Four Periods of Ancient Greek Civilization

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Question no. 01: What are the names and dates of the four historical periods of ancient Greek (Hellenic) civilization? What are the major events, people, and ideas that pertain to each?

Ancient Greek civilization flourished in the 8th century BCE. With the conquests of Alexander the Great, the borders of the Great Hellenic (Greek) civilization attained significant maritime power as they expanded throughout the Mediterranean in their widest reach. During that era, the ideas of oligarchies and polis or city-states emerged instead of kingdoms as the region suffered enforced migration caused by the mass famine. As a result of the social unrest and famine, Greek commoners left Greece to colonize other major parts of Asia and Italy, which disrupted the development of ancient Greek art. Hellenic civilization witnessed an upsurge again in the development of Greek architecture and other forms of art when trade links were re-established between Egypt, Turkey, and Greece. Greek civilization is further subdivided into four historical periods, namely the geometric period, the archaic period, the Classical period, and the Hellenistic period, with their own distinctive cultural characteristics. During the Geometric era from 750 to 1150 BCE, the people of Greece witnessed the abandonment of major old settlements as they lived in small pastoral settings, and they moved constantly according to their lifestyle needs. This era of Greek civilization is marked as the Dark Ages, as life was unbearably harsh for Greece and therefore corresponded to the undeveloped, rudimentary, and limited forms of art and architecture. However, the deconstruction of the social and economic structures of Mycenaeans was improved with the new socio-political hierarchy and hereditary structures, and old hierarchical structures were forgotten. This allowed the rise of democracy, which was a major benefit of this period in Athens in the 5th century BCE.

The next epoch, from 480 to 750 BCE, evolved in Hellenic civilization, which is described as Archaic, in which complex social hierarchies were organized into different classes irrespective of their economic status. The Greek population was organized in city-states or polis, composed of foreign residents, citizens, and slaves, with the assurance of equality of the citizens. This epoch was a period of gradual experimentation as the major city-states of Greece spread throughout the Middle East, coastal towns in the Aegean, Southern Italy and France, the Black Sea, the Ionian, and Spain. In terms of development, the development of pottery in geometric style was undoubtedly the mark of the archaic epoch. The style includes elaborated patterns of zigzags and triangles on large vessels that later led

to the Oriental style mastered by Corinth ceramicists under Eastern influence. The flurry of the expansion of the Greek Archaic epoch was followed by the Greek Classical era known as the “Period of Maturity” from 323 to 480 BCE, in which Sparta and Athens dominated the Hellenic civilization with their military achievements and rich cultural movements (Martin, 1981). Early in Classical Greece, Sparta, led by the oligarchic government, and Athens, led by the democratic government, coexisted peacefully with their cultural and political dispositions. The Hellenistic period from 27 to 323 BCE marks the creation of “Greek-style art,” which focused on the Real rather than Ideal form of art mainly about the emotional world of heroes and gods alike. It opened with the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, emerged as an epoch of substantial maturity, and also witnessed the rise and fall of Greece in the battle of Actium that defines the decline of Ancient Greece. The entire Hellenic culture was subjected to Rome after the battle of Actium, and it did not gain its independent self-determination and revolutionary world until the 19th century C. CE (Martin, 1981).

Question no. 02: What is the main topic of Homer’s great epic poem, The Iliad? Describe the main character and the personal journey he undertakes throughout the narrative. How do these qualities make him a uniquely Greek epic hero? Cite and explain passages from the required reading to support your answer.

Homer’s great epic *The Iliad* takes Achilles’ journey through his burning rage as its primary focus to present the ideas of alienation and then reconciliation through the “wrath” of Achilles—the main character in the poem. It is a journey of Achilles through his anger and the spectacle of destruction, his continuous transformative process, and how the world changes around him during his transformational journey over the epic. Achilles is a courageous, honoured, proud, and vengeful hero of Homer whose wrath is provoked as a result of discord by his sense of honour, which leads him to alienate himself from the Greeks and subsequently from human society. Book 1 opens with the words invoking the muse to depict Achilles’ anger: “Sing, Goddess, Achilles’ rage, black and murderous” (Stanley, 1997). Later, Achilles feels assuagement, which leads him to reconciliation, and he disintegrates himself as a great warrior for the larger community of the entire world. His awakening from the anger as a fiery beast of war transforms him into a compassionate human being by reconciling the disturbing factors in his life that produced strife and evil in his actions. Achilles has all the qualities of a classical Greek epic hero, as he is brave, courageous, noble, and admired by all the people of Greece for his achievements. Initially, Achilles’ wrath seems a rightful response; however, as the story progresses, the righteous anger degenerates into escalation and resentment, reflecting uncontrollable “rage” as one of the significant human qualities. Therefore, the idea of self-control and

