

Ancient greek
architecture on
present day society
history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Some of the most amazing examples of Ancient Greek architecture and sculptures were built primarily for religious purposes, to represent deities or to serve as temples. Examples of such include the Acropolis, the Parthenon, Erechtheum, Apollo Didyma, and the Temple of Athena Nike. Greek architecture and artwork was unique and sophisticated, and the influences of Greek architecture are still present in modern day society. The influences of Ancient Greek architecture can be seen in governmental buildings in the United States of America. The reason for this influence may be because the American Democratic System is believed to be modeled after the Ancient Greek Democracy.

There were three basic orders of Greek columns called Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian. “ Each kind of column had a long shaft and top and bottom elements carved and decorated in a specific way” (Woods 66). The Doric style is rather sturdy and its top is plain. This style was used in mainland Greece; an example would be the columns of the Parthenon. The Ionic style is thinner and more elegant. Its capital is decorated with a scroll-like design called a volute. This style was found in eastern Greece, in the Erechtheum, The Temple of Apollo at Didyma, and the Temple of Athena Nike. The Corinthian style is seldom used in the Greek world. Its capital is very elaborate and decorated with acanthus leaves. The Parthenon combines elements of the Doric and Ionic orders. It has a Doric temple and it also contains a continuous sculpted frieze and four ionic columns, characteristic of the Ionic order (David Silverman).

The early Greeks were interested in luxury as they were in protecting the statues of their gods and athletic heroes. The buildings were boxlike, having

<https://assignbuster.com/ancient-greek-architecture-on-present-day-society-history-essay/>

one or two rooms with a porch in front. A few columns stood on the porch or sometimes went all the way around the temple. Brick and wood were used in constructions, and the roofs were thatched. Square or rectangular floor plans were used, while all doorways, walls, and ceiling were made in the same style and finally, a triangle was placed between the roof and the doorway (Amy B.).

As time passed, Greece carried on more trade with the East. This made them become aware of other styles and the temples became larger increased in number, though the Doric style still continued on. Temples were placed on a height because worship took place in the open. Architects worked carefully on the front of the temple. They gave special attention to the Doric column such as to the base, shaft, and capital. In the triangular area over the doorway, artisans carved figures and designs. Afterwards these figures and designs were painted in vivid colors (Amy B.).

As a result of experience in architectural forms, the Greeks were led to vary certain details, because of this; the Ionic style is quite similar to the Doric. In Ionic temples of smaller proportions, the slenderer columns and thinner walls make the building look light and elegant (The Art of Architecture). The simpler, more massive Doric style gives one a feeling of strength and purity, like the Lincoln Memorial(New York Times). Architecture reached its peak during the classical period of Greek history, which was from about 500 to 300 B. C. Stone and marble were mostly used and builders tried for equilibrium in the way they placed the shapes and masses. They also paid more attention to the design of the inside of the buildings. Color was used to point out structural elements in the design. Greek architectural style
<https://assignbuster.com/ancient-greek-architecture-on-present-day-society-history-essay/>

represents, order, beauty and democracy (Demand Media). It also shows that the Greek designs will never be too old; it still inspires awe and people appreciate the huge stone columns, stoic beauty and fine craftsmanship. These Greek designs are evident in the Capital Building, Jefferson Memorial and the White House today.

The most important building that held all of the Greek Architecture was The Acropolis. Acropolis in Greek means “ The Sacred Rock, the high city” (Ancient Greece). The Acropolis of Athens is a steep-sided hill supporting several temples, districts and other buildings. There are many Acropolises in Greece, and they were often found on a high spot, and were often used as a place for shelter and defense against various enemies, but the Acropolis in Athens was the best known of them all. It towers over the capital and is a very impressive sight. Athens was great center of learning, art and culture. “ Mighty indeed are the marks and monuments in our empire which we have left. Future ages will wonder at us, as the present wonders at us now,” said Pericles, a leader of Athens in ancient Greece (A Guide for Tourists). He was right because modern people still are in awe of ancient Greek buildings and copy their designs. Pericles began a vast rebuilding campaign for the Acropolis. The Parthenon was completed during his lifetime, but work on the Temple of Athena Nike and the Erechtheum did not begin until after his death. The Acropolis is primarily dedicated to the Goddess Athena, and is situated in the middle of Athens. Many myths, festivals and important events are connected to the sacred Acropolis. The Acropolis was a group of temples, theaters and government buildings set on a hill overlooking the city (The Acropolis of Athens).

The Acropolis is said to have been inhabited since at least the 7th Millennium BC. The tomb of Cecrops also lies there and the Athenians kept a snake there which symbolized their first king. There were also other tombs and temples there. All of them were connected to kings, heroes and gods that had to do with Athens. It was during the Pericles era when the Acropolis got the structure we see today. The Acropolis had changed dramatically by the 6th century B. C. It had turned more into a sanctuary and was no longer a place for palaces. Every year a huge procession to the Acropolis took place. The wooden statue of Athena was dressed and it was also sacrificed to. The Panathenean games were also a big event and the games included both athletic and musical competitions. The winner would receive an amphora filled with olive oil. The olive tree was the sacred tree of Athena (Olive Tree and Olive Oil).

