

Greek Art

1100 BC to 400 BC

It is imperative to understand the geographical facts to get a grasp of the evolution and proliferation of Greek art. It flourished on the coast of Asia Minor, i.e. the westernmost point of the Asian continent (most part of modern Turkey) and the islands in the Aegean Sea. Greek settlements had spread till Southern Italy, Sicily, Southern France and Spain. Alexander the Great and his descendants had extended the boundaries of their empires up to Syria, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran and India.

The topography of Asia Minor is split among small mountains; resulting in smaller enclosed valleys. The mountainous countryside though had made communication exchange difficult. This established independence in every valley, leading to creation of city-states. One more characteristic of the Greek landscape is that, due to the peninsulas formed by the geographical formation of archipelagos, the coastline was jagged; forming natural harbours. Thus, the Greeks' constant engagement with the ocean made them sailors. They began trade through the ocean route. Due to their courageous attitude, the Greeks extended their outreach till the western as well as eastern horizons.

The temperate weather here seems to have influenced the Greek temperament. They came across as noble, exuberant and intelligent. Even as they were inclined towards science and philosophy, they had evolved with arts and aesthetics. Moreover, marble rocks were found in abundance, which enabled sculptures to be done largely using marble.

Humanity and Idealism were the two chief ideologies of Greek life. They largely believed the many forms of Nature as God. They humanized these deities. Every city-state had a God or deity, but there was no exclusive priest class as such. Processions were arranged to gain divine blessings and celebrations and festivals were conducted in honour of the deities. Unlike the Egyptians, they did not believe in life after death. They

were worldly people. Thus, believing 'man' to be the centre-point, they tried to interpret life.

The Greeks valued education very highly. Its aim was to educate the student in all fields and make him a good citizen. In the Greek city-state 'Sparta', emphasis was laid on imparting physical education and sports, rather than intellectual edification. Sports competitions in honour of deities began to be held in every city-state. Such meets proved to be special annual attractions in those times, and which is how the idea of the world renowned 'Olympic Games' was conceived. It is understood that the first such world event was held in the year 776 BC. Along with the sports races, grand celebrations of drama and music began to be held. The Greeks were known to be the best philosophers of their times. They explored the form of object and the structural reasons behind them, by examination through minute observation. The greatest philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were Greeks. The thinkers of the world were influenced by these greats through their philosophies.

The Greek culture impacted the Western thinking and arts. Modern European culture is based on the progress made by Greeks in areas of philosophy, science, literature and the arts and the foundations laid down by them. In the Greek ethos, in the league of philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, there have also been state administration-experts like Pericles and Alexander, and scientists like Pythagoras; besides excellent artists like Phidias, Scopas, Myron, Praxiteles. Therefore, the Greek refinement holds a prominent position in human history.

The Greeks believed themselves to be descendants of the God 'Hellen', which is why they call themselves 'Hellenic' and their nation 'Hellas'. The Romans later began to call them 'Greek'. Different tribes and communities had settled themselves on the isles of Greece, but they all spoke a common language, 'Greek'. They had all come together because of this lingual commonality. The Hellenic era is classified into three phases.

- **Archaic Era:** Greek art, it is said, began to emerge in this archaic era. (7th century BC). Ancient artistic features are seen through its course. Later, with the changing circumstances, elegance came to be achieved. Thus, the succeeding period that followed is called the transitional phase (5th century BC). The style adopted in this post archaic era evolved in the city of Athens.

- **Classical Era:** Greek art flourished unprecedentedly in the city of Athens, and hence some call this period, 'Golden Age of Athens'. It existed from 480 BC to 404 BC. The religious ideologies of the Greeks became ascertained during this era, with city-states and organisations getting established. In Art Creation, idealism waned giving rise to manifestations of individualism. Later, in the final stages of this era, political power in Athens became low, and Sparta, the new city-state emerged as the political and cultural centre.

- **Alexandrian or Hellenistic Era:** This era is understood to be the last phase of Greek art. During this period, Alexander the Great expanded his empire and spread art outside of Greece, as Greek artists migrated to the new regions that he conquered. This resulted in the local styles and practices being impacted by Greek art styles, and a mixed style evolving out of this. For instance, in Italy it came to be known as 'Greco-Roman', whereas in Egypt, as 'Tolemic'.

