

PART II THE GRECO-ROMAN AND JUDEO-CHRISTIAN ROOTS

Chapter 4 Classical Greece: Politics, Art, Drama

1. In the seventh century B.C., a rising merchant class made its presence felt.
2. This rising merchant class revolted against the nobility in several city-states and set up a government under a *tyrant*.
3. Other governments soon replaced the *tyrannies*.
4. The form of government that replaced the city-state in Athens was *democracy*, “rule by the people.”

I. Politics and Life in Ancient Athens

1. Greek culture was concentrated in the *polis* (city-state), which included the surrounding countryside.
2. Public buildings were lavish compared to private homes, illustrating the importance of the polis in the hearts and minds of the people.
3. Citizenship was a privilege acquired at birth.
4. Despite its democratic form of government, Athens, like all Greek city-states, condoned slavery.

A. Role of Women

1. Women had few legal rights but their role as family caregiver was valued.
2. Greek drama includes strong intelligent female characters among the upper classes.
3. Placing a woman in a formal leadership role as head of a city-state would have been unthinkable during this time.

B. Peloponnesian War

1. The great age of Athens fell between the end of the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars (480–404 B.C.).
2. Athens won the first and lost the second of these wars.
3. The Peloponnesian War pitted Athens against a rival Greek city-state, Sparta.
4. A history of the war was written by Thucydides.

II. The Classical Period: Architecture and Sculpture

A. The Greek Temple

1. The most distinctive elements of Greek temples were the shape and scale of the columns combined with other features.
2. The two most important combinations or orders are the Doric and Ionic; both were used in the fifth century B.C.

B. The Parthenon

1. The Parthenon (477–438 B.C.) was erected on the Acropolis after a Greek triumph in the Persian War.
2. The Parthenon is a temple to Athena.
3. The Parthenon was built and designed by Kallikrates and Ictinus.
4. It was painted and polished and filled with statues, friezes, and other works.

5. A gold and ivory cult statue was placed at the far end from the door.

C. Early Classical Sculpture

1. The *Kritios Boy*, made in about 480 B.C., was found at the Acropolis.
2. The depiction is both idealized and natural, suggesting balanced movement.

D. Classical Sculpture

1. While not a freestanding work, Greek classical sculpture also achieved expressive perfection in the frieze of the Panathenaic procession.
2. Some of the most beautiful forms of Greek sculpture in existence are represented by the broken remains of the Parthenon's pedimental sculptures.
3. The *Dionysus*, as well as the *Three Goddesses* from the Parthenon's east pediment, are some of the better preserved remains of these classical forms.

E. Classical Architecture and Sculpture Compared

1. A bronze sculpture called *The Spearbearer* by Polykleitos in many ways epitomizes the classical ideal.
2. Similarly, Greek architecture applied principals of balance and proportion associated with classical sculpture.

F. Other Classical Greek Buildings

1. The temple form was a complete entity with its own formalized rules; yet within those rules, there was room for elaborate variation.
2. The Propylaea is a monumental gateway that is part of the Acropolis complex of structure.
3. The Erechtheum is another temple structure built at the Acropolis.
4. Greek architecture was enhanced by all of the other arts: music, painting, music, dance, and drama.
5. Only vase paintings survive from the classical Greek period.

III. From Classical to Hellenistic Sculpture

1. The rich and complex sculptures of the third and second centuries B.C. are called *Hellenistic*.
2. Hellenistic works use the language of the classical period combined with the local traditions, settings, and practices of a wide variety of metropolitan centers throughout the Mediterranean.
3. The Cnidian Aphrodite, made in the fourth century B.C., was among the first nude female sculptures.
4. The ideal female form had evolved at the same time as that of the ideal male form.
5. Another noteworthy example of later Hellenistic Greek art is the great Alter of Zeus at Pergamon in Asia Minor.
6. Though once thought to represent a decline or decadent period of Greek art, Hellenistic art is now appreciated for its own sake.

IV. Classical Greek Drama

1. Greek drama along with other arts flourished in the fifth century B.C.
2. Drama as we know it was a creation of the Greeks.
3. Theatergoing was a festive but important occasion supported by the state.

A. The Development of Tragedy

1. Tragedy preceded comedy and developed sometime before the classical age.
2. Thespis, the first Greek dramatist, created drama based on stories from Homer.
3. The plays of Thespis probably had one actor supported by a chorus.
4. The actor or hero from Homer would tell of his sorrow.

B. The Role of Music and Dance in the Performance of Tragedy

1. From the beginning, music and dance were important aspects of tragic performance.
2. The choruses were likely not only singers but dancers too.
3. Individual actors (always men) also probably danced.
4. Musical accompaniment was provided by an instrument called the *aulos*, a double-reeded wind instrument.
5. The Greeks had a strong faith in music as a tool of character development.
6. Little remains of Greek music; the total spectacle of Athenian drama is based to a certain extent on conjecture and speculation.

C. The Form of Tragedy and the Principal Greek Tragedians

1. In the classical period, tragedy had a consistent form: the prologue, the parodos, the episode, and the exodus.
2. In between the episodes the chorus would sing a three-part ode called a *stasimon*.
3. The principal theme of these tragedies was the suffering of the hero and the greatness of the hero in the face of suffering.
4. Aeschylus (525–456 B.C.), the first tragedian whose plays have survived, added a second actor.
5. Sophocles (496–406 B.C.), author of *Oedipus Rex*, was a contemporary of Aeschylus and added a third actor.
6. Euripides (480–406 B.C.) was an innovator whose plays were very popular, characterized by individual psychology and real-life situations.

D. Oedipus: Legend and Tragedy

1. Sophocles and *Oedipus Rex* epitomizes the spirit of Greek Tragedy in modern times.
2. The works of Sophocles, as well as other Greek tragedies, were based on plot lines familiar to the audience and *Oedipus Rex* was no exception.
3. *Oedipus Rex* follows a western tradition begun with Homer of starting the play in the middle of the story.
4. *Oedipus Rex* is classical in the sense that the story is stripped down to its essence for a clear and balanced presentation.

E. Humanism and Sophoclean Tragedy

1. During Athens' classical age, new developments in science and philosophy challenged old beliefs, particularly in the religious sphere.

2. Confidence in human power and abilities reached its apex.
3. It was at this time that the philosopher Protagoras declared that “man is the measure of all things.”
4. Classical Greek tragedy affirms the dignity and greatness of human beings within the limitations of their individual destinies.

F. *The Women of Troy*

1. Euripides’ play, *The Women of Troy*, was criticized for being plotless and static.
2. *The Women of Troy* explores the consequences and fallout of war.
3. In the tradition of Greek tragedy, it relies on an ancient myth, in this case the Trojan War.
4. The play expresses an antiwar reaction and sentiment to actual military aggression perpetrated by the Athenians at the time the play was written.

V. Greek Comedy

1. The word comedy comes from *komos*, which means revel.
2. Comedy, as an art form, grew out of traditional Greek revels that were ancient fertility rites.
3. Little is known about comedy as a dramatic form but it followed that of tragedy.
4. Aristophanes (485–385 B.C.) is the only classical Greek author whose works survive.
5. The situations in these Greek comedies are often fantastic and frankly sexual.
6. Roman comedies were similar to comedies of manners, which are familiar to modern audiences through modern theater, films, and television.