

THE GIFTS OF GREECE

A truth universally acknowledged is that Western Civilization began in Greece. From that small country -- poor and rocky, as Herodotus wrote -- almost completely surrounded by sea and seeming to belong more to the sea than to land, have come countless gifts, priceless and timeless for all the world, no other country has ever offered. A new dimension of awareness informed her ancient poets, architects and artists, statesmen and historians, scientists and philosophers. The Hellenic ideals of Goodness, Truth and Beauty still teach that human excellence of body, mind and spirit, is close to Godliness, that mercy and purity of soul bring eternal life.

After the long silence of the West, imposed by centuries of religious fanaticism, the masterpieces of her poets, artists and architects, however mutilated by time and human hands, inspired the Renaissance. Scientists of The Enlightenment began again at the very point where their ancient Greek predecessors had stopped. Erasmus, the father of The Enlightenment, exclaimed, "*O, Saint Socrates.*" All philosophy, according to Whitehead, is a footnote to the works of Socrates' student, Plato. The encyclopedic wisdom of Plato's student, Aristotle, continues to instruct humankind.

The glorious legacy of Greece probably would have been lost without the achievements of Aristotle's pupil, Alexander. He is been called *The Great* because he spread the language, ideas and values of Greece across his vast Hellenistic empire. Without the seeds of Hellenism rooted in the empire of Alexander's Roman successors, Christianity would have remained an obscure Semitic cult and Christendom would never have become Europe. The Western world would have developed into a collection of warring, barbaric states, chained to virulent ignorance and ruthless despotism. Without Alexander's Hellenism, there would be no Western Civilization.

Down through the centuries, always at the crossroads of history, the Greeks have fought battles that determined the freedom and the fate of the West. Always outnumbered and alone, the Greeks opposed the monolithic despotism of Persians and Turks, derailed the Nazis and defeated Communist oppression. The Greeks were the first in world history to fight and die for their liberty as free people.

Western Civilization began in Greece because the most precious gift of Greece to humankind is Democracy and the ideal of Liberty -- of social order based on the free will of free-thinking individuals.

As Americans, we owe a profound debt to those who fought and died in the Civil and Revolutionary Wars. They defined our character as a nation. The issues of those battles would have never existed without the sacrifices of those Greeks who fought at Thermopylae, Marathon and Salamis. Those Ancient Greeks were the First Americans. For Greece was the first Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.

Born on September 22, 480 BC, at the decisive battle of Salamis, the Goddess of Liberty, a Greek immigrant from the blue waters of the Aegean, confirms her mythic bond with the sea as she overlooks the New York Harbor and holds high the beacon of her native shore to enlighten hearts and minds in every corner of our planet.

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(Edited by Anthony G. Maroussis)