



9-2020

### St. Thomas Aquinas and the Third Hellenization Period

Demetri Kantarelis  
dkantar@assumption.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

#### Recommended Citation

Kantarelis, Demetri (2020) "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Third Hellenization Period," *Comparative Civilizations Review*. Vol. 83 : No. 83 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol83/iss83/16>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

## St. Thomas Aquinas and the Third Hellenization Period

Demetri Kantarelis  
dkantar@assumption.edu

### Abstract

In this paper, I assert that currently the world has been experiencing the Third Hellenization Period that started with the Italian Renaissance, instigated by the teachings of the theologian and philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE). Unlike philosophers in previous periods (First and Second Hellenization as well as Medieval), St. Thomas preached that Truth is a function of both Natural Revelation and Supernatural Revelation. This resulted in, simultaneously, Christianizing Aristotle (St. Thomas' most referenced philosopher) and Aristotleizing Christianity, thus opening up the doors to human reason that had been muted during the Medieval centuries.

I also assert that the basic constituent of Hellenization is freedom: the freedom to think or reason, the freedom to seek gratification from aesthetics, and the freedom to undertake a spiritual journey towards a less restraining life through empowerment and metamorphosis. Ancient Greeks realized that freedom to pursue their desires, subject to constraints (geographical, cultural and legal) as well as balance of mind and body, would give them the capability to excel in whatever they set their minds to, a freedom that sparked an unyielding endeavor for truth, perfection and excellence that made them achieve phenomenal accomplishments which astound us to this day. It appears that, despite obstacles, this kind of freedom drives the current Hellenization period on a path to higher levels of wellbeing for all.

*Keywords:* Hellenization, Western Civilization, freedom, Aquinas, philosophy, democracy, aesthetics, globalization, history, wellbeing

### Introduction

Figuratively, we all carry the Greek gene. To a small or large extent, we are all connected by a thread, the inheritance that ancient Greeks bestowed on us: Philosophy, Democracy, Athletics, Theater, Mythology, Science, Art, Architecture and Literature among many more. In general, all those universal fundamental ingredients were needed to create an evolving and prospering civilization.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, the Greek thread is not the only thread that connects us. We are also connected by the inheritance we have received from, among others, China, India, Egypt, Judaism, Babylonia, Islam, the Vikings, the Ottomans, the Mayas, the Incas and many more. In this paper, I choose to write about the Greek thread; hopefully, future work will bring to light other threads.

My first objective in this paper is to assert that today the world experiences the Third Hellenization Period which started with the Italian Renaissance in Europe after the Middle Ages. (Hellenization is the way of life based on general principles, established or improved by ancient Greeks.)

This period, like previous such periods, is characterized by universal principles which guide us towards a common denominator world structure for the benefit of all. The differences between this Hellenization period and the previous two are that (a) the current one is global in its scope, (b) the underlying principles are adopted at increasing rates (oftentimes through violent uprising), and (c) it is facilitated, a great deal, by (and evolves with) technological improvements in communications (e.g., internet and social media) and in transportation, as well as the spread of commerce, tourism, sport and entertainment.

My second objective is to try to offer an explanation as to why the ancient Greek contributions are everlasting and growing in relevance. I believe that the ancient Greeks detonated an explosive, an outburst of ideas and principles that, as we speak, is still in progress, engulfing in its inferno, like an expanding fireball, the modern open-minded freedom-valuing world. In the words of Henry Miller (*The Colossus of Maroussi*, pp. 210-211):

[The] spirit of eternity ... is everywhere ... [S]elf-perpetuating Greece ... has no borders, no limits, no age ... it is impressively vast. (pp. 46-52).  
Greece ... made me free and whole ... still ... the fountainhead of wisdom and inspiration.

It is indeed remarkable that today's free people base their evolving way of life on the increasingly important, practical and rewarding formulae invented by the ancient Greeks.

In whatever follows<sup>2</sup>, in Section 2, I attempt to justify why we are currently experiencing the Third Hellenization Period; in Section 3, I stress the importance of freedom in conjunction with Hellenization. This is followed by summary and conclusion in Section 4.

---

<sup>2</sup> In addition to readings excerpts that are quoted throughout the manuscript, the paper has benefited from information and knowledge contained in the following books: Aquinas (1977 and 1999), North (1973), Berlin (1956), Osborne (2008), Paine (2003), Russell (1986), Fine (1983), Kenny (2012), Weitz (1966), Strauss (1987), Cornford (1965), Warner (1986), and Graves (1960).

### Third Hellenization

The First Hellenization Period (FHP) of the western world ended with the unification of Greece under Macedonian rule when Philip II defeated Thebes and Athens (and their allies) in the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BCE). During the FHP period, Greece experienced three civilizations: the Minoan Civilization (with its center in Crete), the Mycenaean Civilization (mainland Greece, primarily Peloponnese) and the Classical Greek Civilization (with Athens serving as both its center and main contributor).<sup>3</sup>

The FHP period was characterized by city states and, according to Morton Smith (*The Ancient Greeks*, p.87): by “the dissemination of Greek artifacts and customs through trade and colonization” — a period during which the western world experienced the birth of sophisticated architecture and art as well as the first work of its literary canon, Homer’s epics; a period interrupted by the so called ancient dark ages (1200–750 BCE) triggered by the invasion of the Dorians who swept down from the North, to be followed by Classical Greece (5th-4th centuries BCE).

The Second Hellenization Period (SHP) of the western world started in 336 BCE with Alexander the Great and continued until 391 CE when Theodosius I the Great decided to suppress non-Christian traditions. The period was characterized by empire-building (Macedonian, Roman, Western Roman, Eastern Roman) founded on, mainly, classical Greek thought. As stated by William Morey (*Outlines of Roman History*, Chapter XVIII), “we might say that when Greece was conquered by Rome, Rome was civilized by Greece.”

The SHP ended when, in 391 CE, Theodosius I the Great instituted a series of decrees called the “Theodosian decrees” suppressing non-Christian traditions. Theodosius I the Great ordered the demolition of all ancient temples, sanctuaries, the banning of the ancient Olympic Games in 393 or 394 CE and, most sadly, the raising to the ground of the Serapeum of Alexandria inclusive of its rich library.

