



▲ **Horse of Selene** *One of the most famous sculptures from the Parthenon frieze. It displays the exhaustion and strain that the horse has suffered while pulling the chariot of Selene – the moon goddess – across the night sky. 447-432 BCE, stone, length 83cm, British Museum, London, England*

Origins and influences – Greece

During the Iron Age, Greek culture needed to renew itself. Following the decline of the Mycenaeans, which may have been prompted by Dorian invaders from the north, parts of the mainland became increasingly depopulated. The era of the Mycenaeans was remembered as a heroic age, celebrated in Greek legends, but little of its material culture survived.

The revival began to take place during the Geometric period (c900–c750 BCE), which takes its name from the simple, linear designs of the pottery of the time. Towards the end of this phase, Eastern influences began to creep in, as trading links with the East improved. This continued throughout the Archaic period (c750–480 BCE), when Greek artists became more confident and gained a taste for experimentation.

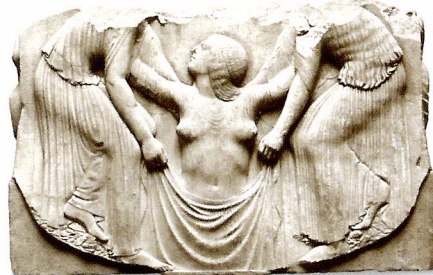
The scale of Archaic artworks was usually modest, but exposure to the opulent and monumental sculpture of Egypt changed

attitudes. In the 7th century BCE, Greek mercenaries were employed in Egypt and were allowed to settle at a single site – Naucratis. Through this, their only legitimate entry point into the land of the pharaohs, Greek artists gained inspiration and a new sense of ambition.

Classical Art

For much of the Archaic period, Greek art was still essentially regional. The idea of a national Greek identity only began to take root in the 6th century BCE. This grew more pronounced in the following century, when the country faced a common threat. The Persian invasion (490 BCE) stirred the Greeks into action and, once the invaders had been expelled, they founded the Delian League (478 BCE), to maintain this sense of unity.

The achievements of the Classical era epitomized these bonds. The building of the Parthenon was a physical symbol of national pride, while the spirit of the new style was the defining point of Greek civilization. The twin goals of naturalism and idealism were unparalleled in the ancient world and they provided inspiration for generations of artists in the West.



▲ **The “Ludovisi Throne” or “Throne of Venus”, from the Villa Ludovisi** *This is an example of the Western Greek style, produced by an expatriate artist working in Italy. The carving is particularly notable for the subtle treatment of the drapery. c470–460 BCE, marble, Palazzo Altemps, Rome, Italy*