Chapter 4: The Prehistoric Aegean
Sites of the Ancient Aegean
Cycladic Art

Marble figures such as these have been found in the graves and settlements from the Cycladic Islands.

The figures are schematically rendered and parts are geometric shapes (note the multiple triangles that make up the female figure on the left).

Most male figures are seated musicians, but their purpose is unknown.

Left: Fig. 4-2. Figurine of a woman, from Syros (Cyclades), Greece, ca. 2500-2300 BCE. Marble, 1’ 6” high.
Right: Fig. 4-3. Male lyre player, from Keros (Cyclades), Greece, ca. 2700-2500 BCE. Marble 9” high.
Minoan palace complexes served all aspects of a community – religious, royal, administrative, and domestic.

The complex design of the Palace at Knossos is believed to be the source of the word labyrinth and the myth of the Minotaur.

Fig. 4-5. Plan of the palace at Knossos (Crete), Greece, ca. 1700-1400 BCE.
Minoan palace complexes were made comfortable with ventilation and illumination made possible by open stairways such as this one.

The columns here are characteristic of Minoan column construction. The capitals are cushion-like, and the column shaft tapers from narrow at the bottom to wide at the top.

Fig. 4-6. Stairwell in the residential quarter of the palace at Knossos (Crete), Greece, ca. 1700-1400 BCE.
The mural frescos at Thera were painted in the true/buon fresco technique.

The painting is an example of a true landscape. However, the goal of the artist was not to realistically depict the rocks and plants, but rather to capture the essence of the landscape.

The Minoan fresco is characterized by vivid colors and curving lines.
Minoans characteristically did not repeat a motif over and over in their sculpture. Rather, the figures evoke energy and are individualized.

The figures in the “Harvesters Vase” have a sense of movement and joy.

Fig. 4-14. Harvester Vase, from Hagia Triada (Crete), Greece, ca. 1500 BCE. Steatite, originally with gold leaf, greatest diameter 5”. 

Minoan Sculpture
“Harvesters Vase”
The corbeled vault within a section of the wall at Tiryns is constructed out of Cyclopean blocks piled in horizontal courses.
Mycenaean Architecture
Lion Gate, Mycenae

The gateway is a post-and-lintel construction, over which is a corbeled arch and relieving triangle.

Within the relieving triangle is a relief of a Minoan column with lions on either side.

Fig. 4-19. Lion Gate, Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1300-1250 BCE. Limestone, relief panel 9’ 6” high.
Mycenaean Architecture
“Treasury of Atreus”

The so-called “Treasury of Atreus” is actually a **tholos**/beehive shaped tomb.

The entranceway to the tomb, like the Lion Gate of Mycenae, is a post-and-lintel construction with a **corbeled vault** and **relieving triangle**.

*Left:* Fig. 4-21. Vault of the tholos of Treasury of Atreus, Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1300-1250 BCE.
*Right:* Fig. 4-22. Treasury of Atreus, Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1300-1250 BCE.