

THE ACROPOLIS

AND ITS MUSEUM

BY GEORGE SOTIRIADES PROF. DR. PHIL.

Part I.—The Acropolis

with 20 illustrations.

ATHENS

PRINTING OFFICE "HESTIA,"

1925

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Title: The Acropolis and Its Museum: Part I--The Acropolis

Date of first publication: 1925

Author: George Sotiriades

Date first posted: Mar. 5, 2019

Date last updated: Mar. 5, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190321

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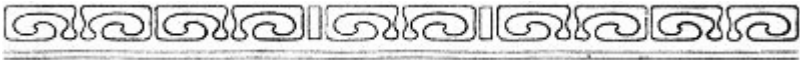
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THE ACROPOLIS AND ITS MUSEUM

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I

THE ACROPOLIS

The Acropolis of Athens, a hard limestone rock with precipitous sides except on the west, rises to a height of 156 metres ^[1] above the sea level. Its width is also 156 metres, its length 270 metres, its shape from east to west is oval and its area is about 30,000 square metres. It is situated in the midst of the plain of Attica, which is bounded on the east by M^t Hymettus (1027 m.), on the north-east by M^t Pentelicon (1110 m.), on the north by M^t Parnes (1413 m.) and on the west by M^t Aegaleus (468 m.). The original town of Athens was built entirely on this rock, which was fortified by high and strong walls, from 4.50 to 6 metres in thickness. Remains of these, which can still be seen to the south of the Propylaea and by the east wall, as well as in other places, are shown in [Figure 2](#).

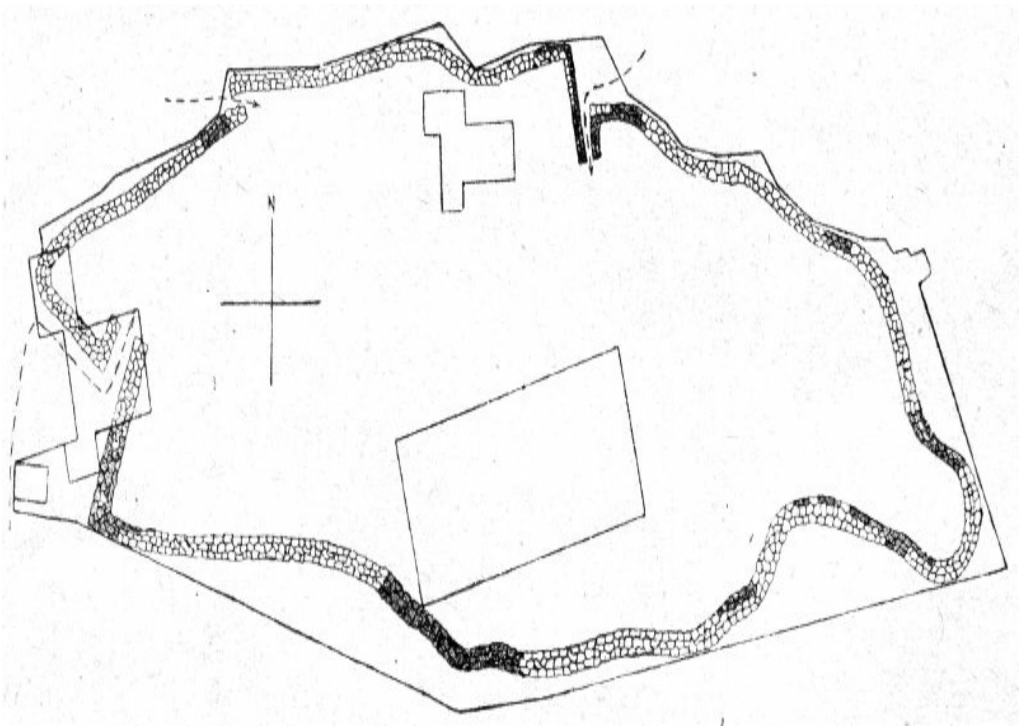


Figure 2.—The Pelasgian walls.

These walls are called Pelasgian or Cyclopean and were 5
built during the 2nd millennium B.C. At this time, between
2000 and 1000 B.C. and particularly between 1500 and 1200
B.C., an important civilisation flourished in Greece, the centre
and home of which was in the large island of Crete. The most
important town in Greece was at that time Mycenae, not far
from Nauplia, in Argolis. This was the capital of Agamemnon,
the richest and most powerful of all the kings of Greece, which
was then divided into many small kingdoms. As the foremost
leader of Greece he made war against Troy and this war has
been immortalized by Homer in his Iliad. Owing to Mycenae
being the first town of Greece in the 2nd millennium B.C., the

civilisation of this period is called Mycenaean. At Mycenae were found the tombs of the ancient kings, and the golden treasure and other objects from them can be seen in the National Museum.

Athens at this time was built entirely on the rock. It was called the «Polis» (town) and within it dwelt the king and the nobles, while the labourers, tradespeople and the rest must have dwelt in little villages scattered about the plain. When in later years, probably long after 1000 B.C., the town spread below the rock, the lower town was called the «Asty» (city) and the rock itself the Acropolis (i.e. the upper town or citadel). Gradually however the people ceased to live upon the Acropolis which was then given up entirely to the worship of the gods, and especially to that of Athena, the protecting goddess of the city. Only during the reigns of the usurpers of the kingly power, Peisistratus and his sons (560-510 B.C.), did it again serve as a dwelling place and fortress.

The Acropolis was always fortified by walls, but the Pelasgian walls only remained intact until 480 B.C., when the 6 Persians captured it. After the Greeks had driven them out by the naval battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. and by the battle of Plataea in 479 B.C., they entirely renewed the old fortifications and even extended them. Themistocles, who commanded the Greek fleet at Salamis, built the northern wall in 478 B.C. as it stands today and Cimon, his contemporary and successor, erected the southern and eastern walls in 465 B.C. The outer face of the eastern and southern walls has been since restored, first by the Venetians about 1400 A.D. and later during the Turkish period 1456-1833 A.D.

Belonging to the most ancient period of the history of Athens can still be seen not only the remains of the Pelasgian or Mycenaean walls, which have been mentioned above, but also traces of the palace and other dwellings. These, which we shall have to refer to again, are on the north side of the Acropolis and near the Erechtheum. At this time the Greeks built neither temples for their gods, nor made statues in their honour, but simply erected altars and worshipped in sacred groves. The earliest temples of the Acropolis were built about 700 B.C. and about the same time statues to the gods were made out of the trunks of trees. These wooden statues were called «xoana».

