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7. Athens: Summary

Robert L. Bloom
Gettysburg College

Basil L. Crapster
Gettysburg College

Harold A. Dunkelberger
Gettysburg College

See next page for additional authors

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7. Athens: Summary

Abstract

The Golden Age of Greece was confined to the relatively short period of two centuries. After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B. C., the vast empire he had built fell apart, and his generals tried to pick up the pieces. By that time the Greek polis no longer possessed the vitality that was reflected in the funeral oration of Pericles. Something like cultural lethargy began to settle upon the descendants of Herodotus and Socrates. The center of learning switched from Athens to Alexandria, in Egypt. [excerpt]

Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Greek history, Greek civilization, Greek philosophers, city-state, Sparta, Athens, Ancient Greece, Golden Age, western civilization

Disciplines

Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity | Ancient Philosophy | Classics | Cultural History | History

Comments

This is a part of [Section I: Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem: Background of Western Civilization](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

Authors

Robert L. Bloom, Basil L. Crapster, Harold A. Dunkelberger, Charles H. Glatfelter, Richard T. Mara, Norman E. Richardson, and W. Richard Schubart

7. Summary

The Golden Age of Greece was confined to the relatively short period of two centuries. After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B. C., the vast empire he had built fell apart, and his generals tried to pick up the pieces. By that time the Greek polis no longer possessed the vitality that was reflected in the funeral oration of Pericles. Something like cultural lethargy began to settle upon the descendants of Herodotus and Socrates. The center of learning switched from Athens to Alexandria, in Egypt. A century and a half later, the rising power of Rome swept Greece into another empire, which proved to be more lasting than that of Alexander. Many Romans became absorbed with things Greek. Some studied the philosophers' writings and translated them into Latin. Greek ideas were incorporated into Roman thought. These ideas were so well known, and also so significant, that the early leaders of the Christian Church could not escape being influenced by them. For centuries the philosophy of Plato, especially as adapted by Augustine, was the most important non-Christian element in Christian theology. In fact, so persistent has been his impact on Western philosophy that scholars generally accept the evaluation of the philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), to the effect that Western philosophy is "a series of footnotes to Plato." In the thirteenth century, a Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225 - 1274) combined elements of his own Christian faith into a synthesis which included much of the reasoning of Aristotle. This synthesis represents the present theological doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. In the field of science, the works of Aristotle dealing with physics, astronomy, and psychology became available to Western Europe only in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. For three or four centuries, they constituted the most authoritative body of knowledge available in these subjects. Aristotle was hailed as "the master of those who know."

* Ibid., pp. 280-284.

As we have seen, new outlooks and methods later rendered obsolete much of what he wrote. [Nevertheless, even today he who would philosophize must come to terms with Plato and Aristotle. One who is attracted to empirical evidence and scientific definition can be expected to find Aristotle more appealing. One who is attracted to a further dimension than empirical knowledge and who looks for the aesthetic and the religious probably will find Plato more to his taste. The influence of the Greeks, though in some areas reduced to a trickle, is still present in Western Civilization]

Greek civilization taken West.

Conquered by Rome - to Rome & then the Western world.

Also to the east, Muslims, carried it to Africa, Spain, etc. from Byzantine.