The Acropolis also held some of the Ancient world's famous architecture. One building was called the Parthenon which was a temple honoring the goddess Athena (The Parthenon). The next building was called the Erechtheum which was a " shrine to Greek gods of agriculture" (Woods 61). The Temple of Apollo at Didyma holds an important sanctuary that holds the oracles of Apollo (Didyma). Then last but not least there was the Temple of Athena Nike which was a symbol of harmony between Greek people (Ancient Greece).

The Parthenon was the first building that was built in the Acropolis. It was made of lime stones and the columns were made of Pentelic marbles (Parthenon). The construction of the Parthenon was between 447- 432 BCE, and the mastermind behind the project was Pericles (Pericles). The temple's <https://assignbuster.com/ancient-greek-architecture-on-present-day-society-history-essay/>

main purpose was to hold the statue of Athena that was made by the Pheidias, a sculptor, out of gold and ivory (Phidias). The Parthenon is a large temple but is not the largest one in Greece. It was constructed in the Doric style, meaning the columns are thicker and shorter and have the simplest design. It had seventeen columns along its length and eight columns along its width. The columns were over ten meters tall and two meters in diameter, and the platform which they rest a bow on a gentle arc brings the corners about 12 cm closer to the ground than the middle (The Parthenon). There are about 13, 400 stones that were used to build the Parthenon and the architects names were Iktinos and Kallikrates(The Parthenon Temple).

The Parthenon's marble columns and other architectural elements appear straight and perfectly proportioned when looked at from a distance (Brown 62). Some of these elements were made out of proportion on purpose. Greek architects knew that perfectly even parts create an optical illusion when viewed from certain angles. They appear crooked and uneven. All of the columns appear equal from a distance because the architects made the Parthenon's end columns a little thicker than its central columns. The end columns were spaced closer together than the central columns for the same reason. The Parthenon's base curves upward slightly so that it appears flat from a distance.

Some of the Parthenon's details are found in other Greek temples while other details are only found in the Parthenon. Each entrance has about six columns in front of it, and the larger of the two interior rooms which was called the naos which kept the cult statue (Greek Temple). Then there was the smaller room that held the treasury. The Parthenon was built to replace two earlier
<https://assignbuster.com/ancient-greek-architecture-on-present-day-society-history-essay/>

temples of Athena on the Acropolis. One of these stood south of the Parthenon and the other was on the same spot as the Parthenon. The Parthenon frieze runs around the upper edge of the temple wall. It is only three feet five inches tall and hard to see from the ground. The frieze has a single subject on all four sides. There is a procession of horsemen, musicians, sacrificial animals and other figures with various ritual functions on three sides. There is a scene centered on a child on the east side who is handing a folded cloth to an older man (The Parthenon and its Sculptural Decoration).

American architect Henry Bacon, who lived from 1866 to 1924, loved the Parthenon and studied its design carefully. He used it as a model for his most famous structure, the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C. The memorial was built between 1915 and 1922 and it has thirty-six marble columns, each forty-four feet high. It has a base of stone steps leading to an open chamber containing a nineteen foot statue of President Abraham Lincoln (Lincoln Memorial).

Strabo once said about The Apollo Didyma, " The temple is adorned with costliest offerings consisting of early works of art."(Athens Greek Guide) The Greeks built the Temple of Apollo at Didyma about 300 B. C. The design of the temple was known a dipteral, meaning that two sets of columns surround the interior section. Didyma is located in the southwest part of modern Turkey. " Didyma" means " twins" who are actually referring to Apollo and Artemis who were the Greek god and goddess and were also twins (Didyma). In Roman times the Didyma temple of Apollo was most noticeable for its 122 enormous columns but all the columns are ruined except for two that are still <https://assignbuster.com/ancient-greek-architecture-on-present-day-society-history-essay/>

standing today. In the Didyma there is a giant sculpture that is a giant Medusa head and it was possibly sculpted by Aphrodisias in the 2nd century A. D (Didyma).

The temple is unusual, that it has no roof and is open to the sky. It is raised on a high, stepped podium and is surrounded on all four sides by double row of columns, and there is twenty-one along the sides and ten across the front and rear (The temple of Apollo at Didyma). “ There was a great doorway behind an array of twelve more columns in the temple’s deep porch” (The temple of Apollo at Didyma). At the far end there was a small temple that housed the “ cult” statue of Apollo and a spring (The temple of Apollo at Didyma). Didyma is extraordinary because of its elaborate array of interior spaces and is also widely known for another reason. In 1979, fine, barely visible lines were discovered carved on the high interior walls. They are the actual blueprint of the temple. “ They are rendered in full scale and precisely scratched into the surface of the marble” (The temple of Apollo at Didyma). They were to serve as a guide over the years it would have taken to complete construction. They still exist because the temple was never finished and the walls of “ cella” court did not receive its final polishing (The temple of Apollo at Didyma).