Theodosius I was called “The Great” because he (a) managed to unite the Western and Eastern Roman Empires (the last Roman Emperor to successfully do so), (b) temporarily secured the future of the Eastern Roman Empire through diplomacy, and (c) championed Christianity with the issuance of his “decrees” against non-Christian traditions.

Unfortunately, though the foundations he built for the unity between Western and Eastern Roman Empire were not very strong; after his death the two Empires broke apart and never united again.

---

<sup>3</sup> Dates, along with main events, have been placed in timelines in the Appendix: Table A1 offers a condensed timeline on Hellenization Periods and Table A2 a more extended version from the Bronze Age to Sulla.

“The Great” one, prior to his death, unwisely enthroned his two sons, Arcadius (12 years old) to rule the East, and Honorius (8 years old) to rule the West. His diplomacy amounted to giving autonomy to non-Roman people, such as the Goths, in exchange for military assistance inclusive of troops and horses to fight for the Empire. The unintended result was the creation of a separate nation within the Empire, which remained a persistent danger to its internal stability.

Some modern historians have intimated that this threat was a factor in the eventual decline of the Empire. For example, in 390 CE, the population of Thessaloniki rioted in complaint against the presence of the local Gothic garrison. The garrison commander was killed in the violence; in revenge, Theodosius ordered the Goths to kill all the spectators (about seven thousand) gathered in the local arena for a circus. For this brutal massacre against humanity, “The Great” one was excommunicated by the bishop of Milan, Saint Ambrose.

Undoubtedly, the “decrees” of Theodosius I against non-Christian traditions mark, as asserted here, the beginning of the Medieval Period which held back western civilization for about a thousand years. Likely, the decrees were motivated by the inferiority of the non-Christian Syrian Neo-Platonism philosophy school, in fashion when Theodosius I acquired power, led by the post-Plotinian philosopher Iamblichus (250-325 CE).

According to John Cooper (*Pursuits of Wisdom*, pp.384-385), “the post-Plotinian so-called Syrian Neo-Platonism ... diverged in momentous ways from the purely rationalist, traditionally Greek-philosophical spirit of Plotinus’s (and Porphyry’s) work. ... In short, for Iamblichus, salvation depended on pagan religious magic” which Cooper (p.385, footnote 123) sees as rationalism’s “degradation and loss of intellectual nerve.”

The ideas of Iamblichus contradicted the prevailing, until then, way of thinking by Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman philosophers; he challenged the predominant philosophy paradigm according to which truth was a function of natural revelation or inference based on human observation. As Cooper (p.387) eloquently puts it, Iamblichus challenged the “philosophy, in the old sense, going back to Socrates and continuing through Plotinus, of a life led on the basis of, and exclusively from, a rationally worked out, independent and authoritative, account of reality (including an account of the nature and characteristics of divinity).”

The ideas of Iamblichus could not compete against Christianity as conceived by Theodosius I. Truth as a function of magic could not hold water; especially the kind of magic that is different from religion.

R. Merrifield (*The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 1987) defines the difference between religion and magic (stated in Wikipedia, 2016) as follows: “ 'Religion' is used to indicate the belief in supernatural or spiritual beings; 'magic', the use of practices intended to bring occult forces under control and so to influence events; 'ritual', prescribed or customary behavior that may be religious, if it is intended to placate or win favor of supernatural beings, magical if it is intended to operate through impersonal forces of sympathy or by controlling supernatural beings, or social if its purpose is to reinforce a social organization or facilitate social intercourse.”

Unfortunately, the faulty transformation Iamblichus established contaminated the pre-existing philosophical paradigm which, as a result, lost its appeal, opening the road to the Christianity model of the times. According to the Christianity model of those times, truth was a function of supernatural revelation (divine communication of truth in which either the manner of communication or its content is beyond the capacity of human nature to attain). Undoubtedly, the ideas of Iamblichus could not compete against Christianity's powerful messages of hope, renewal, selflessness, compassion, justice, forgiveness, and unconditional love and therefore, justifiably, Theodosius I made it the mandatory religion for his people.

Regrettably, the contaminating ideas of Iamblichus caused the disappearance of the pre-existing philosophical paradigm of *natural revelation* from the scene, to appear again about a thousand years later through the teachings of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE). During its absence, humanity experienced the Medieval Period or, as some prefer to call it, the Dark Ages. (The timeline in Table 1 indicates major philosophical paradigms and the corresponding Hellenization periods.)

The “decrees” of Theodosius I the Great against non-Christian traditions, marking the beginning (as asserted here) of the Medieval Period that held back western civilization for about a thousand years, the killing of many people (inclusive of the seven thousand Christians in Thessaloniki), his unwise treaty (diplomacy) with the Goths and the appointment of two minors as his successors — all serve as data against greatness. One may wonder, why still affix the words “The Great” next to Theodosius I?

Later, in 529 CE, Justinian I closed the first university ever established in the history of humanity — Plato's Academy. Although the second university ever established, Aristotle's Lyceum, was no longer an active school at that time, by then Aristotle's “positive” and Plato's “normative” philosophies had settled, harmonically, around Neoplatonism. Hence, when Justinian I closed Plato's Academy, he closed Aristotle's Lyceum as well. In other words, he turned off “reasoning.” Without a doubt, the Theodosian decrees, along with the closing of the two schools in Athens, plunged Europe and the Middle East into intellectual stagnation.

Additionally, the millennium-long Medieval Period was marked by barbarian invasions (similar in havoc-causing to the invasion of the Dorians in ancient Greece), long wars, epidemics, the decline of free trade and atrocities such as the crusades and the various inquisitions, committed by misguided Christian zealots. The Medieval Epoch ended with the advent of various rebirth (Renaissance) occurrences which in some areas of Europe started earlier than in others.

As knowledge of Greek declined in the west after Theodosius I and the fall of the Roman Empire, so did knowledge of the Greek texts, many of which had remained without a Latin translation. The fragile nature of papyrus, as a writing medium, meant that older texts not copied onto expensive parchment would eventually crumble and be lost. The introduction of Greek philosophy and science into the culture of the Latin West in the Middle Ages was an event that transformed the intellectual life of Western Europe. It consisted of the discovery of many original works, such as those written by Aristotle in the classical period. Greek manuscripts had been maintained in the Greek-speaking world in Constantinople, Armenia, Syria, and Alexandria.

