INTRODUCTION

BETWEEN GREECE AND ITALY:
FLAVIAN POETRY AND ITS TRADITIONS

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(ILS 8905; McCrum and Woodhead [1961] 463a)

Emperor Caesar Domitian Augustus Germanicus, son of divine Vespasian, Pontifex Maximus, in the third year of his power as tribune ... restored the temple of Apollo with his own money.

... [ἔδοξε τὰι πό]λει τῶν Δελφῶν τὰς περὶ τοῦ ἀγῶνος τοῦ Πυθικοῦ πεμφθείσας αὐτοῖς ἐπιστ[ο]λὰς εν τὸν ἐπισαμότατον τόπον τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἐν λιθίναν στάλαν ἐνχαράξαι (McCrum and Woodhead [1961] 463b)

The city of Delphi decided to inscribe on a stone stele, in the most prestigious place of the temple, the letters sent to them concerning the Pythian games.

In 84 CE, Domitian restored the temple of Apollo, as the above Latin inscription attests, and in 90 CE, the Delphians decree that the correspondence exchanged with regard to the Pythian games, as we can glean from the Greek inscription above, be inscribed on a stele and set up at the temple. This is one of many disputes that arose during Domitian’s emperorship, which the Flavian ruler intervened to resolve: as Brian Jones suggests, the epistles themselves “attest to the high regard in which Domitian was held in the East, the result, no doubt, of his genuine philhellenism.”¹ This is just a small proof of the relations between Greek cities and the Roman center during the Flavian period, confirmed by even a cursory look at our sources and material culture.

This volume originates from an international conference held in Delphi, Greece, the omphalos of the earth, in the summer of 2012. Delphi was

¹ Jones (1992) 112.
chosen as the place of poetic and literary inspiration celebrated throughout Flavian literature, and in particular, but not limited to, Flavian epic. In Statius’ *Thebaid* 1, for instance, the Delphic Apollo features as the angry god who sends punishment to Argos for the killing of Linus and Psamathe, in the form of the monster *Poine*, the personified Punishment; in the ninth book, we hear about the death of a “prophet whose demise brings silence to Delphi” (*rapto tacuerunt augure Delphi, Theb. 9.513*). The numerous participants in the conference addressed in their papers the intimate relationship of the Flavian Greek and Roman authors with their Greek literary predecessors, but also the meaning of this interaction within the socio-cultural context of the Flavian age more broadly. Undoubtedly, the Flavian authors engage in a fruitful dialogue with the literature produced in Greece from the Homeric epics through the archaic period to the classical age and the Hellenistic period. For example, the *Achilleid* sings of Achilles’ transvestism on the Greek island of Scyros before his trip to Troy, and already in the prologue of the epyllion the author betrays an anxiety to go beyond Homer. Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica* memorializes in verse the Argonautic expedition from Greece to the unknown, barbaric, and uncivilized countries of the Black Sea. The *Thebaid* itself takes place in, and its name from, the Greek city of Thebes, as it recounts the political alliances and enmities among the famous Hellenic cities of the distant mythological past, Argos and Athens.

And yet this extensive engagement with Greece is not just thematic or geographical: the Greek literary past is conceived as the poetic influence of Homer, the Cyclic tradition, Greek lyric poetry, Greek tragedy, Hellenistic poetry and aesthetics, and Greek historiography on Latin prose and poetry. Authors accessible to us, and numerous others no longer extant, fascinate the Flavian authors, not only those who live and write in the city of Rome but also those who are between cultures, such as Statius and Silius in bilingual Naples. The Flavian epicists reach out to Virgil, Ovid, and Lucan, but they only do so through Homer and Apollonius. Martial’s epigrammatic poetry makes extensive use of the Hellenistic epigram, through Catullus and the Latin tradition.

*Flavian Poetry and its Greek Past* breaks new ground by examining the intimate literary affiliation between the Flavian poets and their Greek literary predecessors, but also the meaning of this interaction within the socio-cultural context of the Flavian age more broadly. Early and mid-twentieth century studies on Flavian literature often focused on the narrow verbal correspondences and thematic allusions between the authors of the period and the major predecessors of representative genres in Greek literature, such