

National Archaeological Museum of Athens



The National Archaeological Museum is the largest museum in Greece and one of the world's great museums. Although its original purpose was to secure all the finds from the nineteenth century excavations in and around Athens, it gradually became the central National Archaeological Museum and was enriched with finds from all over Greece. Its abundant collections, with more than 20,000 exhibits, provide a panorama of Greek civilization from the beginnings

of Prehistory to Late Antiquity.

The museum is housed in an imposing neoclassical building of the end of the nineteenth century, which was designed by L. Lange and remodelled by Ernst Ziller. The vast exhibition space - numerous galleries on each floor accounting for a total of 8,000 square metres - house five large permanent collections: The Prehistoric Collection, which includes works of the great civilizations that developed in the Aegean from the sixth millennium BC to 1050 BC (Neolithic, Cycladic, Mycenaean), and finds from the prehistoric settlement at Thera. The Sculptures Collection, which shows the development of ancient Greek sculpture from the seventh to the fifth centuries BC with unique masterpieces. The Vase and Minor Objects Collection, which contains representative works of ancient Greek pottery from the eleventh century BC to the Roman period and includes the Stathatos Collection, a corpus of minor objects of all periods. The Metallurgy Collection, with many fundamental statues, figurines and minor objects. And, finally, the only Egyptian and Near Eastern Antiquities Collection in Greece, with works dating from the pre-dynastic period (5000 BC) to the Roman conquest.



The museum possesses a rich photographic archive and a library with many rare publications, the latter of which is constantly enriched to meet the needs of the research staff. There are also modern conservation laboratories for metal, pottery, stone and organic materials, a cast workshop, a photographic laboratory and a chemistry laboratory. The museum has temporary exhibition spaces, a lecture hall for archaeological lectures and one of the largest shops of the Archaeological Receipts Fund.



The National Archaeological Museum welcomes thousands of visitors each year. Besides displaying its own treasures, it organizes temporary exhibitions and lends artefacts to exhibitions both in Greece and abroad. It also functions as a research center for scientists and scholars from around the world and participates in special educational and other programs. An important feature is the availability of guided visits for people with hearing impediments. The Museum functions as a Special Regional Service of the Ministry of Culture and its five permanent collections are administered autonomously.

The most important collections are:



The Neolithic Collection, which forms part of the Collection of Prehistoric Antiquities, comprises the earliest exhibits in the museum. These come from settlements and cemeteries of mainland Greece and the Aegean islands and date to the Neolithic period and the Early and Middle Bronze Age, that is the pre-Mycenaean periods.

The Mycenaean Collection

Objects of the Late Bronze Age constitute the greatest part of the Mycenaean collection. These come mainly from large centres of the

Argolid, especially Mycenae, but also from Messenia, Lakonia and Attika. They were found mostly in graves and date from 1600 to 1100 BC. The precious grave gifts from the royal graves excavated by H. Schliemann at Mycenae at the end of the nineteenth century, are especially amazing.

The Cycladic Collection reveals the civilization that flourished in the Cycladic islands during the Bronze Age (third-second millennia BC). The development of seafaring, metallurgy and figural sculpture are portrayed. The collection mainly comprises the grave gifts and other finds discovered during the early excavations of Ch. Tsountas and K. Stephanou in various islands

The Thera exhibition. This display contains important finds from the settlement of Akrotiri in Thera, which was destroyed by the sixteenth-century BC volcanic eruption there. Akrotiri was one of the largest centres of the prehistoric Aegean, under the Minoan influence, as indicated mainly through the decorative motives of pottery, the art of frescoes and the adoption of Linear A script.

The Sculpture Collection of the National Archaeological Museum is considered to be one of the most important in the world. The main aim of the display is to present the development of Greek sculpture from the origins of large-scale sculpture (seventh century BC) to the Late Roman period (fourth century AD). The exhibits are unique works of art from mainland Greece and the Aegean islands

The Vase and Minor Objects Collection, which covers the evolution of ancient Greek pottery from the eleventh century BC to the Roman period, is one of the richest in the world. The quantity and quality of the Geometric, early Black-Figure and fourth-century Red-Figure vases is unparalleled.

The Metals Collection. The National Archaeological Museum owns a most remarkable and rich collection of bronze artefacts, which constitutes a distinct permanent collection since 1893. This collection comprises figurines and minor objects, as well as large original bronze statues, such as the Artemision Zeus or Poseidon, the Artemision Jockey, the Antikythera Youth and the Marathon boy.



The Egyptian and Near Eastern Antiquities Collection is unique in Greece, and is one of the most impressive collections of its kind in the world because of the rarity and importance of the exhibits, the finest of which have been on display since 1994. These come mainly from two large donations by Greek expatriates in Egypt: the 1880-1885 donations of Ioannis Dimitriou from Lemnos, who lived in Alexandria, and the 1904 donation by Alexandros Rostovitch from Cairo.

Source : Hellenic Ministry of Culture