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Stoic Authority in the Library of Lucullus: de Finibus 3-4

In the third book of Cicero's philosophical treatise *de Finibus,* the narrator encounters Cato the Younger in the library of Lucullus. The scene has received some academic attention, primarily due to how it depicts two aristocratic Roman males interacting in a learned manner at the villa of their host. However, the scene's greater importance is in how Cicero uses the setting to validate his authoritative position in not only the philosophical debate that he and Cato will have, but even in the process of grafting Greek philosophical values to Roman aristocratic life.

I argue that the scene is crucial in understanding how Cicero validates his role as a translator of Greek philosophy by casting the library setting and the books therein as silent authoritative representatives of their authors. In the third book of *de Finibus* Cicero tells his addressee Brutus about what occurred when he went to the library to fetch (*depromerem*) some books from the library of Lucullus:

When I had arrived there, I saw Marcus Cato, whom I did not know would be there, sitting in the library surrounded by many Stoic books. For there was, as you know, a greed for reading in him, and it could not be satisfied; of course, he would often read in the curia itself, not at all fearing some criticism from the rabble, while the senate was collecting - not taking away from public affairs. So then in such leisure and with such an abundance of books he seemed to be gorging on books, if this word can be used on so fine a thing.

Cicero continues the narrative by recalling that after the two had exchanged pleasantries, including asking about the whereabouts of their would-be host JR Lucullus, Cato invited Cicero to sit down in the library with him and pleasantly discuss the merits of Stoic naming practices.

Scholars have long used the library scene to inform our understanding of the practices of elite Romans. This scene, a chance meeting between two peers, mirrors Plutarch's account of the activity at Lucullus' villa:

For he [Lucullus] collected many writings in a fine fashion, and their use was more estimable than their acquisition, for the libraries were open to everyone and the walkways around them and the study rooms readily received Greeks who went there as if to a refuge of the Muses and spent time with each other in pleasurable flight from their other pressing needs. Often he himself spent time there going on walks with the literary scholars and he obtained for the political individuals what they needed.

Yet is there more to the scene than a simple convenient place for the meeting of like minds? For Johnson (2013: 357), Cicero deliberately constructs the scene in the library to boast of his access to a privileged resource. Johnson is correct to identify the library of Lucullus as a location noted for its wealth of material, and Cicero's free access to the space does note him as a member of a privileged society who has earned the type of access which allowed him to come and go freely, taking what he likes.

Yet there is something odd about this scene, and it concerns the activity that goes on *inside* the library: Stephanie Anne Frampton has recently addressed this peculiarity. Frampton, drawing on the material evidence from site plans such as those at the Villa of the Papyri, argues that the library of a Roman villa is more suitable for storage than it is for philosophical study and discussion. The library at the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum is large enough only to hold the papyri, and, as Casson (75) claims and Dix suggests about this particular library, readers would have consulted the scrolls in the nearby colonnades. In the same way, Cicero and Cato would take the books from the library, as Cicero states his original plan had been. Casson accounts for Cato's behaviour by concluding that Cato's need to research a number of books required that he conduct his work in the library. Yet Dr. Frampton points out that the language of the scene depicts Cato as an oddity, someone who eats books (*helluari libris*) and sits for long periods in a library (*in bibliotheca sedentem...in summo otio*), a room properly used for the storage of books, not for their consumption, literally or figuratively.

Yet if it is peculiar for Cato to sit in the library reading, it is surely much odder for Cicero and Cato to stay in the library as they expound upon Stoic doctrine. We should recall Plutarch's pleasant scene of the villa: the visitors would walk the colonnades where they would be met by other visitors and sometimes Lucullus himself. Cicero, however, pulls up a chair beside Cato as the two decide to debate the merits of Stoic terminology after Cicero makes the bold proclamation that the only original thing the Stoics offered was terminology. Neither the research that Casson sees Cato undertaking nor the access that Johnson sees Cicero boasting of should keep the men in the library during the conversation, contrary to both general habit and to Cicero's stated intent. As Frampton observes, viewing the ancient library as a place for reading is anachronistic. Later libraries would have provided areas designated for studying: the Palatine Library, for instance, completed by Augustus in 28 BCE was composed of twin horseshoe-shaped rooms. Books lined the shelves, but the shape of the room left room enough in the centre for tables and chairs. The twin libraries of the Forum of Trajan follow a similar plan, leaving ample room in the centre for desks and tables.

