Cultural Influences of Ancient Greece

Video Transcript

Ancient Greece was the source of many important developments in literature, the arts, and architecture in Western civilization.

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 the 6th century BCE in Athens with the performance of tragedy 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 most modern theatre in the Western world is based.

Ancient Greek culture was also known for its pottery and sculpture. Its potters introduced a black-figure technique in the 7th century BCE, which featured red and white details and incising for outlines and details. In the 6th century BCE, potters reversed this tradition with the red-figure technique with black pots and figures painted in red.

Early Greek sculpture took inspiration from Egyptian and Near Eastern monumental art, but evolved over the centuries into a uniquely Greek vision of the art form. Greek artists found new ways of capturing 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.

Architecture developed in ancient Greece with the development of city-states. Public buildings were a source of tremendous pride for Greek citizens. In ancient Athens, Pericles ordered the construction of several major temples on the acropolis. Among these was a temple, the Parthenon (begun in 447 BCE and completed in 432 BCE), which many consider the finest example of Greek architecture.
The rise of the city-states also led to the development of formal education for citizens in ancient Greece. An emphasis of citizen-led government required that participating citizens, generally males descended from parents who were citizens, be versed in logic, reasoning, science, and rhetoric. In Sparta, where the highest priority was placed on military dominance, the educational system was structured to support military and physical preparation.

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

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- Author and curator: Rob Reynolds PhD
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