

Roman Influence on Western Civilization

Western civilization is what is presently called modern or contemporary society that mainly comprises Western Europe and North America. It is believed that civilization came in through the influence of ancient cultures the two main ones being Greek and Roman. The influence by Greece was mainly by their golden age and Rome with its great Empire and Republic. Ancient Rome formed the law code much like the one used in the present time in many countries. The belief that a person is innocent until proven guilty originated from the Roman laws. Rome had senates just like the ones used today, with both upper and lower class. Ancient Rome was a civilization that expanded out of a small agricultural community. The empire was founded on the Italian peninsula in the 9th century B.C.

This means that civilization has been in place for centuries. During its existence, it moved from a kingdom to an Oligarchic Republic then to an expanding Autocratic Empire. Roman civilization grew to dominate Southwestern Europe, Southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean area through capture and assimilation. The Roman Empire spanned a wide spread of territory and included a number of cultures. The Roman Empire is categorized into classical era, comprising the joining civilizations of ancient Rome and ancient Greece, jointly referred to as Greco-Roman world. The Romans were proud of their rule but they appreciated Greeks leadership in the fields of art, architecture, literature and philosophy. The Romans were singular people who were once terribly cruel but benevolently democratic. They were barbaric and intolerant at the same time creative and intellectual. By the 2nd century B.C. Romans conquered Greece and came to appreciate the Greek culture. Educated Romans studied the Greek language. The mixing of the elements of Greek, Hellenistic and Roman culture produced a new culture that was referred to as Greco-Roman culture. This is often known as classical civilization. This is the era when the Greek and Roman literature thrived. Ancient Rome contributed very much to the establishment of law, art, literature, war, technology, architecture, religion, and language in the western society. The history of the Ancient Rome still has a key influence on the world today. The Romans were a bridge between the older cultures and the western civilization.

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The Roman greatness was marked by their willingness to receive other peoples ideas for their own purposes. Their architecture, technology, city planning, art and military planning are all as a result of other peoples influences. In fact there was little that they did which was their original idea. The total of what they did was unique to them and made them remarkable people in history.

Christianity played a key role in civilization and the culture that is still in place in the western civilization. In the Roman Empire, art and architecture were religious in nature. During the Pax Romana, Roman culture was spread to Western Europe. The Roman power in the semi-civilized regions of Western Europe that is Gaul, Britain, and Spain and Augustas peace establishment during the Pax Romana meant that there were military stationed in the western provinces. The arrangement assisted in Romanizing and civilizing the western provinces in different ways. The legionary camps in the provinces became lasting settlements, local merchants and families settled around them. As time went by the camp settlements became towns and cities. The military origins of these cities are reflected in Britain in places like Winchester and Lanchester from the Latin terms castra which means camp. Most of the army officials did not return home after they were discharged from the service. They remained in the camps, married local women and raised children under Roman cultures with them. The peaceful existence brought in by Pax Romana, supported the growth of native towns into cities. The city dwellers copied the Roman modes of dressing, language, architecture and local governance. The extended period of peace allowed the Romans time to build excellent systems of paved roads that stretched across the empire. They built strong roads that were all connected some of which are still in use today. The roads were technological marvel. They were constructed of stone, concrete and sand, just like it is done today. The roads connected Rome to the other parts of the empire.

The roads were primarily meant to transport the Roman troops to places that experienced problems, but they served to promote trade and the arrival of Italian merchants into the towns of the western provinces. All this allowed the locals to copy Roman ways of personal incentives and also their cultural practices. It is from the establishment of towns and cities by the Romans that the idea of people living in apartments and establishing of welfare came up.

The language of the Roman was Latin, italic language that relied little on order of words. The Roman alphabet was founded on the Etruscan alphabet based on Greek alphabet. Most of the literature that was studied by Romans at that time was in Greek. The growth of the Roman Empire spread Latin language throughout Europe. With time the Vulgar Latin which differed from classical Latin in grammar and vocabulary, evolved in different areas changing into a number of Romance languages. Therefore it is true to argue that the Indo-European language family comprise of languages that descended from Latin, the language of Ancient Roman. The Latin language became predominant in the western empire and became the foundation for Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and Romanian languages. They all started off as bad Latin but with time established themselves as different clear languages. Latin also influenced other languages used in the Western Civilization in so far as the words used are concerned. For example English, although doesn't have the Latin syntax grammar, has many Latin words. Because Latin was the language of the Roman Catholic Church and of academics, it naturally influenced other languages even the non-Romance languages.

