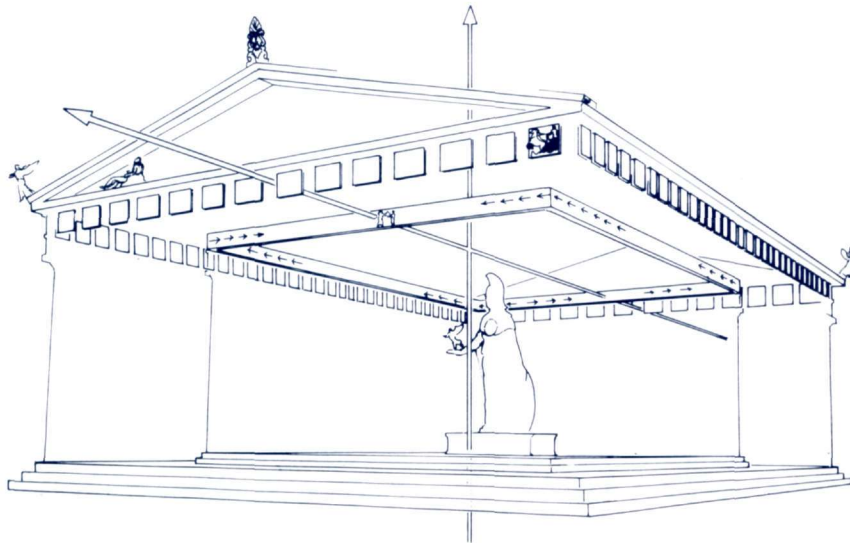




A Day at the Centre for the Acropolis Studies

THE SCULPTURAL ADORNMENT OF THE PARTHENON



The term 'decoration' in its present superficial sense does not convey the ancient essence of the word, especially where sculpture is concerned. This latter art form constituted a most important and exalted art form which ran parallel to the very structural plan of the temple itself. Together, sculpture and structure served common ends in the service of the deity while at the same time expressed cultural values and even alluded to political ideas and concepts. Naturally, however, sculpture's most direct and tangible function was figurative and illustrative. The position of the various sculptural groups in the building present the following notable aspects:

- An Ionic aspect in the continuous frieze at a height along the four sides of the cella.
- Sculptural depictions on all the metopes (92) and not only on a few, as was the case in most of the doric temples.
- A vertically arranged hierarchical succession of three decorative levels.

The first represents mainly earthly life as most of the figures depicted are mortal.

The second represented by the metopes lies in between the other two and depicts mythical scenes.

The third and highest level represents the heavens with figures of predominantly divine beings.

- A horizontal hierarchical arrangement.

The eastern side of the frieze is the most important and formal depicting as it does not only the gods of Olympus but also the eponymous heroes.

Among the metopes only those of the eastern side bear figures of gods (Gigantomachy).

Semi-gods, heroes and divine personifications although depicted on the west pediment are excluded from the east pediment where only gods can be seen and more particularly Zeus himself.

This hierarchy can be compared with that used in Orthodox Christian churches: a Christ Pantokrator presides in the dome, a Virgin Platytera in the apse, and saints in secondary positions further down etc.

The sculptural unities were assembled within the building according to principles springing from a desire to beneficially exploit lines of architectural form. For example, the square surface of the metopes did not allow continuity, the length of the ionic frieze did not favour discontinuity of scenes, and the triangular space left by the pediments imposed particular confines on height and hierarchical positioning of the figures included therein.

Despite the discontinuity of the metopes and their thematic division into four groups (the Gigantomachy on the east, the Iliou Persis on the north, Centaurmachy on the south and Amazonomachy on