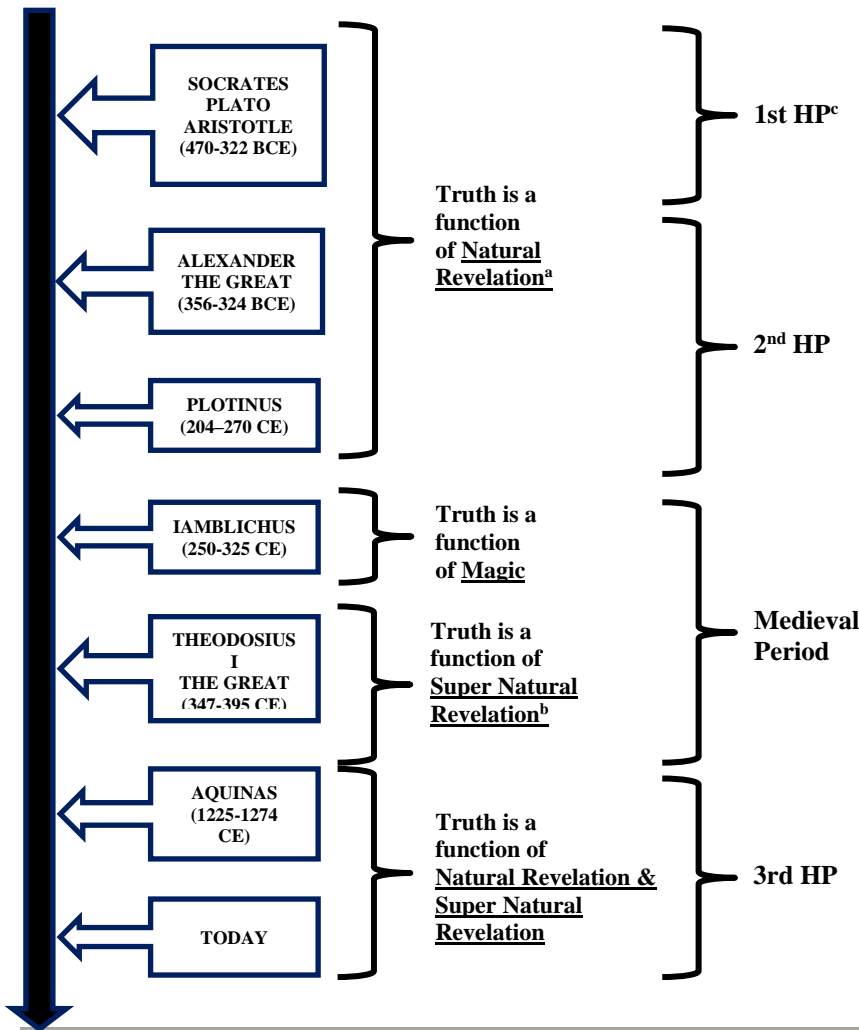
Interest and availability of Greek texts was scarce in the Latin West, but ancient Greek ideas, mostly philosophy and science, had permeated the Islamic world; Muslim conquests extended to the European continent. Sicily and Spain were conquered by the Arabs at around 700 CE. With the aid of Greek and other ideas, Iberia quickly became the most heavily populated and thriving, materially as well as culturally, area in Europe. One of the rulers of Muslim Spain, Al-Hakam II, sought to gather books from all over the Arab world, creating a library which would later become a center for translation into Latin.

Later, crusaders during the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204 CE) sacked Constantinople, thus giving them access to its rich libraries populated by ancient Greek and Roman texts. In turn, many of these texts were translated into Latin by William of Moerbeke (1215-1286 CE), a Flemish Dominican scholar, and Philhellene, one of the most distinguished men of letters of the thirteenth century.<sup>4</sup> At the request of Thomas Aquinas, he undertook a complete translation of the works of Aristotle or, for some portions, a revision of existing translations. It is noteworthy that he was the first translator of the "Politics" (c. 1260 CE) and of the mathematical treatises of Archimedes, among many more.

---

<sup>4</sup> From 1277 on, until the end of his life, William of Moerbeke, served as archbishop of Corinth. A little Greek village, Merbaka (Agia Triada), is believed to have been named for him; it lies between Argos and Mycenae.

**Table 1: Philosophy & Hellenization Periods**



<sup>a</sup> **Natural Revelation** is inference based on human observation.

<sup>b</sup> **Super Natural Revelation** is divine communication of truth in which either the manner of communication or its content is beyond the capacity of human nature to attain.

<sup>c</sup> **HP** stands for Hellenization Period.

Especially after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 CE, and the resulting influx of refugee Byzantine scholars into Western Europe, the spread of ancient Greek and Roman knowledge began to intensify, setting the foundations for the Italian Renaissance and the Third Hellenization Period (THP).

As asserted here, the Italian Renaissance and thus the THP began with Saint Thomas Aquinas whose work marks the end of the *long sleep of reason* from the time of Theodosius I through the Medieval centuries.



Saint Thomas Aquinas played a major part in reinstating the rationalist tradition by intertwining it with Christian theology. By the time Aquinas began his literary work, a large part of Plato's and Aristotle's writings had become available in Western Europe. Although his philosophical orientation was dominated by Aristotle, he was aware of the vast scope of thought produced by the ancients (translations into Latin by William of Moerbeke of Greek and Roman texts collected in Byzantine libraries), and the earlier medieval writers who were also influenced by ancient Greek thought, namely: Saint Augustine (354-430 CE) and Boethius (480-524 CE); the Islamic philosophers and writers al-Kindi (800-872 CE), al-Farabi (872-950 CE), Ibn Sina or Avicenna (980-1037 CE), Ibn Rushd or Averroes (1126-1198 CE)<sup>5</sup>; and the Jewish philosopher and writer Moses Maimonides (1135-1204 CE), whose opposition to the Neoplatonism of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina significantly contributed to Aquinas's understanding.