With the increasing prosperity of the city, art also progressed and so between 700 and 480 B.C. the Acropolis was adorned by many temples and numerous statues. The temples were built of «poros», a kind of soft limestone, and the sculptures were at first of the same material though afterwards marble was used. All these architectural and sculptured monuments were barbarously destroyed by the Persians in 480 and 479 B.C. After 479 the Athenians began the task of rebuilding the monuments on the Acropolis, no longer however in «poros» but in the beautiful Pentelic marble. The most beautiful of all these buildings were made in the time of Pericles (460-431 B.C.), and all the magnificent monuments

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we see on the Acropolis today are relics of that age ^[2]. The finest of these buildings, the Propylaea, the Parthenon and the Erechtheum were almost in a state of perfect preservation until 282 years ago. But in 1645 a thunderbolt fell into the powder magazine, which was in the Propylaea, and an explosion wrecked this marvellous building. In 1687 the besieging Venetians, under the command of Morosini, threw a bomb into

the powder magazine, then in the Parthenon, and so this famous temple was also destroyed. In the same year the Turks demolished the elegant temple of the Wingless Victory and with the stones built a bastion in the Propylaea, but after 1833 the temple was re-erected out of its original blocks. In 1802 Lord Elgin took almost all the sculptured blocks from the Parthenon and removed them to London and finally in 1826 and 1827, during the war of Independence, the monuments were again damaged by the besieging Turks who shot bombs from the hill of Philopappus on to the Acropolis.

Of the two following illustrations, the first ([Figure 3](#)) shows the Acropolis from the west as it was in the most glorious years of ancient Greece, that is to say in the 5th century B.C., the other ([Figure 4](#)) shows how the entrance was changed under the Romans about the 1st century A.D.

The Entrance to the Acropolis.

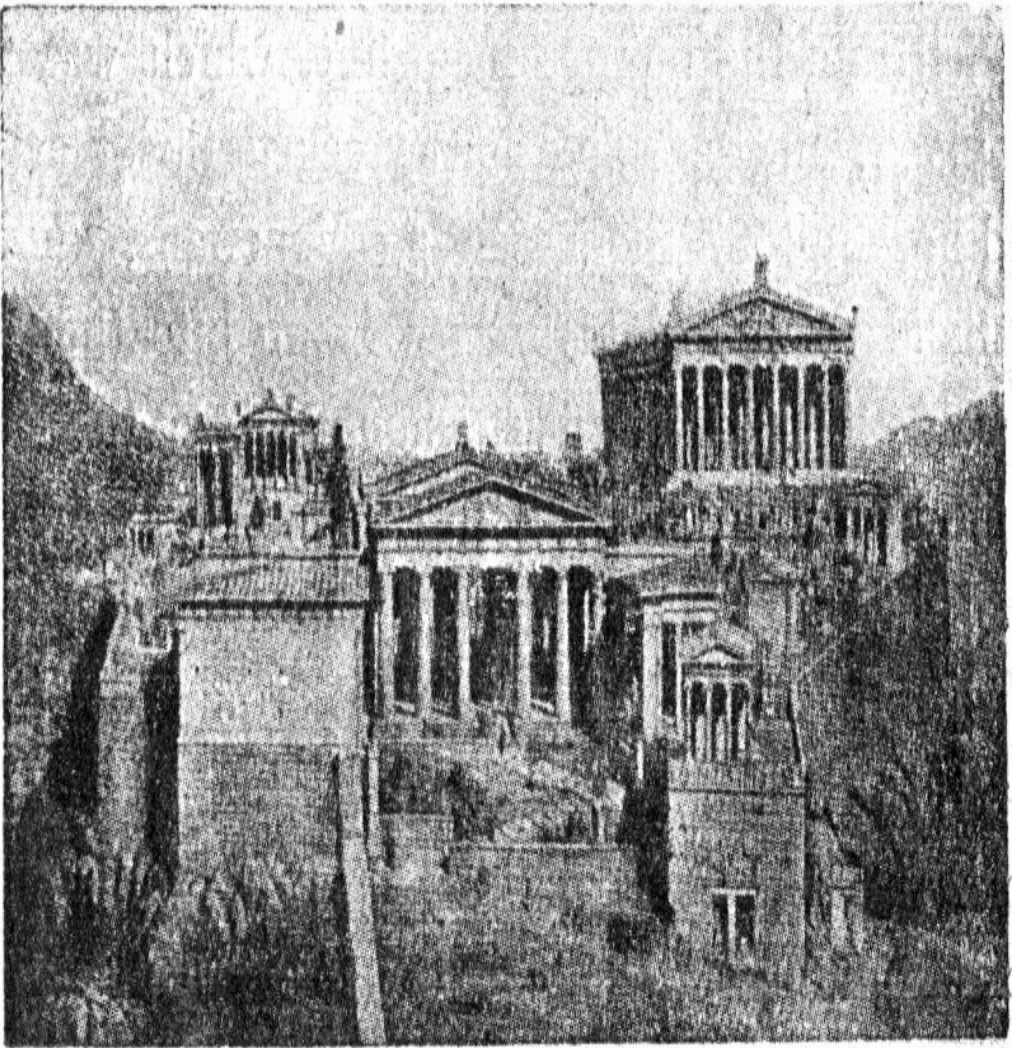


Figure 3.—The entrance, in classical times.

The two towers at the present entrance to the Acropolis were built during the Roman period, perhaps as far back as the reign of the Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211 A.D.). The present narrow doorway and the wall are built of stones taken from an ancient monument, demolished by the Romans, which stood a little to the west of the theatre of Dionysus. The Romans,

probably in the time of Emperor Caligula about 40 A.D., built a large marble flight of steps with a road in the middle for the sacrificial animals, leading from these towers and the doorway up to the Propylaea (see [Figure 4](#)). The steps were destroyed under the Turkish rule and were only roughly reconstructed on the right hand side out of the ancient marbles after 1833. From

about the 5th century B.C. down to the Roman period the entrance was on the southern side below the tower of the Wingless Victory (see [Figure 3](#)) and a paved road led in zig-zags up to the Propylaea. Another similar road can be seen even now at Delphi, leading from the entrance of the sacred enclosure up to the temple.

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The bastion of Cimon; the Temple of the Wingless Victory; the base of the statue of Agrippa; the well of the Clepsydra.



Figure 4.—The entrance, in Roman times.

Ascending the present steps we see on the right the bastion of Cimon; upon this was built in about 450 B.C. the little temple of the Wingless Victory. This exquisite building is shown in its restored state in [Figure 5](#). It was a temple of Athena, who was given the name of Victory after the victories of the Greeks over the Persians, and was hence generally called the temple of Athena Victory. In the front of the Temple was a doorway and

two windows, and within was a wooden statue of Athena, seated and holding in one hand her helmet and in the other a pomegranate. The frieze of the Temple, of which part is still to be seen, represents the victory of the Athenians over the Persians at Plataea in 479 B.C. In front of the Temple was an altar. All round the bastion was a balustrade, showing in relief winged figures emblematic of Victory decorating trophies or preparing sacrifices to Athena. Fragments of these wonderful reliefs are to be seen in the Museum in the room on the right hand side of the entrance. The Temple is what is technically known as an «Amphiprostyle Ionic Temple», which means that it is in the Ionic style and has columns at both ends.

