

Traditional scholarship on the Second Sophistic has often viewed Greek literature of the Second Sophistic period through the prism of “Greek culture vs. Roman power” (Bowersock 1969, Swain 1996). According to this reading, Greek intellectuals maintained a sense of cultural identity based on the Greek language and a canon of classical (mostly Athenian) texts and this identity based on classical literature stood in contradistinction to the Roman political and military power structure. In recent years, however, there has been a growing awareness that *paideia* could also be claimed by Romans to mark Rome’s entrance into the civilized world and by non-Greeks (such as Lucian) to define themselves as culturally Greek (Whitmarsh 2001 and 2007). In other words, Greek literary culture and the Hellenism which it could help create were not stable categories in the first and second centuries CE. This paper further destabilizes the “Greek culture / Roman power” dichotomy by arguing that for at least two Greek authors, Plutarch and Ailios Aristeides, Hellenism could be based not only on classical Greek literature and culture, but on the memory of classical Greek martial valor.

This paper will consist of an analysis of two texts, Ailios Aristeides’ *Panathenaic Oration* and Plutarch’s *Whether the Athenians Were More Famous in War or in Wisdom*. Ailios Aristeides composed and delivered his *Panathenaic Oration* around 155 CE. This speech is meant to praise the deeds of the Athenians, whose city was viewed in the Second Sophistic period as the home of Greek literary culture and *paideia*. Yet Aristeides devotes more than half of the oration to extolling Athens’ military glory, from the legendary wars against the Amazons to the fourth-century BCE wars against Philip of Macedon. In contrast, he spends a mere nine paragraphs (out of 404) praising the Attic language and Athenian literature. Similarly, Plutarch forcefully argues in his treatise that classical Athenian generals such as Themistokles and Miltiades are more noteworthy than any of the city’s poets, orators, or philosophers. Through an examination of these two works and several specific examples each author uses to support his argument, we can see that in the second century CE there was a vibrant strain of Hellenism which valued Athens’ military achievements as much as, if not more than, her literary achievements.

This notion of constructing a Hellenism based on past military glory undercuts the view of much traditional scholarship on the Second Sophistic and further strengthens the idea that Hellenism was a malleable category in this period, able to be appropriated and redefined in multiple ways. Indeed, this paper will argue that authors like Plutarch and Ailios Aristeides used the memory of Athens’ classical military dominance to construct their versions of Hellenism precisely because Romans could not appropriate that memory in the same way they could appropriate the language and literature of classical Athens.