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The Alleged Incapacity of the Romans for Speculative Thought

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Butler University Early Theses Collection

Summary

Volume of Collection
8 boxes, 154 folders

Collection Dates
1887 – 1911

Scope and Content Note

The collection contains early theses manuscripts from Butler University dating from 1887 until 1911 on subjects including Literature, Religion, Science, Greek and Latin. Until 1897 Butler required all students, including undergraduates, to write a theses statement in order to receive a degree. One year after Butler University joined the University of Indianapolis and became Butler College the theses requirement for undergraduate students was dropped. Postgraduate theses are available in this collection ending in 1911. While the majority of these manuscripts are handwritten, as early as 1908 graduate students were required to type theses statements. The documents are arranged alphabetically by author.
The Alleged Inactivity of the Romans for Speculative Thought.

The theory that no complete state, since the creation of the world, affords a complete taste for the aristocratic and legislative, as well as the warrior and legislator, was an amusing one to Ancient Rome. It was only in the sense no longer enforced by the court that the admitted under the strongest protest, the dignity of the intellectual culture.

Language like at the root of all mental culture, and it was especially the case with the Greek language; not at all inferior to, and the artistic literature of the Roman to a very extent upon a Greek basis. Interchange with the Greeks in Greece, Italy, in Sicily, Greece and the Near East, presence of Ionian and Carian Greeks in Rome, spread of Greek language, employment of Greek poets in the instruction of youth. All these naturally contributed to this trend, so that the unyielding nature of the Romans gradually gave way to the laws of the Greek foreign culture.

Our chronicles were written in Greek, and the public demanded some delivered in Greek. Therefore under the Greek influence that Roman literature began to develop itself.
The Romans fell duly to task of exchanging their mother tongue for the Greek, to refine and adapt it to the changed state of culture, and they found themselves dependent on the Greeks for the work, and so the work of elementary instruction was placed in the hands of the Greeks, and every sort of instruction was usually obtained as instruction. As the Latin alphabet was very similar to that of the Greek, and as the two languages had a very close affinity, it was not a very difficult task for a Greek with all his taste and imagination to teach it.

The Romans knew no mode of supplying the want of a more advanced Latin instruction than that of transferring the study of Greek language and literature to the study of Latin. So such a transformation as this was lacking to the Romans, and as they had not a great imagination to borrow, they depended entirely upon the Greeks for this. The latter assisted the Romans as much as they were able, but the Romans gave as little help in this work, and were completely under the influence of the Greeks, and as they were living up to raising the standard of their literature, they gladly received every suggestion which the Greeks might offer.
and thus literature and language followed very closely after the style of the Greeks. The most flourishing period of Roman literature therefore is characterized by the predominance of the Greek mind.

The Romans who generally wrote and spoke Greek with ease, much necessity learned acquaintance with Greek works in art and science, with their home and plans of mixing and especially with the Greeks who had come to Rome, and employed as tutors, readers, and teachers. Philological Greek writings were translated as services in the schools. Public libraries were established by the Greeks and as lively and accessible, it became a popular study. That in every field of thought except that of law, when Rome remained strictly national, the Roman intellect was entirely under the ascendency of the Greeks. The masterly history, poetry, philosophy, and art owed their first impulse to their intellectual contact with the Greeks.

Roman literature properly should have its origin in the interval between the first
and second Punic wars, for it was at this time that the Romans could see the wonderful results of Greek culture pointed out to them in the capture of Carthage and, especially, by the annihilation of Sicily in the war with Carthage, because they had an excellent and lasting life. Many of the inhabitants of the conquered provinces went to Athens to live and introduced this art and cultivation there, and it is from this period that Roman poetry took its regular and connected form. But this was also through the influence of the Greeks, for Simnides called the Fates and Roman Poetry, yet he was half Greek and half Roman. He was brought to Athens at an early age, and made his living by teaching Greek and translating plays to the stage. The Romans, therefore, did not introduce poetry; they were not imaginative people, and they followed the lead of the Greeks in their poetry. Alexandria also had a great influence on Roman poetry, and some of the great critics regard very much the mingling of the two, but had not Latin for the reasons. We could not have had Catullus or Virgil
we have known Virgil and Ovid.

Even with these influences, Roman Poetry did not take its origin from the

modern empires or the Greeks, but from the

demands of the school, which needed Latin

manuals, and this made their poetry weak.

This school was one of the most ef-

cfective infiltrators of the new spirit, because

they used the Latin Language in it, but not

understanding. They spoke in Latin, but did

not have Latin thoughts, their ideas were

Greek.