Architecture

The characteristics of Greek architecture which catch the attention instantly are the simple yet rational construction, the immensity, the proportionality, the elegance in the creative details and artistic use of the materials used in the construction. The Greek architecture, though simple, was yet attractive; its aesthetic speciality being the graceful pillars, and beams and frames resting on them. The roof was balanced on the pillars, which enhanced further the beauty of the structure. Egyptian temples had pillars too, but on the inner side. As the pillars in the Greek temples were erected on the visible front, the edifices began to look more huge and appealing. There is no sign of arches having been used in Greek architectural design.

The materials used in building were abundantly available in the Greek empire. Wood was available in the forests, and a variety of attractive and shining marble stone from the mountains. Ivory and Bronze were used too, but they were imported from outside.

Architectural Style

The three main types of Greek architecture were – 1) Doric, 2) Ionic and 3) Corinthian. These types are important gifts bestowed by the Greek

architects to architecture. These types of styles are called 'Order'. The forms of these styles having once been determined by the Greeks, the later architects do not seem to have made any changes, or created any modern style. Proportionality is the foundation of Greek art, and a few changes seem to have been made in it.

Doric Order Design

In the Doric order, a structure is divided in three parts: the lowest part – a plinth of steps, pillars and entablatures. A temple of the Doric order stands on a plinth of three large steps, of reducing heights as they ascend.

The uppermost step has a pillar erected on it. This pillar does not have a base, and its shape is broad near the ground and tapering towards the top. The middle part has a slight bulge, which is not readily noticed. If the sides of the pillar are straight and parallel, then they appear concave in the middle when seen from a distance. To do away with this illusion, the Greek architectural scientists consciously made the mid-part of the pillar to swell slightly. Thus, the pillar looks straight even when we see it at a distance. The pillar is not made from one stone; separate independent parts are formed first, and later connected through a running wooden or metal rod in the centre.

There are about 16 to 20 carved, elongated rolls designed on the pillars. At the apex, there used to be three to four horizontal and circular engraved rims. Above these, there was a pillow-shaped stone with a flat abacus to top. All this formed the pillar head, or the capital. It serves as a binding agent which joins the pillar, beams and plinth.

The structure components from the capital to the roof are called the 'entablature'. This is made up of three components: a flat square horizontal beam (Frieze), the horizontal band of the square frame (Cornice) and Triglyph. The rooftop used to be of tiles of solid clay. The roof was made of wooden beams. The triangular part above the entablature is known as 'gable' or 'pediment'. The gable was used as a space for relief sculptures and it was mainly done in Greek temples.

Like the gable, there used to be sculptures on the frieze too; these were painted chiefly in colours red and blue. The use of green, yellow and golden colours was used scarcely. The colours were applied so that, the different structural components could be identified, the glossiness of the

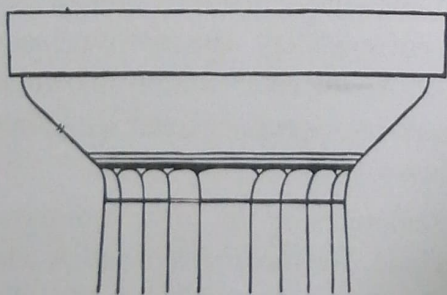
stones could be subdued, and the figurines could be distinctly seen.

Ionic Order

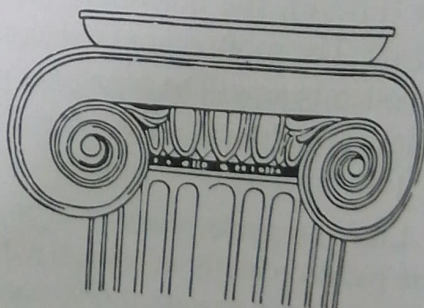
The Ionic Order design style is chiefly decorative, impressive, delicate and elegant. Akin to the Doric style, here too, there used to be the base of the 'ascendingly reducing in size' steps. Every pillar had its own separate base made up of two circular slabs. There used to be about twenty-four carved ridges on the pillar. An attractive capital is the characteristic of the Ionic order style. In the pillow-like capital, on the stone, there used to be an adornment of: beads, curls or ovals, and bow-shaped leaves. At both ends of the stone, there used to be motifs of roll forms. Above this, there was the capital abacus. There used to be three decorated beams, with a square frame, to top it all.