Thomas Aquinas was influenced heavily by Saint Augustine who in turn was influenced by the works of Aristotle (particularly his *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*). Augustine, in both his philosophical and theological reasoning, had formulated an earlier synthesis of philosophy and theology by combining the Christian faith with elements of Plato's thought, which he had discovered in the writings of the Neoplatonist Plotinus and his early and influential writing on the human will — a central topic in ethics, which would become a focus for later philosophers such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer. Shortly after Augustine, in the sixth century, Boethius made a portion of Aristotle's works available in Latin.

Prior to Saint Thomas Aquinas, thinkers wrestled with the problem of relating philosophy and theology, expressing this problem as the relation between faith and reason. Aquinas exerted a decisive influence by clarifying the precise questions involved, acknowledging alternative solutions offered by different authorities, and answering the major objections to his Aristotelian-Christian solutions. In this way, Aquinas perfected the “scholastic method.”

Thomas Aquinas believed that revelation could guide reason and prevent it from making mistakes, while reason could clarify and demystify faith.

By combining the philosophical principles of reason with the theological principles of faith, he became the chief founder of Scholasticism, the objective of which was the reconciliation of classical and late antiquity philosophy, especially that of Aristotle and Neoplatonism, with Christian theology.

He argued that Aristotle's method of using reason and observable facts from nature to arrive at truth led to God.

---

<sup>5</sup> Averroes' reception in Western Europe contrasted with his ultimate rejection by Arabs in Spain. Soon after Averroes, ancient Greek ideas in the Arab world were largely opposed by those who disliked anything not “truly Arab.”

According to Aquinas, humans must use reason to understand “natural law,” which comes from God. Scholastic philosophy was an attempt to put together a coherent system of *traditional* thought rather than a pursuit of genuinely novel forms of insight. The content of this system was for the most part a fusion of Christian theology and the philosophies of Plato and especially Aristotle. Most distinctive in scholasticism was its *method*, a process relying chiefly upon strict logical deduction, taking on the form of an intricate *system* and expressed in a *dialectical* or disputational form in which theology dominated philosophy.

It has been said that Aquinas “Christianized” or “Baptized” the philosophy of Aristotle but, in the centuries that followed the Renaissance and to this day, there is ample evidence that Christianity was also “Aristotleized” by Saint Thomas Aquinas.

According to Josef Pieper (*Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, back outside cover): “Aquinas reconciled the pragmatic thought of Aristotle with the Church, proving that realistic knowledge need not preclude belief in the spiritual realities of religion. ...[T]he marriage of faith and reason proposed by Aquinas in his great synthesis of a ‘theologically founded worldliness’ was not merely one solution among many, but *the* great principle expressing the essence of the Christian West.” In other words, Aquinas taught us to seek *truth as a function of both natural revelation and supernatural revelation*.

After the initial surge of interest in classical learning and values, which brought us the early THP, chiefly characterized by the renewed freedom to reason and explore, many discoveries and events followed that fanned the flames of change and progress, turning this latest Hellenization progression into an ever growing explosion that today has been engulfing in its inferno, at increasing speeds, the whole world. It is also during this period that the Scientific Revolution gained momentum, and observation of the natural world replaced religious doctrine as the source of our understanding of the universe and our place in it. Copernicus up-ended<sup>6</sup> the ancient Greek model of the heavens by suggesting that the sun was at the center of the solar system and that the planets orbited around it. At the same time, exploration, colonization and Christianization of what Europe called the “new world” continued.

---

<sup>6</sup> According to Petrakis (2004), “The theory that the Earth revolves around the Sun was a truly revolutionary scientific advance. It also provided great impetus to the development of the modern scientific method, which was finally liberated in the middle of the 16th century from the constraints of dogma and nonscientific considerations. This breakthrough is often but mistakenly attributed to the great Polish astronomer Nicholas Copernicus, and despite indisputable evidence to the contrary, the true discoverer of the theory, the astronomer Aristarchos of Samos that lived in the 3rd century BCE in Alexandria, is still sometimes denied his due credit.” Petrakis quotes Sir Thomas Heath regarding the matter as follows: “Sir Thomas Heath has written in his definitive study on Aristarchos: ‘Copernicus himself admitted that the theory was attributed to Aristarchus, though this does not seem to be generally known ... But it is a curious fact that Copernicus did mention the theory of Aristarchus in a passage which he afterwards suppressed.’”

Suddenly, the world of the Europeans was a lot bigger, and opinions about that world were more varied and more uncertain than they had been for centuries.

Among the many discoveries during or after the early THP are: clocks, lenses (eyeglasses, microscopes and telescopes), the printing press, compass, gunpowder, the submarine, the market system, scientific progress (e.g., chemistry), the industrial revolutions (from the first to the fourth), and many more. And among the many events, one may enlist the exploration of new lands, the end of the Hundred Years' War between the English and the French, the writings of Shakespeare and the Protestant Reformation. Additionally, the West experienced the advent of the Age of Reason, the re-birth of Democracy as well as the re-birth of the modern Olympic games.

Undoubtedly, during the THP, the World appears more united, increasingly morphing into a global entity—a more progressive, more compassionate and more peaceful cosmopolis that takes advantage of the net benefits associated with all those valuable concepts contributed by the ancient Greeks.

It seems that Globalization [the rising interdependence of nations in terms of economics (free markets and international trade subject to some regulation), governance (mostly free democratic nations), and culture (continually liberated and amalgamated via social media, international sport and entertainment)] has been fanning the flames of Hellenization across the known world especially since “economics,” “governance” and “cultures” are all governed by *freedom to reason*, the freedom that gave birth to the ancient Greek achievements, the freedom that still propels us today towards better understanding and higher levels of well-being.

### **Freedom and its impact**

For the ancient Greeks, freedom was the basis of their civilization. They realized that freedom to pursue their desires, subject to constraints (geographical, cultural and legal) as well as the balance of mind and body, would give them the capability to excel in whatever was important to them. This freedom sparked an unyielding pursuit of truth, perfection and excellence and made them achieve phenomenal accomplishments that astound us to this day. According to Herbert Gintis (2006):

There is a model of human well-being compatible with the notion that we humans are complex adaptive systems, endowed by our genetic constitution with certain capacities—cognitive, affective, psychomotor, aesthetic, and spiritual—and an individual well-being depends on the extent that we have developed these capacities and have the means of exercising them. Happiness, in this view, is not what you have, but what you are. Societies are judged, then, not on what material comforts they generate, but on the extent to which they foster the development of human beings fully capable of exercising their personal capacities.