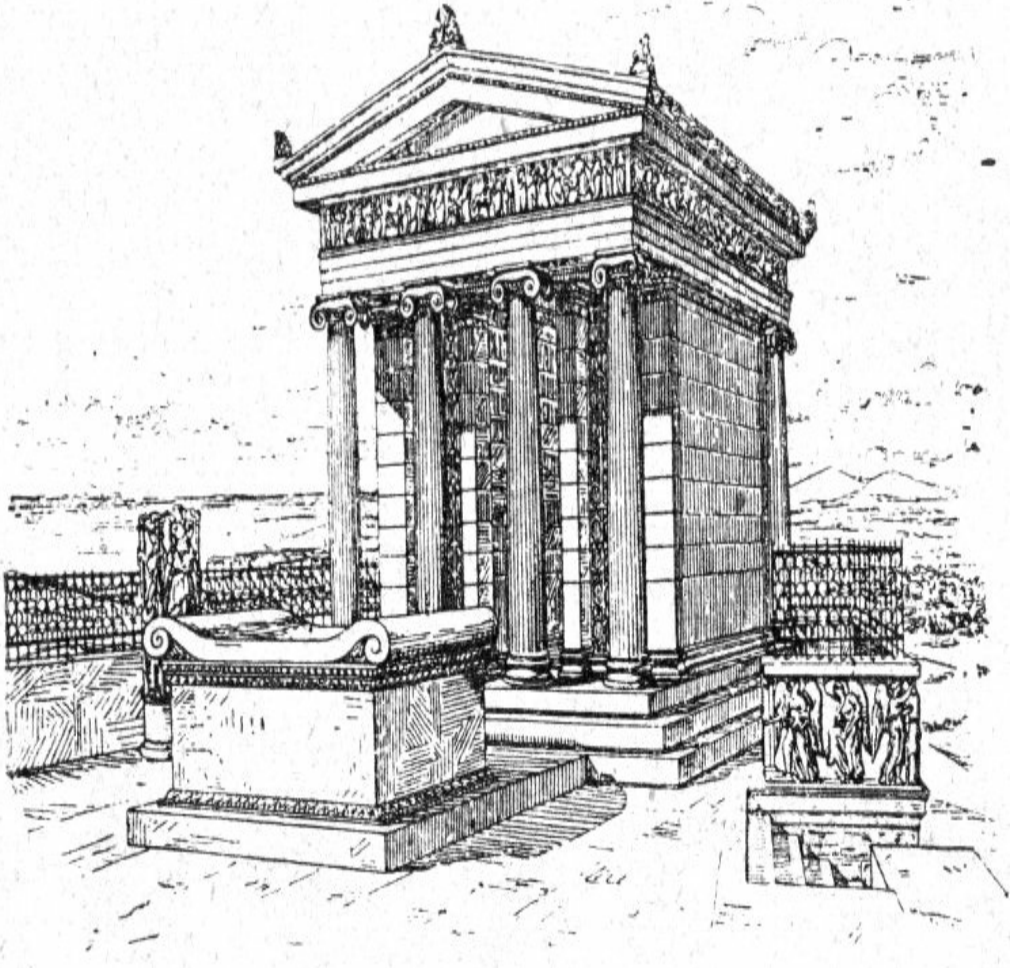


Figure 5.—The Temple of the Wingless Victory.

Opposite the bastion of Cimon to the north stands a base of the Roman period. It was built in 27 B.C. and carried a statue of the Roman admiral Agrippa, son-in-law of the Emperor Augustus, in a chariot. To the north of this base an ancient mediaeval stairway leads to the well of the Clepsydra which is now inside a small Christian chapel dedicated to the Holy Apostles.

The Propylaea.

The oldest enclosure of Pelasgian walls on the Acropolis is seen in [Figure 2](#). The western side of it passed through the Propylaea but there was also an outer wall, which, passing outside the present entrance between the towers, enclosed the western side of the Acropolis, called in ancient times the Pelargikon. It also included some of the ground to the northwest and perhaps also some on the south side. Of this wall not a fragment is now left, and the only existing remains belong to walls and other buildings of mediaeval and Turkish times.

In the inner Pelasgian wall which passed through the Propylaea, Peisistratus, in about 540 B.C., built an imposing gateway or «Propylon» as the Greeks called such entrances. A part of this still survives behind the south west corner of the Propylaea. Pericles however undertook the construction of a noble marble building to form a «farseen front» (τηλαυγὲς πρόσωπον) for the whole of the western end of the Acropolis. In 437 B.C. the architect Mnesicles began the work, which was however interrupted in 432 B.C. before it was finished, by the Peloponnesian war which began in the spring of 431 B.C.

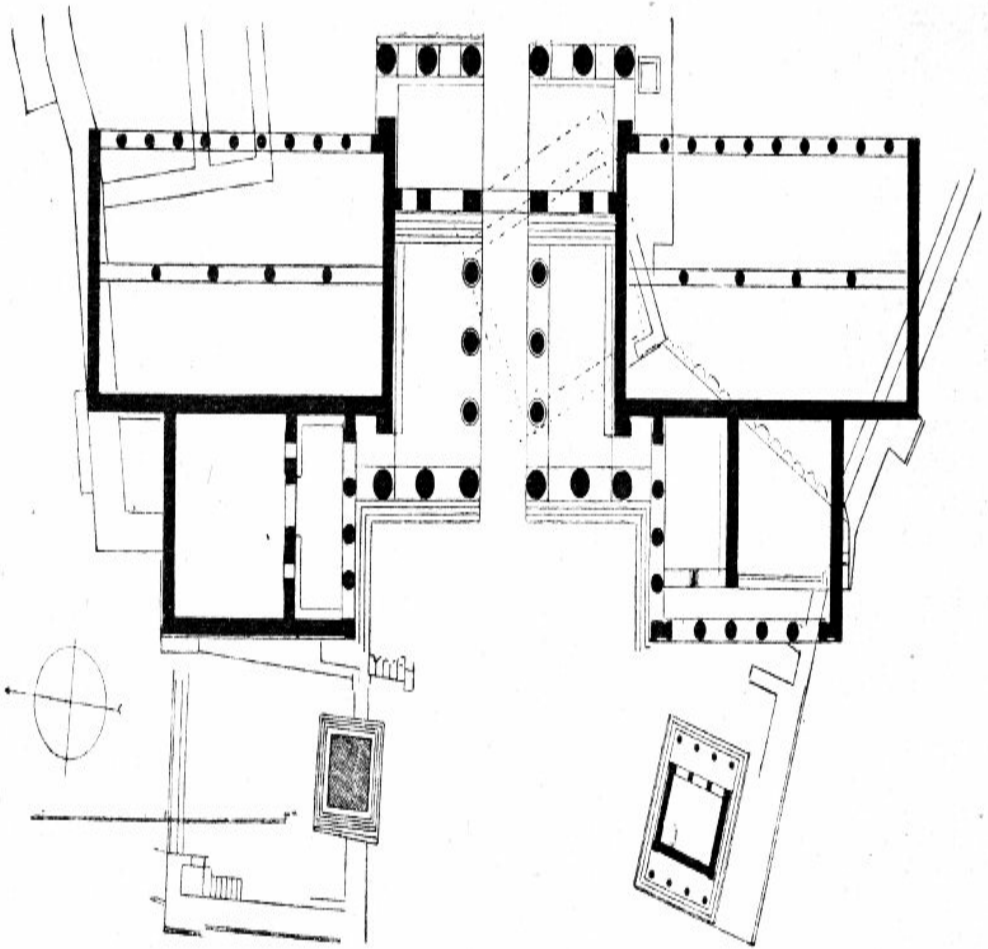


Figure 6.—Mnesicles' Plan of the Propylaea.

