

PHILHELLENIC MOVEMENT

Classical or Greco-Roman antiquity¹ is one of the foundations of European civilization as a whole, but a passionate admiration of the arts and civilization of ancient Greece, as distinct from those of Rome, is a more recent phenomenon. The philhellene creed² was summed up by [Percy Bysshe Shelley](#)'s declaration,³ in the preface⁴ to his drama *Hellas* (1822), that "We are all Greeks." All western civilization, on this account, derives from Greece, with Rome seen merely as the conduit⁵ through which this influence flowed. The origins of Hellenism lie in the mid-eighteenth century, in the shift of taste and attitudes that expressed itself aesthetically in a reaction against the baroque and the pursuit of simplicity; socially in the cult⁶ of the primitive,⁷ natural man, and the noble savage⁸; and politically in the ideologies of the American and French revolutions. [Johann Joachim Winckelmann](#) (1717–1768), the founder⁹ of [art history](#), characterized the qualities of Greek sculpture and literature as "a noble simplicity and a calm greatness." The critic and thinker [Gotthold Ephraim Lessing](#) (1729–1781), in his essay *Laocoön* (1766), accepted this account¹⁰ of sculpture but disagreed over literature, observing that Greek tragedy represented extreme emotional and physical suffering. These ideas were popularized¹¹ by [August Wilhelm von Schlegel](#) (1767–1845) in his *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (1809–1811) translated into English in 1815 as *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*; translated into English in the first years of the nineteenth century, it had great influence in Britain. Such discourse¹² commonly admired Greek civilization for being unlike that of the modern world and measured it against the present day through various contrasts: between past and present, South and North, classical and Romantic, sculpture and music, perfection within defined limits and a reaching for the infinite.

Meanwhile, an accurate knowledge of classical [Greek architecture](#) was made known to western Europe for the first time since antiquity through James Stuart and Nicholas Revett's *The Antiquities of Athens* (first volume, 1762; second volume, 1787). This made possible the Greek Revival,¹³ an architectural style that aimed at copying Greek forms as far as was practicably possible in modern conditions. It reached its zenith in the first decades of the nineteenth century but had a longer significance in establishing revivalism in architecture (that is, the faithful imitation of old forms as distinct from the adaptation of them to new aesthetic effects). The Greek Revival was Europe-wide but especially favored in Germany and Britain (above all in Scotland), in part because it was felt to embody a reaction against the Latinate or baroque culture of southern Europe. In the [United States](#), comparably, it was seen as a plain, manly style, fit for a young nation that had thrown off the fripperies of the Old World.

¹ αρχαιότητα

² πίστη, δόγμα

³ διακήρυξη, δήλωση

⁴ εισαγωγή, πρόλογος

⁵ αγωγός

⁶ λατρεία

⁷ πρωτόγονος

⁸ ο ευγενής άγριος

⁹ ιδρυτής

¹⁰ εξήγηση, περιγραφή

¹¹ εκλαϊκεύω, διαδίδω, καθιερώνω

¹² λόγος

¹³ αναβίωση

The literature and thought of Greece was especially important to Germany at a time when it was emancipating¹⁴ itself from a sense of inferiority¹⁵ to France and Italy. One view was that there was a natural kinship¹⁶ between Greece and Germany; another view, exemplified¹⁷ in the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), saw ancient Greece as a distant,¹⁸ ideal aspiration.¹⁹ From either viewpoint the significance of Greece to the German spirit was profound. The architecture of [Karl Friedrich Schinkel](#) (1781–1841) made Greek forms seem the natural expression of modern German resurgence.²⁰ Meanwhile, Germany was leading all of Europe in classical scholarship and philology. The work of Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt (1819–1897) exercised²¹ a substantial influence²² on general culture; a more unorthodox figure was the self-taught [Heinrich Schliemann](#) (1822–1890), excavator²³ of Troy and Mycenae, and still the most famous of all archaeologists, whose discoveries gave glamour to the material remains of the Greek world.

In parallel with these aesthetic and historical explorations came throughout Europe a shift²⁴ in political attitudes: Athenian democracy, which had usually been regarded as an awful warning of the disastrous effects of giving power to the common people, now became an object of praise.²⁵ [Thomas Paine](#) (1737–1809) was radical but a harbinger²⁶ of the future when he declared that he found more to admire and less to censure²⁷ in the Athenians than in any other form of political organization. At the same time, the modern Greek struggle for independence fired the imagination of idealists. (Often the term philhellenism is applied to an enthusiasm for modern Greece, with the term Hellenism applied to a love for ancient Greek culture.) When Lord Byron adopted the modern Greek cause, his international prestige²⁸ gave it an added glamour, which was made all the more romantic by his death in Greece (of an illness, however, not in battle). Once the Greeks gained their freedom, western Europe largely lost interest in the modern nation, but a passion for ancient Greece continued through the nineteenth century. It provided an arena²⁹ in which modern debates could be fought out: thus Christians saw Greek thought and culture as helping to prepare the ground for the coming of the Gospel (and it was not forgotten that the [New Testament](#) was written in Greek), while for agnostics and atheists Greece offered an alternative source of moral and spiritual values. The aesthetic movement of the later nineteenth century, both in France and Britain, celebrated ancient Greece for its worship of beauty and the supposed youthfulness and innocence of its culture; Walter Pater (1839–1894) was the most eloquent³⁰ spokesman for this view. Pater also hints at the homoeroticism in Greek culture, a subject