After the Persian invasion in 480/79 B. C. E, the west side of the temple was built to see the holy image of goddess Athena. The Erectheum is an ionic temple with two chambers at different levels. It is on the northern side of the Acropolis, opposite the Parthenon. The western part and eastern part both have a cella and the temple was finished in 406 B. C. E. According to the myths, Athena caused an olive tree to grow when she was contesting
<https://assignbuster.com/ancient-greek-architecture-on-present-day-society-history-essay/>

Posieden for the honor. The temple displays the finest examples of the Greek Ionic order. The Erechtheum was originally the palace of the mythical king who was named Erectheus I (Athens Greece Guide). People believe that the holy snake of the Athens once lived there and that the grave of the mythical king Cecrops is also in the temple.

The Erechtheum is a very complex and complicated temple. The plan that it was created from is hard to understand; it was designed to accommodate the uneven ground on the site. The elegance and delicate forms of the Erechtheum contrast sharply with the neighboring Parthenon (Erectheion). The temple faces east and its entrance is lined with six long Ionic columns. The wall to the north and west takes a major drop to almost twice the altitude of the front and south sides. The temple is also original because it incorporates two porches. One is at the northwest corner and it is supported by tall Ionic columns. The one at the southwest corner is supported by The Caryatides, six large female statues. They have become the temple's main feature because they seem to support the porch's roof on their heads.

There is a continuous frieze around the exterior of the temple, but the theme of it is not known. Its form is unusual because white marble figures were attached to a flat background of dark gray marble. Normally a frieze would present painted figures on a monochrome painted background. The entire building was "lavishly decorated with wall frescoes, gilded rosettes, and an array of colored features and low relief sculptures" (Ancient Greece Erectheon).

Not much is known about the interior plan of the Erechtheum. The temple has undergone major rebuilding phases through the centuries making its original interior a mystery. Modern plans show it as divided into two or more rooms and more than one level. It was damaged first in classical times by a major fire before it was renovated. During the seventh century CE, the interior walls of Christian Basilica were removed and new ones were built. The temple was later converted to a harem during the Ottoman Empire and the north porch was "walled up" (Ancient Greece Erectheon).

During the Archaic era a small temple stood on the site that faced to its east which was known as The Temple of Athena Nike (Temple of Athena Nike). It is located southwest of the entrance to the Acropolis and is built in the Ionic order. It has a row of four columns in front of each of its narrow sides. The frieze on the upper section of the walls shows the conference of gods on the east side. There are also scenes from battles on the other three. This building was destroyed by the Persians in 480 BCR along with the rest of the Acropolis and was not rebuilt until 435 B. C. E. In 420 BCE, the classical temple that has survived was completed. The statue was made of wood and held a pomegrade in the right hand and in the left hand it held a helmet. The temple had no wings like it was custom for Nike statues of the time to have. Legend has it that the statue didn't have wings so it could never leave the city of Athens. The fort of the Temple of Athena Nike surrounded the temple and acted as a guardrail to protect people from falling off of it.

The classic temple is smaller than other temples in the Acropolis, even though it is 11 feet tall (The Parthenon). The temple's ratio of the column height to its length is 7: 1, while it is customary for Ionic temples to have a <https://assignbuster.com/ancient-greek-architecture-on-present-day-society-history-essay/>

ratio of 9: 1. It is the first building that greets the visitors who approach the Propylaia and it faces to the east. Early in its history it was a place of worship for gods or goddesses associated with wars. It has been found with excavations that an open pit existed on The Temple of Athena Nike. Bronze Age Greeks used to pour wine in the pit and also put figurines of the gods in there(The Parthenon).

Even in today's architecture, Greek influence can be found all over the world. For example, the White House today looks like the Parthenon by the triangle top and ionic columns, but the little details decorating the frieze of the Parthenon are not seen in the White House. The Ionic architectural form is visible on many Washington, D. C. memorials and buildings. The Lincoln Memorial, patterned after Doric architecture, is one famous example of Greek architectural style today. Modern designers also use them to convey elegance. Museums, courthouses, libraries, government buildings and monuments all use Greek architectural style (Demand Media). The use of marble, limestone and columns were used in Greek architecture and still are today. Notable ways in which we still use Greek style include columns, friezes and decorative elements. Greek culture has had a tremendous impact on the world, including the way the United States of America government buildings are structured. Greek architecture is one of the ways in which we still enjoy and imitate the Greek legacy.