

The Parthenon

The Parthenon, the great temple that dominates the Athenian Acropolis, was built by the leading statesman Pericles, in honour of the goddess Athena, by the architects Ictinus and Callicrates from 447 to 438 B.C. The famous sculptor Pheidias, a personal friend of Pericles, had general responsibility for supervising the entire project.

The temple has always been famous for the unprecedented wealth of its sculptural decoration, which comprised the great gold and ivory statue of the Athena Parthenos, 13.5 metres high, in the cella, the east pediment with the Birth of Athena, the west pediment with the Contest between Athena and Poseidon for the privilege of being the guardian divinity of the city, the 92 metope reliefs with the Battle of the Giants, the Sack of Troy, the Amazonomachy and the Centauromachy on the east, north, west and south sides, and the Ionic frieze representing the Panathenaic procession.

The Parthenon Frieze

The Parthenon frieze is a continuous relief band, running along the top part of the outside wall of the main temple, within the outer colonnade. Its total length was 160 meters while its height was approximately one meter. Rich colours and added metal attachments were used to decorate the individual figures that stood out against a deep blue ground.

The frieze illustrates the great procession of the Athenians to the Acropolis, in honour of goddess Athena during the Panathenaia festival. Participants in the composition were 360 divine and human figures and more than 250 animals, most of them horses. Competing groups of riders and charioteers take up most of the procession. There follows the procession of the sacrificial animals as well as the groups of men and women bringing the holy ritual vessels and the offerings.

The Peplos Scene

Depicted in the middle of the east side, above the entrance to the temple, is the culmination of the festival, the handing over of the "peplos", a new robe, the gift of the Athenians to the ancient heaven-sent wooden cult statue of Athena.

Five figures appear in the central scene. Three females, two carrying the sacred stools and a larger one, perhaps a priestess who leads them. A reverent male figure, probably the Archon-King and a boy hold the peplos.

Which of the two receive the peplos to present it to the goddess Athena? Justify your answer.



The Olympian Gods

To the left and right of the peplos scene, are illustrated seated the twelve Olympian gods, executed with exceptional skill. These must have been sculpted by the great and famous sculptors of the day such as Pheidias, Agorakritos and Alkamenes, who all took part in this outstanding project.

Look at the wonderful heads, the beautiful clothes, the outstanding throne!

Try to identify the deities and justify your identification. Carefully note the hierarchical position they have in the composition, the relationship between them and their characteristic attributes (or symbols) that they hold and which you recognize from mythology.

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Friezeblock IV, British Museum



Friezeblock V, British Museum



Friezeblock VI, Acropolis Museum

Design and Layout: AltSys



Friezeblock VII, Acropolis Museum

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Friezeblock VIII, Acropolis Museum

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Friezeblock IX, Acropolis Museum

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The Olympian Gods at the Parthenon Frieze

Friezeblock VI, Acropolis Museum

