

MU's pioneering art exhibition is **Homing in**



This bronze statue of a man is from about 700 B.C. An offering to the gods, the piece was probably found at a sanctuary in Crete. The clenched fists were an ancient pose of worship.

All of the pottery and sculpture featured in this article is part of the collection of MU's Museum of Art and Archaeology.

LIn a way, a riddle will be on exhibit this fall at Mizzou's Museum of Art and Archaeology. The clues might be found in the painted pottery and bronze sculptures, in the jewelry and artifacts that make up this exhibition of ancient Greek art.

After four years of meticulous research and planning, "From Pasture to Polis: Art in the Age of Homer" will showcase 101 works of art from 26 American museums, including many from MU's rich collection of preclassical Greek art. It will be the first major traveling exhibit ever to focus on this period — from 1000 to 700 B.C. — a time when Greece struggled back from its own dark ages with brilliant advances in art, commerce and government that set the stage for Western civilization and art.

Many questions remain for scholars to sort out. What led to the destruction of the Bronze Age civilization in Greece? Whose armies sacked the glittering palaces of mythical Greek kings like Agamemnon more than 3,000 years ago?

Are the legends true; did Agamemnon and his allies actually conquer the city of Troy? And what caused the breakdown of Greek society and led to the dark ages that stretched for centuries after the Mycenaean period?

Scholars have uncovered evidence that suggests the period from 1200 to 1100 B.C. was a time of tragedy for Greece. Trade with neighboring countries was shut off. The population may have plummeted by as much as 90 percent. The quality of pottery and art dwindled.

"We're trying to discover what society was all about, what was going on in daily life," says Dr. Susan Langdon, the museum's adjunct associate curator of ancient art and exhibition curator. "Pottery can be one of the best pulse points of society; it's something that everyone had to have. You can tell a lot about the general spirit of the society by looking at the pottery.

"The pottery from the Mycenaean palaces probably was produced by professional artisans. It was shipped and traded around the Mediterranean world. In the dark ages the quality declined; it looks like production was in the hands of amateurs."

Much of the art work in the exhibit is from 800 to 700 B.C., and documents the reflowering of Greek life. The pottery shines with skilled craftsmanship, mathematically precise patterns and decorations. "The best works are so perfectly done, they almost look machine-made," Langdon says. There's also a military flavor to many of the pottery paintings — chariots, warriors and battle scenes. "That's one of the great questions of the period. Were they occupied with military problems?" she asks.

"This is rather a rare period for a museum to have art from. The big finds were in Athens at the turn of the century, and much of it went to European museums and collections. In this country there are few great holdings of art from this period."

1450 to 1200 B.C.

Mycenaean Period (Late Bronze Age)
• Trojan War about 1200 B.C.

1200 to 1100 B.C.

Sub-Mycenaean Period
• Time of catastrophe — great palaces burned

1100 to 800 B.C.

Dark Ages
• Population drastically reduced
• Art, trade and commerce diminishes

on ancient Greece

BY JOHN BEAHER

Much of the exhibit is made up of painted pottery and small bronze sculptures. There are bronze-headed spears, spiral earrings of gold, small sculptures of gods and goddesses, amber beads from the northern Baltic area and an iron knife, excavated from a tomb on Cyprus.

This period of renewal in Greek history is marked by many accomplishments. It was the beginning of the "polis," the Greek city state. During this time the great Panhellenic sanctuaries to the Olympian gods were established, and the Greeks borrowed their alphabet from the Phoenicians. There was a rebirth

This amphora dates from about 725 B.C. and was found in Athens. It was used to bury human ashes. The painted battle scenes are clues to the owner's high social status.

Jeff Wilcox photos

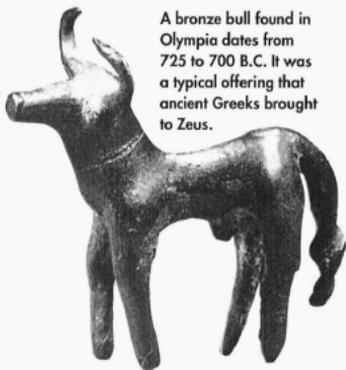


of art, renewed contact and trade with foreign lands and the beginnings of Greek colonization around the Mediterranean.

It also was a time when the great tradition of Homer and his epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, galvanized Greek civilization. "The poems are very fundamental in forming the culture we know as Greek. His work had a profound influence on that period and over the next several centuries," Langdon says. "Greeks saw Homer as sort of the father of their culture. The art reflects that. Again and again, the artists base their work on mythological heroes from Homer."

The exhibition is not simply a display of artifacts, says Dr. Morteza Sajadian, museum director. It explains the cultural transformation that was under way. "This project is significant academically because so little has been said about this period and the art from this period. It really is a pioneering project," Sajadian says.

Funded with grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Museum of Art and Archaeology's membership group, Museum Associates, "From Pasture to Polis" will be an intellectual resource for the entire state. As the organizing institution, the museum will premiere the exhibit Oct. 9 before opening in museums at the University of California-Berkeley Jan. 19 and at



A bronze bull found in Olympia dates from 725 to 700 B.C. It was a typical offering that ancient Greeks brought to Zeus.

Harvard University April 23.

MU will sponsor a national symposium Oct. 23 that will bring together internationally known scholars to discuss current thought and controversial issues in the study of this period. In addition, classes in disciplines from all around campus will use the exhibit to explore different aspects of the time. Columbia Public Schools are working with the museum to include the exhibit in their curriculum this fall.

"This period is a wonderful one to study, partly because there are so many controversies," says Langdon. "When you get all these works of art together in a room, it's like having a conversation with them." ☐

800 to 700 B.C.

Geometric Period

- Period of rebirth
- Greek city state established by 700 B.C.
- First recorded Olympic games in 776 B.C.
- Greek alphabet invented 750 B.C.,
- Homeric epics composed between 750 and 700 B.C.

700 to 480 B.C.

Archaic Period

- Beginning of large-scale stone sculptures
- Beginning of classic stone Doric temples
- Persian Wars close the period from 490 to 480 B.C.

480 to 300 B.C.

Classical Period

- Golden Age of Athens
- Parthenon dedicated 437 B.C.