

Greek cultural influences

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The culture of ancient Greece reflects the importance of the individual in society in many different ways. The Greeks used art, philosophy, and even their system of government to convey their beliefs in the importance of one single man in a society. Greek artists showed value for the individual. All people were portrayed in Greek art, from the sagging old woman to the ideal athlete. Although early Greek art focused on the human ideal, their later art shows that the Greeks appreciated all forms, and found the human body in general to be a beautiful thing.

Even the gods in Greek art showed how highly the Greeks valued humanity. The gods were depicted as humans, and were made to human scale; no huge overpowering deity was ever portrayed in their art. The Greeks appreciated themselves in their art as much as they appreciated the gods. Even on the most famous temple of all time, the Parthenon, humans were portrayed. The frieze that adorned the upper face of the Parthenon depicted the human procession in honour of the god Athena. It was not just sculptures and architecture that showed Greek pride in the individual.

Greek drama showed a huge appreciation for humans in all their glory. The Greeks valued human emotions; their plays covered a wide array of subjects, all the way from the tragedies of war to the comedic side of a society in the perils of war. These subjects made it possible to reveal the Greek appreciation for real life situations, showing the value they placed on human actions, but most of all on human nature. Like the various forms of Greek art, the government of ancient Greece appreciated the individual by creating an environment in which individuals were free to express themselves.

Tyrants like Pisistratus and Cleisthenes came to power to try and make the polis a better place for the individual. These tyrants reformed the state in many ways; they helped make it possible for the rich and poor to have equal rights, and they created the conditions for the construction of the splendid monumental buildings ancient Greece is remembered for today. Although not all tyrants were good, they all had one thing in common: they were all citizens of Greece, and ruled to improve the lifestyle of the citizens of Greece.

After the end of tyranny, Greece had a democracy; a government ruled by the people for the people. This democracy was made up of a number of committees who did everything from working the laws all the way to handling military affairs. Any man could become a member of these committees if they were at least eighteen years of age. Individuals were elected by the people for exactly one year. This system also made it so that even the poor citizens were not powerless, and it enabled Greek legislation to be governed by new people with new ideas every term.

Clearly, the Greeks took advantage of the abilities of its citizens. Along with creating a fair society for its citizens to live in, the Greeks also promoted the forward thinking and ideas of its people. The philosophies of such Greeks as Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates helped shape Greek society in many ways. Plato valued the ability of all people, and believed that the ideal polis would be one in which every citizen would do his part according to his or her abilities, and there would be no distinguishing marks between the rich and the poor.

Socrates also valued people in that he believed human beings and their environment are the essential subject of philosophical inquiry, meaning that humans and their actions were extremely complex and hard to understand, so they were worth studying. He also believed that the conscience of an individual provided better morals than even the laws of the government; he valued other people's thoughts and what they had to say. The last of the three major Greek philosophers, Aristotle, believed that god had no purpose, and therefore people were to depend upon themselves.

All of these philosophers are similar in that they all appreciated the thoughts and ideas of every individual, and their own ideas helped make it possible for all people of ancient Greece to appreciate what they had to say. The various characteristics of Greek society show pride in the individual in a number of different ways. The Greeks created an environment in which human actions, emotions, and imaginations were appreciated and encouraged. Humans were the subjects of statues, dramatic performances, and even philosophical debate. The Greeks were appreciated by themselves as well as the polis.