

INTRODUCTION: A CLASSICAL ICON

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The image of a ruined marble temple sitting silently and alone atop its high rock is embedded in our minds. It conjures the glory of the classical past, Western civilization, and even democracy. Its image graces hundreds of publications from travel magazines to art history textbooks. It looks clean, white, and glistening in the Mediterranean sun. This is the Parthenon – the icon of Everyman.

The reality, however, is rather different. The Acropolis swarms with noisy tourists, the ongoing and seemingly never-ending restoration project raises dust, and the temple on closer examination is disappointingly orange. Like seeing the *Mona Lisa* for the first time, the casual visitor feels any reaction she has may be inadequate to the intellectual and cultural weight of this masterpiece.

How did the Parthenon, or Temple of Athena Parthenos (“the Virgin”), become an icon of the classical, and why does it continue to be scrutinized in minute detail, measured to within a fingernail’s thickness, its every sculpted figure subjected to arcane iconographical analysis? One of the reasons is simple: it survives. Like its contemporary down in the Agora, the Hephaisteion, it was adapted to Christian use and so remained virtually intact (until the explosion of 1687). But unlike the Agora temple, the Parthenon retained most of its vast sculptural decoration – a 524-foot frieze, ninety-two metopes, two pediments, and akroteria – and so it became a subject not only for architectural historians but also art connoisseurs. Its iconic status was certainly helped by Lord Elgin’s looting of the marbles and their later installation in the British



Museum (1816) where they are still viewed by millions of visitors annually.

The Parthenon is also ideally located. After liberation from the Ottomans in 1833, Athens eventually became the capital of Greece and quickly evolved into the metropolis it is today. Like the White House in Washington or the Houses of Parliament in London, the Parthenon sits at the heart of the modern capital and so has become emblematic of its country, past and present. Just as Thucydides (1.10) predicted, the monuments of classical Athens serve to exaggerate its political importance, while its great rival and conqueror Sparta, lacking such magnificent buildings, lies in relative obscurity. Finally, but not least, there is the quality, complexity, and impact of the temple itself – the substance of this book.

Let us begin with impact. The most faithful replica of the Parthenon itself exists today in Nashville, Tennessee (albeit in reinforced concrete),¹ but its architectural form has been reprised in buildings as diverse in time and space as the classicizing U.S. Customhouse in New York (1833–42) and the modernist chapel by Le Corbusier in rural France (1955).² Beginning with Stuart and Revett's monumental publication of the temple and its sculptures (1789),³ Western architects have had access to the plans, elevations, and decorative details of the Acropolis monuments. The discovery in 1838 of some of the so-called refinements of the Parthenon led architects to incorporate features such as curvature into their buildings, and the raging debate over painted versus unpainted architectural sculpture resulted in polychrome decoration on classical revival structures.⁴ A representative example is the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1916–28), the dolomite walls of which exhibit upward, outward, and inward curvature while its pediments are replete with colorful, life-size sculpted figures of the classical gods.⁵ Through the sale of casts by the British Museum to other museums and art academies throughout Europe and the United States, the sculptures of the Parthenon have exerted an equally wide-ranging influence on artists of all media.⁶ A young horse from the west frieze, for example, turns up in a post-impressionist painting done in Tahiti by Gauguin who reviled Greek art.⁷ The mode of transmission in this case was not a cast but a photograph found in the artist's hut after his death.

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Photographs of the Parthenon have contributed greatly to its iconic status. Beginning with daguerrotypes in the 1830s and culminating in Edward Steichen's great gelatin silver print of the dancer Isadora Duncan flanked by the temple columns, the photographic medium has not only documented the state of preservation of the temple and its sculptures at various periods, it has also helped to ossify it in its current configuration, namely, that created by the Greek Archaeological Service in the mid-nineteenth century after the Acropolis was made an official archaeological site. By disseminating the classic view of the Parthenon in an inexpensive medium, modern photography helped to increase tourism to Greece and raise esteem for this particular example of classical architecture.⁸

