

ASSIGNMENT 2: CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS: GREECE AND ROME

Read the following material. Then read Chapter 2, pages 31–47, in your textbook. When you feel you’ve mastered the material in this assignment, answer the questions in *Self-Check 2*.

As you can tell from its title, Chapter 2 covers the civilizations of Greece and Rome. Below are some suggestions for you as you read through and study the material in this chapter:

1. Notice the dates of construction on the pieces of architecture illustrated and described in the textbook. Imagine how difficult this process must have been, given the lack of sophisticated modern equipment available to architects today.

2. Pay close attention to the vocabulary introduced in this chapter. For example, Figure 2.5 alone (page 33) presents 13 important architectural terms—terms that will become everyday vocabulary to you in the field of interior design.
3. Try to enjoy what you're reading. The material is full of fascinating historical and architectural information.

Greece

Greece is often considered the cradle of Western civilization. In fact, on the northern edge of the Mediterranean, the foundation for later European civilization grew. Overlapping the middle portion of Egyptian history from the last chapter, the Greeks developed their temple as a derivative of the *megaron*, the main room in a palace. These temples gave us many of the architectural terms that are used in daily design language yet today—for example, *gabled roof*, *entablature*, *cornice*, and many others.

Like the Egyptians you read about in Chapter 1, the Greeks had a solid foundation of proportion and used the Golden mean often in designing their edifices. For example, the Parthenon at Athens (shown in Figure 2.6), the most perfect Greek temple, has two interior spaces each proportioned to the Golden ratio of 1:1.618. It also displays advanced concepts called *refinements*, in which items such as columns and horizontals are adapted to counteract and correct the optical illusion that makes straight lines seem to curve or verticals to lean. You'll read about refinements on page 33. As you read, think about how complex such alterations were for designers.

The Greeks also introduced the delicate shifting of forms away from a strictly mechanical precision, which the book refers to as “humane”; however, today we liken it to something that's man-made.

Rome

Ancient Roman design was based extensively on Greek precedents. The Romans were content to borrow the aesthetic concepts of the Greeks, expanding, elaborating, and ornamenting them as they chose. Their most amazing contributions were to engineering works, such as roads, bridges, and aqueducts, and in their creation of vast interior spaces through the use of arches, vaults, and domes.

In the process of building, they also developed concrete, a mixture of cement or mortar, stones or gravel, and water. Before this development, the traditional method of enclosing spaces was to use cut stone. However, the Romans wanted “a substance that would flow into place in any desired form and subsequently harden into an artificial stone.” Concrete was very strong, and it was flexible because it took on the shape of whatever space it was poured into. It was also safer than wooden structures, because it was fireproof. The main drawback was that the concrete was unsightly. Therefore, the Romans generally covered concrete surfaces with more aesthetic-looking material.

In their baths, Romans devised a system for heating rooms to varied temperatures based on the needs of each room. Read about this amazing system on page 41 of your textbook.

What was it like to live in Ancient Rome? The boxed feature on page 42 of your textbook presents some interesting quotes from some people who actually lived there.

Greece and Rome: A Comparison

Temples. While no complete interiors of any Greek temple exist, many contained only a simple single room, thought to be painted in various strong colors (pages 33–36). In contrast, Roman temples (pages 41–43) show evidence of more elaborate interiors, often with coffered ceilings, columns, pilasters, niches, vaults, and domes.

Houses. In Greece, houses were simple, whitewashed groupings of rooms around an open courtyard. Although house plans varied by individual preference, there's little evidence that they were concerned with symmetry and other formalities. The Romans, conversely, had homes that were designed from the inside out. Rooms were symmetrically laid out around the central axis of the *atrium*, which led to the courtyard. Larger homes often had two courtyards and even a second story, perhaps with rooms for children, servants, and storage. The interior decoration of the Roman homes, as surviving objects from ruins have shown, often had elaborately painted walls of wainscot, panels, and *trompe-l'oeil* (page 44 in your textbook), all of which have given us a glimpse of their varied and rich furnishings. The influence of Roman civilization can be seen through subsequent periods, though missing from the Middle Ages; it reemerges in the Renaissance as a dominant theme of European architecture and design.

Before proceeding to Assignment 3, please complete *Self-Check 2* and check your answers with those given in the back of this study guide.



Self-Check 2

Match the terms in the left-hand column below with the definitions in the right-hand column.

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|---------------------|---|
| _____ 1. apse | a. The triangular end wall created by the sloping sides of a roof structure |
| _____ 2. capital | b. The top element of a classical column |
| _____ 3. cornice | c. The second of the three orders of ancient Greek and Roman architecture, characterized by volutes |
| _____ 4. frieze | d. The large central hall space of early Greek palaces |
| _____ 5. gable | e. A colonnade supporting a roof to form a porch, usually at the entrance to a building |
| _____ 6. ionic | f. A round, domed interior space |
| _____ 7. keystone | g. The triangular form from Greek and Roman architecture often used as an ornamentation detail in interiors and furniture |
| _____ 8. megaron | h. A flattened column set against or engaged with a wall surface |
| _____ 9. Pantheon | i. The second or middle band of a classic entablature and by extension any horizontal decorative band |
| _____ 10. pediment | j. A semicircular end of a basilica or church chancel |
| _____ 11. peristyle | k. A sequence of columns surrounding a building or interior court |
| _____ 12. pilaster | l. The Roman temple to all the gods built as a domed structure of equal diameter and height containing an oculus at the top |
| _____ 13. portico | m. The topmost element of an entablature or any projecting element at the top of a wall |
| _____ 14. rotunda | n. The topmost voussoir in an arch |

Check your answers with those on page 79.