Corinthian Order

The Romans used this style more than the Greeks did, as Greeks were fond of simplicity. The exceedingly flamboyant and fashionable citizens of the city-state Corinth brought about the development of this design, which is why it is known as the Corinthian style. It has entablatures like the Ionic style, with a slight difference though in the pillar and its separate base, and an altogether different capital style than that of the Ionic order. The capital had the form, like that of an inverted bell, with proficient, decorative design of leaves of acanthus creepers over it. The leaves in the creepers were shown arranged in pairs and with their tips bent. The capital looked densely decorated with this design. Therefore, the capital, unlike that of the two other order styles, was not distinctly visible; creating an illusion as if it has been held by the leaves.



1) Doric



2) Ionic

Temples

The Greek used all their artistic proficiency to erect temples despite building distinct types of monuments; the objective being – to provide a sheltered house to idols of deities. It was customary those days to pray in the open, so the need to incorporate a separate chamber for the convenience of the devotees was not felt, nor did they feel the necessity of different sections for other religious practices. The religious needs were minimal and hence the structure design of the temple was kept simple yet splendid.

The rectangular chamber in the temple was called the *sanctorum* (*Cella*). This had no windows and only one door at the front. The plan of the *Cella* was similar to the architectural design of the *Megaron Hall*. In case of a larger *sanctorum*, it had two doors. There was in the centre of the *Cella* the idol of a deity. The walls of the earlier *sanctorums* were raised and having erected two columns on the façade, a porch was formed on the outer side. This first appearance of the temple is known as ‘*Distyle in Antis*’, ‘*distyle*’ being two columns, and; ‘*antis*’ the raised walls in the Greek lexicon. The Greek architects liked this architectural design very much. They repeated the idea at the back end of the temple and designed two columns in the rear just like they had done on the front. There was no way though to go from the *Cella* to this rear porch. The term given for such two-porched plan formed erecting four columns is ‘*Double-in-Antis*’. With time, the temple plan changed according to the number of columns. The temple with a façade with four columns was known as ‘*Prostyle*’, and if these columns were replicated at the rear end, then the term for such temple plan was ‘*Amphiprostyle*’. Slowly and gradually, the temples became dense with columns surrounding the temple on all four sides. This was known as ‘*Peripteral*’. Later, with the need and time, the number of columns went on increasing.

In the earlier stages of construction of temples, the *Doric order* was in vogue. A famous instance of this is the ‘*Temple of Hera*’, built in the *Doric style* in *Olympia*.

The Persians raided the Greek around 480 BC and the Greek art declined. Later, the Greek retaliated and defeated the Persians and once again the city of Athens flourished and became powerful. It is said the golden age began during the reign of King *Pericles* (461 BC to 429 BC).

The Greek built majestic architecture in Acropolis (meaning 'high city on rock') of Athens. They also revived and reorganized the temples which had been devastated due to the battle. They built structures different from those they had built earlier; constructing the 'Parthenon' temple in place of the earlier 'Athena'. Similarly, they rebuilt the 'Erechtheum' and 'Nike Apteros' Temples anew.

The Temple of Parthenon

This temple of the Doric Order style is understood to be a magnificent example of Greek architecture. It marks the Greek golden age due to the large form and proportionality of the temple. King Pericles had entrusted the planning and building of this temple to architects Ictinos and Callicrates; the sculptural décor being given to the then famous sculptor, Phidias. This temple is entirely built out of marble, and it took about 10 years to complete. Among other built structures in Acropolis, this stands out. The length of this temple is 69 metres and width about 30 metres. It has two sanctuaries, a smaller and a bigger one. The bigger one was located on the east and had in it, an idol of Goddess Athena, of 12 metres in height, made of gold and ivory. The smaller sanctuary is on the west; which was known as Parthenon, which may have given the temple its name. It is not definitely clear what this sanctuary was used for. It appears it may have been used to store valuables or as an exclusive ladies' sanctuary. There are eight pillars on either side, i.e. the façade and the rear end. The columns near to the walls on either side are seventeen each. Due to the relief decorated on the entablature and metopes the structural beauty of the temple has been enhanced. There is also sculpture relief in the pediment (triangular space formed due to slanting roofs). In time ahead, when Greece accepted the newly emerged Christian religion, then this temple was converted into a church. This was later followed by the Turkish invasion seeing the church change to mosque. In the war that took place in 1768, this temple was used to store ammunition. Once an explosion led to the Parthenon being quite devastated. Lord Elgin then moved a lot of the sculptures in the temple to the British Museum.