[3]

About ten million drachmas were expended on this building. It was on the south side that the work remained unfinished. In [Figure 6](#) we see the original, unaccomplished plan of Mnesicles with the two wings on the west and the two porticoes on the east side; in [Figure 7](#) we see how the south-west wing was intended to be completed. [Figure 8](#) represents the restored view of the Propylaea.

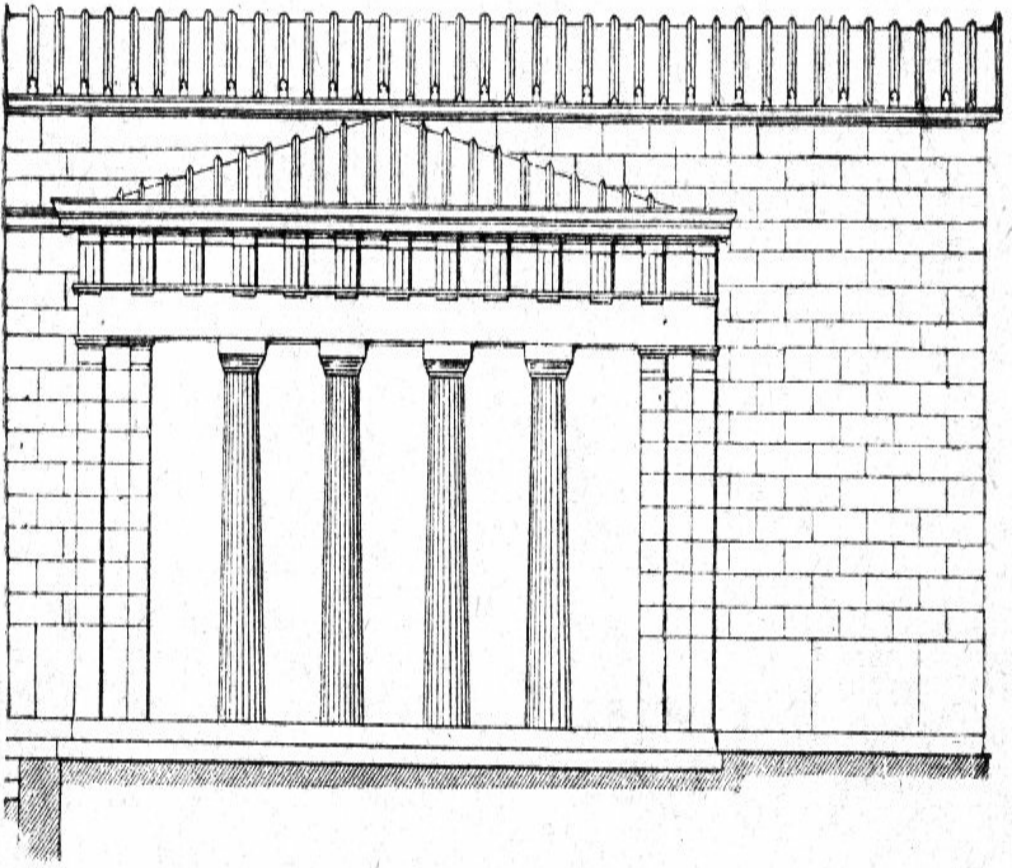


Figure 7.—The west wing restored.

This magnificent building consists of one central hall, the «Propylon», and two rooms, which flank it on either side. It has in front six Doric columns which create a deep impression by their austere grandeur and stately simplicity. Within are six Ionic columns of more slender proportions and more richly decorated, which support the marble roof. Large wooden doors lead to the eastern portico, also supported by six Doric columns through which the incomparable view of the rich temples and innumerable works of art on the Acropolis broke upon the gaze of the worshippers. Inside the hall were statues

and works of art. The marble ceiling was decorated with coloured panels, many of which are still preserved and have lately been restored to their original position.

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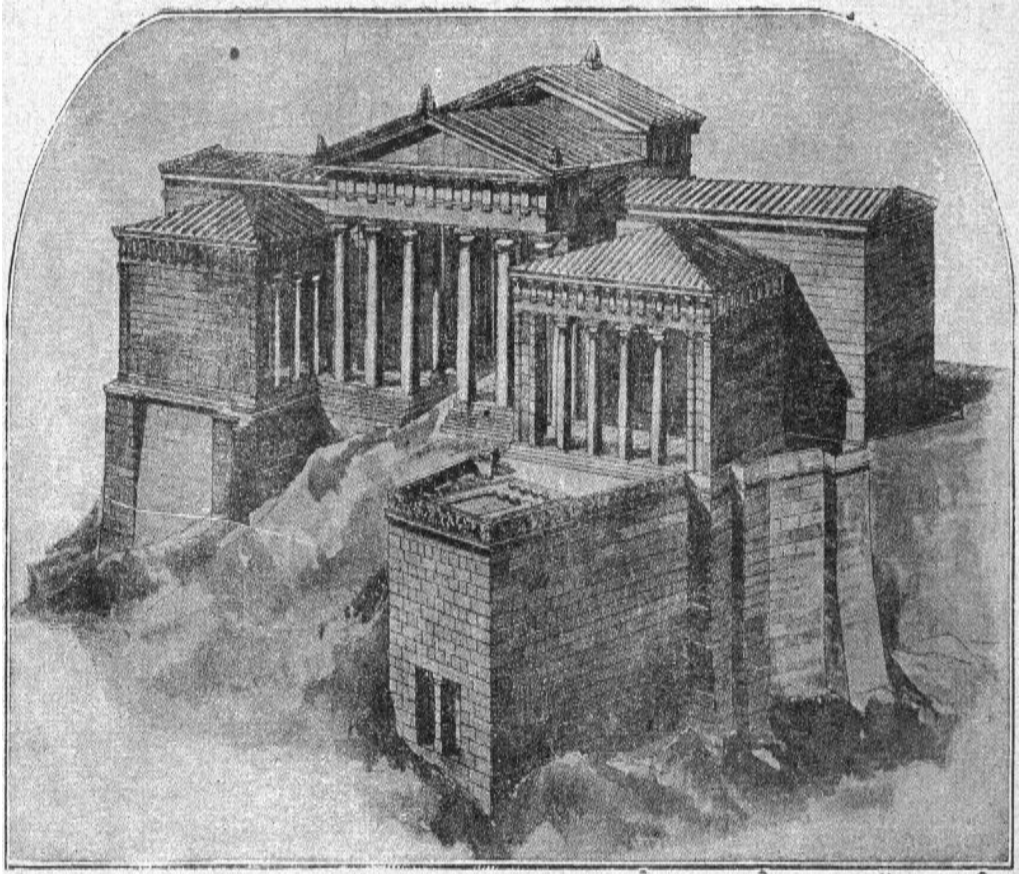


Figure 8.—The restored view or Propylaea.

