

ART

SCULPTURE

The art and sculpture of Ancient Egypt were a major influence on early Archaic Greek works. However, by the Classical Period in the fifth century BCE, the Greeks had developed an important and radical artistic skill of their own.

Sculpture A is an example of Egyptian Sculpture

Sculpture B is an example of early Archaic Greek sculpture

Sculpture C is an example of the later Classical period of Greek sculpture

Impressive as they were on their own, buildings like the Parthenon would not have been quite so magnificent without the statues and carvings created to decorate them. Greek sculptors were among the finest the world has ever known.

The Greeks were particularly adept at sculpting the human form. Sculptors carefully studied what people looked like, not only while they were still but also while they were moving. The sculptors then tried to re-create what they had observed, paying particular attention to how the subject's muscles looked. In most cases, the result was a statue that looks as if it could come to life. For example, look at the statue of the discus thrower pictured on the previous page. The athlete depicted in the statue looks as though he is in the process of launching his discus into the air.

While the Greeks wanted statues to look lifelike and active, they did not necessarily want them to look realistic. Greek sculptors were not interested in depicting people as they really looked. Instead, they chose to portray their subjects as physically perfect, without any blemishes or imperfections. As a result, Greek statues almost all depict figures of great beauty and grace.

Though we know a great deal about ancient Greek sculpture, very few original works remain. Much of what we do know about Greek sculpture is based on copies of Greek statues made by the Romans a few hundred years later. Roman artists made many copies of what they considered to be the greatest Greek statues, including the discus thrower shown in this chapter. Many of these copies survived even after the original statues were destroyed.

Source: "Golden Age of Athens," Susan Ramirez, et al., World History: Human Legacy, Holt (adapted)

POTTERY

Although today it is thought of as a primary symbol of Greek art, **pottery design** is considered a secondhand art form for the Ancient Greeks. The Greeks used pottery vessels primarily to store, transport, and drink such liquids as wine and water. Smaller pots were used as containers for perfumes and ointments. However, because fired clay pottery is highly durable—and few or no Greek works in wood, textile, or wall painting have survived—the painted decoration of Greek pottery comprises a large part of the archaeological record of Ancient Greece, and since there is so much of it, it has heavily influenced our understanding of Greek society.

Pottery A is an example of Geometric Style

Pottery B is an example of Orientalizing Style

Pottery C is an example of Black-Figure Pottery Style

Pottery D is an example of Red-Figure Pottery Style

Greek pottery developed from a Mycenaean tradition. The earliest stylistic period is the **Geometric**, lasting from about 1000 to 700 BCE. In this period the surface of the pot was completely covered with a network of fine patterns of mostly circle and arc, but also meander (key pattern), checker, triangle, herringbone, and swastika. Human figures, when drawn, were portrayed from the side. The pots made at this time were the earliest in Greek art to show narrative scenes from popular myths, particularly those about Heracles.

Expanding Greek trade during the late 8th and early 7th centuries BCE led to a growing Eastern influence on Greek pottery painters. In this “**Orientalizing**” phase, Asian motifs found their way onto Greek pots. New subjects appear, especially such monsters as the sphinx, siren, griffin, gorgon, and chimaera, as well as such exotic animals as the lion. Painters from the Greek polis of Corinth created figures painted in black glaze with thin lines cut away to show detail.

Athenian painters adopted this **black-figure pottery** style around 630 BCE but emphasized human figures rather than Oriental animal motifs. From 600 BCE on, Athens increasingly became the dominant centre for Greek pottery, eventually exporting its ware throughout the Mediterranean world. The method by which this distinctive color was achieved, involving a complicated three-stage process of firing, has been successfully analyzed and reproduced in the 20th century.

Red-figure pottery, invented at Athens about 530 BCE, is just the reverse of the black-figure style in that the reddish figures appear light against the black background of the pot surface. Because the details of the figures such as eyes and interior lines were painted on in black with a brush, this style allowed more subtle details than did the cutting tool used in black-figure pottery. The red-figure technique allowed a more naturalistic and attractive depiction of human figures. These advances in Greek pottery design give some idea of achievement in large-scale painting at the time. Greek artists sought to endow their figures with mood and character, as well as the capacity for action.

Source: “Greek Pottery,” Encyclopedia Britannica (adapted)