



**Acropolis
of
Athens**

The greatest and finest sanctuary of ancient Athens, dedicated primarily to its patron, the goddess Athena, dominates the modern city from the rocky crag known as the Acropolis. The most celebrated myths of ancient Athens, its greatest religious festivals, earliest cults and several decisive events in the city's history are all connected to this sacred precinct. The Acropolis of the fifth century BC is the most accurate reflection of the power and wealth of Athens at its greatest peak, the golden age of Perikles.

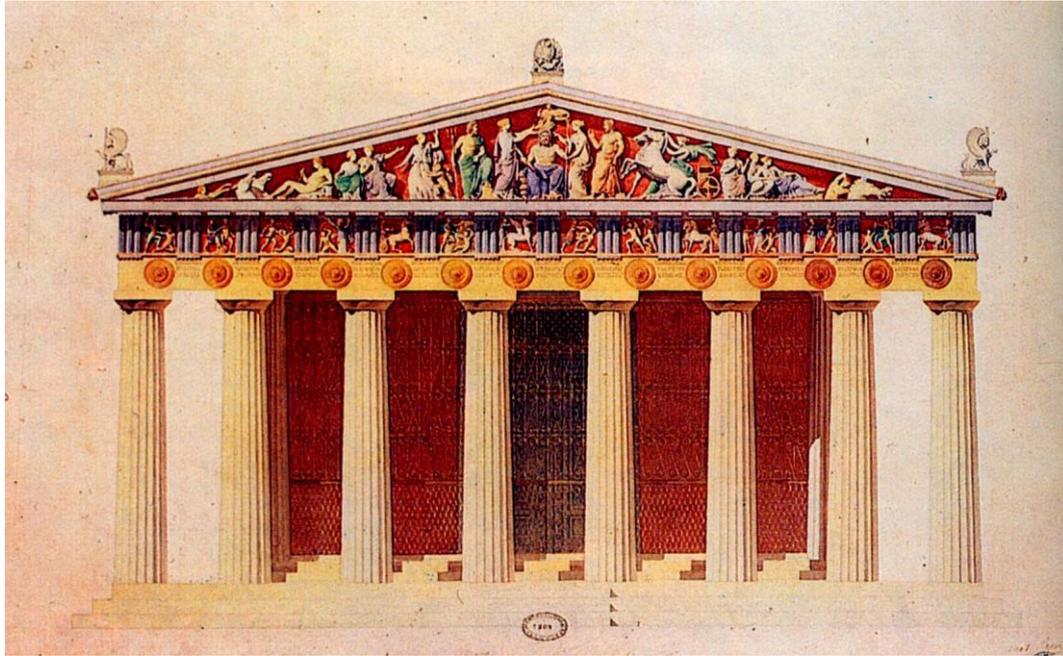
Pottery sherds of the Neolithic period (4000/3500-3000 BC) and of the Early and Middle Bronze Age, show that the hill was inhabited from a very early period. A fortification wall was built around it in the thirteenth century BC and the citadel became the centre of a Mycenaean kingdom. This early fortification is partially preserved among the later monuments and its history can be traced fairly accurately. The Acropolis became a sacred precinct in the eighth century BC with the establishment of the cult of Athena Polias, whose temple stood at the northeast side of the hill. The sanctuary flourished under Peisistratos in the mid-sixth century BC, when the Panathinaia, the city's greatest religious festival, was established and the first monumental buildings of the Acropolis erected, among them the so-called "Old temple" and the Hekatompedos, the predecessor of the Parthenon, both dedicated to Athena. Numerous opulent votive offerings, such as marble korai and horsemen, bronze and terracotta statuettes, were dedicated to the sanctuary.

After the Athenians defeated the Persians at Marathon, in 490 BC, they began building a very large temple, the so-called Pre-Parthenon. This temple was still unfinished when the Persians invaded Attica in 480 BC. The Athenians buried the surviving sculptures and votive offerings inside natural cavities of the sacred rock, thus forming artificial terraces, and fortified the Acropolis with two new walls, the wall of Themistokles along the northern side and that of Kimon on the south.

In the mid-fifth century BC, when the Acropolis became the seat of the Athenian League and Athens was the greatest cultural centre of its time, Perikles initiated an ambitious building project which lasted the entire second half of the fifth century BC. Athenians and

foreigners alike worked on this project, receiving a salary of one drachma a day. The most important buildings visible on the Acropolis today - that is, the Parthenon, the Propylaia, the Erechtheion and the temple of Athena Nike, were erected during this period under the supervision of the greatest architects, sculptors and artists of their time. The temples on the north side of the Acropolis housed primarily the earlier Athenian cults and those of the Olympian gods, while the southern part of the Acropolis was dedicated to the cult of Athena in her many qualities.

