

# GREEK ART

## Using this digital sourcebook

This interactive PDF explores Greek Art.

You should view this PDF on a desktop computer to experience full interactivity. Interactive elements will not work on mobile devices.

To watch videos, click the video image or the link provided. This will take you to YouTube to watch the video there. Use the 'back' arrow on your browser toolbar to navigate back to the PDF.

Some boxes are interactive. If you see a prompt to Click to Reveal or Learn More, you can do this to reveal a new question or fact.

Terms in **bold** may be words you are less familiar with – hover over these for a glossary pop-up.

For more information on any of the artefacts included in the sourcebook, or to discover more examples of Greek art in the Liverpool World Museum collection, visit the National Museums Liverpool online collection.



# GREEK ART

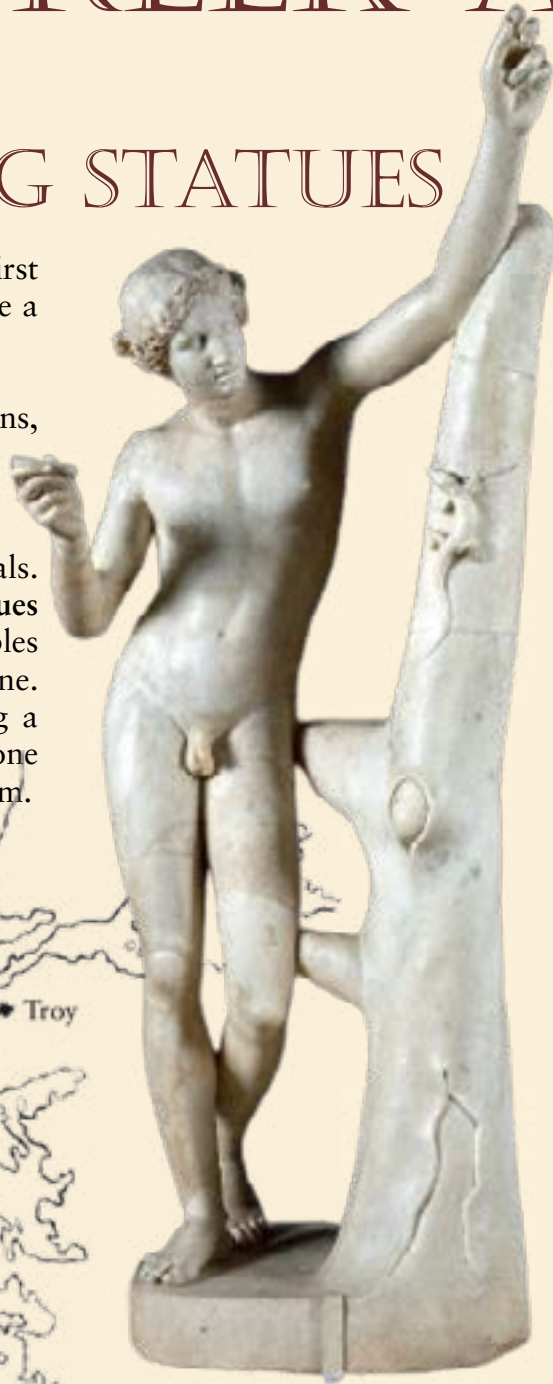
## PART 1:

## FREE STANDING STATUES

Think about ancient Greece and one of the first images to pop into your head will probably be a marble statue.

Greek freestanding statues depicted politicians, heroes, famous actors and athletes, and above all gods and goddesses.

Statues were used as grave markers and memorials. The most important sculptures were **cult statues** – statues of gods which would live inside temples and stand as physical representations of the divine. Whatever the subject, the reason for creating a statue was the same – to commemorate someone important and immortalise them in artistic form.



Early cult statues were made of wood, and later sculptors also worked in precious materials such as ivory and gold.

But most Greek statues were made out of either marble or bronze. Bronze was a much more expensive material to use than marble, but offered greater **tensile strength**. In bronze, extended limbs could support themselves without the addition of the props necessary in marble sculpture.

## APOLLO THE LIZARD KILLER, 1 CE – 100 CE

The statue is a Roman copy of a bronze statue by Praxiteles, the original dating to c. 350 BCE.