Did the ancient Greeks attempt to create an environment (a society or civilization) conducive to enabling human beings to use their personal capabilities?

Clues for an answer to this question may be found in Thucydides. In his superb *Pericles' Funeral Oration* (available on various online sources in many languages) in addition to offering a *how-to* formula for the ages on what ought to constitute a funeral oration for fallen patriots, Thucydides describes morals, traditions and customs of the times that are practiced even today in the West.

Most significantly though, he points out that *freedom* is the factor that contributed to the achievements of Athens — a factor that is still in force today especially as it applies to the so-called western nations which are classified as *free nations* relative to the rest of the world. Undeniably, freedom is one of those founding blocks of western civilization.

Pericles starts by eloquently stating that those who fall defending freedom deserve the paramount honor and that the orator should be careful neither to disregard nor to exaggerate the achievements of the fallen defenders.

In turn, he states:

- that freedom has given birth to a “greater than her reputation” Athens ready to die for resisting rather than to live submitting;
- that the power of Athens is freedom, that happiness is the fruit of freedom, that freedom is the fruit of valor;
- that freedom equals fearlessness and military advantage.

He continues by declaring that it is best:

- to remain free instead of imitating others;
- to govern with freely elected officials through democracy;
- to lead free and enjoyable individual lives subject to ethics and the law;
- to encourage free and open discussion, purposefulness and good risk-taking, wealth accumulation for use (not for show), anti-poverty efforts and the practicing of genuine generosity.

He concludes by stating that “comfort, therefore, not condolence, is what I have to offer to the parents of the dead.”

Broadly speaking, the answer to the question posed above (*‘Did the ancient Greeks attempt to create an environment (a society or civilization) conducive to enabling human beings to use their personal capabilities?’*) is yes.

Greeks unleashed three fundamental freedoms which enabled people to more effectively utilize their abilities:

- the freedom to think or reason; in other words, the freedom to critically think about everything — from the human body and spirit to the entire universe; they believed that everything is governed by an order accessible to human reason;
- the freedom to deal with the nature, creation and appreciation of beauty (natural and human-made) through the prism of subjective rationality and societal parameters; in other words, in the splendor of Greek scenery, the freedom to endeavor gratification from aesthetics;
- the freedom to undertake a spiritual journey towards a less restraining life through empowerment and metamorphosis.

These three freedoms propelled Greece (especially Golden Age Greece) to become *classic*; they established *vehicles to evolving optimization* rooted in morality (truth and justice), genuine happiness (honor, sacrifice, respect, and struggle against evil) as well as unique spirituality (to deal with, primarily, empowerment and the need for security and psychological comfort.) At an increasing rate, these vehicles to evolving optimization are still used today; they constitute the well-known concepts of philosophy, democracy, theater, sport, mythology, art, architecture, medicine and many more.

Sir Maurice Bowara (*The Greek Experience*), the eminent scholar and author, has called these ancient Greek achievements “incredible,” revealing “Greece in its Golden Age [as] a dynamic, colorful, infinitely creative society based on the belief that action in all its forms was the natural end of men.”

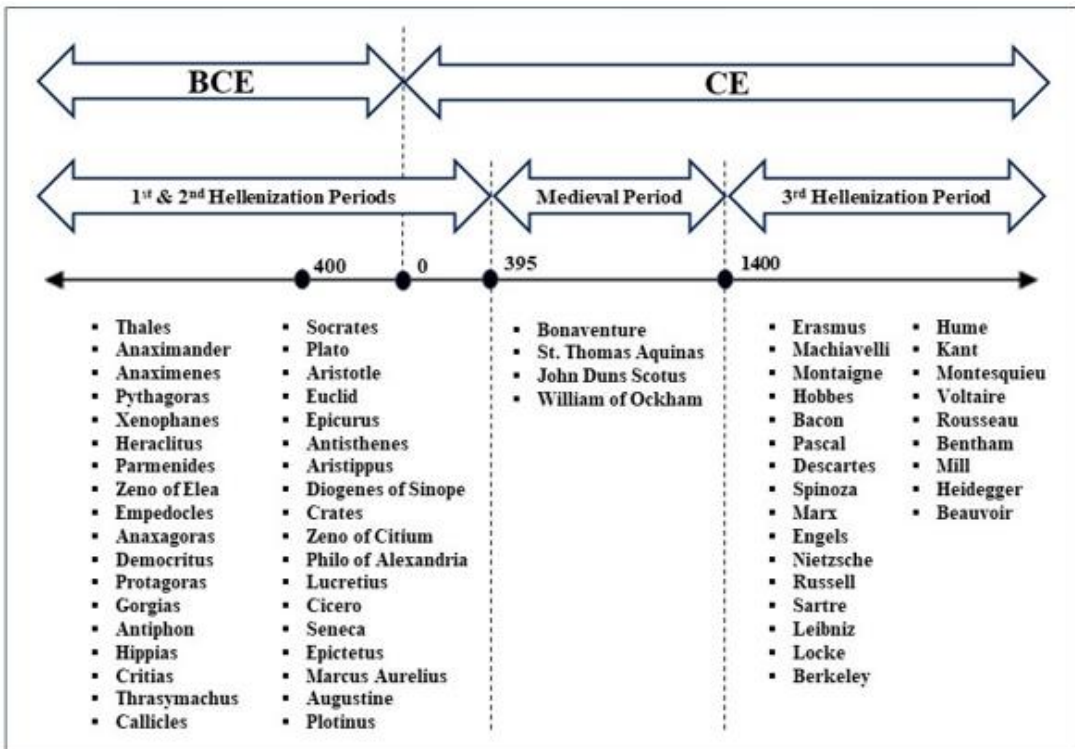
There is an abundance of evidence that since then, these freedoms are enabling humanity to progress in an evolutionary fashion towards a new optimum, subject to new knowledge and constantly adapting to timely universal concerns.

As one may infer from above, the most important freedom that ancient Greeks permitted to themselves and pursued with vigor and rigor was the freedom to reason, the freedom to philosophize. Chronologically, Figure 1 shows, non-exhaustively, how philosophy has evolved since ancient times in the West. The same figure can also be viewed as a distribution of philosophers from ancient times to modern; it exhibits a high-low-high pattern (such as the letter M), where “low” corresponds to the Medieval Period.

