

*When we refer to “The Acropolis” today, we mean the Athenian Acropolis of the 5th century B.C. with its marvellous buildings and sculptures symbolizing the values and achievements of classical civilization.*

*The Acropolis today is an archaeological precinct which has been excavated down to bedrock. With the help of this pathfinder, look around you to find the remains of the past and try to visualize how the classical Acropolis looked by comparison with what you see today. Try to conjure up a vision of the splendid sanctuary where the ancients worshipped their guardian goddess.*

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*This little pathfinder is based mainly on models at a scale of 1:500 on display at the Centre for Acropolis Studies (research and design: M. Korres; construction: P. Dimitriades)*

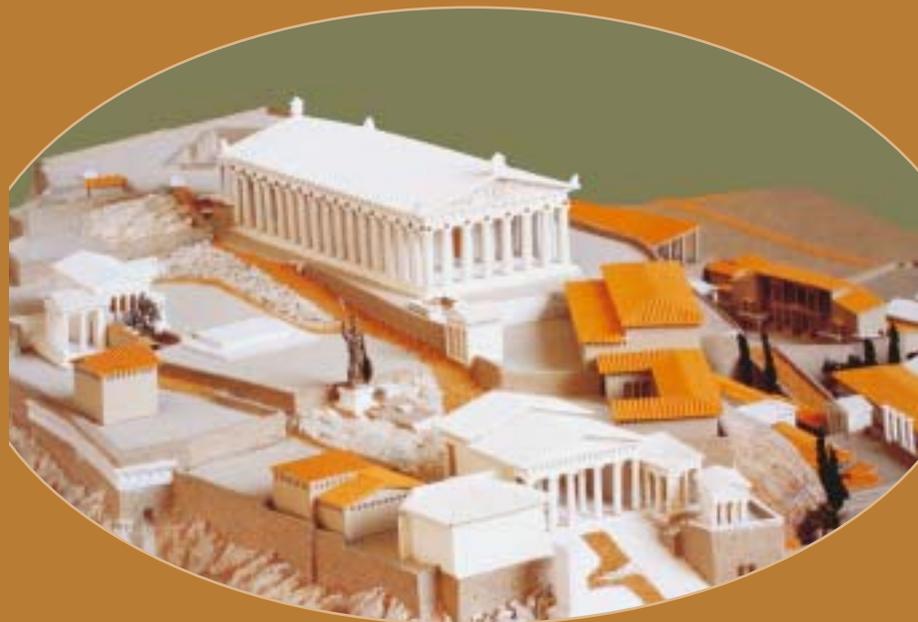
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MINISTRY OF CULTURE  
ACROPOLIS RESTORATION SERVICE  
FIRST EPHORATE OF PREHISTORIC & CLASSICAL ANTIQUITIES  
DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION & EDUCATION

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# Let's Go to the Acropolis





The Acropolis in the 4th Millennium B.C.

Long long ago the very earliest settlers chose to make their homes on a rocky hill in the Attic plain, 156 m high, not far from the sea. This low hill was naturally fortified by its steep slopes, providing a place of safety for the first settlers who could build their huts on the fairly flat top of the hill. Best of all, the few natural springs all around guaranteed that they would not suffer from thirst when besieged by enemies.

The rocky hill was to become the first town (*polis*).

According to mythology, two gods competed for the honour of being the guardian deity of the town. The contest took place on the top of the hill. Poseidon offered salt sea water and Athena offered an olive tree. The legendary king Kekrops chose the olive tree; thus the new town, taking its name from the goddess, is called Athens. The “Sacred Tokens”, the marks of Poseidon’s trident and the olive tree, were reverently cherished by the Athenians. According to another legend, Zeus, the father of the gods, sent a wooden statue down from the sky, an image of the goddess, the “heaven-sent”, which was to become the holiest one in the town for centuries.

As the years went by, the settlement gradually grew larger. In the Mycenaean period the “Cyclopean” walls made out of huge boulders surrounded the hilltop. Later on when the first fortification wall was built around the lower town, the top of the hill, namely the highest part (*akron*) of the town (*polis*) was called the Acropolis.



*The Acropolis in 480 B.C.*

As early as the 8th century B.C. (the Geometric Period) the Acropolis ceased to be a fortress and for the first time became a sanctuary and the religious centre of the town, the place of worship imbued with age-old myths. In 500 B.C., the era of democracy, there were two or three temples on the Acropolis. One of them, the “Old Temple” was built by the sons of Peisistratos in 525 B.C. to house the “heaven-sent” cult statue. The foundations of this temple are preserved between the Parthenon and the Erechtheion; the pediment sculpture depicting the Battle of the Gods and the Giants is in the Acropolis Museum. Splendid votive offerings dedicated to the gods, mainly statues of the 6th century B.C., were set up in the sanctuary area.

After the Athenians had won a victory over the Persians at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C., they began building a new temple in order to give thanks to Athena for helping them; this temple, the first to be made of marble, is known today as the Older Parthenon.