Apollo is the god of music and the oracle associated with the famous ancient site of Delphi. In the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, the god slayed a snake-dragon called Python which terrorised the land and people of Delphi. He was therefore often named as **Pythian Apollo**. The theme of Apollo the lizard killer is probably an allusion to the story of the Pythian Apollo – although this lizard is a lot less intimidating!

We know who made the original statue because we have a description of it by the Roman writer Pliny:

*Praxiteles made some very beautiful works in bronze... He made a young Apollo with an arrow in his hand lying in wait for a crawling lizard, which they call 'Apollo the Lizard Killer'.*

Pliny the Elder, Natural History 34.69-70

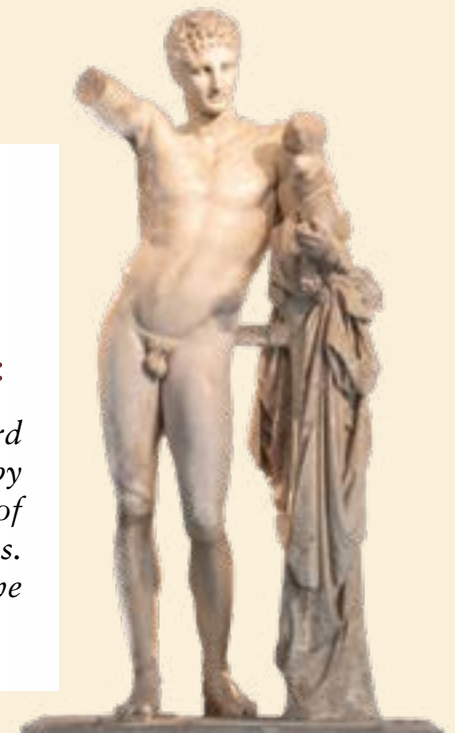


Museum number: 59.148.12



### THINKING POINTS:

*Compare Apollo the Lizard Killer with another sculpture by Praxiteles such as the Aphrodite of Knidos or Hermes and Dionysus. How successfully do you think the artist captures his subjects?*



# THE INCE ATHENA, C.1 CE – 100 CE



Museum number: 59.148.8

The way Athena stands and the thick drapery of her dress derive from the famous but now lost gold and ivory statue of Athena Parthenos, or Athena the Maiden, created by the famous Greek sculptor Pheidias in the fifth century BCE, for Athena's temple in Athens.

The goddess is young and has an oval face, large eyes and a serious but serene expression. She wears a helmet and a long, belted dress. With her left hand, Athena probably once held a spear or a shield while her raised right arm probably held the statue of the winged goddess Nike (Victory). The owl she currently holds is an eighteenth-century restoration to allude to the wisdom of the goddess.

This statue is called the 'Ince Athena' after Ince Blundell Hall where it once stood. Henry Blundell was the collector of most of the Roman sculptures in the Liverpool World Museum collection.

Statues in the **Archaic Period** of Greece (early 6th century – early 5th century BCE) commonly depict young men (**kouroi**, singular kouros) and young women (**korai**, singular kore) who either stand rigid and upright, or are walking forward with their weight balanced between both feet. Their hair is often carved in simplistic ringlets. As such, they appear artificial and awkward.

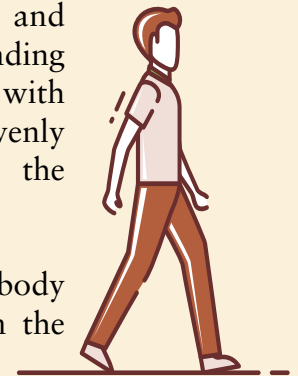
In the **Classical Period** (early 5th century – late 4th century BCE), sculptors developed the **contrapposto** position. Instead of placing one foot in front of the other in a straight line, as in Archaic sculpture, the back leg is now slightly relaxed, with more weight placed on the front foot. This creates contrast between the figure's shoulders and hips, and avoids symmetry.

You can see the effect of the contrapposto position in statue of Athena on this page. Note the position of her back foot, and the effect this has on her stance.

