



Historically Speaking

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Art of Ancient Greece

The art of ancient Greece is usually divided stylistically into four periods: the Geometric, Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic. The Geometric age is usually dated from about 1000 BC, although in reality little is known about art in Greece during the preceding 200 years, traditionally known as the Greek Dark Ages. The 7th century BCE saw a slow development of the Archaic style as exemplified by the black-figure style of vase painting. Around 500 BCE is usually taken as the dividing line between the Archaic and the Classical periods, and the reign of Alexander the Great (336 BC to 323 BC) is taken as separating the Classical from the Hellenistic periods. From some point in the 1st century BCE onwards "Greco-Roman" is used.

There was no sharp transition from one period to another. Forms of art developed at different speeds in different parts of the Greek world, and as in any age some artists worked in more innovative styles than others. Strong local traditions, and the requirements of local cults, enable historians to locate the origins even of works of art found far from their place of origin. Greek art of various kinds was widely exported. The whole period saw a generally steady increase in prosperity and trading links within the Greek world and with neighbouring cultures.

The survival rate of Greek art differs starkly between media. We have huge quantities of pottery and coins, much stone sculpture, though even more Roman copies, and a few large bronze sculptures. Almost entirely missing are painting, fine metal vessels, and anything in perishable materials including wood. The stone shell of a number of temples and theatres has survived, but little of their extensive decoration.

Ancient Greek art has exercised considerable influence on the culture of many countries all over the world, above all in its treatment of the human figure. In the West, Greek architecture was also hugely influential, and in both East and West the influence of Greek decoration can be traced to the modern day. Etruscan and Roman art were largely and directly derived from Greek models, and Greek objects and influence reached into Celtic art north of the Alps, as well as all around the Mediterranean world and into Persia.



Venus de Milo (Aphrodite of Melos)

The Venus de Milo is an ancient Greek sculpture that was created during the Hellenistic period, sometime between 150 and 125 BC.E. It is one of the most famous works of ancient Greek sculpture, having been prominently displayed at the Louvre Museum since shortly after the statue was rediscovered on the island of Milos, Greece, in 1820.

The Venus de Milo is believed to depict Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, whose Roman counterpart was Venus. The sculpture is sometimes called the Aphrodite de Milos, due to the inaccuracy of naming it after a Roman goddess. It is now widely agreed that the statue was created by Alexandros of Antioch.

Made of Parian marble, the statue is larger than life size, standing 6 ft 8 in high. The statue is missing both arms, with part of one arm, as well as the original plinth, being lost after the statue's rediscovery.

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Heracles and Athena, black-figure side of a belly amphora by the Andokides Painter, c. 520/510 BC



The Venus de Milo, discovered at the Greek island of Milos, 130-100 BC, Louvre

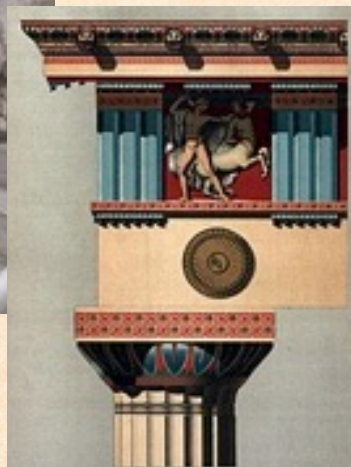


The Hellenistic Pergamon Altar: l to r Nereus, Doris, a Giant, Oceanus



Macedonian tomb fresco from Agios Athanasios, Thessaloniki, Greece, 4th century BCE.

Reconstructed colour scheme of the entablature on a Doric temple



Pottery painting, sculpture, architecture, frescoes, coins and jewelry were among the many artistic endeavors of the ancient Greeks. Pottery, sculptures and coins exist in plenty. Architecture is often in ruins and frescoes are rarely found in good condition. In the 6th century there was a school of sculpture as well as the ancient temple of Phanios Apollo near Fana in southern Chios. I include this school in my books as a place to visit to see the art being produced there as well as another place to sell blocks of marble and chests of an abrasive called emery, which was used to polish the finished sculptures.



Athenian tetradrachm with head of Athena and owl, after 449 BC. The most acceptable coin in the Mediterranean world.