reasoning in a hero's life rather than emotions is an overriding notion in Homer's Iliad. In book 22, Achilles talks about Patroclus while Hector is dying: "Hector, you deemed that you should come off scatheless when you were spoiling Patroclus" and calls him a fool while dooming him with the words "dogs and vultures shall work their will upon you" (Stanley, 1997). This shows Achilles' wrath: when he finds out Hector has killed Patroclus, he immediately goes to nail him down, which depicts how he takes action to avenge Patroclus and reflects his qualities as an epic hero who makes decisions to protect his people on an immediate basis. He embodies the honour that is highly regarded in Greek civilization by choosing early death on the battlefield rather than living anonymously and by avenging Patroclus' murder. He also embodies the characteristics of the ideal Greek hero as he regards an individual's power and honour more than anything as a warrior. "I was born to die young", he says while crying in front of his immortal mother, "You bore me doomed to live but for a little season" (Stanley, 1997). Although Achilles meets his end in the Trojan War, he earns the title of being a heroic legend as his mother foresees his glory before he enters the stakes of the war.

Question no. 03: What are some of the differences between Greek (Classical) art and Hellenistic art? What are some of the factors that bring about these changes? Cite and explain an example from each period of both sculpture and architecture to illustrate your point.

The Hellenistic epoch, mainly in the development of art, opens after the death of Alexander in 323 BCE and is followed by the evolved notions of realism and modernity of the Classical Greek period. On the other hand, the Classic Greek art style began after the end of the archaic period in the 5th century with the notion of the meticulous study of the anatomy of the human forms. The main difference that marks the Hellenistic art style as distinct from the Classical style is the transition of sculpting and the realistic vs. idealistic figures. The Classical period focuses on sculptures as perfect, static, and realistic figures, whereas the Hellenistic period sees idealism and emotions as the main focus of the movement of figures. The body movements of the Hellenistic art style depict a sculpture through emotions such as agony, anger, sadness, happiness, wrath, etc., through portraying contraction and expansion of muscles, twisted torsos, and fine details from head to toe in order to reflect the freedom of expression. Contrary to the Hellenistic style, the Classical art style is known for balance, proportion, and harmony in the sculptures, with no precise movements at all as the figures remain rigid. Moreover, the remarkable scientific and cultural achievements reflected in Philosophy, Literature, and Classical Art produced masterpieces such as the dramas of Euripides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and the Comedies of Aristophanes were among them which dominated thought for thousands of years. The epoch was the landmark of Greek artistic domination as man became the "measure of all things"

(Martin, 1981).

To illustrate the Classical art style, I have chosen the sculpted art form of the. *Aphrodite of Knidos,* which is one of the best examples of. a static nude sculpture of an ancient Greek goddess with no motion at all. The art form sculpted is not of any common person but is of an important personality that confirms one of the characteristics of the Classical art style. Moreover, the goddess' emotionless nude sculpture displays the alternative notion to male heroic nudity with no emotions on the face and in the eyes, which was the hallmark of Classic Greek art (Hubert, 1997). On the other hand, to illustrate the Hellenistic art style, I have chosen. *Venus de Milo,* who is also an ancient Greek goddess sculpted of marble with male heroic nudity posed in a classic style S-curve. This posture, with the semi-nude torso having a draped piece of cloth around the lower part of her body, details the Hellenistic body of art with a S-curve (Arenas, 2002). Her missing arms make it a mysterious form of Hellenistic art and have made this sculpture one of the most debated ancient Greek statues in the world.

Works Cited

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