The beams of the ceiling, each 6.30 metres in length, are also of marble; two of these, which were lying broken upon the pavement, were also put back in their original place. The room on the north contained pictures and was therefore called the «Pinacotheca». On the two projecting walls in front

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of the Propylaea were bronze statues of horsemen and on the south the base of one with its inscription can still be seen. Inside the Propylaea on the east, two large porticoes were to have been built, but on account of the war they remained unfinished ^[4]. In 1387 the Franks built a large tower, afterwards taken down in 1875, out of the stones from the Propylaea.

The Temple of Artemis Brauronia; the statue of Athena Promachus; the old Temple of Athena.

When we pass through the Propylaea we have on our right the sacred enclosure of Artemis Brauronia (Brauron was a small village in Attica). At present nothing can be seen but the position of two porticoes, and of the temple itself not a fragment remains.

All over the Acropolis can be seen cuttings in the rock, marking the position of inscribed columns, statues and other votive offerings. On entering the Acropolis and turning first to the right and then towards the west we see in the corner where the Pelasgian wall joins the Propylaea, remains of the earlier Propylon, built by Peisistratus.

Left of the entrance and about midway between the Propylaea and the Erechtheum stood the great bronze statue of Athena Promachus or Polias (the protectress of the City), a work of the artist Pheidias.

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If we walk straight on towards the east we find, between the Parthenon on the right and the Erechtheum on the left, the

remains of the foundations of a large temple, which was built in «poros» stone by Peisistratus between 540 and 520 B.C. This Athenian monarch, or as the ancients called him «Tyrant», was a patron of poets and artists, and adorned Athens for the first time with fine public buildings. The plan of this ancient temple of Athena can be seen in [Figure 9](#). Even before the time of Peisistratus there was another temple there, built by Solon the law-giver of Athens not long after 594 B.C. Its length was 100 feet, but it had no colonnade.

Peisistratus however added the colonnade and ornamented the gables with marble statuary, still preserved in the Museum; the corresponding sculptures of the Temple of Solon were of «poros». The Temple thus restored by Peisistratus, which was commonly called the Hecatompedon, was in the Doric style surrounded by a colonnade. The entrance to ancient Temples was almost always from the east. The first little room to the east, divided into three aisles, was the chief sanctuary or dwelling of the goddess and in it was the cultus-statue. The back part of the building to the west, which was called the «Opisthodomos» and consisted of a hall and two rooms, was used for storing the Temple treasure and for the offerings and vessels of the sanctuary. The altar on which the sacrifices were offered was outside the Temple in the open air. This Temple was burnt and destroyed by the Persians in 480 and 479 B.C., and the Athenians afterwards used the drums of the columns, the architraves and the triglyphs as material for building the north wall of the Acropolis. A few capitals can be seen today to the west of the Parthenon, where they were dug up in the place where the Athenians had thrown them. On all these stones are traces of fire. Over the «poros» stone with which the Temple was built was a layer of white stucco, still

visible in certain parts.

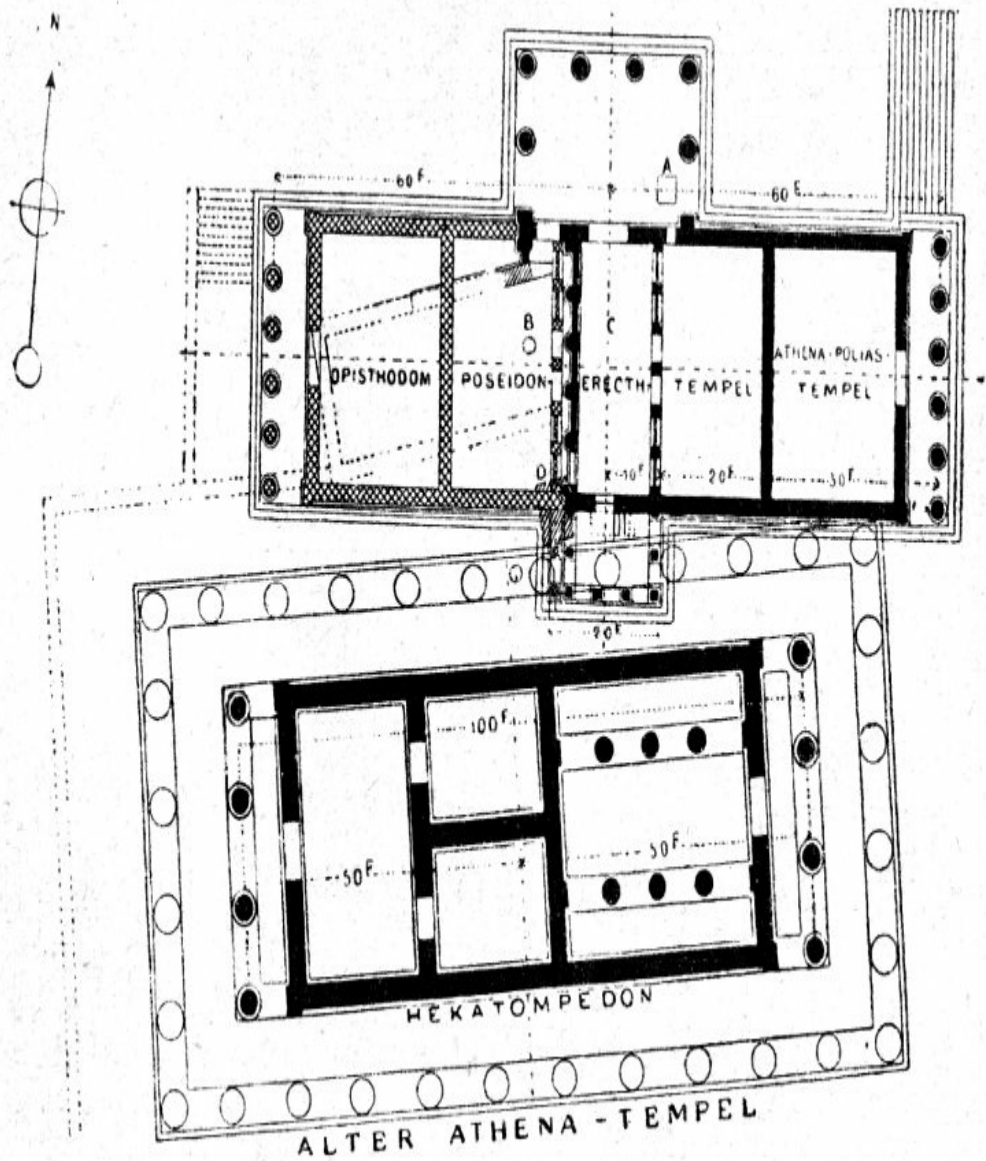


Figure 9.—Plan of the ancient Temple of Athena and projected Plan of the Erechtheum.

