

Acropolis, Athens, Greece *

Entrance to the Acropolis is from the west, by way of the Propylaea. This building was the work of the architect Mnesikles and was erected in the years 437-432 BC. It consists of a central building and two wings. The north wing had paintings or frescoes on its walls, and is therefore known as the Pinakothekē ("Art Gallery"). The small Ionic temple of Athena Nike was erected to the south of the Propylaea about 420 BC. The architect of this temple was Kallikrates. It had four Ionic columns at both the front and back. A marble protective balustrade with relief figures of Nike encircled the top of the bastion on which the temple was built.

The Parthenon, a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena, was the earliest of the Classical monuments on the Acropolis, which were built in the second half of the 5th c. BC to replace the earlier buildings destroyed when the Persians burned the Athenian Acropolis in 479 BC. Perikles was the inspiration behind the building of the temple and the work was directed by Pheidias. The architects of the Parthenon, which was constructed and decorated between 447 and 432 BC, were Iktinos and Kallikrates. The Parthenon is a Doric peristyle temple with eight columns on the ends and seventeen on the sides. The columns, walls and sculptural decoration are of white Pentelic marble.

All the upper parts of the temple were decorated. On the outside, the metopes were carved with the battle of the gods and Giants (Gigantomachy) on the east side, of the Lapiths and Centaurs (Centauromachy) on the south, of the Athenians and the Amazons (Amazonomachy) on the west, and the Trojan War on the north side. The two pediments had scenes from myths connected with the goddess Athena: the birth of the goddess in the presence of the other gods, on the east pediment and her contest with Poseidon for Athens on the west. The walls of the cella were encircled by a relief frieze depicting the Panathenaic procession. The chryselephantine statue of the goddess by Pheidias stood inside the temple.

The Erechtheion was built about 420 BC on the north side of the flat summit of the hill and housed earlier cults. It is an Ionic temple, with a complex design. On the east side is a porch, with six Ionic columns, on the north a monumental propylon and on the south a porch, the roof of which is supported by six figures of maidens, the famous Caryatids. The cella was divided into two parts, in which Athena and Poseidon-Erechtheus were worshipped.

The space between the large sanctuaries mentioned above was filled with smaller sanctuaries and other buildings as well as with bronze statues dedicated to the gods.

The Acropolis Museum was built on the Acropolis in 1874, before the major excavations by P. Kavvadias and G. Kawerau, which lasted from 1885 until 1891. Of the finds yielded by these excavations, only the marble and poros sculptures remained on the Acropolis. The inscriptions, bronzes, clay objects and a variety of other items are now in the National Archaeological Museum, where they were originally taken for conservation.

The works now on display in the Museum fall into two basic categories: a) Architectural sculptures (pediments, metopes, friezes) from the decoration of the buildings. b) The dedications offered to Athena, the goddess of the sanctuary on the Acropolis. Chronologically, these cover the Archaic period (600-480 BC), the period of the Severe Style (480-450 BC) and the Classical period (450-330 BC).

Vestibule

Marble sculptures of the 5th and 4th c. BC. The Prokne of the Alkamenes. Head of Alexander the Great. The base of Atarbos. Hermes Propylaios. Relief with a decree containing a treaty between Athens and Samos.

Room I

Sculptures from the decoration of early Archaic buildings (600-570 BC). The Hydra pediment. Pediment with a lioness tearing apart a calf. Gorgon.

Room II

Pediments and dedications of the first half of the 6th c. (600-550 BC). Pediment of the triple-bodied monster. Pediment with Herakles entering the Olympos. Sphinx. The Moschophoros (calf-bearer). The Kore with the pomegranate. Clay relief plaques, figurines and busts (*protomes*) are displayed in the showcases.

* Brochure from the Ministry of Culture of Greece.

Room III

Pediment with a lion tearing apart a bull (570-560 BC). Korai of the island workshops (570-560 BC).

Room IV

Archaic dedications of the second half of the 6th c. (550-500 BC). Korai (the Peplos Kore, the “Maiden of Chios” and others). The Rampin Horseman and the “Persian” Horseman. Hunting dog. The Athena of Endoios.

Room V

Archaic dedications of the last quarter of the 6th c. (525-500 BC). The Gigantomachy pediment. The Kore of Anterior.

Alcove

Clay pottery and figurines from the sanctuary of the Nymph on the south slope of the Acropolis (6th-5th c. BC). Miniature sculpture from the Acropolis (6th c. BC).

Room VI

Sculpture from the period of the Severe Style (480-450 BC). The Kritios Boy. The Kore of Euthydikos. The Propylaea Kore. The Athena of Angelitos. The relief of the Pensive Athena.

Room VII

Sculpture from the decoration of the Parthenon (444-432 BC). Metope 12 from the south side with a Centaur and a Lapith woman. The group of Kekrops, the torso of Poseidon, Lissos and Kallirrhoe, from the west pediment. The torso of Hephaistos, and the torso of Selene from the east pediment. Small models with reconstructions of the pediments.

Room VIII

The Parthenon frieze (438-432 BC). Figures from the Erechtheion frieze (410BC). Balustrade with relief figures of Nike from the temple of Athena Nike (420-410 BC).

Room IX

Caryatids from the south porch of the Erechtheion (420 BC). Relief with an Athenian trireme.

The sacred rock of the Acropolis was for many centuries the most important religious centre of the city of Athens. The first traces of occupation go back to the Neolithic period. In Mycenaean times it was the seat of the king, whose megaron stood roughly on the site on which the Erechtheion was built many centuries later. After the 11th c. BC it became the home of the cult of Athena, patron goddess of the city that took her name, and of other gods, and was adorned down to the end of antiquity with majestic temples, brilliant buildings and a vast number of votive monuments. In the middle of the 5th c. BC, when Athens was at the height of its power, the ambitious artistic programme of Perikles was implemented: the Parthenon, the Propylaea and, a little later, the temple of Athena Nike and the Erechtheion, were all erected between 447 and 406 BC, remaining to the present day witnesses to the Greek Classical civilization.