The Classical Period – Cultural Developments

Video Transcript

The Classical period of Western civilization was a period of many important developments in literature, the arts, and architecture.

In the late 8th or early 7th century BCE, rich oral traditions were collected into written form, giving us seminal works such as Homer’s epics, the Iliad and Odyssey.

Greek theatre began in Athens in the 6th century BCE with the performance of tragic plays at religious festivals. These plays introduced conventions such as dialog, normalized plot structures, and dramatic irony. Greek theater, both tragedies and comedies, spread around the Mediterranean and influenced Hellenistic and Roman theatre. They also formed the foundation upon which all modern theatre is based.

Literary forms continued to develop in Roman civilization with Catullus’ lyric poetry, Virgil’s epic poetry, and Horace’s odes. Other important works of Roman literature included Juvenal’s satires and early examples of prose fiction — the Satyricon by Gaius Petronius and The Golden Ass (or Metamorphoses) by Lucius Apuleius.

Greek sculpture from 800 to 300 BCE took inspiration from Egyptian and Near Eastern monumental art and, over the centuries, evolved into a uniquely Greek vision of the art form. Greek artists found new ways to capture the human form, focusing on proportion, poise, and the idealized perfection of the human body. Their figures in stone and bronze have become some of the most recognizable pieces of art ever produced by any civilization.

The Classical period was also the time in which Greek and Roman architects erected impressive structures that became a dominant influence in the Western world, impacting the Renaissance to the present day. The Romans adopted the Classical focus on proportion, perspective, and harmony in Greek buildings and added new ideas, materials, and technologies (such as concrete, the arch, and
the dome). The result was a new architectural style and the construction of strong, well-engineered buildings. Many of which can still be seen today.

As you look around the city you live in, can you see the influence of Greco-Roman culture?

About this transcript:

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