Other Temples

During the period 421 BC to 406 BC, the second famous temple 'Erechtheum' was built. The plan of this temple was designed by the

architect 'Mnesicles'. The structure of Erechtheum is unusual, being erected on two levels; the difference between two levels is 3 metres. Having been designed by the Ionic order, it has two façades – on the east and the north. On the north, it has the columned porch, whereas the southern end is rendered beautifully, as it has in place of columns, sculptures of female figures holding aloft the roof parts. This space is called the 'Maiden's Portico'.

Theatre

The concept of an open theatre was a new and different transformation brought about in architecture by the Greek architects. The theatre was divided in three major parts: semi-circular auditorium, circular stage, and a smaller platform behind the stage (Proskenion) for artists. The Greeks made use of the slope of a cliff, excavating the rock formations, to prepare seats for the audience; in its centre they formed a circular stage for the performing artists and musicians. There was initially a platform behind the stage, but later a structure was erected over it, which was used at times by the artists and musical ensemble, and other times also used as a backdrop for plays. The famous theatre at Epidaurus is of such a kind. Using similar methods on cliff slopes as mentioned above, a stadium with audience seating accommodation was also built. In it, special rooms for rehearsals, bath and general waiting are also seen to have been designed. The stadium, at times, is seen to have been used for other entertainment purposes also.

The Greek architects have not only built temples and public edifices, but also private structures. These are designed with a garden in the centre, surrounded by columns all over, and structures housing several rooms.

Sculpture

The Greek had progressed with sculpture as admirably as they had with architecture. They tried to bring in dynamism and emotions in sculpture, with reliefs, round, still and action-depicting sculptures' achieving remarkable success. They endeavoured successfully to manifest through statues, the human body in its glory and with accurate proportions. They tried to capture the deities in human form. Their craze for sports prompted the Greek to study the anatomy of the muscular and healthy

physiques of sportsmen in order to create the ideal human forms they imagined. In fact, even while building architectural structures, they kept the ideal human proportions in mind.

In the beginning, they used resources like wood, limestone, and Tufa rock for creating sculptures. Later though, there was a lot of marble available on the land of Greece which was excavated and used for carving; bronze being the other metal resource in abundance. There is another unique technique the Greek employed to create sculptures, known as 'Chryselephantine'. For this, an iron skeleton was covered with wood, and the whole-body form covered with ivory, with golden sheets for costumes. These types of idols were mostly made for the temple deities, as from the point of view of the Greeks it was essential that these dazzled most, outshining everything else.

The subjects that intrigued and beckoned the Greek sculptors for their sculptures were varied. The carvings on the capital had been done with finesse. The reliefs on the frieze and the metope in turn, being at a distant height, were engraved in a way that it could be seen from far below too. The pediment, i.e. the triangular space formed below the roofs, owing to it being very difficult to sculpt there, required a fair amount of skill. Yet, making remarkable use of even this space, the Greeks have excellently depicted the biographical incidents of the temple's deities and battle scenes. Thus, after variedly experimenting, the Greek sculpture attained perfection and came to be looked up to as a classic.

Later, during the archaic era of 650 BC to 480 BC, the Greek sculptors focussed their attention on two types of sculpture. 1) The Doric, where male statues were specially made. These sculptures were known as 'Kouros'. 2) The Ionic, where female idols, called 'Kore' were mostly carved.



Kouros Sculptures

It is understood that these are statues of the Greek God Apollo. In appearance, these sculptures are characteristically still and stiff, with hands sticking to the body, upright head, broad shoulders, the left leg slightly lifted ahead, and stylish hairdo. The lips and chin are typically moulded to affect a mystical smile,

which is known as the 'archaic smile'. These idols are in the nude.

Kore Sculptures

These are clothed sculptures. Perceived to be as rigid as the Kouros creations, the right hand of these idols is shown to have been lifted a little, and the carvings done with special force and spontaneity.

The phase from 500 BC to 450 BC was a transitional or Classical period of the Greek regime. During this period, remarkable sculptures like – 'Charioteer of Delphi, Spear-bearer, Discus Thrower' were chiselled. The prominent sculptors of that era were Myron, Phidias, Polykleitos.

Charioteer of Delphi

This is a sculpture of a charioteer, and is currently in the Delphi Archaeological Museum. Probably created as a victory-monument, this sculpture depicts a victorious chariot-driver standing on his two feet, with his body inclined a little towards the right. He is wearing an attire akin to a pleated robe suspended till the ankles, a belt fastened above his waist. His eyes have been inlaid using glass. It is indeed a portrait-sculpture, but does not seem to be of any specific individual. As truly, this era saw the Greek sculptors necessarily incorporating all the characteristics of an individual in the sculpture.