In 480 B.C. the Persians launched their second campaign. They devastated Athens, went up to the Acropolis where they destroyed and burnt the temples and votive offerings. But after the naval Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. and the Battle of Plataia in 479 B.C. the Greeks drove the Persians out. The Athenians hurriedly repaired their walls. They built architectural members from two destroyed Acropolis temples into the Acropolis north wall: the entablature of the Old Temple and column drums of the Older Parthenon. The broken statues from the temples and the votive offerings which the Athenians reverently buried in pits are the archaic masterpieces now in the Acropolis Museum.

For the next thirty years building activities on the Acropolis were discontinued.



*The Acropolis Through the 2nd Century A.C.*

The great building programme carried out on the Acropolis in the mid-5th century B.C. has been linked to the names of the great statesman, Pericles, and the great artist, Phidias. The south wall was built and 200,000 tons of earth were transported up the hill in order to create a large level area on top of the Acropolis. The quarries on Mount Pentelikon provided the marble for the new buildings on which 200 to 250 excellent artisans worked unceasingly. Thus within ten years the sanctuary acquired a new form which came to set the standard and then to symbolize classical culture of antiquity. The largest building was the Parthenon, perhaps the most perfect architectural work ever created, adorned with uniquely excellent sculpture. On the north side the Erechtheion in the Ionic order housed the ancient image of the goddess. The entrance to the sanctuary was reorganized with a monumental gateway, the Propylaea, for which a new original plan was invented, but it was never completed. Just outside the exquisite little temple of Athena Nike was built on a bastion. Smaller sanctuaries, altars and secular buildings were also constructed on the Acropolis.

Hundreds of inscriptions and votive offerings, usually statues on bases, adorned the sanctuary. The bronze statue of Athena Promachos, 12 metres high, created by Phidias was the largest and most impressive votive offering. Many other statues, not only of Athena but also of other gods stood in the sanctuary. Votive offerings with mythological subjects, Herakles, Theseus, Perseus, Phrixos, the Trojan Horse, and also valuable armour, war booty, ships and tripods were dedicated to the goddess.



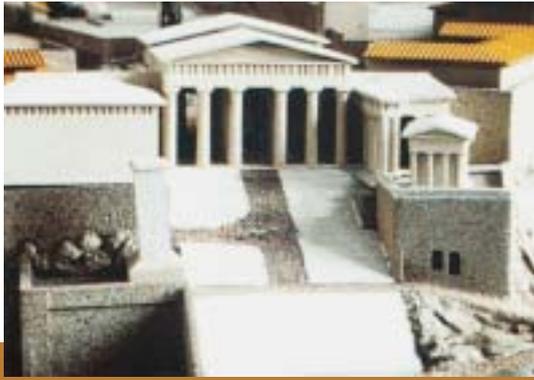
## The Acropolis Today

One catastrophe after the other reduced the famed Acropolis buildings to the ruinous state in which we see them today. The first of the two great destructions was in 267 A.C. when the barbarian tribe of Herulians who had occupied and devastated Athens set fire to the Parthenon. The second was in 1687 during the Venetian-Turkish war when the Turkish ammunition dump in the Parthenon was blown up. The explosion paved the way to the seizure of the most important temple sculpture, most of which is now in the British Museum.

Today the Acropolis is an archaeological precinct. At the end of the 19th century the Archaeological Authorities excavated down to bedrock, where one can see the cuttings made for the foundations of older buildings or the beddings for statue bases. None of the buildings still has its roof. Marble architectural fragments from these structures lies scattered around on the surface in extremely large numbers. From 1830 onwards limited restoration projects were carried out on all of these buildings.

The Acropolis Museum displays sculpture from the Parthenon, the Erechtheion, the temple of Athena Nike and earlier temples, as well as the archaic votives found in pits where they had been buried after the Persian destruction of 480 B.C.

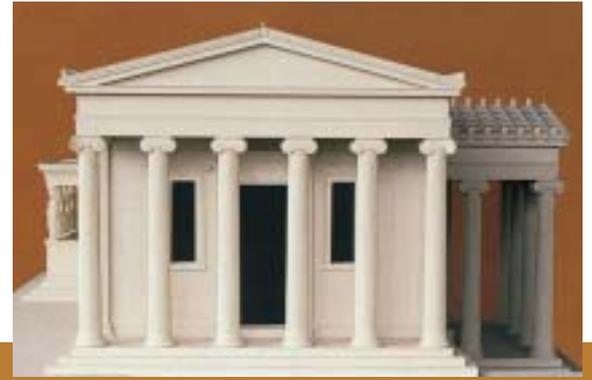
## *The Entrance to the Acropolis*



The Propylaea, the magnificent monumental entrance to the Acropolis, was built entirely of marble, directly after the Parthenon. Due to the Peloponnesian War the Propylaea was never completed. The highly original design combining the Doric and the Ionic orders has an asymmetrical plan and Doric columns of different scales harmoniously adjusted to each other. The Propylaea was famous for its marble ceiling coffers, the five doorways leading to the interior of the sanctuary and the so-called Pinakothek (picture gallery) in the north wing.

