Ancient Greek Arts and Architecture

Ancient Greek Architecture

The earliest buildings built in Greece in the New Stone Age are small houses or huts with wooden walls around them for protection. Later bigger houses were built and stone walls were constructed around the villages.

By the Early Bronze Age, there was one bigger house in the middle of the village and fancier, bigger stone walls surrounding the village.

In the Late Bronze Age, under the influence of Western Asia and the Minoans on Crete, there are palaces and big stone tombs, as well as paved roads, bridges, and dams (and more stone walls).

During the Greek Dark Ages, the palaces were burned and the roads, bridges and dams fell apart. At the end of the Dark Ages, however, with the beginning of the Iron Age and the Archaic period in Greece, a new type of building emerged: a temple for the gods. There are houses, but no more palaces. Roads, bridges and stone walls begin to be rebuilt.

In the Classical Period, there are more temples that are bigger with new design ideas. The Parthenon is built in the 440's BC. Democracy prevents the Greeks from building palaces or big tombs, because politically all men are supposed to be equal, so it would look bad to have a big palace, even if you could afford it. Instead, the Greeks built public buildings where men could meet and talk.

By the 300's BC, in the Hellenistic Period, there are some new architectural types. Less time is spent on temples and more time is spent on the new form of architecture: the theater. Many theaters were built all over the Greek world. There was also new interest in town planning during this time. Streets began to be laid out in straight lines, instead of just developing naturally.

With the conquests of Alexander the Great, architecture became an important way to spread Greek culture and show who was in charge in the conquered countries.

Once the Romans conquered Greece, around 200 -100 BC, they too used architecture to show that they were in charge. As a result, there were many buildings in the Roman style. About 400 AD, the Greeks converted to Christianity and begin to build churches and monasteries.

During the Middle Ages, parts of Greece were taken over by the Normans. They built castles. The other parts of Greece that were still controlled by the Byzantine Empire built in a more West Asian style of architecture. In 1453 AD, the Byzantine Empire was taken over by the Turks, so Islamic mosques began to be built in Greece.
The Ruins of Ancient Greek Architecture

Athens, a city in southeastern Greece, is the capital and largest city in the country. It dominates the economic, cultural and political life of Modern Greece. Athens is often called the “Cradle of Western Civilization” because of its historic cultural achievements during the 5th and 4th centuries BC. The city still holds the ruins of ancient buildings and monuments, as well as works of art from the Classical Age of Ancient Greece.

The city’s most famous feature is the Acropolis, a flat-topped hill capped with the ruins of ancient temples, monuments and works of art. The ruins include The Parthenon and the Temple of Athena Nike. The southern slope of the Acropolis was once the cultural center of the ancient city. It includes the ruins of the Theater of Dionysus. Below the Acropolis are remains of the agora, the ancient market and public meeting place. All of these ruins date to the 5th century BC and each is considered a masterpiece of classical Greek architecture.


Greek Sculpture

Very few pieces of Greek sculpture survived for people to see today. Being made mostly of limestone and marble, one might think the sculptures would have survived. Both limestone and marble, however, can be burned and turned into lime, one of the ingredients used to create cement. During the Middle Ages, most Greek statues were not valued. As a result, they were burned in lime kilns to make cement, which was seen as more valuable than the statues. Almost all archaeological sites in Greece found medieval lime kilns in the middle of them. Some Greek sculpture is known because of the Roman copies that survived. It is known that Greek sculpture has been divided into seven main periods. It is difficult, however, to know exactly which period a statue belongs in.

Greek Painting

Although we know, from written sources, that the Greeks painted pictures from the Bronze Age through the Roman Conquest and beyond, most of the paintings have been destroyed. More older paintings survived than the more recent ones. This is because some of the Bronze Age paintings were buried by volcanoes (i.e. Pompeii) and others were buried by earthquakes. They were preserved under the ash, so archaeologists were able to uncover them. Later paintings that survived did so safely because many of them were painted on the walls of underground tombs.

The earliest real paintings we have from the Greek world are from the Minoan Culture on the island of Crete. They were painted on the walls of palaces where the rulers of Crete lived around 1700-1400 BC. When the walls were plastered, the paint was brushed onto the wet plaster, so that the paint soaked into the plaster as it dried. This is called fresco painting. The Minoans were very interested in nature and loved to paint life-like plants and animals. The Minoans also painted pictures of their employers, their friends and
slaves. When the Mycenaean destroyed the palaces around 1400 BC, some of the pictures survived because they were buried under the ruins of the palaces.

