

Ancient Greece: the Nereid Tomb



Relief from the Nereid Tomb
showing warriors storming a city
Lycia, Turkey
390-380 BC

Visit resource for teachers
Key Stage 2

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Before your visit

Background information

The Nereid Tomb was built for Arbinas (also spelled Erbinna), ruler of Lycian Xanthos (from 390 to 370BC), south-west Turkey. It is the largest and finest of the Lycian tombs found at Xanthos. The Tomb reflects the Greek and Persian influences on Lycian culture. Following Persian practice, Lycian nobles were buried in tombs raised on a high podium: the form of this tomb is that of a Greek Ionic Temple.

The tomb was built between 390 and 380BC and is the first known example of a temple tomb, the greatest of which was the Mausoleum of Halikarnassos. The tomb takes its name from the Nereids, sea-nymphs whose statues were placed between the columns of this monumental tomb. The sea-nymphs were the daughters of the sea-god Nereus.

The architecture of the Nereid Tomb is much influenced by the Ionic temples of the Acropolis of Athens and its lavish decorative sculpture, which can be seen reconstructed and displayed around the walls of Room 17, is a mixture of Greek and Lycian style and iconography. It is possible that the architect and sculptors were Greek.

Above the base of the podium were three courses of marble blocks, the upper two carved with reliefs. These were topped by a colonnade of Ionic columns, four on the short sides and six on the long, surrounding the cella (inner chamber of the tomb). The cella contained the actual burial and limestone dining couches for feasting in the afterlife.

The pedimental sculpture shows a dynastic (ruling) couple (possibly Arbinas and his wife) enthroned in the centre attended by their children and attendants. The frieze above the columns depicts hunting scenes. The frieze running around the top of the cella wall shows figures bringing offering trays and leading bulls and goats to an altar. The smaller podium frieze shows a battle involving the siege of a city. The large podium frieze shows a battle with scenes of infantry and combat.

Resources

British Museum websites

Teaching history with 100 objects

Free online resources to support teachers working in the new history curriculum through object-based learning. Access information, images, and video as well as teaching ideas for lessons at Key Stages 1-3.

www.teachinghistory100.org

Books

For adults

Jenkins, I, *Greek Architecture and its Sculpture*, British Museum Press, 2006.

For children

McAllister, E, *Pocket Timeline Ancient Greece*, British Museum Press, 2006.

Sheehan, S, *The British Museum Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Ancient Greece*, British Museum Press, 2002.

Gallery information

Room 17 contains the Nereid Tomb and associated sculptures and reliefs. The reconstruction of one side of the tomb in the north of the gallery dates from 1967 to 1969. The placement of the sculpture is uncertain. The walls of the room are lined with friezes belonging to the Tomb. The south end has three free standing Nereid female statues. The two lions flanking the entrance to Room 18 are guardians of the tomb.

What is it like to visit this gallery?

Room 17 is a large open room and very impressive but can get congested as it is the route into Room 18, the Parthenon Galleries. There are benches within the room which can be used to gather around. The room has four doors leading from it so has a lot of movement of people through it and the gallery can get very noisy.

Case Numbers

Please note that case numbers are usually small, white and high up on the glass.

Preliminary activities

General introductory activities

- Locate the area covered by the ancient Greek world in an atlas and look at the modern countries which currently exist in this region of the world.
- Explore ancient Greek architecture using images to illustrate different styles and buildings. Introduce the three architectural styles of Ionic, Doric and Corinthian.

Activities to support gallery activities

- Look at temple architecture in detail. Illustrate the elements of temple design, their functions and decorative details. Teach children terms such as metope, pediment, frieze and column.
- Discuss ancient Greek sculpture. Introduce sculptural designs including relief and free standing sculptures.
- Explain that the Nereid Tomb was not in Greece, but actually in a kingdom in southwest Turkey. Locate Lycia on a map.

During your visit

Gallery activities: introduction for teachers

The gallery activities are a set of activity sheets which can be used by students working in Room 17. The sheets can be used as stand-alone activities or you may wish to develop work around particular sheets as suggested in the before and after sections of this resource.

- Where case numbers are indicated on a sheet, these are usually to be found marked in white numbers high up on the glass of that particular case.
- You are welcome to select the activities which are most appropriate for the focus of your visit and adapt sheets to meet the needs of your students.
- Each activity is designed to support the students in looking at, and thinking about, objects on display in the gallery.
- Individual activity sheets may be undertaken by single students, in pairs or as a small group.
- Where space is provided for recording this may be undertaken by the student or an adult helper as is most appropriate for the students involved.
- Familiarise the students and accompanying adults with the chosen activity sheets at school before the day of the visit. Make sure students and adults know what they are to do and are familiar with the vocabulary used on the sheets or which they may encounter in the gallery.