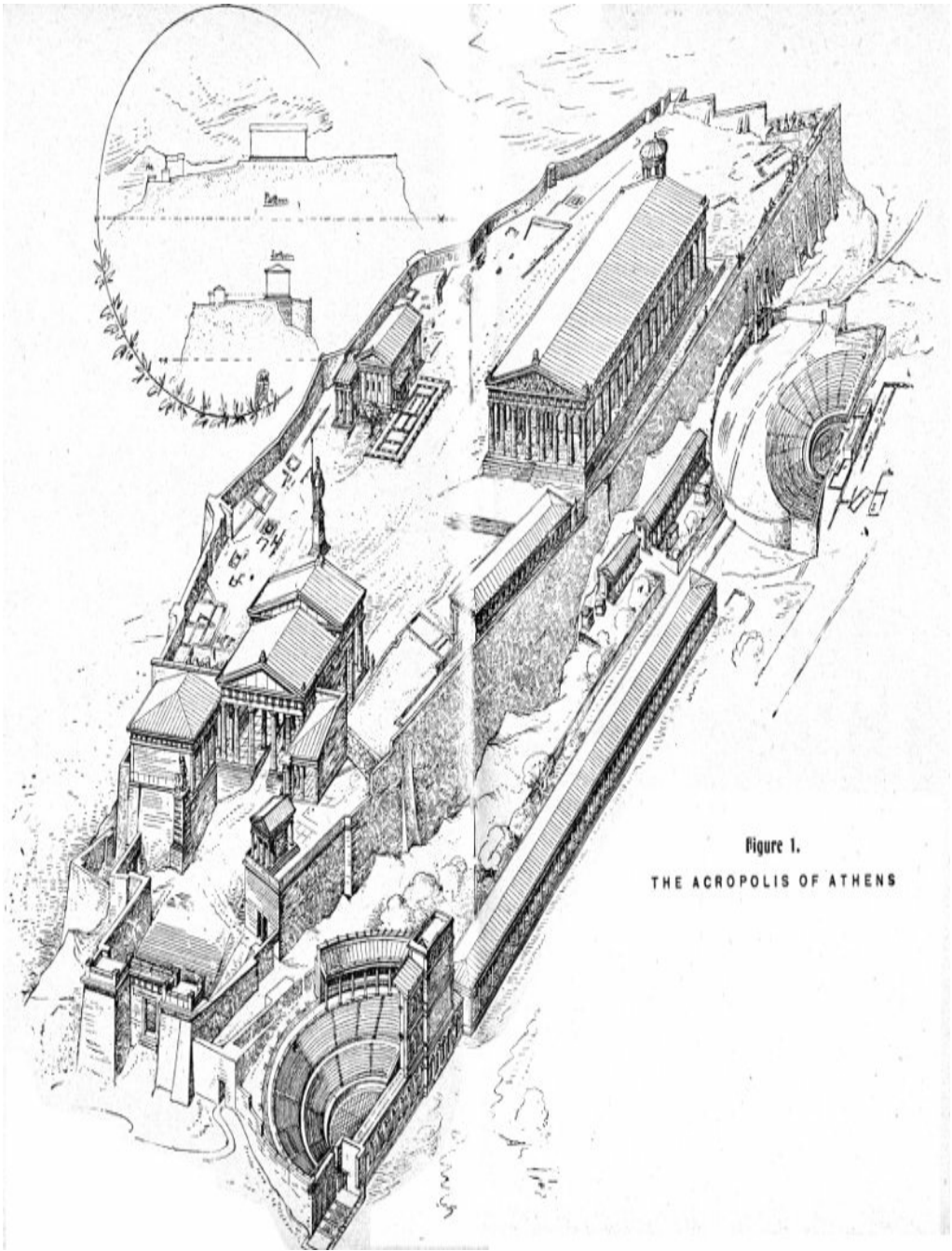


Figure 1.
THE ACROPOLIS OF ATHENS

Figure 1.

THE ACROPOLIS OF ATHENS

[High-resolution Map](#)

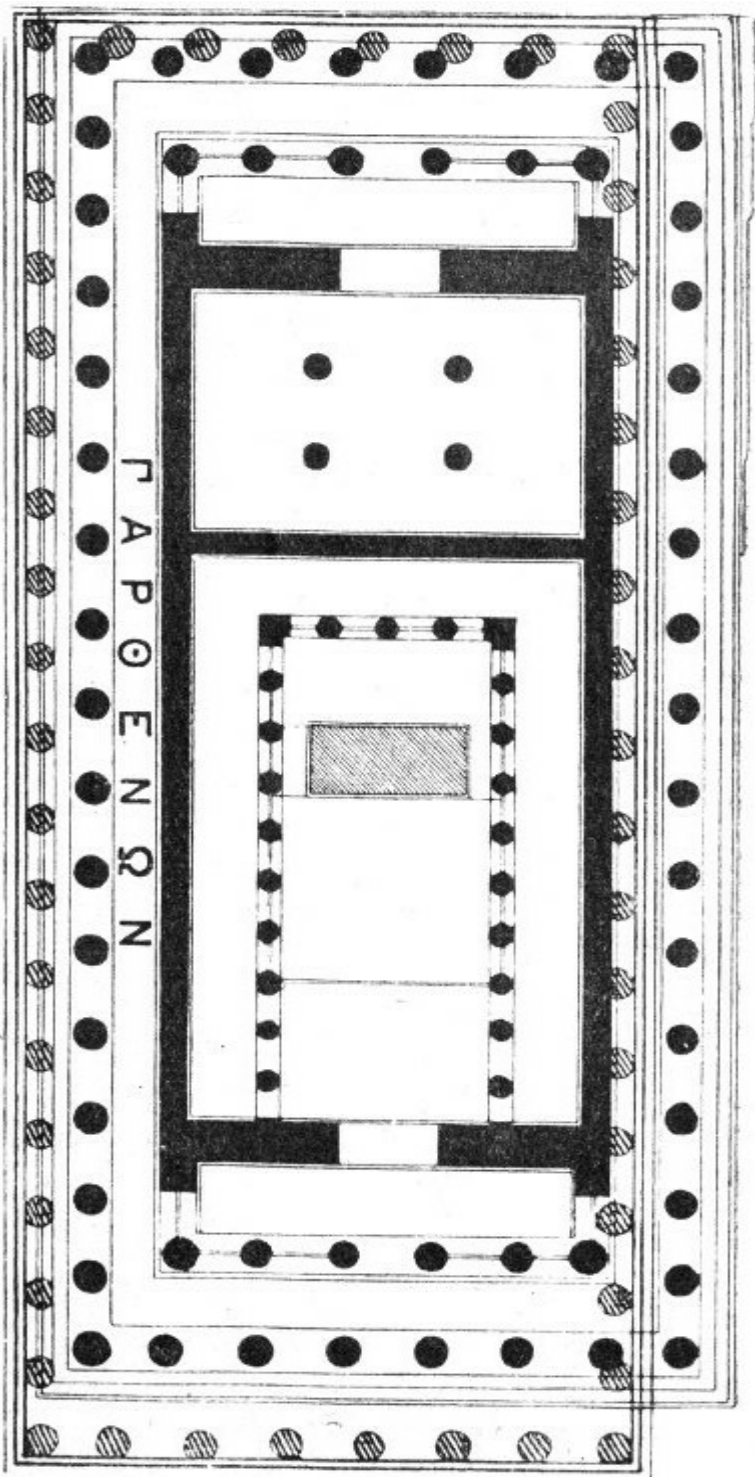


Figure 10.—Plan of the Parthenon.