The 1830s were clearly a watershed in Parthenon studies: the temple site was reclaimed and cleared of later construction by the newly liberated Greeks; refinements and added color were being recognized for the first time; the sculptures were cast in plaster and widely distributed; the just-invented medium of photography was recording its true likeness in minute detail. In this fixation on the classical phase of the building, its long post-antique history was being destroyed and lost. We tend to lose sight of the fact that for nearly four hundred years (ca. A.D. 1460–1833) the Parthenon was a mosque, and during twice that span (ca. A.D. 600–1458) it served the Christian community of Athens, first as a Byzantine church and later as a Latin cathedral.⁹ The attentive visitor can still see on the marble walls traces of Latin inscriptions and remnants of frescoes, not to mention the hacking away of the “pagan” figures of the metopes, testifying to the later ecclesiastical function of the building. A bell tower built in the twelfth century still occupies the southern end of the Parthenon's opisthodomos, or rear porch. The mosque and minaret, however, have left few traces in the wake of the demolition of almost all Turkish structures during reoccupation.

What has left indelible damage and major losses is the bombardment of the Parthenon by the Venetians under general Francesco Morosini on September 26, 1687. Serving as the Turks' gunpowder magazine, the Parthenon exploded when hit, sending the marble roof, most of the cella walls, columns from the north and south peristyles, and carved metopes and frieze blocks flying, crashing to the ground and smashed



to smithereens. As if that wasn't enough damage (not to mention the loss of human life) Morosini proceeded to loot the building of some of its larger sculptures – yet more horses for Venice – but his faulty tackle snapped, dropping an over life-size Poseidon and the horses of Athena's chariot from the west pediment to the rock of the Acropolis forty feet below.¹⁰ Fortunately for art historians thirteen years earlier (1674) Jacques Carrey, an artist in the entourage of a French embassy sent to Athens by Louis XIV, made drawings of the pedimental sculptures, the south metopes, and over half of the frieze.¹¹

What Morosini did not manage to take, Lord Elgin's agents stripped in 1801 to 1805. Keen to find antiques to decorate his new house in Scotland, Elgin used his ambassadorial position to obtain a *firman* (edict) from the sultan allowing his agents to take "some pieces" from the Acropolis. In addition to the fifteen well-preserved metopes from the south side and all but two of the remaining pedimental figures, he removed sixty-seven frieze blocks, the back halves of which were sawed off for ease in transport. In spite of this, the central east – and most important – frieze slab broke in two during loading.¹²

In light of such depredations it is a wonder that any decoration survives on the Parthenon at all. Occasionally the survival of a sculpture is due to an erroneous identification. One example is the last metope on the north side where the two well-preserved draped women might have been read in Christian times as the angel Gabriel with the Virgin Mary and so were spared.¹³ Another is the seated group of an embracing man and girl in the west pediment, which was identified as the Roman emperor Hadrian with his wife Sabina and so was left in situ by Elgin's agents. Some fragments of sculpture became buried on the Acropolis after the explosion to be discovered when Greek excavations began in the 1830s; others were embedded into the fortification walls and are still coming to light today.¹⁴

The biggest event in the Parthenon's recent history, and one that has and will continue to transform our understanding of this monument, is the ambitious work of the Committee for the Preservation of the Acropolis Monuments that began in 1975. Under the architect Manolis Korres's brilliant direction, restoration work on the Parthenon has resulted in many unexpected insights, such as the fact that there were windows in

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the east wall of the cella and possibly also a second Ionic frieze. There may have been as many as three predecessors of the building that stands visible today, dating back to the early sixth century B.C.¹⁵ New and more accurate measurements of the temple have allowed scholars to understand more fully the extent of the temple's refinements. Newly quarried blocks of Pentelic marble are being shaped to broken pieces to allow the incorporation of original blocks, and sculptures badly ravaged by air pollution have been replaced with resin casts. When this project is complete, we will have a new classical icon to contemplate and study.

