

ARCHITECTURE

DESIGN OF THE PARTHENON

The Athenians wanted their city to be the most beautiful in all of Greece. To help reach this goal, they built magnificent temples, theaters, and other public buildings throughout the city. To enhance the appearance of these buildings, they added fine works of art, both painted and sculpted.

The grandest of all Athenian buildings were built on the acropolis at the city's center. Marble temples and bronze statues on the acropolis were visible from all over the city, gleaming in the sunlight. No other building on the acropolis, however, was as magnificent as the Parthenon, the massive temple to Athena that stood at the center of the acropolis. Begun by the Athenian General Pericles in 447 BC, the Parthenon took some 14 years to build. When finished, the marble temple was more than 200 feet long and 100 feet wide. However, the Parthenon was impressive for its proportion, not for its sheer size. Its designers were careful not to make it either too tall, which would have made it look flimsy, or too wide, which could have made it appear squat. Like most Greek temples, the Parthenon had doors but no windows. The structure was surrounded by tall, graceful columns, above which were slabs of marble carved with scenes from myths and wars. Though the ruins of the Parthenon appear white today, parts originally were painted in vivid colors. A huge gold and ivory statue of Athena stood inside the temple.

Source: "Golden Age of Athens," Susan Ramirez, et al., World History: Human Legacy, Holt (adapted)

SACRED SPACE ON THE ACROPOLIS

Of all the architectural wonders of the Ancient Greek world, none is more famous than the **Acropolis** at Athens. An acropolis, literally "high city," was a feature of many Greek cities, originally used for defensive purposes but later utilized for religious functions. The structures that exist on the Acropolis today were almost entirely those built under the Athenian leader **Pericles** after the Greco-Persian Wars in the 5th century BCE. Prior to the conflict with Persia, the Acropolis already possessed two temples, the **Temple of Athena Polias** and the Hekatompedon. However, after the Athenian victory over the Persians at the Battle of Marathon, the Hekatompedon was demolished to make room for a new temple, the original **Parthenon**. According to Robin Francis Rhodes, it "was probably intended, at least in part, as a monument to and a monumental thank-offering for the miraculous survival of their tiny democracy in the face of an immense and aggressive Persian tyranny."

Yet, before it was ever completed, the Persians returned for a second attack, in the prelude to the Athenian victory at the Battle of Salamis, the Persians invaded the abandoned city of Athens and destroyed every structure on the Acropolis. It was only in the years after the Athenian victory over Persia that the **Periclean Parthenon** was built on the site where the original Parthenon was being built. The second temple, the **Temple of Athena Polias**, was not rebuilt. Instead, the site it formerly occupied became a holy space, and the **Erechtheion**, which was built alongside it, included a porch that over looked the grounds where the temple once stood.

Source: "The Theatricality of the Periclean Acropolis," Peter Casey, Midterm Paper for HIST 711 Urbanism in Antiquity with Professor Joel Allen at CUNY Queens College (adapted)

PARTHENON AS POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

The Acropolis of Periclean Athens was built not only to honor the gods and fulfill a religious function but also to serve as a symbol of Athenian greatness... **The Mycenaean Wall** was part of the original structure... from the Mycenaean period. During the [renovations of Pericles], part of the older remaining structure, with its rougher, clearly more ancient appearance, was retained... so that visitors to the site could make a visible connection to the past and to the antiquity of Athens. [On] the former site of the **Temple of Athena Polias**, [porches] extended from the newly built **Erechtheion** to dramatically overlook the remains of the Temple destroyed by the Persians, which would have elicited feelings of solemnity (seriousness, mourning) as well as anger, and reminded the visitor of what the Athenians had experienced and what they had sacrificed. Finally, the **Periclean Parthenon**, among its many features worth mentioning, included friezes (relief sculptures along the top of a building) depicting battles with centaurs and giants, understood to represent the civilized Greeks fighting back against the barbaric Persians, along with other depictions of the valiance and bravery of the Athenian soldiers. All together, the Periclean Acropolis provided its visitors with a theatrical experience, [in] an attempt to use these structures for more than simply religious functions, and guide the visitors through the story of the greatness of Athens, past, present, and future.

Source: "The Theatricality of the Periclean Acropolis," Peter Casey, Midterm Paper for HIST 711 Urbanism in Antiquity with Professor Joel Allen at CUNY Queens College (adapted)

PARTHENON THROUGH HISTORY

The Parthenon in Athens has a long and complex history. Built nearly 2,500 years ago as a temple dedicated to the Greek goddess Athena, it was for a thousand years the church of the Virgin Mary of the Athenians, then a mosque, and finally an archaeological ruin. The building was altered and the sculptures much damaged over the course of the centuries. The first major loss occurred around AD 500 when the Parthenon was converted into a church. When the city was under siege by the Venetians in 1687, the Parthenon itself was used as a gunpowder store. A huge explosion blew the roof off and destroyed a large portion of the remaining sculptures. The building has been a ruin ever since. Archaeologists worldwide are agreed that the surviving sculptures could never be re-attached to the structure.

Source: "The Parthenon Sculptures," BritishMuseum.org