As pointed out by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, unless new studies reveal additional names, “Histories of medieval philosophy often treat Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham as the ‘big three’ figures in the later medieval period; a few add Bonaventure as a fourth.”

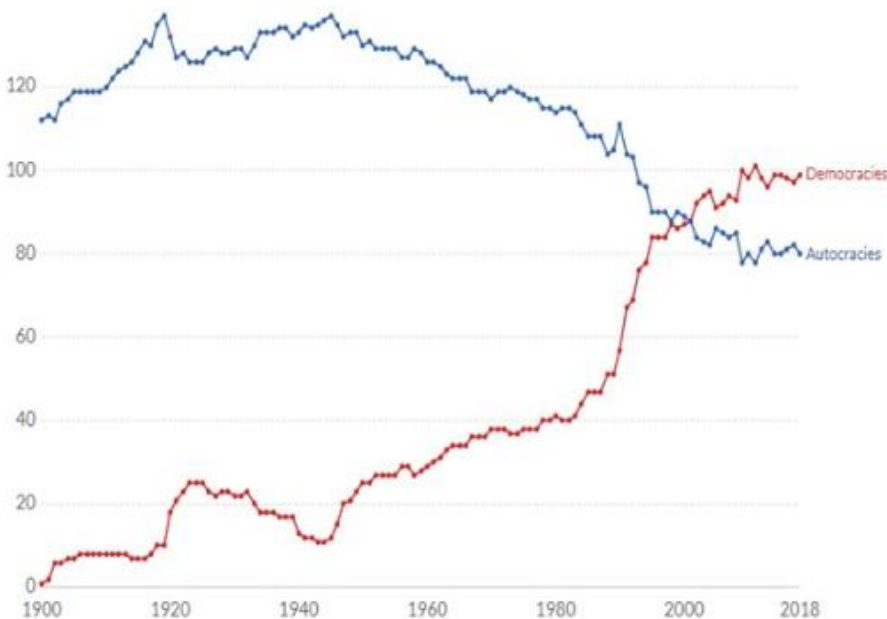
After Philosophy, freedom to reason in ancient Greece (especially ancient Athens) contributed Democracy. In 2019, there are 195 countries in the world. This total comprises 193 countries that are member states of the United Nations (UN) (2019) and two countries that are non-member observer states: the Holy See and the State of Palestine. Not included in this total count of 195 countries are: (1) Taiwan (the United Nations considers it represented by the People's Republic of China); (2) The Cook Islands as well as Niue, both states in free association with New Zealand which are members of several UN specialized agencies and have been recognized "full treaty-making capacity," but are neither member states nor non-member observer states; (3) Dependencies (or dependent territories, dependent areas, dependencies) and Areas of Special Sovereignty (autonomous territories); and (4) Other countries recognized by the UN as not being self-governing.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Philosophers from BCE to CE**



**Figure 2:** Democracies and Autocracies through time

## Numbers of autocracies and democracies



Source: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-9/>

Currently, out of 193 recognized countries, 123 are democratic. Unlike philosophy, since ancient Greek times, democracy did not spread as fast. Figure 2 depicts the slow rise in the number of democracies over the last two centuries. The end of World War I led to the birth of many democracies. However, during the 1930s, many of these young democracies then reverted to being autocratic. After World War II, the number of democracies began growing again. But it was the fall of the Iron Curtain, circa 1989, that led to a more dramatic increase in the number of democracies.

Although there are many negatives associated with Democracy (such as, among others, gridlock and polarization, harmful lobbying, slow in deciding, susceptible to kidnapping and to social media interference), democratic nations are more likely to secure the peace, deter aggression, expand open markets, promote economic development, protect their citizens, combat international terrorism and crime, uphold human and worker rights, avoid humanitarian crises and refugee flows, improve education, improve the global environment, and protect human health. By and large, the benefits associated with Democracy exceed the costs.

Other contributions made by ancient Greek free thought, which continue to evolve and mutate during the THP, are those that relate to their undertaking of a spiritual journey towards a less restraining life through empowerment and metamorphosis by relying on a religion that made gods in their own image, mythology, drama, comedy, and of course art in all its forms, concepts which to this day evolve and mutate as we speak; more specifically:

- *pleasing to the senses, visual and performing forms of art* (from ancient theater to modern theater and cinema, from hand-made to machine-made art, from lyra to modern guitar music, and from ancient temple to modern skyscraper architecture);
- *mythology* (from Hesiod, Homer and Aesop to modern Superman, Harry Potter and Star Wars);
- *epic and lyric poetry* (from Homer and Pindar to modern literature narration, to sonnets and from free verse poems to lyrics for songs);
- *prose fiction* (from Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe* and *Clitophon*, to Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Hemingway, and Rowling);
- *historiography* (from Herodotus and Thucydides, the fathers of historiography, to cliometrics);
- *science and mathematics* (from Thales, Pythagoras, Democritus, and Archimedes, to Tesla, Einstein, Mendeleev, and Higgs);
- *technology* (from triremes to modern boats and from the Antikythera mechanism to modern computers); and
- *athletics* (from ancient to modern Olympics and to other modern sports such as football and basketball).

Undoubtedly, in this increasingly globalized THP, one must wonder how society would deal with (a) income disparities between the haves and the have-nots that appear to be stagnant, (b) climate warming, (c) conflict and unrest, and (d) threats to global health? What the above paragraphs imply is that the world is more likely to deal with these problems successfully when the freedoms to reason, elect and create are nurtured universally than when they are not.

## Summary and Conclusion

I asserted above that currently the world has been experiencing the Third Hellenization Period which started with the Italian Renaissance, instigated by the teachings of the theologian and philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE).



Unlike philosophers in previous periods (First and Second Hellenization as well as Medieval), St. Thomas preached that Truth is a function of both Natural Revelation and Supernatural Revelation which resulted in, simultaneously, Christianizing Aristotle (St. Thomas' most referenced philosopher) and Aristotleizing Christianity, thus opening up the doors to human reason that had been muted during the Medieval centuries.