Gallery activities: briefings for adult helpers

Gallery activity: People in action

- The Nereid Tomb friezes show scenes of battles, a city under siege and ambassadors approaching a Persian governor. The people are carved to look like they are moving or in action.
- This activity requires the students to draw upon historical evidence for their drawings of people in action.

Gallery activity: The Nereid Statues

- The Nereid statues are the female statues standing in between each column on the Tomb. There are also three other Nereid statues located towards the opposite end of the room.
- This activity encourages the students to study the statues and thereby appreciate the sculptural expertise that created them.

Gallery activity: Greek Architecture

- This Tomb is a tomb in the Ionic Greek style of architecture. The pediment is the triangular element located on the top of at the front of the Tomb. The friezes are the sculpted bands that run around the Tomb. The columns are the vertical pillars that hold up the roof. The capitals are the carved elements located on the top of each column.
- This activity asks the students to use observational skills to draw an accurate portrayal of each of the architectural elements.

Gallery activity: Friezes

- Friezes are sculpted bands decorated with scenes of activity. The friezes on the Nereid Tomb are located along the bottom of the tomb and around the top. There is also one on the inner section of the Tomb.
- This activity encourages observational skills to analyse and identify scenes.

People in action

- Stand in front of the Nereid Tomb
- What type of material has been carved to produce the building and its sculptures? Tick the box next to the correct answer below.

wood

stone

metal

plastic

There are sculptures of people carved on to the tomb. Many of them are moving or doing different activities.

- Find two people who are moving in different ways or shown in different positions and draw them in the boxes below. In the spaces beneath each box write a description of what the person is doing or how they are moving.

Person 1

Description 1

Person 2

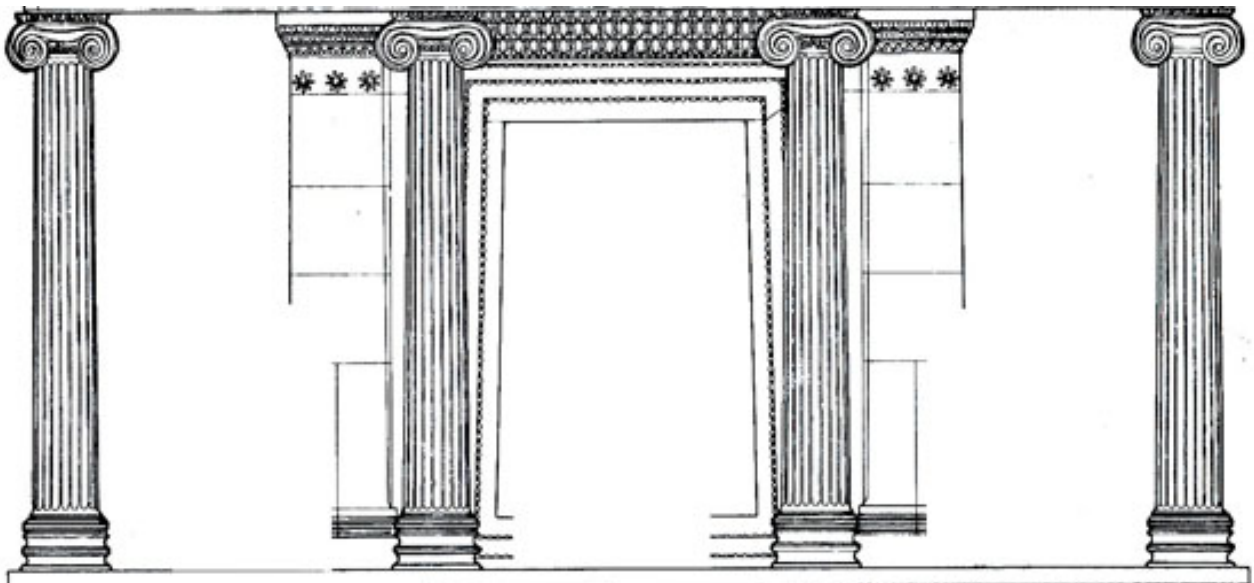
Description 2

- Look at other figures in the room and see if you can spot someone who is calm and not moving.

The Nereid statues

The Nereid Tomb is named after the female statues between the columns. They are the daughters of the sea-god Nereus.

- Walk around the Tomb and count the Nereid statues. How many are there? There are (number)Nereid statues on the Tomb.
- The image below shows the central part of the Tomb with three female statues removed. Look carefully at the Tomb in front of you and draw a line from each statue shown below to the space on the image where it belongs.



- Go with your group to the three Nereid statues at the other end of the room. Look at them closely. Why do you think archaeologists have said they are sea goddesses?

Greek architecture

- Stand facing the Nereid Tomb.
- The Nereid Tomb was designed using Greek architectural ideas. Look at the tomb and find the architectural features listed in the boxes below and draw an example of each.

the pediment (triangular space; without the figures)

a column

a section of frieze

a capital (top of a column)

- Look at the friezes. What you think is happening on each one?