## ACTIVITY

Stand in front of a mirror and move between a rigid standing position, a walking stance with your weight carried evenly between both feet, and the contrapposto position.

How does the rest of your body shift as you move between the positions?



# COLOUR IN GREEK STATUES

We think of marble statues as white, because the rich yellows, reds, blues and golds which originally decorated Greek sculpture have not survived.

In reality, a statue's clothes, hair and accessories would all have been painted. Eyes could be painted, or inlaid with precious metals and stones. The statues' skin would be darkened with paint, honey or oil. To an ancient Greek, a perfectly white marble statue would have seemed incomplete.

The graphic artist and researcher Hardeep Dhindsa has created an artistic reconstruction of the Ince Athena, giving a sense of what it may have looked like originally.



To learn more about colour in Greek statues, watch the video using this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2gCJ6mYdAE>

## PART 2:

# GREEK VASES

Greek vase-painting, like sculpting, underwent a radical shift over time.

Until the 8th century BCE, vases were typically decorated with geometric patterns and simple, stickman-like figures – this period is fittingly known as the **Geometric Period**. During the 8th century, the **Orientalising Period** saw the introduction of Eastern motifs, including flowers and exotic animals. This was driven by Greece's growing trade relationship with the East.

### ATHENIAN AMPHORA, 550 BCE – 500 BCE



Museum number: 1977.114.15

This **amphora** has lost one of its handles and is decorated in the black figure on red background technique.

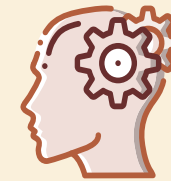
The scene on one side is of two warriors seated and playing a dice or board game, and is well known from an amphora in the Vatican Museum, signed by the ancient vase painter Exekias. The theme became extremely popular with vase painters but was not verbally attested in any of Homer's poems.

On the other side, the scene is of the god Dionysus holding a large drinking cup (kylix) surrounded by two female companions.

The Archaic Period is marked by more complex figures and a move away from repeated patterns towards the depiction of stories.

The vase on the left demonstrates this well; the artist, whose name was Exekias, has tried to capture a narrative within a single static image.

We see two of the greatest Greek warriors, Ajax and Achilles, playing a board game. Athena stands between them. It is far more sophisticated than earlier designs. The neck and the base of the vessel are still decorated with a repeating design, so that the whole surface of the vase is used. In Greek art, leaving any blank space was avoided. The vase is an amphora (one of its handles is missing), a vessel used for storing wine and oil.



### THINKING POINTS:

Why do you think it was important for a vase-painter who wanted to tell a narrative to select a scene with care?

Think of your favourite story. What one image would you choose to depict the whole narrative?

The Athena vase (previous page) is in the **black-figure technique**. The black is not actually painted onto the vase. Rather, a fine layer of liquid clay, called a **slip**, was added to areas of the pot which would be made black. Details were then incised into the slip, so that the red clay beneath the slip was exposed. During the first stage of the firing process, oxygen was introduced to the kiln and the clay oxidised, turning red – just as iron exposed to the air turns red and rusty.




In the second stage, smoke was introduced instead of oxygen and the vase turned black in the carbon-rich environment. The third, final stage reintroduced oxygen, but this time areas covered by the slip remained black while the rest of the pot became red once more.

A pure clay with very little iron in it could also be added to the vessel, which, when fired, would not oxidise at all and would come out as white detail. White indicated both death and femininity in ancient Greece, so it was used extensively for both funerary vessels, and the skin of women (such as Athena in the vase on the previous page).

Around 530 BCE, marking the start of the **Transitional Period**, a figure known as the Andokides Painter invented a new technique for vase-painting – **red-figure technique**.

Simply put, this was the reverse of the black-figure technique. Instead of adding slip to outline figures, in red-figure technique, slip was added where the background of the vessel would be. When fired, the background would therefore turn black while the figures remained red. The slip was applied with a brush, making the details more exact than with incision. Red-figure technique also allowed for more contrast and depth in illustrations.

The Classical Period of vase-painting saw the introduction of even more advanced techniques, including the use of paint to add colour details such as blood. **Foreshortening** was used to render depth in a two-dimensional picture by manipulating a picture's relative proportions. Mythological scenes continued to be exceptionally popular, as well as scenes taken from Greek theatre performances.

