

Impact of greek and roman civilization



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INTRODUCTION

There is no ancient history without the mention of Greek and Roman civilizations. Ancient civilization was part of the history that formed the basis of the world we know today. Many people would ask why Greek and Roman civilizations became so popular in the world. In Western culture and identity, Greeks occupy a very prominent place in conception. The Greeks have made generations of influential writers and scholars especially due to their Hellenic culture. Roman civilization on the other hand was founded in 800BC on an Italian peninsular (Spielvogel, 2008). Roman civilization, which is a mighty empire, started as a monarchy and then shifted to a republic before becoming an empire. Much of ancient Rome culture got inspiration from ancient Greece (Mahaffy, 2009).

Collins Randal in the book “ The sociology of philosophies: a global theory of intellectual change” points out that “ culture begets itself”. He points out that culture is autonomous and that culture explains its changes, terms and forms (pg 9). Collins points out that, culture beliefs such as religion, ethnic consciousness and political ideologies are not correlated with social variables such as class. Collins says that intellectual activity is basis of intellectual communities. The various aspects that make up intellectual activities include religion, social knowledge and intellectual networks.

RELIGION IN GREEK AND ROMAN CIVILIZATION

Greeks and Roman are intellectual communities that believed in religion. Greeks believed that religion was important because it made their lives better. They believed in many gods and goddesses (polytheistic). They

believed that gods would take care of them both when they were living and when they died. The Greeks believed that their gods and goddesses were very powerful that they controlled everything from the winner of a race to waves in the ocean (Mahaffy, 2009). Each god or goddess had one or two specific roles they performed and controlled in life. The Greeks built beautiful temples for their gods where they used to go pray, worship and offer sacrifices in form of animals. The Greeks prepared festivals in honor of the gods whereby they sacrificed animals as gifts to their gods. The Greeks made large festivals that included a feast with music, plays and dancing after which they paraded and made sacrifices. An example of a Greek goddess is Athena (goddess of wisdom and war). A temple known as Parthenon, built for the goddess stands to date.

The Greeks believed that Mount Olympus was where all their gods and goddesses lived. Examples of some of the gods the Greeks worshipped and their specific roles include Zeus-supreme leader of the Gods, Hermes-messenger of the gods and Poseidon- god of the sea. Collins stated that one of the intellectual activities relating to religion is giving intellectual rituals (pg 28). Greeks showed their solidarity through religious ritual of animal sacrifices and festivities.

The Romans later worshipped the same gods as Greeks but under different names (Guaitoli, 2006). The Greeks could not worship at the temple only but there were holy sites referred to as “ oracles”. The Greeks believed their gods used signs in nature to answer their questions. They used their priests to ask their question and listen to the answers through signs.

Romans just like Greeks believed in religion and attached great importance to it. Just like the Greeks, they were polytheistic, they believed that their gods were responsible for their creation and controlled their lives. Romans classified religion in to state religion and household religion (Spielvogel, 2008). Household religion involved worshipping the gods that protected the family and house. Roman houses contained a sacred place regarded as altar where every family prayed to the gods each morning. Just like the Greeks, The Romans believed in gods and goddess that they believed controlled everything in life from killing for food to falling in love.

Just like the Greeks, Romans honored their gods and goddesses by building grand temples. They also offered animal sacrifices to the gods and gave them gifts that they thought would please them. They believed that if the gods were happy with them, they would in return receive good luck but if they were angry with them, something would go wrong.

Political institutions in Greek and Roman Civilization

City-states divided Ancient Greece with Athens as the largest city-state (Liberati& Bourbon2002). City-states were many small areas sub-dividing the state. The mountainous ecology of Ancient Greece separated the city-states making it very difficult to travel from one city-state to another. Everyone believed that their city-state was better than the other was although they all worshipped the same gods and had similar traditions. Initially a few wealthy men ruled the city-states before a government system was introduced.

Each city-state had its own government who ruled through democracy. The democratic government allowed people to rule and to vote for their leaders.

Athens subdivided their people into three classes; the upper class that consisted of male citizens born in Athens, middle class consisted of male citizens not born in Athens while the lower class consisted of slaves. Voting in ancient Greece took place in public assemblies and only males born in Athens voted. The upper class group discussed the laws that benefited ancient Greece but not the middle class or lower class.

