

# Cato Predicted Greek Philosophy And Ethics Would Destroy Rome

Marcus Portius Cato (234-149 B.C.) was a famous Roman senator, consul, censor, general and writer. The Roman historian Livy (59 B.C.-17 A.D.) stated that Cato was “*a man of integrity and uprightness*”.<sup>1</sup> In his “Roman History”, the Roman historian Dio Cassius (approx. 150-235 A.D.) wrote the following about Cato: “*He was a man who surpassed those of his age in every virtue.*”<sup>2</sup>

The ancient Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (330-approx. 391 A.D.) compared Cato the Elder to those in Ammianus’ time who craved for bronze statues and associated fame: “*Of these few some set their hearts upon statues, believing that in this way their fame will be secured for ever, as if there were more satisfaction to be gained from senseless bronze figures than from the consciousness of a well-spent life. They have these statues covered in gold leaf, a privilege first granted to Acilius Glabrio for his skill and courage in defeating king Antiochus. But Cato the censor showed how much finer it is to despise these vanities and to set one’s steps on what the bard of Ascrea calls the steep path to true glory. When he was asked why, unlike many others, he had no statue, Cato replied: ‘I would rather have good men wondering why I have not deserved a statue than grumbling because I have been given one: that would be much worse.’*”<sup>3</sup>

In his writing “On Tranquility of Mind” (7) in his “Dialogues”, the Roman statesman Seneca (4 B.C.-65 A.D.) recorded: “*...or if you had access to the age of Cato, which produced many men worthy to be born in Cato’s time. (It also produced many who were worse than at any other time and who committed appalling crimes: for both groups were necessary for Cato to be appreciated – he needed the good to win their approval and the bad to prove his strength.)*”

Roman writer Cornelius Nepos (approx. 99-24 B.C.) wrote the following about Cato: “*...although often attacked, he not only suffered no loss of reputation, but as long as he lived the fame of his virtues increased.*”<sup>4</sup>

In his “Pro Archia Poeta”, Roman senator Cicero (106-43 B.C.) wrote that Ennius of Rudiae, the father of Roman poetry (died 169 B.C.) wrote in praise of Cato.<sup>5</sup> Cicero himself said: “*Such was the brave and venerable Marcus Cato, the most accomplished man of his day*”<sup>6</sup> and “*the great Marcus Cato, prince of all virtues.*”<sup>7</sup>

Dio Cassius records that in a speech to the Roman Senate, Cato wrote that women should be adorned “*with modesty, with love of husband, love of children...*”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Livy, “History of Rome”, Book 32, Section 27, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Dio Cassius, “Roman History”, Book 18, Section 17.

<sup>3</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, “The Later Roman Empire”, Book 14, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Cornelius Nepos, “The Book of Cornelius Nepos on the Great Generals of Foreign Nations”, Book 24, “Cato”, 2, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Cicero, “Pro Archia Poeta”, ix, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, vii, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Cicero, Pro Cnaeo Plancio”, viii, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Dio Cassius, “Roman History”, Book 18, Section 17.

## Cato predicted that Greek ideas and practices would destroy Rome

Marcus Portius Cato was very concerned that the sexually immoral practices of the Greeks and Asians would spread among the Romans. The Roman historian Livy recorded that Cato told the Roman Senate: *“The better and the happier becomes the fortune of our commonwealth day by day and the greater the empire grows – and already we have crossed into Greece and Asia, places filled with all the allurements of vice, and we are handling the treasures of kings – the more I fear that these things will capture us rather than we them.”*<sup>9</sup>

As the ancient Greek historian Plutarch (48-122 A.D.) records, Marcus Portius Cato wrote *“History of Rome”*.<sup>10</sup> Drawing on this source and possibly other historical sources, Plutarch recorded that when two Greek philosophers, Carneades the Academic and Diogenes the Stoic philosopher came as ambassadors from Athens to Rome, *“the most studious of the city’s (Rome’s) youth hastened to wait upon them and became their devoted and admiring listeners.”*<sup>11</sup> But Cato was very displeased about this event and criticised it publicly. Plutarch recorded: *“This he (Cato) did, not, as some think, out of personal hostility to Carneades, but because he was wholly averse to philosophy, and made mock of all Greek culture and training, out of patriotic zeal. **He says, for instance, that Socrates was a mighty prattler...** And seeking to prejudice his son against Greek culture, he indulges in an utterance all too rash for his years, declaring, in the tone of a prophet or a seer, that Rome would lose her empire when she had become infected with Greek letters. But time has certainly shown the emptiness of this ill-boding speech of his, for while the city was at the zenith of its empire, she made every form of Greek learning and culture her own. It was not only Greek philosophers that he hated, but he was also suspicious of Greeks who practiced medicine at Rome.”*<sup>12</sup> In Plutarch’s *“Cato the Elder”* in the Penguin edition of *“Makers of Rome – Nine Lives by Plutarch”*, Plutarch says that Cato stated that *“Socrates was a **turbulent windbag...**”*<sup>13</sup>