During both the First and the Second Hellenization Periods, Truth was a function of Natural Revelation. Towards the end of the Second Hellenization Period, the philosopher Iamblichus (250-325 CE) started to preach that Truth is a Function of Natural Revelation and Magic (magic resembling what today is known as black magic).

Unfortunately, the faulty transformation Iamblichus established contaminated the pre-existing philosophical paradigm; as a result, it lost its appeal, opening the road to the Christianity model of the times, according to which Truth was a function of Supernatural Revelation alone (divine communication of truth in which either the manner of communication or its content is beyond the capacity of human nature to attain).

Undoubtedly, the ideas of Iamblichus could not compete against Christianity's powerful messages of hope, renewal, selflessness, compassion, justice, forgiveness and unconditional love; therefore, justifiably, Theodosius I made it the mandatory religion for his people. Regrettably, the contaminating ideas of Iamblichus caused the disappearance of the pre-existing philosophical paradigm of *natural revelation*, only to appear again about a thousand years later through the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas. During its absence, humanity experienced the Medieval period or, as some prefer to call it, the Dark Ages.

I also asserted that the basic constituent of Hellenization is freedom: the freedom to think or reason, the freedom to seek gratification from aesthetics, and the freedom to undertake a spiritual journey towards a less restraining life through empowerment and metamorphosis. Ancient Greeks realized that freedom to pursue their desires, subject to constraints (geographical, cultural and legal) as well as balance of mind and body, would give them the capability to excel in whatever they set their minds to; this freedom sparked an unyielding endeavor for truth, perfection and excellence and made them achieve phenomenal accomplishments that astound us to this day.

It appears that this thirst for freedom drives the current Hellenization period on a path to higher levels of wellbeing for all. Undoubtedly, universal exercising of the freedoms to reason, elect and create are more likely than not to contribute solutions to our current global ailments such as stagnant income disparities between the haves and the have-nots, climate warming, conflict and unrest, and threats to global health.

## References

- Aquinas, Thomas (1999), *On Faith and Reason*, Stephen F. Brown (ed.), Hackett Publishing, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, ISBN (13) 978087220456.
- Aquinas, Thomas (1977), *Great Books of the Western World (Volumes 19 and 20)*, Robert Maynard Hutchins (ed.), Encyclopedia Britannica, ISBN 0-85229-163-9.
- Berlin, Isaiah (1956), *The Age of Enlightenment*, Mentor Books, New York, N.Y., USA.
- Bowra, C. M. (1985), *The Greek Experience*, Orion Publishing Group Co, London, UK, ISBN 029778613X.
- Cooper, John M. (2012), *Pursuits of Wisdom*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, USA, ISBN 9780691138602.
- Cornford, F.M. (1965), *Before and after Socrates*, Cambridge University Press, UK.
- Fine, John V.A. (1983), *The Ancient Greeks: A Critical History*, Harvard University Press (The Belknap Press), Cambridge Massachusetts, USA, ISBN 0-674-03314-0
- Gintis, Herbert (2006), "The Economy as a Complex Adaptive System" (A Review of Eric D. Beinhocker, *The Origins of Wealth: Evolution, Complexity, and the Radical Remaking of Economics*)  
<<http://www.umass.edu/preferen/Class%20Material/Readings%20in%20Market%20Dynamics/Complexity%20Economics.pdf>>.
- Graves, Robert (1960), *The Greek Myths: 1*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, Maryland, USA.
- Kenny, Anthony (2012), *A New History of Western Philosophy*, Oxford University Press (Clarendon Press), UK, ISBN 978-0-19-965649-3.
- Merrifield, R. (1987), *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, Guild Publishing, London, UK, ISBN-10: 0941533263.
- Miller, Henry (1941), *The Colossus of Maroussi*, Cold Press, New Jersey, USA, ISBN 978-0-8112-1857-3.
- Morey, William (1901), *Outlines of Roman History*, American Book Company, New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, USA
- North, Douglass (1973), *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History*, Cambridge University Press, UK, ISBN 978-0-521-29099-9.
- Osborne, Roger (2008), *Civilization: A New History of the Western World*, Pegasus Books, New York, USA, ISBN 978-1-933648-76-7.
- Petrakis, Leonidas (2014), "Ancient Greeks and Modern Science: Who Discovered the Heliocentric System?", *The National Herald*, New York, USA, May 22-23, 2004, <http://www.demokritos.org/Aristarchus%20and%20Copernicus-Petrakis.htm> .
- Paine, Thomas (2003), *Common Sense, The Rights of Man and Other Essential Writings*, Signet Classics (first published in 1776), USA, ISBN 0451528891.
- Pieper, Josef (1991), *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* [original in German (1986), translated from German original (1962) by Richard and Clara Winston], Ignatius Press.

- Russell, Bertrand (1986), *A History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Simon & Schuster, UK, (first published 1945), ISBN13: 9780671201586.
- Smith, Morton (1960), *The Ancient Greeks*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca New York, USA, ISBN 080149852X.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2014) <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume/>.
- Strauss, Leo and Joseph Cropsey (ed.) (1987), *History of Political Philosophy 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA, ISBN 0-226-7771031.
- United Nations (2019), <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/democracy/index.html>
- Warner, Rex (1986), *The Greek Philosophers*, Mentor Books, New York, N.Y., USA, ISBN 0-451-62732-6.
- Weitz, Morris (ed.) (1966), *20<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy: The Analytic Tradition*, The Free Press, New York, N.Y, USA, Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 66-10366.
- Wikipedia (2016), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic\\_and\\_religion#cite\\_note-Merrifield-7](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_and_religion#cite_note-Merrifield-7).