Many classical archaeologists have been faulted for being too Athenocentric, and the group of scholars contributing to this volume could well be called "Parthenocentric." It has been my privilege to ask some of the best scholars working on different aspects of the Parthenon, from its ancient setting to its impact on contemporary architecture, to contribute to a comprehensive study of this complex and enduring monument. A new scholarly book devoted to the Parthenon, surprisingly, is long overdue.¹⁶ Collectively we hope that this volume will be useful to both students coming to this building for the first time as well as seasoned scholars who want an update on its history and influence. These essays demonstrate various methodological approaches from connoisseurship to digital imaging and show how new finds (such as the Pella hydria or the Agora token) can elucidate lost imagery.¹⁷ Most important, these new essays examine the Parthenon in context, whether it be physical (the setting), historical (the Athenian Empire),¹⁸ architectural (relation to other buildings), political-religious (sculptural program), or cultural (the *Nachleben*).

In spite of this learned focus on the Parthenon, many basic issues will remain unresolved. Did the west chamber have Corinthian or Ionic columns? Did the evolving design of the building move from east to west or west to east? What was the role of Perikles? Were there two designers as there were two architects? Why was Pandora, that "beautiful evil," on the base of the chryselephantine statue? And even more basic, was the Parthenon a temple or a treasury? Although these and other questions may remain unanswered for the present, this volume provides the most up-to-date analyses of that most abiding icon of the classical past, the Parthenon.



Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. The Nashville Parthenon was constructed in 1922–30 with the consultation of the architectural historian William B. Dinsmoor. See Creighton and Johnson 1991.
2. For the impact of the Parthenon on modern architecture, see Etlin's chapter in this volume.
3. Their work was supported by the Society of Dilettanti, and their influential book *The Antiquities of Athens* was published in 1789 (although dated 1787), the year after Stuart's death. The first published engraving of the Parthenon appeared in Jacob Spon and George Wheler's *Voyage d'Italie de Dalmatie, de Grèce et du Levant* (1676), later republished by Wheler in his *Journey into Greece* (1682) dedicated to Charles II.
4. For a list of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century buildings that incorporate curvature, see Haselbeger 1999a, 309–13. On the debate regarding the painting of Greek sculpture, see van Zanten 1994 and Prater 2002.
5. See Brownlee 1997.
6. Casts of the Parthenon marbles were first commissioned from the neoclassical sculptor Richard Westmacott by the British Museum and by 1838 a second set of molds was made. See Jenkins 1990.
7. The painting *The White Horse* by Gauguin (Gare d'Orsay) is one of several that reprises motifs from the Parthenon frieze. For another see Neils 2001a, 236–37, fig. 171.
8. For the relationship of the Parthenon to early modern photography, see the contribution of Szegedy-Maszak to this volume.
9. For the Christian and Muslim phases of the building, see the chapter by Ousterhout in this volume.
10. For a complete description of this disastrous event, see Korres 1990, and Hurwit 1999, 291–3.

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11. For the Carrey drawings, see Bowie and Thimme 1971.
12. For a full discussion of Lord Elgin and his activities, see St. Clair 1998.
13. The interpretation is that of Rodenwalt 1933.
14. See in particular the ongoing publications of Alexander G. Mantis from 1985 to the present.
15. See Korres in Bouras 2003, esp. 8, fig. 7.
16. Although reprinted in later editions, the book on the Parthenon edited by Vincent Bruno (1974) is out of date. The stimulating new book by Mary Beard (2002) presents primarily a cultural history of the building, and the lavish volume edited by Panayotis Tournikiotis (1994) is beyond the means of most students.
17. In particular, Athenian vase paintings have helped us to interpret otherwise lost or badly damaged sculpture; see the essays by Schwab, Neils, and Palagia in this volume.
18. On the historical context, see Kallet in this volume.

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1. View of the Acropolis from the southwest. Photo: American School of Classical Studies, Alison Frantz Collection AT 71.