However, these later developments in large-scale building projects do not explain the scene in Cicero's *De Finibus*. Lucullus' library, after all, would have more in common with the Villa of the Papyri than an Imperial library. It is therefore unlikely that two individuals would choose to sit inside such a library. Why Cicero locates this dialogue inside the library is hinted at in the prologue to the entire work. It is in the very opening that he acknowledges what he knows will be a problem in the reception of his work. Namely, he sees an audience that has no need of translations of Greek philosophy, a genre to which de finibus clearly belongs: "And there will be those (and certainly these people are learned in Greek letters and look down upon Latin), who

say that they would rather spend their time in reading Greek." Cicero's Varro elaborates on the opposing position well in the *Academica* (1.3):

For when I saw that philosophy had been displayed most diligently in Greek literature, I deemed that if some of us were held by the study of it, and if they are students of Greek doctrine, they would rather read Greek than Latin; but if they shrank back from the arts and teachings of the Greeks, they would care not even for those things that cannot be understood without Greek learning; and thus I was unwilling to write those things which neither the unlearned would be able to understand nor the learned would want to read.

Varro has refused to write philosophy because he sees no audience. Certainly, the addressee of *de Finibus* does not require a translation. Marcus Brutus had worked with the Academic Aristus and in the *Academica* Cicero compliments Brutus on being able to translate so well that the Greek sources will no longer be needed.

Therefore, in order to appeal to his learned audience that does not need his translations, Cicero indicates that he is adding something to his translations that could not have been present in the original. Perhaps surprising to nobody, the valuable item that Cicero adds to his translations is Cicero himself, a feature which the originals are sorely missing. Specifically, Cicero claims to be adding his own judgment, an intellectual evaluation of the source that draws upon his years of rhetorical and philosophical training, and his in-depth familiarity with Greek learning. He outlines what this addition will entail in the opening of *de Finibus* (1.6):

But what if we do not perform the service of translators, but protect those things which have been said by those men whom we approve of, and add to those things our judgment and arrangement of writing? What reasons do those critics have for preferring the Greek texts before those which are well-styled and not simple reproductions from the Greek sources?

For Cicero, this proposition explains how his texts will be improvements upon the originals. He will mediate the source material in order to make the information contained within more

meaningful to his audience. In order to make such an improvement, Cicero will need to summon his training in his application of judgment.

Yet such judgment, in which some parts of the source are being entirely left out, surely requires familiarity with the source material, both the written form and the larger precepts behind the writing. Cicero cues the audience that he is well-versed in the tenets of various philosophical schools throughout his philosophical translations. For instance, when debating the Epicurean Torquatus about the intended lessons of Epicurus, Cicero quotes directly from Epicurus' Kuriai Doxai, asking Torquatus to correct him if he makes any mistakes. Later, when Torquatus challenges him on a particular interpretation of Epicurus' meaning of the word *hedone,* (2.12) Cicero snaps at him and exclaims: "So if these (Epicureans) can understand what Epicurus meant, cannot I? So that you know that I catch his drift, first of all what I call *voluptas* is the same thing as what he calls hedone." As far as Cicero's familiarity with Stoicism, he translates the Panaetius' *peri tou kathekontas* into *de Officiis*, frequently explains the school's naming practices, and regularly refers to the famous Stoic Posidonius, whom Cicero first meet while he was a youth, as a close friend (*Tus.* 2.61, *Fin.* 1.6),

In the library, the books serve the same function as Cicero's insistence that he has read the works of Epicurus and his references to Posidonius as a close friend: namely, the books hint at Cicero's close familiarity with their subject material. Furthermore, the scene implies that Cato is going to recount what he has just read. Cicero has found him confined in study, and now he is prepared to answer for all of Stoicism. Rather than depicting the men strolling the walkways, Cicero, as author, keeps his interlocutors in a small room with only two chairs of furnishing, surrounded by an audience composed of authoritative Stoic documents that with their presence

lend their *auctoritas* to the discussion. Unlike a living Greek, the books are silent: they cannot speak, and so must choose a representative. That role falls to Cicero through the mediation of the Cato character, who channels all of the material that surrounds him. Cato becomes the living representation of the silent Stoic books that surround him and, in turn, Cicero's role as a translator, as one familiar enough with the source works to make the necessary value judgments about them, is enhanced by this lending of authority from the books to Cato.