Ancient Rome was an empire that had emperors as the leaders. Just like Greece, a government headed by an emperor ruled Rome. The power of the government in Rome was balanced between three branches; the executive, the legislative and the judicial (Guaitoli, 2006). The executive branch consisted of two leaders (consuls), elected by the upper class to serve for one year. Their role was to order Roman army during wars and supervise the senate. Mayors, tax collectors, city police among other superior persons in cities formed part of executive branch.

The senate consisting 300 male citizens who owned the land formed the legislative branch. The men appointed by the consuls controlled the consuls by telling them how much to spend and on what activities. The judicial branch consisted of six judges that decided on the punishments the criminals would receive. The judges' elections occurred after every two years (Guaitoli, 2006). In Rome only adults had permission to vote and just like the Greek system, males who owned the land could only do amendment or criticize law.

Role of Men and women in Greek and Roman Civilization

Men, women and children had different roles and responsibilities in Greek and Roman culture. In Greek culture, men wore special clothes known as ‘chitons’. Chitons showed the man status in the society specifically through the decoration. The men mostly worked as farmers or businesspersons during the day and demanded great respect while at home. Men were the ones in charge of the house and the family. Women and children in Greek culture did not eat in the same room as men. The slaves fed and entertained men during dinner as they lay on couches.

Women on the other hand were not given much responsibility, they were not allowed to go to Olympics, visit the city or even eat or sleep in the same room as men. Their work was to run the household, have children and manage the slaves if they were wealthy and if not work the fields.

In the Roman culture, men wore clothes known as ‘togas’. The patterns and color of a man’s ‘togas’ showed what his status was in the society. Men in Roman culture were the masters of the family and the house. They worked during the day and socialize with other men in the afternoon and evenings. Men in Roman culture had different roles depending on whether you were rich or poor. The man main role was to provide for his family. Women on the other hand took care of the household and children. Women in Roman culture were not too restricted as some could hold jobs such as teaching.

Comparing Religion and Political Institutions in Greece and Rome

Greeks and Romans portrayed many similarities in their religion beliefs and rituals. Both cultures were polytheistic, believing in many gods and goddesses. Both cultures also believed that the gods and goddesses controlled everything in life from creation, their lives and everything that goes on. Greeks and Romans believed their gods were very powerful and that they gods took care of them both when they were living and when they died. Both Greeks and Romans believed in intellectual activity of religious rituals. Both cultures honored their gods and goddesses by offering animal sacrifices. Both Greeks and Romans built beautiful temples where they used to pray and offer sacrifices to their gods and goddesses. Both cultures believed that the gods answered their prayers through nature's signs. Roman believed that gods would show a sign if they were happy and they were unhappy something bad would happen. Both cultures had many gods and goddesses with each god or goddess having a specific role to play or a specific place to control.

Despite having so much similarity in the religion, Greeks and Romans also have some differences in their religious beliefs. Although both cultures believed in gods and goddesses, they had named them differently. Greeks believed that their gods and goddesses live on Mount Olives (Sansone, 2004) whereas Romans did not have a specific place where all their gods and goddesses lived. Greeks religion was not classified while Roman classified their religion as either state region or household religion. Greeks had set-up holy sites known as ' oracles' where they used to pray in, while Roman has

set places in their houses known as ‘ altars’ where they used to pray at as a family.

Greeks and Roman civilizations were similar in the way their political institutions were made. They both believed in a government system of ruling. Both Greeks and Romans voted for their leader who was the head of the government. Both cultures regarded the upper class males’ citizens by birth as the only significant people in law making and amendment. In both cultures, women were not allowed to vote and only adults who had attained the legal age (18 years) could vote.

The differences in political institutions included issues such as the Greeks believed in democracy while the Romans it depended on the political leaders chosen. The Roman government consisted of three branches, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary while the Greek government all people ruled. Greece had subdivision called city-states with each city-state having its own government while Rome there was only one government with three branches that rules the land.

CONCLUSION

Roman and Greek civilization form a part of ancient history of the world. They both greatly influenced the Western culture as some of the beliefs and culture followed today got inspiration from them. When we compare the two cultures to the Collins theories of intellectual activity, it is evident that the two cultures were rich in culture intelligence. They had deep respect in religion and rituals that brought them together socially (Collins, 2000 pg 28). The social problems the two cultures exhibit is division in to classes only

males who are citizens by birth are allowed to vote. Women are not mentioned anywhere in any political decisions showing gender biasness. Just as most historians suggest, Greek culture highly influenced Roman culture. In terms of religion and political institutions, the two cultures can be classified as ‘ socially intelligent’ despite of social division and gender inequality.