¹⁴ απελευθερώνω, χειραφετώ

¹⁵ κατωτερότητα

¹⁶ συγγένεια

¹⁷ που εκφράζεται ως παράδειγμα, που γίνεται φανερό ως παράδειγμα

¹⁸ μακρινός

¹⁹ αξίωση, όνειρο, φιλοδοξία

²⁰ αναβίωση, αναγέννηση, εκ νέου ανάδυση

²¹ ασκώ

²² σημαντική επιφροή

²³ που έκανε ανασκαφές

²⁴ μεταβολή

²⁵ ἔπαινος

²⁶ προάγγελος

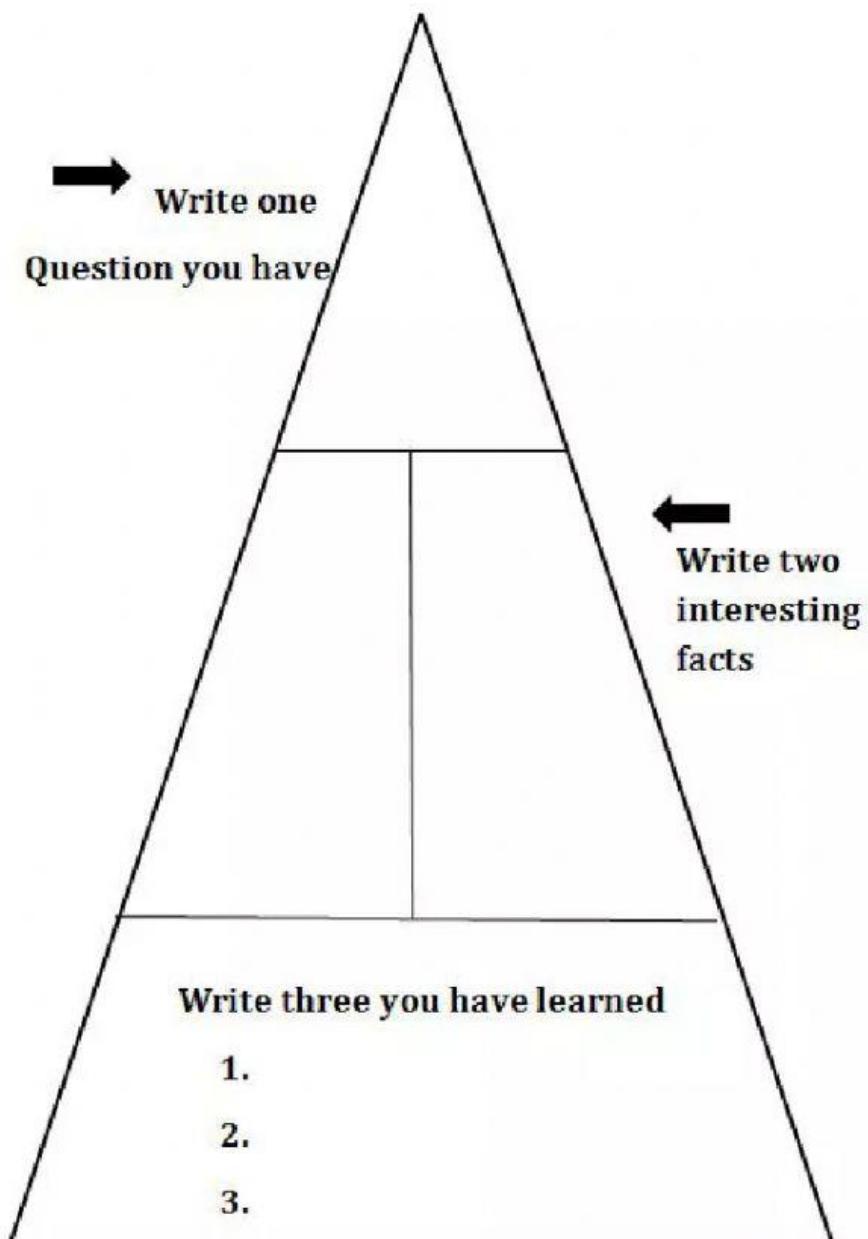
²⁷ επικρίνω

²⁸ γόντρο, αίγλη

²⁹ πεδίο

³⁰ εύγλωττος, εκφραστικός

handled more overtly by other apologists³¹ for homosexuality. In Germany, however, a new kind of Hellenism appeared in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), which saw in the tragedians Aeschylus and Sophocles a tense equilibrium³² between the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses of the human psyche. These ideas were to influence Sigmund Freud's theory of the mind, and Freud also drew on³³ Sophocles for his idea of the Oedipus complex. In contrast to earlier Hellenism, a sense that the Greeks explored the dark and irrational side of humanity was to be influential throughout the twentieth century.



³¹ συνήγορος

³² ισορροπία, ισοζύγιο

³³ αντλώ

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