In his *“Memorable Doings and Sayings”*, the Roman Valerius Maximus (lived first century A.D.) wrote about Cato Major: *“Admiration of his brave and unblemished life made M. Porcius Cato venerable to the senate. So much so that when he was filibustering in the house against the tax farmers contrary to the wishes of Consul C. Caesar and in consequence was led to prison by a lictor on Caesar’s orders, the entire senate followed him without hesitation...”*

*When the same personage was watching Flora’s games, put on by Aedile C. Messius, the people blushed to ask that the actresses be stripped naked. When Favonius, a great friend of Cato’s who was sitting next to him, told him of this, he left the theatre, not wishing that his presence should interfere with the custom of the show. The people followed him as he went out with tremendous applause and then recalled the ancient mode of merriment back to the stage, confessing that it recognised more majesty in Cato alone than it claimed for its universal self. To what resources, what magisterial powers, what triumphs was this accorded? Cato’s patrimony was small, his way of life narrowed by self-restraint, his clientships not large, his house closed to canvassers, his father’s family with one celebrated ancestor, his aspect by no means ingratiating, but his virtue complete on all counts. It made everyone who may wish to indicate a blameless, excellent citizen use Cato’s name as a definition.”*<sup>14</sup>

Cato was not a prophet of God. But he had a very good understanding of the practical morally corrupting effects which Greek philosophy and culture had had on Greek society by that

---

<sup>9</sup> Livy, *“History of Rome”*, Book 34, Section 3, Point 3.

<sup>10</sup> Plutarch, *“Marcus Cato the Elder”*, 20, 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 21, 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> *“Makers of Rome – Nine Lives by Plutarch”*, Penguin, London, 1965, page 145.

<sup>14</sup> Valerius Maximus, *“Memorable Doings and Sayings”*, Book 2, 10, 7-8.

time. Cato knew that Greek philosophers had mostly advocated or at least passively accepted paedophilia or pederasty, public nudity and other immoral practices.

Plutarch claimed that Cato's prophecy was not fulfilled. Plutarch says that Rome was at its greatest when it had adopted every form of Greek learning and culture. It is true that Rome was greatest militarily, economically and scientifically when it adopted every form of Greek learning and culture. But it was at this same time that Roman society became more morally corrupt and wicked than it had ever been. This laid the foundations for the collapse of the Roman Empire in later centuries.

Moral corruption usually takes centuries to finally produce the collapse of a society.

Note also that Plutarch says that Cato "*was also suspicious of Greeks who practiced medicine at Rome.*" As shown in my next section, one of Cato's primary reasons for saying this was revealed by the Roman statesman Pliny the Elder (23-79 A.D.). Like Plutarch, Pliny would have had access to Cato's "History of Rome" also.

## **Pliny the Elder recorded Cato's concerns**

The Roman governor, admiral and writer, Pliny the Elder wrote that because of the sexually abusive attitudes of so many Greek male physicians in ancient times, Cato was more afraid of the entrance of one Greek male physician in Rome than he was of the invasion of Rome by an army led by a foreign queen: "*What adulteries have been committed under the colour hereof, even in princes' and emperors' palaces? As for example, Eudemus and Livia the princess, and wife to Drusus Caesar; Valens likewise with the queen or empress above-named, Messalina. But say that these crimes and odious offences are not to be imputed unto the art itself, but rather to be charged upon the persons, I mean the corrupt and lewd professors thereof: yet surely I am of this belief, that in regard of these enormities, Cato was as much afraid of the entrance of physic, as of some queen into the city of Rome.*"<sup>15</sup>

In the above, Pliny's expression "*What adulteries have been committed under the colour hereof...*" refers to adulteries between male doctors and female patients under the guise of being medical treatments.

---

<sup>15</sup> Pliny the Elder, "The Natural History", Book 29, Section called "Doctors".