Roman poetry is very much inferior

in interest to Greek poetry, and it is a

work of cultivated imitation and not a

creative art. Although they imitated the

Greeks, they were not always successful

in their reproductions. They were especially

inferior in epic and didactic poetry and in

Philosophical dialogues. They brought nothing

new into the world, and they had only an im-

itative reproduction. They imitated forms

of composition, meter, cadence, poetic diction,

thought, art, and tradition. But Greek

poetry opened a new world of thoughts and
sections. It sprang from many sources and
differs itself in every age and civilization,
while Latin poetry remained the same and
did not even change in different generations.
The Romans did not lack a speculative ca-
pacity, and thus their poetry does not resem-
ble that from which the Greek poets of Greece
contemplated the wonder of humanity.

Roman poets first learned from the
study of Greek poetry to feel the graceful con-
trast between the musical forms of expression
and were thus encouraged and trained to
evoking similar effects from their native lan-
guage. But Roman poetry seems to be
\[...

The Roman Drama was a reprodu-
tion of the Drama of Greece. The titles of many
of these indicate that they were either de-ictic
or translated from the Greek or were founded
on the Greek legends and mythology. Not only
the titles were taken from the Greeks but also
the characters, form, and motifs. But with
all of this it was impossible for the Roman drama to reproduce the inner spirit of the noblest types of the Greek drama as to reveal its artistic excellence.

The Greek tragedy was a place wherein the vivid fancy and emotions of a primitive age met and combined with the knightly traits, the social and political life of the greatest era of ancient civilization. They represented the fleeting and sufferings of national heroism arisen by long altercation in the feelings of many generations, and appealed to all national help in dangers. This was represented with great solemnity to the Greeks, but it had no meaning whatever to the Romans. The Roman might understand the natural emotion of a strong will or might to move to sympathy with the sufferer or actor, but he could not understand the consolation which overcome the natural emotion for the mere earthly affair in a great dramatic action, and would he know the inward lessons of self-knowledge and self-mastery and would not have the feeling of awe and mystery which were diffused through the thoughts and imaginations of the Greeks.
The mind most capable of speculation is most acute in its appreciation of comedy. But this form of literature had little influence on the style and sentiment of the Romances. In Comedy as in Tragedy the Romances were not virtues of creative vigor, but translators and imitators.

Ancient Rome had more power and vastness than parts, because lacking imaginative force she could supply its place with the rich colorings of rhetoric. The visible city, though now bent, tilled, the power and splendor of imperial Rome, and that not idle but actual, was a theme fitted to inspire the patriotic writer or historian, but not to create the finer susceptibilities of the poet. The contemplation of the splendor and the pride of ownership, such as a magnificent city would have excited the Greeks, to brown mortal deities, imbued in Philosophy and Literature and furnished them with excellent subjects for speculation, while with the Romances their minds went no farther than the subjects of war, national life, eloquence and law. And thus their writings were limited to the recitation of facts. They were not able to go beyond that, and...
land did not even think then in good form. They had a fine military discipline and their minds were so busy engaged on these subjects of war and national life that they did not think much on the literary subjects and the great philosophical questions. and their capacity for reasoning was not increased. But the Greeks did not think so much then; they cultivated their minds and improved them by applying themselves to the subjects which required deep thinking and gained great intellectual capacity and power of speculative reasoning.

In prose literature, history was the first to establish itself, and for a long time historical composition was more admired than writing in other chronological recording points of the year. The earlier annalists wrote in Greek, after the second Punic war S. A. tells of the writing of some annalists in Rome, from Sempio to his own time. The Romans had written records from an early date, also personal experiences, but they were not capable of establishing a great and original historical school. They acquired a false conception of history from the Greeks, which injured their
history to such an extent that it could never be regained. The Romans thought much of"actor life" that instead of keeping the simple commentaries of the men who contributed to make Roman history, they were very indifferent to these historical documents and were content with the meagre yearly registers of the magistrates. The only written manuscripts before the Punic wars were composed of registers, laws, and hymns.

From the beginning the Romans kept records in which they obtained the names of the magistrates for each year and a daily record of the memorable events. The "Libri Iustici" books containing the lists of magistrates told of the treaty between Rome and Carthage and the truce made with Ptolemy and Gabii.

Besides these records a register of the family was kept by each great house telling of the honours gained in the performing of great deeds. All of this shows the surroundings of this history. It was not based on any principles. The idea of preserving the truth and handing it down for its own sake was entirely unknown to them. It was through national pride that these records were kept. But one may
say that this showed a quality of patriotism in those growing up at that rude period. Instead of this, it was a selfish motive to make their person stronger and to strengthen that of the city and not for the instruction of mankind.