The little Ionic temple of Athena Nike, built on a bastion in front of the south wing of the Propylaea, was for the cult of Athena, protectress of the Athenians in battle. The temple housed a statue of Athena; the pediments, the frieze and the marble parapet around the bastion all had sculpture.

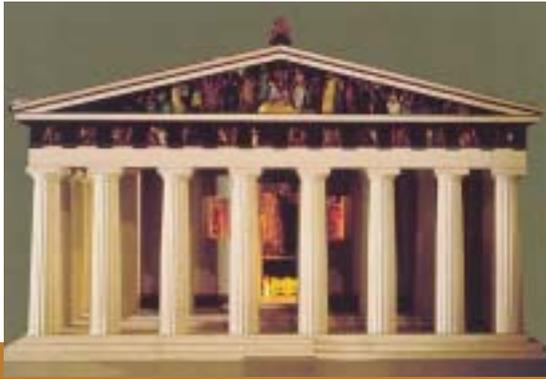
## *The Erechtheion*



The Erechtheion site was the most sacred place of all on the Acropolis: here were the “heaven-sent” image and the “Sacred Tokens”, and the cults of age-old chthonic deities. In order to accommodate the many preexisting precincts, the temple had to be given an extremely irregular plan and was built on different levels. The marble temple is divided into an eastern section dedicated to Athena Polias, protectress of the city, and the western one dedicated to Poseidon-Erechtheus from whom the temple derives its name. The temple, a brilliant example of mature Ionic style, has two projecting porches, one on the north side giving access to the western half of the building, the other on the south, the well-known Caryatid Porch. The temple had two sculptured friezes with mythological subject-matter.

To the east of the Erechtheion was the “Great Altar” where sacrifices were made during the Panathenaic Festival.

## The Parthenon



The most important temple of classical antiquity dominates the centre of the Acropolis. The temple, of Pentelic marble, in the Doric order but with many Ionic features, was built under the general supervision of the famous sculptor Phidias, the personal friend of Pericles, the political leader of Athens. The Parthenon has been considered a masterpiece of architecture from ancient times to the present because of the perfection and absolute harmony of its architectural forms.

The temple was famous for its sculpture. The great gold and ivory statue of Athena Parthenos, towering 13.5 m high in the cella, was a masterpiece. The two pediments depicting the birth of Athena and the “contest” between Athena and Poseidon, the 92 relief metopes and the Ionic frieze 160 metres long, showing the Panathenaic procession, create an unprecedented sculptural ensemble integrated with a unique temple.

## The Other Monuments



There was a series of other structures on the Acropolis for which we have little information; the specialists disagree about their identification since only their foundations are preserved. The sanctuary of Zeus Polieus (1) was on the highest part of the rock, northeast of the Parthenon. The sanctuary of Pandion (2), the legendary king of Athens, was at the eastern end of the Acropolis. The sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia (3) was northeast of the Propylaea. The sanctuary of Pandrosus (4) was to the west of the Erechtheion. The little circular temple of Roma and Augustus (5) built in the Roman period stood in front of the Parthenon.

There were also secular buildings on the Acropolis, such as the Chalkotheke (6), east of the Braurionion, a storeroom for various votive offerings of bronze. The Arrhephorion (7) on the north side was the house of the Arrhephoroi, the young girls who wove the robe (peplos) of Athena every year.



The sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus (1) with the first temple of the god was created on the Acropolis South Slope as early as the 6th century B.C. The semicircular orchestra was the first beginnings of the theatre there, an integral part of the sanctuary. After the Persian Wars the cult of Dionysos assumed a more official character, the dramatic contests were instituted and the theatre was redesigned. In the 4th century B.C. a new larger temple was built on the site, the theatre was rebuilt with stone benches and a Doric stoa was built along the length of the scene building.

Pericles built the Odeion (2) a little to the east of the theatre. This was an enormous almost square hypostyle hall for musical performances. The Asklepieion (3), the healing centre of the time, was founded directly below the Acropolis cliffs in the 5th century B.C. The temple of Asklepios and Hygieia, the altar and the two-storey Doric stoa, the ruins of which we see today, all date to the 4th century B.C.

The large Stoa of Eumenes (4), over 160 metres long, is still further to the west. This stoa, the gift of the king of Pergamon, Eumenes II, was built in the 2nd century B.C. and functioned as a shelter for the spectators at the nearby theatre when it rained. All we see now of this formerly luxurious two-storey stoa are the arches butressing a strong terrace retaining wall along the length of the Acropolis slope.

The Odeion of Herodes Atticus (5) is a Roman structure. Built by the wealthy Athenian Herodes Atticus around 170 A.C., it is still preserved in good condition today. According to the Roman models, the stage building has an extremely high wall, stairways to the right and left, and a large oblong chamber which has been destroyed. In ancient times it was covered with a wooden roof.

The prizes for the victors in the contests for choral lyric were bronze tripods. The men who sponsored the choruses were called *choregoi* (literally chorus-leaders) and for the purpose of displaying the prize tripods they set up choregic monuments at their own expense; simple bases, columns, or temple-like structures, such as the choregic monuments of Nikias and Thrasyllos.