

# Ancient Greece

**Greek art is widely regarded as the chief cornerstone of Western civilization. Inspired by the achievements of the Egyptians and the Minoan culture on Crete, Greek sculptors strove for – and succeeded in creating – a perfect balance of beauty, harmony, and proportion.**

## Origins and influences – the Aegean

Greek culture dates back to the Bronze Age (c3000 BCE). In the Aegean, there were important developments in the Cyclades and on Crete although, ultimately, both cultures were absorbed by the Mycenaeans. However, their association was not straightforward. At first, the Minoan (Cretan) influence was far stronger and some historians used to regard Mycenaean art as a provincial form of it.

The Minoans were not Greek-speakers. Their origins are uncertain, although some believe that they came from Anatolia (Asian Turkey). Certainly, their art forms display a number of eastern traits, most notably from Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia. Minoan craftsmen rapidly outshone these



▲ **View of the Acropolis** *The citadel of Athens was built on top of the Acropolis, overlooking the city. Its principal structure is the Parthenon, a temple which was begun in 447 BCE, to replace the buildings that were destroyed during the Persian occupation.*

sources, though, producing a rich culture, centred on their palaces and their bull-cult.

The Mycenaeans absorbed Minoan ideas, only taking the lead when the Cretan civilization collapsed in c1400 BCE. The Mycenaeans, who were dominated by a warrior

aristocracy, rapidly grew rich and powerful, as the wealth of their graves attests. One theory suggests that they fought as mercenaries for the Egyptians, who paid them in gold. Their decline dates from around 1100 BCE.

## CURRENT events

**c1250 BCE** Regarded as a legend by some, there is evidence that the famous Trojan War took place around this time.

**776 BCE** First recorded Olympic Games.

**490 BCE** The Persians invade Greece and occupy Athens. They are expelled after defeats at Salamis (480) and Plataea (479).

**356 BCE** Birth of Alexander the Great. Educated by Aristotle, he went on to create a vast empire. He also founded the city of Alexandria in 331 BCE.

## TIMEline

The first major achievements on the Greek mainland stemmed from the Mycenaean culture, which flourished from around 1600 to 1100 BCE. The Archaic period produced some early masterpieces, most notably the Lady of Auxerre (c640 BCE), but it was during the Classical era that Greek art blossomed fully. The Parthenon sculptures (447–432 BCE) provide the highlight of Athenian culture, which Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) spread far and wide.

**c1500 BCE**



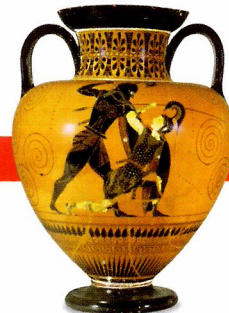
**AEGEAN** Funerary Mask

**640–630 BCE**



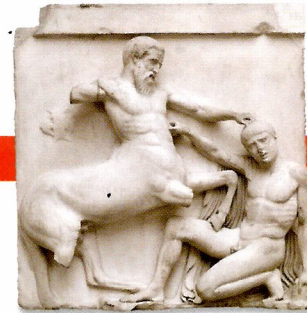
**ARCHAIC** The Lady of Auxerre

**540–530 BCE**



**ARCHAIC** Achilles Slaying Penthesilia

**447–432 BCE**



**CLASSICAL** Lapith Fighting a Centaur

**c42–20 BCE**



**HELLENISTIC** Lacoön and his Sons