(AurigaDelfi.jpg, Wikimedia Commons, CC 3.0)



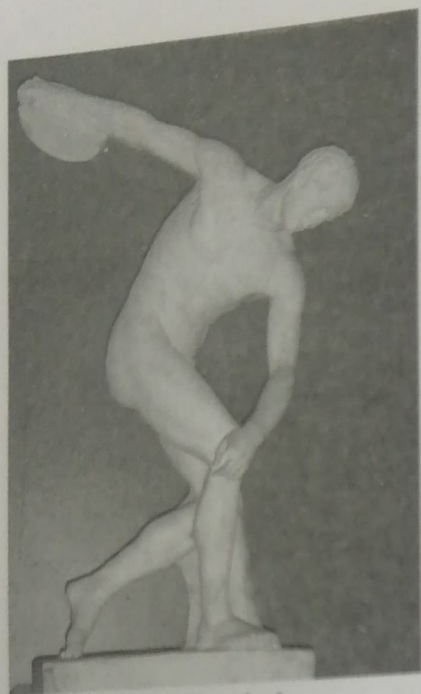
AurigaDelfi

Doryphoros (Spear-bearer)

This idol made by Polykleitos was made from bronze. The prototype now available is of marble. Its action is rhythmic. One of his legs seems to be in movement, whereas the other is firmly grounded balancing the body. The archaic rigidity and symbolism is not seen in this creation.

Discus Thrower

Being a famous sculpture of an athlete, this is a creation by the Greek sculptor Myron. Standing with a specific bent posture of a discus thrower, the idol's right hand holding the discus is lifted high behind his body and



Discobolus

above his head, whereas the left hand has come down in front of the right knee. Therefore, his body has assumed the shape of the English letter, 'S'. But the manifestation of feelings on his face, and liveliness in his action seem absent. This is because, in the 5th century BC Greek art, preference was given to sculptures with common features, without any attention towards individualistic expressions. Hence, the lack of emotions on the faces of idols. (*Discobolus.jpg*, *Wikimedia Commons*, CC 3.0)

Phidias: Greek Sculptor

Phidias was the most influential figure in bringing glory and excellence to Greek art. In the period 498 BC to 432 BC, he designed two famous statues, one of the Goddess Athena at Acropolis, and the God Zeus at Olympia. These idols provide a manifestation of their art accomplishment. Both the statues, with a wooden core, are sculpted with gold, ivory and bronze. The statue of Zeus is 13 metres in height, whereas the Athena idol is 9 metres tall. Phidias became renowned due to these two creations of his. The genius and the artistic excellence of Phidias are on display in the metope, frieze and slanting roofs of the Parthenon, in its pediment and the architectural décor in it. The incidents depicted on these architectural elements seem lively, dynamic and attractive. On the outer wall of the Parthenon's sanctorum, Phidias has designed a flowing relief décor on a panel, 150 metres in length and 5 metres in height. By rendering on this panel, a procession headed towards the temple, he has brought into existence an innovative method. Moreover, on the pediment of the temple's eastern part he has sculpted the life sketch of the Goddess Athena.

Later, as Athen's political power declined, the outdated empirical notions were left behind. The significance attributed to deities and religion in the older period began to deteriorate. Individuality gained prominence against the erstwhile societal values. The philosopher Socrates explored the principle of the power of the individual. The ideological transformation

in the society influenced the art world as well. Therefore, we find the manifestation of individualistic features and emotions in the sculptures of the 4th century BC. The sculptors of this period were more inclined towards presenting the beauty and charm of the human body. Scopas, Praxiteles and Lysippos were the best sculptors of this period.

Scopas

He was a sculptor of the first half of the 4th century BC. He was known for the depiction of pathos and sorrow in his sculptures. It is said he created about 50 sculptures.

Praxiteles

An eminent sculptor of the 4th century BC, Praxiteles was proficient in sculpting young people.

'Hermes Carrying the Infant Dionysus' is a famous statue made by Praxiteles.

