

# The glory and grandeur of the acropolis essay sample

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The city of Athens is not the only famous for being the site of the first Modern Olympics but also for various museums that showcased the architectural expertise of the Greeks of the ancient world(UNESCO, “ *Acropolis, Athens* ”).

During the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC after the Greeks defeated the Persians, Athens took the lead among the other cities of the ancient world in the flourishing of art. Led by Pericles, a group of artists converted a rocky hill into a one-of-a-kind monument. During that time, vital monuments were constructed: the Parthenon by Ictinus, the Erechtheon, the Propylea, which serves as the entry point to the Acropolis, and the mini-temple Athena Nike(UNESCO, “ *Acropolis, Athens* ”).

The Acropolis served as both a fortress and state sanctuary of ancient Athens. Built around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, most of its massive remains still stand to this very day. During the Late Bronze Age, it was fortified by walls such as those of Mycenae and Tiryns in Southern Greece. After the fall of the Mycenaean civilization, it continued to be used and fortified the Acropolis for many centuries(Glowacki, “ *The Acropolis* ”).

During the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century, the Acropolis was transformed into the sanctuary of the goddess Athena. Towards the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Acropolis was the site of architectural and sculptural activities in preparation for the celebration of the Panathenaic festival in 566 BC. During this period, the first stone Doric temple of Athena was constructed in the Acropolis(Glowacki, “ *The Acropolis* ”).

Today, the Acropolis is considered as a World Heritage Center by the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)(UNESCO, “*Acropolis, Athens*”).

### The Parthenon

The Parthenon served as a memorial for the goddess Athena. Emperor Theodosius converted it to a Christian Church in honor of the Virgin Mary, the Franks then made it into a Catholic Church in 1204 and to a Mosque by the Turks in 1458. When the Christians made the Parthenon into a Church, part of the Metopes were ruined(Lahanas, “*The Parthenon: History, Reconstruction, Technology and Interesting Facts*”).

In 480 – 479 BC, majority of the structures in the Acropolis was destroyed by the Persians. The building of the Parthenon started in 447 BC and its completion was in 438 BC. Pheidias added the decorations in 432 BC with the assistance of close to 70 other sculptors.

Venice sculptor Francesco Morosini ruined Athena’s chariot horses when he tried to remove them from the Western pediment(Lahanas, “*The Parthenon: History, Reconstruction, Technology and Interesting Facts*”).

In 1686, the Turks destroyed the temple of Nike and its restoration was completed in 1835. In 1687, as the Turks were using the structure as a powder magazine, Morosini’s forces attacked them. The temple was instantly destroyed when a German lieutenant fired the crucial shot. The roof of the

temple gave in and its pillars were ruined(Lahanas, “ *The Parthenon: History, Reconstruction, Technology and Interesting Facts* ”).

### The Pre-Construction Years

Designing and preparation of the site where the Parthenon would be placed took a couple of years. The initial years were spent on collecting the huge amount of pure white Pentelic marble located in a quarry which is 3, 000 feet above the ten mile stretch of land separating it from the construction site(Lane, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

In addition, a single block of marble required a couple of days trip and was worth 300 drachmas. Even the carts the transport the marbles required 12 feet wheels pulled by 30 oxens. Pulleys as well as ropes were used to heave the immense marble stone weighing almost twenty two tons to Acropolis. This was the only time that the sculptors could decorate the stones and for the laborers to start erecting the outer and inner columns, which numbered 46 and 12, respectively(Lane, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

The main section of the temple was constructed from 444 to 441 BC. The 40 foot tall statue of Athena was made from wood and ivory. Her shield and helmet were designed from pure gold(Lane, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

Overall, the total cost for the construction of the Parthenon was estimated at 3, 500, 000 drachmas just for the gold. The ivory, on the other hand, was worth 1, 386, 000. The entire structure was worth 12, 072, 000 drachmas.