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Several architectural members of the Temple, for instance the triglyphs and cornices were picked out with colour, especially with red or blue, while the «poros» statues and reliefs were painted all over. The marble statues and architectural members were also partly coloured.

The Parthenon.

The Parthenon, which was built during the ascendance of Pericles (about 447-438 B.C.), is the most wonderful building of all antiquity. Standing in an elevated position it enhanced the brilliance of the other buildings and the countless statues and offerings which stood around it on the Acropolis. An earlier temple of «poros» stone had been begun on this site probably shortly after 510 B.C.

After 490 B.C., when the Athenians had defeated the Persians at Marathon, the design was slightly altered and the construction of the new temple was begun in marble.

In 480 B.C. the Persians found it unfinished and destroyed it; the drums of the columns, which had been damaged by fire, were used again by the Athenians after 479 B.C. as material for the north wall of the Acropolis near the Erechtheum, where they are still to be seen, and Pericles entirely rebuilt the temple on a new plan. [Figure 10](#) shows both the first and the third plans; [Figure 11](#) the temple as it is today; [Figure 12](#) its various sections. In [Figure 13](#) can also be seen the internal view of the

temple and the position of the statue of Athena, the goddess to whom it was dedicated. This was the wonderful gold and ivory Athena of Pheidias; the statue, which showed the goddess standing erect, and reached up to the roof, rested on a marble base and was made of wood overlaid with plates of ivory and gold. A small marble copy of it, an inferior work of Roman times, is in the National Museum. [Figure 14](#) is a restoration of the Parthenon, and [Figure 15](#) shows a view of the restored corner from the east side. The *cella* alone was as long as the whole ancient Temple of Athena. The large hall behind the principal sanctuary i. e. the *cella* was called the Parthenon; in it were kept the temple-vessels and votive offerings to the goddess, and it was from this hall, that the whole temple took its name.

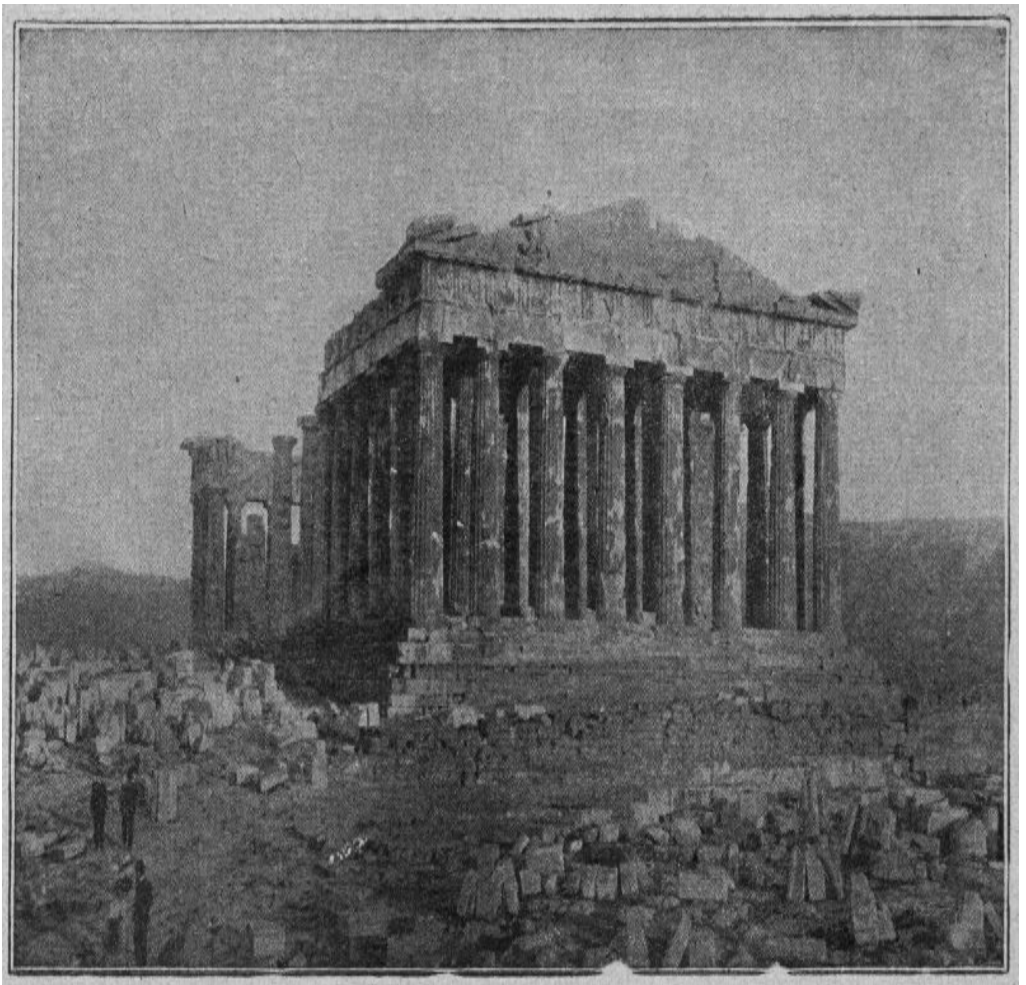
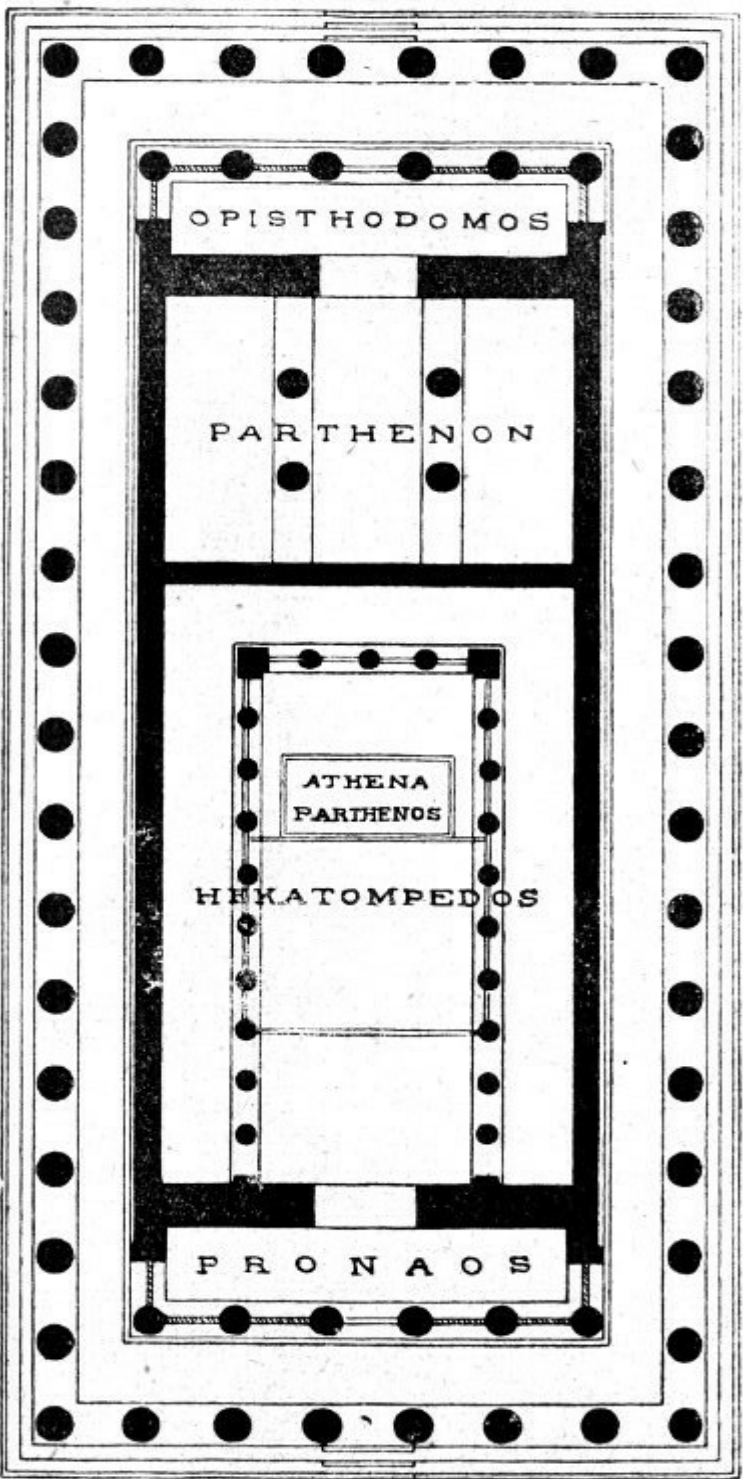