After the end of the Peloponnesian war in 404 BC and until the first century BC no other important buildings were erected on the Acropolis. In 27 BC a small temple dedicated to Augustus and Rome was built east of the Parthenon. In Roman times the Acropolis retained its prestige and continued to attract the opulent votive offerings of the faithful. In subsequent centuries the monuments of the Acropolis suffered from both natural causes and human intervention. After the establishment of Christianity and especially in the sixth century AD the temples were converted into Christian churches. The Parthenon was dedicated to Parthenos Maria (the Virgin Mary), was later re-named Panagia Athinotissa (Virgin of Athens) and served as the city's cathedral in the eleventh century. The Acropolis became the fortress of the medieval city. Under Frankish occupation (1204-1456) the Propylaia were converted into a residence for the Frankish ruler and in the Ottoman period (1456-1833) into the Turkish garrison headquarters. The Venetians under F. Morosini besieged the Acropolis in 1687 and on September 26th bombarded and destroyed the Parthenon, which then served as a munitions store. Lord Elgin caused further serious damage in 1801-1802 by looting the sculptural decoration of the Parthenon, the temple of Athena Nike and the Erechtheion. After the liberation of Greece, the monuments of the Acropolis came under the care of the newly founded Greek state. Limited investigation took place in 1835 and 1837, while in 1885-1890 the site was systematically excavated under P. Kavvadias. In the early twentieth century N. Balanos headed the first large-scale restoration project. A Committee for the Conservation of the Monuments on the Acropolis was created in 1975 with the aim to plan and undertake large-scale conservation and restoration on the Acropolis. The project, conducted by the Service of Restoration of the Monuments of the Acropolis in collaboration with the First Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, is still in progress.



Parthenon

The Parthenon, dedicated by the Athenians to Athena Parthenos, the patron of their city, is the most magnificent creation of Athenian democracy at the height of its power. It is also the finest monument on the Acropolis in terms of both conception and execution. Built between 447 and 438 BC, as part of the greater Periklean building project, this so-called Periklean Parthenon (Parthenon III) replaced an earlier marble temples (Parthenon II and Partenon I). The Periklean Parthenon was designed by architects Iktinos and Kallikrates, while the sculptor Pheidias supervised the entire building program and conceived the temple's sculptural decoration and chryselephantine statue of Athena.

The Parthenon is a double peripteral Doric temple with several unique and innovative architectural features. The temple proper is divided into pronaos, cella and opisthodomos, with a separate room at the west end, and is surrounded by a pteron with eight columns on each of the short sides and seventeen columns on the long ones. The interior demonstrates an innovative approach to both new and old elements: inside the cella a double pi-shaped colonnade established a background for the gold and ivory statue of Athena Parthenos, which showed the goddess in full armour carrying Nike (Victory) to the Athenians in her right hand. The west room, where the city's treasures were kept, had four Ionic columns. The two-sloped wooden roof had marble tiles, marble palmette-shaped false antefixes along the edge of its long sides and false spouts in the shape of lion heads at the corners. Marble statues adorned the corners of the pediments and large, ornate palmettes their apex. The pediments were decorated with sculptural compositions inspired from the life of the goddess Athena. The east pediment depicted the birth of the goddess, who sprang from the head of her father, Zeus, before an assembly of the Olympian gods, while the west pediment showed Athena and Poseidon disputing for the possession of the city of Athens before the gods, heroes and mythical kings of Attica. Ninety-two metopes alternating with triglyphs were placed above the epistyle of the outer colonnade and under the architrave. All of them were adorned with reliefs, the earliest sculptures of the Parthenon. Their themes were derived from

legendary battles: the Gigantomachy was depicted on the eastern side, the Trojan War on the northern side, the Amazonomachy on the western side and the Centauromachy on the southern side. The frieze, an element of the Ionic order, brilliantly added to this Doric temple along the top of the cella, pronaos and opisthodomos, depicted the splendid procession of the Panathinaia, the greatest festival of Athens in honour of Athena.

The Parthenon remained unchanged until the fifth century AD, when it was converted into a church dedicated first to Saint Sophia and later to the Panagia (Virgin Mary). Under Turkish rule it became a mosque. In 1687, during the siege of the Acropolis by Morosini, the Parthenon was bombarded and largely destroyed. Further serious damage was caused in the early nineteenth century by Lord Elgin, who looted much of the temple's sculptural decoration and sold it to the British Museum. Conservation and restoration of the Parthenon took place in 1896-1900 and again in 1922-1933. A vast conservation and restoration program of the monuments of the Acropolis, including the Parthenon, is currently under way since 1975 by the Service of Restoration of the Monuments of the Acropolis in collaboration with the First Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, under the supervision of the Committee for the Conservation of the Monuments of the Acropolis.