Roman history, Romans replicated many Greek statues, but throughout time, they began to incorporate “unpleasant

physical details” and focused on realism in their works (Pollitt, 155). Roman art and painting very commonly depicted their religion, derived from Greek mythology, as the central theme. Roman portraiture is also identified by realism. Using hyper-realistic portrayal of the subject’s characteristics. This style originated from Greece but survived due to Roman values and customs.

Ancient Greece had a tremendous role in the development and how the Roman Empire acquired their status and importance in the ancient world and distinguished themselves from other ancient civilizations. Their education, literature, and art were mostly derived from Greek ideas and concepts, but the Romans continuously improved on those concepts to build one of the most powerful and long-lasting empire the world has ever seen. The Roman Empire’s long-lasting success could be largely due to Greek’s influence, but the Roman Empire did develop their culture their own way and ultimately shaped how we know them today.