	RED CLAY VESSEL	ADDED SLIP	PURE CLAY DETAILING
 <p>First stage of firing: Oxygen introduced</p>			
 <p>Second stage of firing: Smoke introduced, little oxygen</p>			
 <p>Third stage of firing: Oxygen reintroduced</p>			



### ACTIVITY: CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

What do you think happens at each stage of firing?

Look at the table on the left. Check your understanding by trying to predict what happens at each stage of firing for red clay, added slip, and pure clay detailing.

Click to reveal the answers.

The vase below, in the red-figure technique, shows the myth of Oedipus. The man in the centre of the vessel is probably Oedipus, and he has been pounced on by the **sphinx**, a half-lion, half-woman hybrid. The sphinx would challenge passers-by to answer her riddle and devour anyone unfortunate enough not to give the correct answer. Oedipus successfully answered the sphinx's riddle, defeating her.

The vessel is a **krater** – a large mixing bowl used at Greek drinking parties to dilute wine with water. Greek wine was syrupy and very strong, so it needed to be mixed before it could be enjoyed.



Museum number: LL 5041



Watch this video on *Decoration on Greek vases*  
by Dr Chrissy Partheni

<https://youtu.be/voUCRiv6hOA>

## ATHENIAN KRATER, c 350 BCE

This krater is attributed to the style of the Meidias workshop. Meidias is the name given to an Athenian red figure painter of about 420-400 BCE. His work has a highly ornate style. He was accomplished in foreshortening and in arranging figures in different planes.

The scene on one side of the krater depicts the Theban sphinx. The reverse shows three male youths with cloaks thrown over their shoulders and wrapped around their bodies. One of the youths is holding a strigil, a tool used to clean the sweat and dirt of the body of male athletes. The youth on the left is holding an aryballus, a pot used for storing olive oil or perfume, used as a body cosmetic. The scene probably reflects customs associated with athletics.



As well as thinking about the design of a pot and the techniques used to make it, it is important to consider its shape and function. Vases, even the most elaborately designed ones, were never intended exclusively as pieces of art, but also had a practical use.

Different vase shapes indicate different functions.


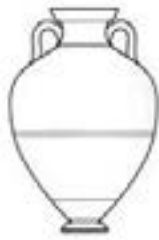









### ACTIVITY: PREDICT THE FUNCTION

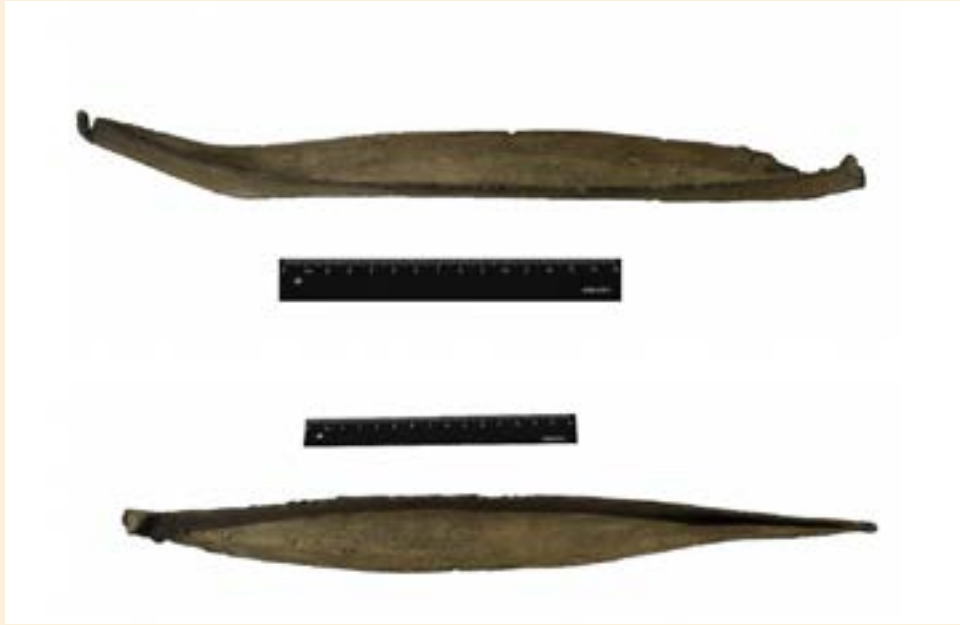
What function do you think each of the vases could be used for, based on their shapes?