It is well-known for its delicate carving in marble, and manifestation of personal feelings. Hermes's left hand rests on a tree stump as he leans on it, due to which his body is inclined. The cloth draped on his shoulder has fallen on his arm due to his inclined posture, forming a design of pleats. His right hand is raised. The infant Dionysus is gesticulating with his hands trying to leap towards Hermes. Praxiteles has succeeded here in lively sculpting of an emotional moment in marble. (*Hermes and the infant Dionysus by Praxiteles.jpg*, Wikimedia Commons, CC 4.0)



Hermes and the infant Dionysus by Praxiteles

Lysippos

He was a prodigious sculptor of the final phase of the 4th century BC. The Great Alexander had him as one of his courtiers. It was Lysippos who modified the established proportions of Greek sculpture. Prior to this, till the Hellenistic period, the full height of the human body used to be seven heads. Lysippos changed this to eight heads. The idols created after a change in the proportions began to look taller and leaner. 'Apoxyomenos',

the statue of an athlete wiping away his body sweat is very well-known.

After Alexander's death, the Greek empire dissipated into different states. The artists of that era came to the capitals of these new states. The heirs to Alexander patronized these artists. Therefore, in the dying years of Greek art, the kind of works that were produced, though of an unseen kind, no doubt, turned out to be energetic. The subjects that came to be chosen during this period happened to be vibrant and dramatic. This led to the emphatic manifestation of intense and violent human emotions in the sculpted forms. The famous sculptures of this new kind are 'The Dying Gaul', 'Laocoon and his Sons', 'Niobe and her daughters', etc. But the names of the sculptors of this age are unknown. A little brief about these famous sculptures are as follows:

A lively depiction of the triumph of the Attalid monarchy over the Gaul tribes is found to be seen in the sculptures of the temple of the Athena Goddess, at Pergamun. 'The Dying Gaul' is a famous sculpture of this series. We can see a full-of-life and marvellous manifestation of the anguish in the sculpted creations here.

The sculpture, 'Laocoon and his Sons', is from the 2nd century BC. Laocoon was a priest of the Greek deity Apollo. As the Greek tale goes, Laocoon incurs the wrath of the God Apollo, due to which the deity unleashes a serpent on the former. A very dramatic depiction of this legend is brought about in this sculpture.

In the sculpture, Venus de Milo a new spark of feminine beauty is visible. (*Front views of the Venus de Milo.jpg, Wikimedia Commons, CC 4.0*)

In this period phase, due to the introduction of realism in creation of sculptures, the subjects began to have a variety. The day-to-day life activities also came to be imbibed.



Front views of the Venus de Milo

Drawing and Other Visual Arts

There are not many instances of Greek drawings and paintings. But in those times, there was indeed a rise in these fundamental arts too. There is such purported mention in Greek literature. According to the information given by Greek scribes, there were fantastic murals in the Stoa (covered walkway or Portico) in the city-state of Athens. These murals were done by Polygnotus, the contemporary of Phidias. These had the depiction of the victory of the Athenians over the Persians. There is mention of famous painters in the records, in the 5th and 4th century BC, it was Zeuxis and Parrhasius, and Protogenes and Apelles, in the time of Alexander. The inference drawn from the murals found in the excavation conducted at Pompeii in Rome is that they could be prototypes of the original Greek creations, because of the depiction of Alexander and Darius in battle.

Ceramics

From the decorative designs on the Greek ceramic vessels, we can imagine a little about the drawing and painting. Such Greek objects are famous the world over due to the artistic shapes and attractive designs drawn on them. There was a huge demand in those days for vessels produced in Athens. These vessels were used largely to store oil and honey. There was a colony of potters in Athens, called Keramikos, from which the word 'ceramics' was derived. The Greeks, it seems may have first created forms for objects of storage, later followed by make-up, decoration, proportion, polish and appeal. They had made objects of various shapes. There were vessels with handles on both sides to store honey, grains, oil, etc. or pots with wide mouths. The container with three handles called 'Hydria', it is said, was for water. Besides, different names like, 'Krater', 'Kylix' were given to certain vessels.

Before the 5th century BC, on the natural red of the vessels, a form was drawn with black. The details within the form were carved with a pointed tool, due to which the actual colour of the vessel also would be revealed. While this type of design was known as the 'Black Figure Style', in the period following the 5th century BC, the red clay vessels were polished first and then pictures were drawn over it. The outline and other details of the picture were etched and painted, and the background painted with black. The vessels painted thus were known as 'Red Figure Style'. This style was done more elegantly than the Black Figure style. The



subjects of the pictures drawn were – mythological incidents, dances, banquets, schools, sports and other such regular activities of life. An excellent testimony of Greek art is the vessel with two handles done in the ‘Black Figure’ style, kept at the Vatican Museum.

The range of skills of the Greek artisans can be seen in a variety of artefacts like coins, ornaments, jewellery, tools, besides household utility items made of metal, glass and wood.