

surpassed the capital itself in splendor and magnificence, and have left ruins which are the wonder of the modern traveller. Through these came that great overland traffic with the farthest East, which formed a perpetual succession of caravans between the Roman and the Chinese provinces.

What lay beyond the nearest deserts crossed by the caravans was a profound mystery to the Romans. Their arms had never reduced Persia to subjection; nor had a Roman general ever gazed on the plains of Scinde, or embarked his legions on the Persian Gulf. The Parthians were more formidable to the Romans than the Persians had been to the Greeks; nor did the Latin historian ever forgive Alexander for leading his armies beyond the flight of the Roman eagles.

The descendants of those Greeks who had thus outdone the Romans in the farthest East, still lived with a certain vitality in their old home. Athens was more populous than ever, and the country was prosperous. But the glory had departed, and the ancient genius had vanished forever. It would be a great mistake, however, to suppose that the Greeks had sunk to a level with the other races under the iron dominion of Rome; on the contrary, they towered above them all.

The position of the Greeks at this time is partly instructive and partly amusing. They were at once the scholars, the wits, and the sharpeners of the day. Their literature was studied everywhere; their arts were everywhere admired. No one who pretended to be anybody was ignorant of their language. It was the universal tongue, and had penetrated into all countries. Everything that required art, skill, ingenuity, all the finer employments of every kind, had everywhere fallen to the lot of the Greeks. They were the best painters, sculptors, architects, and musicians. The master-pieces of art now preserved at Rome, if they bear any names at all, have those of Greek artists. Wealthy Romans sent their sons to Athens to acquire a liberal education, or hired Greek