Just like what happens in modern times, these amounts were a subject of investigation(Lane, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

### The Parthenon During Hellenism and Roman Period

The Acropolis was the site of many dedication ceremonies by foreigners, generals, rulers, and statesmen. As the center of religion, it represented the glorious period of the Greeks during the Hellenistic and Roman Period(Glowacki, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

In 267 AD, the Herulians from Northern Europe attacked and conquered the whole of Athens. This resulted to the construction of walls which fortified the city stretching from Northern Acropolis where the Library of Hadrian is located and back to the south going to the Northern and Eastern Slopes(Glowacki, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

### Athena's Old Temple

Prior to its destruction by the Persians in 480 BC, the Old Temple of Athena was the most important monument in the Acropolis. It was the focal point of reconstruction after the Persian War(Glowacki, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

The Parthenon was the site of archaeological excavations for the Old Temple of Athena. It is believed that the Parthenon was a bigger replacement for Athena's Old Temple so there was a presumption that it was designed as a replacement for the Old Temple(Glowacki, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

However, since it was a sacred monument in honor of the Persian destruction, the Parthenon was constructed to the south of the Old Temple adjacent to it. Because of its location, the Parthenon brought about huge engineering problems since there was a need to expand the Acropolis to the south. The people of Athens did not want to destroy the Old Temple found underneath the Parthenon(Glowacki, " *The Parthenon* ").

From 1885 to 1889, a systematic campaign for excavating the Acropolis was implemented by the Panagotis Kavvadias, the Curator of Antiquities with the aid of George Kawerau, a German architect. This project required removal of the entire soil in order to get to the natural rock level. The excavation was done thoroughly around the Parthenon. Consequently, Wilhelm Dorpfeld discovered the Old Temple of Athena was at the middle of the Terrace, located at the northern portion of the Parthenon(Glowacki, " *The Parthenon* ").

Despite Dorpfeld's findings, modern day archaeologists still refuse to recognize his discovery. Dinsmoor, who was the head of the Archaeological Institute of America, argued that what was found was not the Old Temple of Athena but rather a secondary one which was probably constructed by the sons of Peisistratos. This was supported by archaeologists from Canada and France(Glowacki, " *The Parthenon* ").

Dorpfeld's findings was significant in a sense that it was able to establish that the Old Temple of Athena underwent three phases so that it became larger than the original size(Glowacki, " *The Parthenon* ").

## The Structure of the Parthenon

The Parthenon is a Doric temple with eight and seventeen columns at its facade and flanks, respectively in conformity with the required ratio of 9: 4. These values governed the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the temple as well as other aspects of the building such as the distance between the columns and their height(Ancient Greece. org, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

Its cella was larger than the usual to be able to accommodate the immense statue of Athena, which made the front and back porch smaller than its normal size. A row of six Doric columns serves as support for the front and back porch and a 23-Doric column colonnade surround the statue. The positioning of columns behind the statue was quite unusual since in the past, columns in Doric temples were positioned on the flanks. However, because of the Parthenon’s sheer size, it allowed the construction of two-story columns(Ancient Greece. org, “ *The Parthenon* ”) .

The Parthenon was no breakthrough in the field of building construction. Nevertheless its stylish design became a standard in Classical architecture many centuries after its construction. Although a large temple, it is not the biggest one in Greece. It symbolizes the aspirations of Greek thought at the height of the Classical period. Greek ideals were seen in the perfect dimensions of the building, its complex architectural attributes, as well as its anthropomorphic statues(Ancient Greece. org, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

At present, the Parthenon is an outdoor monument. Eighty percent of it is ruined after enduring several hundred years of earthquakes, armed

struggles, and gunpowder explosion. In 400 BC, the statue of Athena was removed from the Parthenon to be transferred to Constantinople. The Parthenon today is nothing but a bare skeleton as a result of numerous exploits by treasure hunters. In fact, Lord Elgin of England benefited from the its sculptural works(Ancient Greece. org, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

The Parthenon is the embodiment of the glory of ancient Greece. It is unique from other Greek temples because it veers away from the Doric temples of the past. Its intricate architectural style may be difficult to duplicate in modern time(Ancient Greece. org, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

More importantly, the Parthenon was a symbol of the democratic ideals of every Greek citizen. Democracy was at the forefront of its construction as seen in the meetings of the Assembly discussing common issues pertinent to Greek domestic or foreign policy(Ancient Greece. org, “ *The Parthenon* ”).

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