Look at the table on the right. Check your understanding by trying to predict what each might have been used for, just by looking at the images.

Click the “Click to reveal answer” box and read the description - see if you were right!

		
KRATER	AMPHORA	HYDRIA
A large bowl used to mix syrupy wine with water	A storage vessel, particularly for wine, oil and grain	Used for water, with two side handles for carrying and a longer back handle for pouring
		
STAMNOS	OINOCHOE	KYLIX
A storage vessel, sometimes with a lid	Used to pour wine, it often has a distinctive trefoil-shaped lip	A shallow drinking cup
		
KANTHAROS	LEKYTHOS	PYXIS
A deeper drinking cup	Used to hold oil, with a long neck and thick rim to make the oil pour out slowly	A box used to store jewellery or cosmetics





Museum number: LL 5041

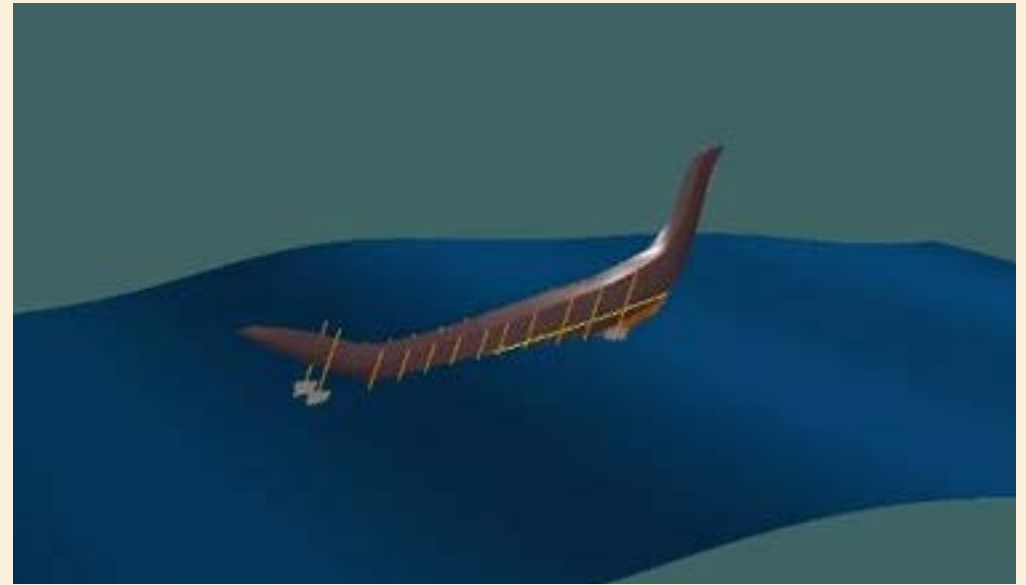
## BOAT MODEL, C. 2700 – 2300 BCE

This model of a boat may be simple, but it too is a carefully crafted piece of ancient Greek art. It was probably a votive offering either in a grave or a settlement. It reminds us that ancient Greek art was more than just statues and pots. Most ancient art has been lost to us. For example, very few paintings have survived. The inspiration for the boat model came from real life and the experiences of seafarers of the pre-Bronze Age communities of the Aegean sea. It is through travelling that these communities developed their trade networks and achieved prosperity.



This resource was created by the Advocating Classics Education (ACE) project and the Liverpool World Museum as part of the AHRC funded project (AH/V006592/1) 'Improving access to Classical Studies in museums and schools' on which Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson (King's College London) was Principal Investigator.

©Arlene Holmes-Henderson, Chrissy Partheni, Peter Swallow



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1qR5ffYXu0>

*Credit: Panos Tzovaras PhD student at Southampton Marine and Maritime Institute, University of Southampton*

## DID YOU KNOW...?

This digital reconstruction of the boat model can tell us how larger boats of this type would have floated.