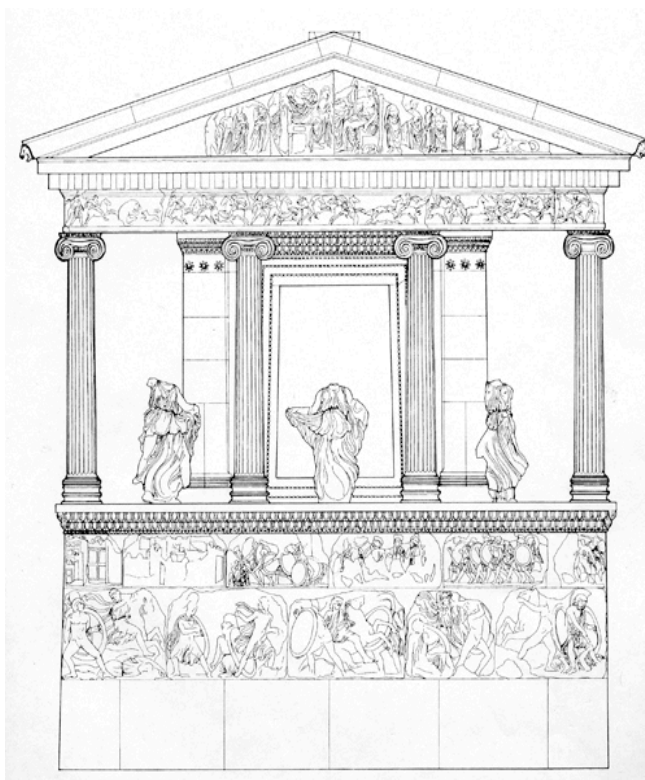
Friezes

The tomb has carved friezes. These show different scenes and activities.

Look for the friezes described below and tick the box next to each one when you have found it.

- a city under siege (clue: look for the faint building outlines and men climbing a ladder)
- a battle (clue: look for people fighting both on foot and on horseback; many carry shields to protect themselves)
- a hunting scene (clue: look for men on horses chasing animals; in the left of this scene a bear is being attacked by a dog)

- The drawing below shows an outline of the tomb. Draw a line from the labels to where they are located on the tomb.



battle scene

city under siege

hunting scene

- Look at the friezes on the walls of this room. What do they show?

After your visit

Follow-up activities: introduction

These activities aim to encourage pupils to reflect on the work undertaken in the Ancient Greek galleries during their Museum visit.

- Some of the activities draw directly on the information gathered at the Museum while others encourage the pupils to draw on personal experience or undertake additional research in the classroom.
- Each activity includes a suggestion for classroom work and also an outcome which may be in the form of a written piece, drama presentation or artwork.

Follow-up activity: People in action

Curriculum links: history, art & design, literacy

Skills: observation, analysis, practical design

- Review the sculptures seen during the visit. Distribute the students' drawings of people in movement and ask them to describe what they have drawn.
- Using a drawing they did during the visit or subsequently ask the students to design a model of a person in movement. This could be a relief sculpture using papier-mâché or a 3D sculpture using clay or a modelling material.
- An extension to this activity could involve the students writing a report on the making of the figure, any information they found useful and any problems they encountered and how they overcame these.
- Use images to illustrate how movement and people in action are shown on sculptures from ancient Greece. Use sculptures such as the Nereid Tomb and the Parthenon frieze.

Follow-up activity: The Nereid Statues

Curriculum links: history, literacy

Skills: discussion, listening, investigation

- Distribute the worksheets the students completed during their visit. Ask them what they remember about the Nereid statues. Write any descriptive words they use on the whiteboard.
- Discuss the probable background to the Nereid Tomb's name. Explain that these figures are thought to be the sea-god Nereus' daughters who guide people across the sea to the land of the dead. Ask the students why the Tomb might have these particular statues.
- Set a research task to find out about sea gods and goddesses, for example Nereus, Poseidon, Amphitrite, Thetis, Triton, and Hippocamp.

Follow-up activity: Greek Architecture

Curriculum links: history, maths, art & design

Skills: observation, analysis, practical design

- Discuss the Nereid Tomb and its architectural style. What elements of typical Greek design do students remember seeing?
- Distribute the worksheets the children used during the visit. If any students did not complete the worksheet use images of the Nereid Tomb or a similar building to allow them to draw each element needed.
- This work could be extended by producing 3-D models of the temples the students have designed online.

Follow-up activity: Friezes

Curriculum links: history, citizenship

Skills: analysis, observation, discussion

- Review the three friezes identified during the visit.
- Discuss the use of friezes in ancient Greek architecture. Explain their decorative qualities and the message they portray. Imagine friezes as advertisements: what are these ones telling you about the person who built the tomb?
- Use modern examples of pictorial advertisements to study how messages are conveyed through a visual medium today.