

## Art of the Aegean Islands

Three major cultures flourished on the islands in the Aegean Sea, on Crete, and along the Aegean coast: Cycladic, Minoan, and Mycenaean.

### Cycladic

The Cycladic culture, flourished from about 3200 to 2000 BCE in the Cyclades, a group of islands in the Aegean. The simplified, geometric nude female figures from this area are highly appealing to modern sensibilities. The Cycladic culture produced decorated pieces of pottery as well as marble bowls and jars.

## Ancient Greek Art

From around 660 to 475 BCE, during the Archaic Period, the Greeks, influenced by the stone sculptures of Egypt and Mesopotamia, created sculptures carved in marble and limestone. Temples were also built during this time period using columns in the early **Doric** and **ionic** decorative styles. Vase painting was another notable art form and was done in many different styles.

## Roman Art

The Roman discovery of the equivalent of modern **concrete** was a major contribution to architecture. With this strong material, the Romans were able to construct huge domed buildings. They

## Byzantine and Medieval Art

With the fall of the Roman Empire, a vast empire evolved into separate and often warring kingdoms. But even as the Empire collapsed in Western Europe, it continued in Byzantium.

The art that is best known from this Eastern culture is **mosaic** work in which small ceramic tiles, pieces of stone, or glass were set into a ground material to create large murals. It is an art that is largely Christian in content. In terms of Byzantine architecture, the Hagia Sophia (532–537 CE), built in Constantinople, is still considered one of the greatest architectural achievements in history.

Notable from the early medieval period (c. 375–1025) is the art of nomadic Germanic peoples, particularly their metalwork. Wood was the most important medium to the Vikings, who carved artistic designs and sculptures on their wooden ships.

Tremendous shifts occurred in the art of the medieval period with the emergence of Christianity as a major religion and the Church as a powerful patron of the arts.

### Minoan

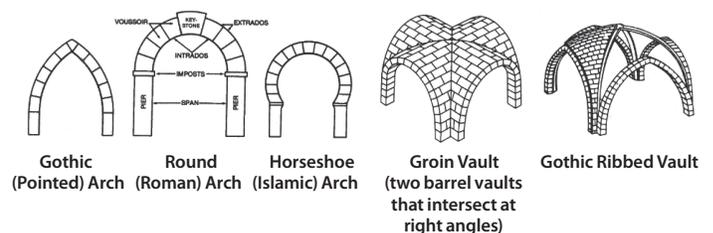
The Minoan culture centered around the city of Knossos on Crete, where the legend of the Minotaur—a half man and half bull who devoured those who entered his maze—is supposed to have taken place. The art of these island people depicts sea life and includes statues of a female snake goddess. The Minoans created artworks that were characterized by a naturalistic pictorial style.

### Mycenaean

Centered around the city of Mycenae on the Greek mainland, the Mycenaeans built elaborate tombs. The best known objects are gold and show astonishing levels of mastery in goldsmithing.

Greek statuary evolved from a stiff, frontal presentation like that of the Egyptians to an increasingly natural-looking figure. A pose called “**contrapposto**,” or counter positioning, was invented to show the body to its best advantage. In contrapposto, the standing figure is posed with its weight shifted onto one leg, for a more relaxed, naturalistic appearance.

also pioneered the use of the curved **arch**, using this form to build bridges and aqueducts. Two buildings that can still be seen in Rome, the Colosseum (72–80 CE) and the Pantheon (c. 126 CE), remain as monuments to the engineering genius of the Romans.



### Romanesque

Romanesque churches are usually formed of a tunnel of arches called a **barrel vault**. A **vault** is an arch-shaped structure that is used as a ceiling or as a support to a roof.

### Gothic

The Gothic style developed in the first half of the twelfth century. One characteristic of the Gothic style was the use of **pointed arches**. Another important element of the Gothic style was the addition of **ribbed vaults**, a framework of thin stone ribs or arches built under the intersection of the vaulted sections of the ceiling. Another was the use of **flying buttresses**—additional bracing material and arches placed on the exterior of the building.