## Appendix

**Table A1: Hellenization Periods**

<p><b>First Hellenization Period of the Western World (3000 BCE to 338 BCE)</b></p> <p>From the Minoan &amp; Mycenaean Civilizations (3000 BCE) to the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BCE) won by Philip II of Macedonia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Architecture &amp; Art</li> <li>• Epic Poems</li> <li>• City States</li> <li>• Trade</li> <li>• Colonization</li> <li>• The ‘Greek’ Dark Ages</li> <li>• Birth of, among other, Philosophy, Democracy, Theater and Sport</li> </ul>
<p><b>Second Hellenization Period of the Western World (337 BCE to 391 CE)</b></p> <p>From the time Macedonians took over with Alexander the Great (336 BCE) until Theodosius I The Great (390 CE).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Macedonian Empire</li> <li>• Hellenistic Centuries</li> <li>• Roman Empires (Unified, Western, Eastern or Byzantine until 390 CE)</li> </ul>

<p><b>Medieval Period (Western Europe) (392 CE to 1200s, 1300s, or 1400s CE)</b></p> <p>From the suppression of non-Christian traditions by Theodosius I The Great (391) CE to Renaissance (variously interpreted as beginning in the 1200s, 1300s, or 1400s CE, depending on the region of Europe and on other factors)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suppression of non-Christian traditions</li> <li>• End of Olympic Games</li> <li>• Demolition of Alexandrian Library and Ancient Temples</li> <li>• Barbarian Raids</li> <li>• Population Decline</li> <li>• Decline of Free Trade</li> <li>• Scarcity of Literacy</li> <li>• Cultural Decline</li> <li>• Long Wars</li> <li>• Epidemics</li> <li>• Crusades</li> <li>• Inquisitions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Third Hellenization Period of the Entire World (1200s, 1300s, or 1400s CE to today)</b></p>	<p>• <b>Renaissance</b> Surge of interest in Classical Learning and Values (Thomas Aquinas), Printing Press and Compass, Gunpowder, Discovery and Exploration of New Continents, Free Trade, Copernican System, End of the Hundred Years' War between the English and the French, Capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans, Translation of Ancient Literature from Arabic to Latin and other Languages, Protestant Reformation, Ejection of Moslems from Spain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Revolution and re-birth of Democracy</li> <li>• Emergence of the Free Market System (Adam Smith)</li> <li>• Re-birth of Olympic Games</li> <li>• Democracy: dominant form of government in the world (2014)</li> <li>• Western Philosophy, Sport, Theater (and its mutations), Art, Architecture, Science, prevalent in all countries across the globe</li> <li>• Globalization (increasing interdependence of nations in terms of economics, governance and cultures) spreads Hellenization at increasing rates</li> </ul>

**Table A2: Timeline from the Bronze Age to Sulla**

<b>The Bronze Age</b>  <b>3,000 – 1,100 BCE</b>	<b>2,000 - 1,700 BCE</b> Mycenaean enter mainland Greece.
	<b>1,700 - 1,500 BCE</b> The height of Minoan Civilization is reached.
	<b>1,400 BCE</b> The rise of Mycenaean naval strength.
	<b>1,200 BCE</b> The Trojan War, civil war, and the fall of the Mycenaeans.
	<b>1,150 BCE</b> Dorian Immigration into Greece mainland.
	<b>1,150 - 1,100 BCE</b> Aeolian Immigrations begin to Asia Minor.
<b>The Dark Age</b>  <b>1,100 - 800 BCE</b>	<b>1,100 BC</b> End of Mycenaean age and civilization. Early city states are ruled through monarchy.
	<b>1,100 - 1,000 BCE</b> Ionian Immigration to Asia Minor.
	<b>900 BCE</b> Dorian migration to the Aegean islands, Asia Minor (area around Rhodes), and through the Peloponnese.
<b>Archaic Period</b>  <b>800 - 500 BCE</b>	<b>800 - 700 BCE</b> Monarchies begin to be replaced by Aristocratic Republics.
	<b>776 BCE</b> Date of the first Olympic games.
	<b>621 BCE</b> Draco's code of law - Athens.
	<b>600 BCE</b> Coin currency introduced.
	<b>566 BCE</b> Panathenaic festivals established.
	<b>546 BCE</b> Persian invasion and conquest of Greek territories throughout Asia Minor.
	<b>507 BCE</b> Cleisthenes' democratic constitution.
<b>Classical Period</b>  <b>500 - 400 BCE</b>	<b>490 BCE</b> First Persian invasion of Greece, the Battle of Marathon.
	<b>480 BCE</b> Second Persian invasion of Greece, Spartans are defeated at Thermopylae, Athens is occupied by the Persians. The Persians are finally defeated at Salamis.

<p><b>Classical Period</b></p> <p><b>500 - 400 BCE</b></p> <p>(continued)</p>	<p>The founding of the Delian League.</p>			
	<p><b>479 BCE</b> Persians are defeated at Plataea.</p>			
	<p><b>448 BCE</b> Peace with the Persians</p>			
	<p><b>443 - 429 BCE</b> Pericles is leader of Athens during the Golden Age.</p>			
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td rowspan="3" style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>431 - 404 BCE The Peloponnesian War</b></p> </td> <td> <p><b>430 BCE</b> Plague in Athens</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p><b>411 BCE</b> Revolts in Athens</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p><b>404 BCE</b> Athens Surrenders to Sparta.</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><b>431 - 404 BCE The Peloponnesian War</b></p>	<p><b>430 BCE</b> Plague in Athens</p>	<p><b>411 BCE</b> Revolts in Athens</p>
<p><b>431 - 404 BCE The Peloponnesian War</b></p>	<p><b>430 BCE</b> Plague in Athens</p>			
	<p><b>411 BCE</b> Revolts in Athens</p>			
	<p><b>404 BCE</b> Athens Surrenders to Sparta.</p>			
<p><b>Late Classical Period</b></p> <p><b>400 - 330 BCE</b></p>	<p><b>395 - 340 BCE</b> Warfare between rival Greek leagues.</p>			
	<p><b>371 BCE</b> Thebes defeats Sparta at Leuctra</p>			
	<p><b>338 BCE</b> Philip of Macedonia leads the Greek City States.</p>			
	<p><b>336 - 323 BCE</b> Alexander the Great's reign begins.</p>			
<p><b>Hellenistic Age</b></p> <p><b>330 - 30 BCE</b></p>	<p><b>323 - 148 BCE</b> Greek City States remain relatively independent. Frequent warfare continues between rival leagues.</p>			
	<p><b>200 - 196 BCE</b> First Roman victories over Greece.</p>			
	<p><b>148 BCE</b> Macedonia becomes a Roman province.</p>			
	<p><b>146 BCE</b> Corinth destroyed by the Romans.</p>			
	<p><b>86 BCE</b> Athens is sacked by Sulla.</p>			