GREEK SCULPTURES

1. Phidias

One of the most important Classical sculptors was Phidias, who created the Statue of Zeus at Olympia. This was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. His style emphasized idealized human forms and divine majesty, reflecting the values of the Golden Age of Athens.

2. Praxiteles

Another key sculptor was Praxiteles, known for Hermes and the Infant Dionysus. Unlike Phidias, Praxiteles focused on softer, more natural forms and emotional expression. His works introduced a new sense of humanity and sensuality, marking the transition into the Late Classical period.

Together, Phidias and Praxiteles show how Greek sculpture evolved from the idealized divine to the expressive and human.

Byzantine Empire

Now moving forward in history, we arrive at the Byzantine Empire, the Eastern half of the Roman Empire.

After the fall of Western Rome in 476 CE, Byzantium remained as the sole heir of Roman power. Its capital, Constantinople, became the bridge between Asia Minor and Europe, and a stronghold of Christianity. Interestingly, the term “Byzantine” was only used long after the empire had already fallen.

Byzantine Architecture and Prominent Figures

Byzantine architecture is most famous for its grand domes, mosaics, and symbolism of light. Two key figures stand out:

1. Isidore of Miletus and the Hagia Sophia

Isidore of Miletus, together with Anthemius of Tralles, designed the Hagia Sophia under Emperor Justinian. Completed in 537, it was the largest church in Christendom for almost a thousand years. Its dome, supported by pendentives, symbolized the heavens and became a model for later Byzantine and even Ottoman architecture.

2. Julianus Argentarius and the Basilica of San Vitale

Another important figure was Julianus Argentarius, who financed and helped plan the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy, around 547. Though outside Constantinople, Ravenna was under Byzantine control. The church’s octagonal plan and its famous mosaics of Justinian and Theodora show the union of church and state. San Vitale later inspired Charlemagne’s chapel in Aachen, proving its long-lasting influence.

Byzantine Sculptures and Prominent Figures

Unlike Greek sculpture, Byzantine sculpture moved away from naturalism and focused more on symbolism, spirituality, and imperial authority.

1. Theodosius I

One early example is the reliefs on the base of the Obelisk of Theodosius in Constantinople. These carvings show the emperor presiding over games, emphasizing hierarchy, power, and divine sanction.

2. Theodora

Another figure is Empress Theodora, wife of Justinian, depicted in the mosaics of San Vitale. Though mosaic, her stylized, almost sculptural image shows her as both a political and spiritual leader. Her portrayal reflects the Golden Age under Justinian, where art served imperial and religious authority.

3. Leo VI “the Wise”

Later, during the Macedonian Renaissance, small-scale devotional works like the Harbaville Triptych became popular. Associated with Leo VI’s period, these ivory carvings reflect personal piety, with Christ and the saints depicted in intricate detail. They show how sculpture evolved from monumental Roman forms to portable, symbolic objects for worship.