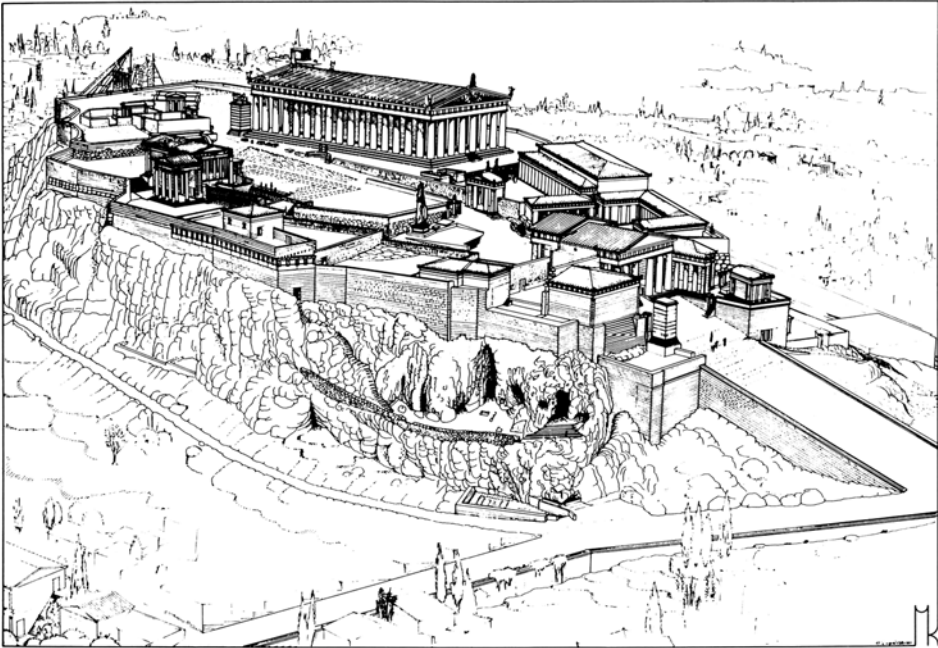
CHAPTER ONE

SPACE AND THEME: THE SETTING OF THE PARTHENON

Jeffrey M. Hurwit

In the classic, distant panoramic view of the Acropolis (Fig. 1), the Parthenon stands heroically upon the summit of the rock, like a huge statue upon a pedestal. It is seen in a muscular three-quarter view: both its width and length impress at once, emphasizing not only the sheer mass of the building but also its independent existence in, and in defiance of, space. Its foundations and steps lift it far above the present walls of the citadel (they are basically medieval and later walls), higher than the comparatively puny Erechtheion to the north, far higher than the Propylaia and Nike temple bastion to the west. It stands isolated against the Attic hills and sky, a transfixing point of reference. The rhythm of its solids and voids, its columns and intercolumniations, imposes a measure upon the landscape; its long horizontals seem like corrections to the lines of the Acropolis itself. Its order and power compel Athens to surround it: it takes dominion over citadel and city.

It always did: there is no question that in antiquity, as today, the Parthenon dominated the Attic skyline.¹ But the skyline of the Acropolis itself was not then the same: the walls and roofs of buildings no longer standing filled the space between the Propylaia and the Parthenon, and for someone touring the summit, the building's setting was complex and cluttered. The nineteenth-century clearing and reconstruction of the Acropolis left it a composition of four discrete monuments – a clean, spacious marble tableau. The resulting emptiness between the buildings and around the Parthenon allows the modern visitor to move around freely and continually reframe it, unobstructed, in his shifting vision. In



2. Reconstruction of the Acropolis from the northwest. Drawing: M. Korres.

antiquity, however, this empty space was not there: from many points of view the Parthenon was at least partly obscured by other buildings, walls, and monuments (Fig. 2). The original setting of the Parthenon to some degree complicated the ancient view and appreciation of it, yet at the same time made its place on the Acropolis richer and more charged: what is partly hidden is more tantalizing than what is fully revealed. Moreover, the setting of the Parthenon in the Classical period – and that setting continually evolved even in the Hellenistic and Roman periods – was not just physical or spatial. It was thematic, too: if the Parthenon was set just off the geographical center of the citadel, it nonetheless stood squarely at the ideological center of a constellation of monuments that pronounced and continually reiterated both the venerability, the antiquity, of the Acropolis, and the power of Athena as a goddess of victory.

The Approach

The Propylaia marks the end of the Panathenaic Way, the long road that led from the Dipylon gate at the northwest corner of the city, across the Agora, and up the west slope of the Acropolis: its last stretch was