

Cicero's Athenian Days: Intellectual Rivalry through Study Abroad

Study abroad is a known practice among Roman elites in the late Republic. Cicero's autobiography in the *Brutus* (313-16) presents a detailed account of the orator's experience studying in Greece and Asia Minor in 79-77 BCE. Moreover, *De Finibus* 5 is set in Cicero's student days in Athens and gives modern readers a peek into the life of Roman students abroad. Building upon previous scholarship on Roman study abroad in the late Republic (Daly 1950, Rawson 1985, Alcock 1993, Habicht 1997), my paper will discuss Cicero's self-fashioning through the presentation of his study abroad experience. By analyzing the depictions of Cicero's and other Romans' education abroad (or lack thereof) in *Brut.* and *Fin.*, I argue that study abroad has become a ground for Roman elite rivalry in Cicero's works.

The setting of *Fin.* 5 in Athens in 79 BCE is unusual for a Ciceronian dialogue. The typical setting is in an Italian villa, such as Cicero's Cumae estate in *Fin.* 1 and 2, and Lucullus' Tusculum villa in *Fin.* 3 and 4. Steel (2005) argues that the Athenian setting in *Fin.* 5 symbolizes the transmission of philosophy from Athens to Rome by conquest. Van der Blom (2010) thinks that the Athenian setting shows the importance of where education takes place. Expanding from previous works on the physical space, I will explore the implications of casting Marcus Piso as the main interlocutor of *Fin.* 5. By comparing the character Piso's philosophical beliefs in *Fin.* 5 with his behaviors depicted in *Brut.* 236, I will show Cicero's ironic portrayal of Piso as someone who fails to enact his philosophical learnings. On the other hand, it is Cicero's own behaviors in *Brut.* 313-14 that conform to Piso's philosophical doctrines. Such a contrast undermines Piso's intellectual achievements when he had received the same philosophical education in Athens as Cicero had. Thus the intertextual reading of *Brut.* and *Fin.* 5 displays

Cicero's elaborate strategy to undercut his powerful intellectual rival Marcus Piso, whose erudition in Greek learnings surpassed Roman predecessors (*Brut.*236: *maximeque ex omnibus qui ante fuerunt Graecis doctrinis eruditus fuit*).

Cicero's competition with Marcus Piso indicates philosophy's growing importance when his political clout and his ability to exert oratorical power declined under Caesar's dictatorship. This shift is also captured by the female personifications of *Eloquentia* in *Brut.* and *Philosophia* in *Fin.* While *Eloquentia* falls silent (*Brut.*22: *eloquentia obmutuit*), *Philosophia* learns to speak Latin (*Fin.*3.40: *Latine docere philosophiam*). Thus, the conveyance of philosophy from Athens to Rome, the translation of Greek writings into Latin, and the display of his intellectual achievements abroad became new means for Cicero to maintain his influence and relevance. His study tour in his younger days gained new significance for Cicero writing in his 60s, and in turn it allows modern readers to have another understanding of Roman education.

Bibliography

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