The Romans regarded all kinds of literature as men combined in style. Swinburne says, "History is clearly akin to poetry and is written for purposes of narrative rather than being compared with the modes of transmitting knowledge to posterity, it avoids the dulness of continuous narration by the use of rarer words and less paraphrase." A writer was not called an Orator unless he had good style. All the documents, essays, memoranda of their public conduct, copies of their speeches, etc., were noticed by the majority of people unless their author was celebrated or had an elegant style. The thought was not considered, they cared nothing for it. "Orator" was a great word to civil persons, and success was not to answer with, but it was the Orator as a people had great talent for public speaking, that their business fell in their eloquence and not their thought. Where boys they were taught to be with their
father in the senate, in the forum, among his agricultural duties and gained a great knowledge of public business and their forms for speaking was obtained by practice not by rules of art and rhetoric. But these speakers were not put in writing except in

species form and register, they did not have the habit for writing them. All their religious and legal writings were arranged in rhythmic form and were known by the name of Carmen

les that the earliest compendium of history into

really the first prose writers did not write in

Latin but in Greek.

Oratory was practiced for a long time by

the Romans without art and method, although

instruction and practice in oratory went with

the Roman from youth through his entire political

life, but it was only through the influence of Greek

rhetoric that the Roman oratory acquired form

system and artistic treatment, both in theory

and practice. Public speaking was necessary in

every department. The generals on field of battle,

the senators and magistrates all had to be pub-

lic speakers. The orator was held far above

the orator and oratory was cultivated to a great

extent, but it never reached an art form
who wished to gain great public favor, generally began with funeral orations, though in later times it was considered more honorable to begin with public accusation. Cato was the first great orator, he was a successful accuser and in many trials defended himself with distinction. His chief characteristics were force, bravery and orating acuity. He wrote in a rude style and no one studied his writings, his renown was in the force of his eloquence. Thus we see that Cato did not from himself create in poetry, history nor eloquence.

The study of Philosophy at Rome had been suppressed for some time and it was feared for two reasons. It tended to cause dissension in religion and it diverted men's minds from public life in which they were as much interested. After the war with Persia many of the Greek Philosophers won the confidence of the Romans and imparted to them a great many of their own philosophical views. The Romans instantly grasped these ideas but being as inferior to the Greeks, did not have the force to grasp the spirit of argument, but merely the empty form, and as the Romans were
deep thinkers they could not carry out the argument, nor from ideas opposite to the Greeks but
imitated them in philosophy as in everything else.

The object in Greek philosophy was to
attain to truth, while the Roman was to apply
the truths to government of life. Although the
Greek mind was not limited as to calculation,
the reaching thought
was not to the formation of a governing principle.
The Roman on the other hand did not undertake
these long of abstract speculation nor the charm
of reasoning for the sake of another end,
but it was for the government of self. Vanished
a great contempt for philosophers, yet he was more
added in Greek philosophy, and with his keen
appreciation of the Roman character he saw that
his people as well as himself were unfitted for
speculative thought; and that in much case the
cultivation of philosophy would only bring forth
pedants and hypocrities.

The Romans remained entirely dependent
upon the Greeks in philosophy without pro-
ducing anything original. The main point
with them was utility not the theoretical but
the practical side of philosophy. Cicero on the
basis of an acquaintance with the Greek philoso-Ø
ephers, wrote a number of philosophic treatises without capacity or need for deep and original speculations. He imitated Plato by putting his writings in the form of dialogue, but he was far from matching him in thought and argument. In his efforts to establish a certain balance between theory and practice, Cicero shows the preference for the new Academy on account of its sophisme. Having in harmony with the sound of the advocate and orator, also for an account of its moral tone.

Although Greek philosophy acquired a certain influence over the Romans through the medium of tragic poetry, it was second with an apprehension compounded of solemn import-Ø
cance and emotion misgiving.

The Greeks had an influence over the Romans in language, poetry, history, eloquence, and philosophy, and the Romans were always ready and willing to receive anything which they might suggest and often sought their advice and instruction. In their willingness and anxiety to accept and adopt all the help from the Greeks and taking them-
generally as their renown of thought, the Romans humility slow, although their pride never allowed them to publicly acknowledge it, their inferiority to the Greeks in their intellect and genius. They thought that by their contact with the Greeks they might be able to gain a literary talent and be able to write and think for themselves. It was not want of ambition that the Romans were not as speculative people but lack of power and imagination.

Roman literature seemed to flourish for some time under this Greek influence and many prominent writers were produced but this did not last long. There were many forms of art and science which they did not work out. Their imagination was as narrow and their constructive talent so small that they were not able to take up these subjects. Science, poetry, history, philosophy had all been perfected by the Greeks and the Romans felt that they could not be able to cope with them.

The fact that the Romans with their model, the Greeks a speculative people and the best example which could be found, and entering under their influence, and having advantage of a model whose brilliancy of thought was unequal
in civilized world; and not being able to en-
ere in an instance, and seldom to equal
the Greeks, and generally very much inferior
to them, shows that the Romans were not deep
thinkers, and were not capable of deep and
speculative thought. "Imitation is always
a confession of poverty, a want of original
genius."

Reth. Galvino Barcell.

June, 1826.