Source: http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/art/greekart.htm
Greek Pottery

Very few Greek painted pictures have survived the 2500 years since they were painted. So, most of what we know about Greek art comes from the pictures they painted on pottery. Pottery, even if it gets broken, can be put back together, and a good deal of it has even survived whole, mostly in Etruscan tombs.

A lot of the Athenian pots were for made for funerals. When people died, their relatives put these pots in their graves or used them as grave markers. Often these pots had funeral scenes on them. Other vases and pieces of pottery had scenes from Greek mythology, historical events, battles, warriors and athletes pictured on them.

Source: http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/art/greekart.htm
Ancient Greek Arts and Architecture

Directions: Read the information on Ancient Greek Arts and Architecture and then answer the questions below.

1. What types of buildings were built during the Classical Period in Ancient Greece? During the Hellenistic Period?

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____________________________________________________________________________________

2. What were most of the Ancient Greek sculptures made of and what happened to most of them during the Middle Ages?

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____________________________________________________________________________________

3. Most Ancient Greek paintings were destroyed. Where have archaeologists found the few paintings that have survived?

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____________________________________________________________________________________

4. Where does most of what we know about Greek art come from?

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____________________________________________________________________________________

5. When one country conquered another, what is one way they were able to extend their culture and show they were in charge?

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____________________________________________________________________________________
Greek Ruins and Artifact Website Directions

A. To see photographs of the ruins of ancient Greece taken in the mid 1800’s go to:

http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/archive/default.htm
  click on Antiquaria tab at the top of the page
  click on the Photographs and Glass Slides link
  click on the Sites link.

This will bring up a list of sites to browse in the photography database.

Three useful sites are:

- Greece, Athens
- Greece, Athens, Acropolis
- Greece, Athens, Agora

When you click on a site, it will bring up photographs to click on. Each photograph will be identified by place and may include the date the photo was taken.

Preview the sites and choose a few photographs to review.

Then, go to the Greece, Athens site and click on Photograph 31: Theatre of Dionysus. Analyze this photograph and then complete the photograph analysis worksheet.

B. Art.com is a website that has photographs of numerous Greek artifacts. Below is a list of five photographs you may want to view:

http://www.art.com/asp/display-asp/_/id--23628/Greek_Artifacts.htm

You can browse through the photographs or to find a photograph listed below, click on advanced search and type the item number listed into the Search by Product ID box.

After viewing several items, choose one to analyze and use either the Photograph Analysis Worksheet or the Artifact Analysis Worksheet, whichever one is most appropriate for the item, to record your observations.

1. Photograph of a palace room.
   Within the "Queen's Megaron" at Knossos, Palace of King Minos, Crete
   item #: 12141132A

2. Photograph of ancient surgical instruments.
   Surgical Instruments, Various Dates within Roman Period
   item #: 11721196A
3. Photograph of a bronze helmet.
   A Greek Bronze Corinthian Helmet, circa 6th Century BC
   item #: 11783427A

4. Photograph of an ancient vase.
   Athenian Black-Figure Amphora, Showing Olive Gathering, circa 520 BC
   item #: 12631857A

5. Photograph of an ancient vase.
   Etrusco-Ionian Black-Figure Hydria Depicting a Hunting Scene, from Cerveteri, circa 540-530 BC
   item #: 12058495A
Photograph Analysis Worksheet

Directions: Study the photograph for two minutes. Form an overall impression of the photograph and then examine individual items.

1. QUALITIES OF THE OBJECTS IN THE PHOTOGRAPH
List the objects in the photograph. What are they made of? Describe how they look.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. USES OF THE OBJECTS IN THE PHOTOGRAPH
A. What might they have been used for?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

B. Who might have used them?

________________________________________________________________________

3. WHAT DOES THE PHOTOGRAPH TELL US?
A. What does it tell us about the technology of the time in which the objects were made and used?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

B. What does it tell us about the life and times of the people who made and used the objects?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

C. Can you name a similar item today?

________________________________________________________________________
Artifact Analysis Worksheet

1. TYPE OF ARTIFACT
Describe the material from which it was made: bone, pottery, metal, wood, stone, leather, glass, paper, cardboard, cotton, plastic, other material.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE ARTIFACT
Describe how it looks and feels: shape, color, texture, size, weight, movable parts, anything printed, stamped or written on it.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. USES OF THE ARTIFACT
A. What might it have been used for?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

B. Who might have used it?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

C. Where might it have been used?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

D. When might it have been used?
________________________________________________________________________