Romans most lasting and great contribution to the western civilization is the law. The earliest Roman law mostly dealt with the rights of the Roman citizens. With the expansion of the Roman Empire, the Romans came to accept that laws should be fair and equal to every person, whether wealthy or poor. With time judges started to recognize and learn certain principles of justice. The principles were influenced by the wisdom of the stoic philosophers. They were based on common sense and practical ideas. Some of the standards of the Roman law were every person had the right to receive equal treatment under the law every person was believed innocent unless proven guilty the burden of proving was the accusers rather than the accused people were to be prosecuted for deeds not thoughts and any law that proven to be unreasonable and revoltingly unfair could be done away with. The principles of the Roman law continued to form the foundation of many legal systems in the European countries and other countries influenced by Europe like the United States. Most of the legal systems in the modern civilizations also follow the legal system of the ancient Rome. An example is the legislative body whose elected representatives are called senators.

The annals of history are defined by the Romans and adapted by the western civilization. The years are defined on the basis of the birth of Jesus Christ in the Roman town of

Judea. Romans came up with the idea of the modern calendar. The calendar was the church calendar and the holidays were like they are observed today only that in those days the holidays were church holidays otherwise called Holy Days. In fact the word holiday, as used in the modern civilization comes from the phrase Holy Day. The daily lives of the people even the kinds of food they ate were controlled by Christian doctrines. In a way the church dictated the culture because even politics and traditions were interwoven with religion and faith. Christianity which traces its origin from the Roman Empire still thrives as the world's greatest religion. Therefore Christianity is a major link between the ancient world and the modern civilization. The appealing message of love and forgiveness as preached by Christianity made a very great impact in development. People needed to work together in unity for development to be achieved. Christianity was able to influence the rest of the world leading to civilization because the Christians owed it to their faith to spread the gospel. Before Christ departed he asked his followers to spread the gospel all over the earth and win new converts. Roman accepted the challenge of spreading the gospel. It is them who helped in the spread of Christianity making it the greatly spread religion.

Roman Empire was the birth place of Christianity and democracy, the major developments of contemporary history. Christian theology gave rise to the inviolability of individual believer and summon for the obedience to the authority that is Christ who was higher than other rulers like Caesar. This idea defined and supported the concept of liberty under law. Christian institutions, especially the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church in a struggle with the holy Roman emperor and local monarchs, bestowed to the western civilization the concept of separation and limitation of powers.

Rome invented the concrete which is a major component in building structures up to date. The Romans also used bricks and glass. The Romans built big, strong and beautiful structures most of which are still standing to date. Its favorite architecture shape, the arch, is still being used today especially for government and capital buildings. The popularity of the architectures remained because the idea was so practical. In fact Thomas Jefferson started a Roman revival in the United States in the 18th century. In this case, most public building for example the United States capitol and majority state capitols have Roman features. In the United States modern legal structures are made in the imitation of ancient Roman Empire. Romans invented aqueducts and sewers. The aque-

ducts were made by Roman engineers to deliver water into cities and town. This technology is being used today for water delivery and drainage of sewer.

It would be untrue to state that western civilization was influenced by Roman Empire alone. The Greek empire in fact also played a great role in the civilization. In a sense the Roman Empire was a bi-cultural empire, having Greek language and Roman language that is the Latin. Greek came up with the idea of alphabet that is used today. It was also from Greek that the idea of Olympics began. Although Roman spread the idea of democracy, it was the Greeks who came up with the idea. The empire had common citizens participating in their government and choosing their own leaders. Like it is done in courts today, the Ancient Greek Empire had trials and actual jury that was made up of common citizens. Payment of labour was started in Greece. It was the Greek philosophers who started the idea of writing literature and staging plays. With time Greek became the language that was used by the educated elites. The language used in the contemporary west, including English, has in them some Greek terms. The western half of the Roman Empire adopted completely the Greek language. In fact Greek was used as the official language of the Byzantine Empire. Roman artists, philosophers and writers adapted the Hellenistic and Greek models for their own purposes and came up with a style of their own. Roman art and literature became a powerful tool to express the Roman ideas of power, permanence and solidity.