The setting of the fifth book of De Finibus reinforces my thesis that Cicero uses the setting as authoritative representatives from the past. In the fifth book Cicero describes how while in attendance at a lecture of the Academic Antiochus, he arranged a stroll with his friends Marcus Piso, Titus Pomponius (Atticus), Lucius Cicero, and his brother Quintus.

We decided amongst ourselves that we should take an afternoon walk in the Academy, mostly because that place would be free from the crowd at that time...And when we arrived in the Academy, which is not without reason a famous space, it was empty as we had hoped.

The Romans, visitors to a foreign establishment, tell each other of whom the place reminds them: Piso imagines Plato in the garden close at hand; Quintus has a vision of Oedipus coming to the place; Atticus admits that he cannot forget Epicurus, even if he wanted. The conversation leads to Piso expounding on the doctrine of the Old Academy, a discourse that takes up the rest of the fifth book of *de Finibus*. At the conclusion Atticus, the Roman most immersed in Greek life of all of the interlocutors, compliments Piso for expressing in Latin what he thought was impossible, and to boot, as well as the Greeks do.

Here it is impossible to miss the point of the setting in the dialogue: while the hallowed grounds of the Academy retain their function as reminders of Greek minds, the reminders are of those who have long since departed. No longer do Plato, Oedipus, or even Epicurus walk these

Athenian halls. Indeed, presently no Greek stands in the Academy. The absence of Greeks here is more remarkable than the scene in the third and fourth books of *de Fin*: first of all, the Romans are actually in Athens, a sure location of at least some Greeks. Secondly, the reason that the Romans are in Athens is to attend a lecture of Antiochus the Academic. The Greeks, as they were in the library scene, are speechless. When the Old Academy needs its victor, it finds a Roman. The Academy, here a representative of all Greek thought - Plato, Oedipus, and Epicurus, is now the intellectual domain of the conquering Roman.

Finally, there is one more oddity in both scenes. In all of Cicero's dialogues, the conversation between Cato and Cicero in books 3 and 4 and the Academy scene of Book 5 are the only ones that are hostless. Every other dialogue, no matter the topic, has a host. In books 3 and 4, the would-be host Lucullus is mentioned and talked about, but never appears. In book 5 Antiochus is mentioned, but not as someone who would host. The hosts of book 5 are the ghosts that the Romans imagine there - Plato, Epicurus, and Oedipus or the Academy itself; in books 3 and 4, the books on Stoicism function as the hosts. Again, in both instances the hosts are voiceless, but at the same time they guide the topic of discussion as one might expect a host to do: Stoicism in books 3 and 4, and Academic philosophy in book 5.

At the opening of *de Finibus* Cicero addresses those critics who are concerned that he is misusing his time in translating philosophy. To answer these critics he shows that he is adding something that they cannot get from reading the original text itself, since his critics are capable of simply accessing that original. He claims that his translations are better than the sources through the addition of his judgment, and he uses the setting of his dialogues symbolically to show how his system of judgment is approved by the Greek authorities. In the third book of *de*

Finibus an abundance of books on Stoicism oversee Cato's explanation of Stoic doctrine; in the fifth book, Piso stands in the Academy and relates to the impressionable Lucius Cicero why the Old Academy is superior to the New.

The scene in the library of Lucullus is then a sign of intellectual appropriation. No living Greek speaks the roles of the Stoics – although Cicero's friend Posidonius seems an ideal candidate. True, by the time Cicero wrote *de Finibus* in 45 BCE, Posidonius was dead, but for that matter so was Cato. It is not death that disqualifies Posidonius from this role, but his Greekness, and the same goes for Antiochus the Acamdemic in the fifth book. For Cicero's purposes, a Roman must stand as the foremost authority of Stoic philosophy and the voice of the now-gone Greeks is relegated to books and buildings. From their position on the bookshelves and in piles around Cato, they can only lend their authority to their Roman advocate, thereby symbolizing the transfer of philosophy from the Greek intellectual domain to that of the Romans. Cicero positions himself at the forefront of this movement; his voice is a superior alternative to the reading of texts written by Greeks now long buried in the past.