There are quite a number of Greek and Roman philosophers who contributed to the development of mathematics, science, philosophy, literature, and art into what they are today. The founder of western literature was according to Greek legend a blind poet called Homer. He has influenced very many medieval and modern poets and novelists. Homer was the showpiece of Greek education feeding the imaginations of Greek poets, dramatists, philosophers, historians, sculptors, politicians and the common people for generations. He was known as the Founder of Western Literature, not only because he was its pioneer and greatest author but also because he made a direct influence to most of the literature figures that followed.

There were other Greek and Roman philosophers who contributed to the Western Civilization. Some of the knowledge is being used even today. One of them is Anaximander who wrote About Nature. His work was the pioneer work of prose in western history.

He computerized the size and distance of the sun from the earth with only a slight error. Like all other human beings make errors, this did not mean that what he came up with did not have effect on Western Civilization. He originated the concept of evolution. There were other modifications of the theory but he is the one who came up with the original idea with all the others building on from it. Pythagoras was the first man to form the term philosopher. He believed that the earth operated according to mathematical laws. Pythagoras and those that believed in his theory influenced on Plato and through him, western philosophy in general was established. Their stress on the number being the informing principle proves significant in the developing of science. Most of his theories are still in use today.

Xenophanes was the student of Pythagoras. He was a poet as well as a philosophers and he is oftenly referred to as Father of Geology and Paleontology. This is because he was the first to come up with a theory of Extensive Geological Change. He also suggested that clouds were formed by water vapor that rises up into the air.

Ampedocles reiterated the theory of evolution by Anaximander and also proposed the pioneer theory of natural selection to explain how it operates. His argument was that only change determined the physical attributes of various species and that their adaptability determines whether they survive or become extinct.

Leucippus proposed the atomic theory but it was later developed by his student Democritus. The theory presented all matters as comprising of minute, invisible and indestructible atoms. The atoms differed in shape, size and weight but not in quality. Varying arrangements of the atoms produced varying substances. Leucippus and Democritus also argued that the creation of the worlds was as a result of the collision and aggregation of falling and swerving atoms in the universe. Leucippus and Democritus argued that the universe was made up of matter and void and operating entirely according to natural laws.

Anaxagoras argued against the belief that the sun was god Hyperion but a mass of white-hot metal. He also added that the stars were also white-hot stones, just like the sun but their distance from the earth was big for their heat to be felt on the earth. He argued that the moon was created from the same substance as the earth and its light was

reflection of sunlight.

Hippocrates is the Father of Medicine. He was the first person to argue that all diseases were as a result of natural causes. He emphasized the importance of testing medical theories. The Hippocratic School wrote a famous oath for physicians which they promised to respect. This opened the door to investigation of causes of diseases and possible treatments. This is also the origin of the oath that is usually taken by doctors and other medical practitioners.

Herophilus is the Father of Anatomy. He argued that the brain was the center of the nervous system and that the arteries transport blood and not air. This theory is generally acceptable. Erasistratus is the Father of Physiology. He differentiated sensory from the motor nerves. He expounded the knowledge of the digestive system and explained the roles of the heart. Euclid wrote the book elements systematizing the theories of plane and solid geometry. Strabo an extensive traveler compiled a map on the known world. Dioscorides compiled a list of drugs and the plants they could be gotten from in On Medical Matters, which was the pioneer text on botany and pharmacology.

It is apparent that the modern science in the west began with the wide spread of Greek manuscripts. The modern civilization learnt from the Greeks and Romans confidence in human ability to decode the physical laws that controlled the universe. They also learnt the willingness to formulate, argue and test conventional theories.

Discussion

Even though the Romans were not as innovative as the Greeks, their influence to the western civilization was great. In addition to their own contribution to the civilization, they brought Greek ideas down to earth modifying them and transmitting them throughout the western world. In fact without Roman conquest, Greek ideas would not have reached the west. Were it not for the Roman sense of social accountability to temper the individualism of Hellenistic Greece, classical culture could have died without any influence on the western world. Therefore it is agreeable without doubt that the Roman Empire had a great influence on western civilization.

By conserving and adding to Greek civilization, Rome fortified the western culture and

traditions. The world would be very different had it not been for Roman Empire. If ideas were borne and died with the originators there would be no civilization.