Figure 11.—A view of the Parthenon.

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OPISTHODOMOS

PARTHENON

ATHENA
PARTHENOS

HEKATOMPEDOS

PRONAOS

Figure 12.—Plan of the Parthenon of Pericles.

To the west of the large hall was a smaller room called the Opisthodomos, corresponding to the Pronaos from the east side, and the space between the columns of both was railed in. Both the *cella* and the large western hall were lighted solely by their high and wide doors. There were no windows. 24

The *cella* was divided into three aisles. Four columns supported the roof of the large hall to the west. On the inner colonnade of the *cella* stood a row of smaller columns reaching to the roof.

The roof of the Parthenon was undoubtedly wooden and was covered with marble tiles. The ceiling of the outer colonnade («Peristasis» or «Pteron») was of marble. In the three steps leading to the entrances of the temple, at the east and west ends, were other smaller steps.

The space around the temple was certainly levelled up to the steps and perhaps also paved.



Figure 13.—The cella of the Parthenon.

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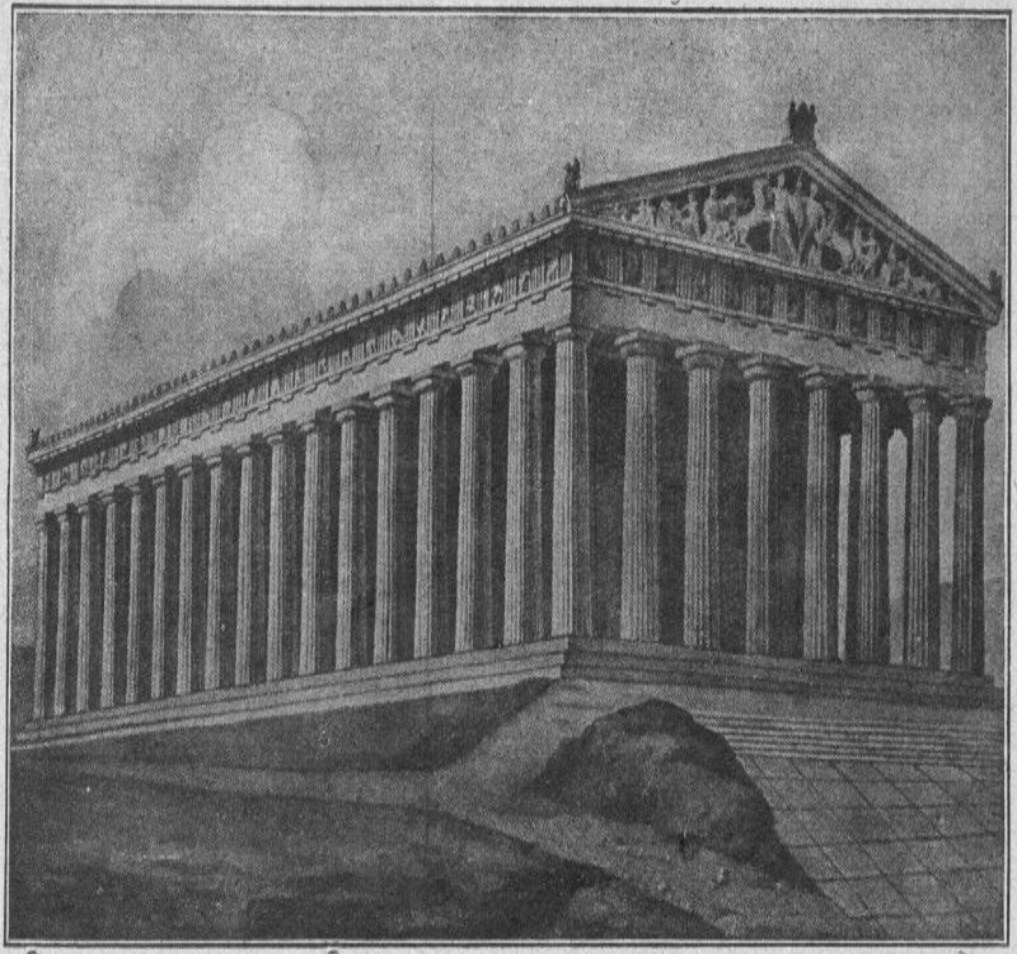


Figure 14.—The Parthenon restored.

Above the architraves many metopes are to be seen, but they have been much damaged by time and the Turks. Such as remained intact in Lord Elgin's day are now in the British Museum, as are also the sculptures which adorned the

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eastern and western gables. In the eastern gable was a representation of the birth of Athena and in the western the strife between Athena and Poseidon for the possession of Attica. The interior of the colonnade of the temple was decorated by a frieze, representing the procession of the Panathenaea, or great festival of the goddess. The frieze is only preserved in its original position on the western side where one can distinguish the horses being prepared for the festival. The other slabs of the frieze are in the British Museum, with the exception of a few in the Acropolis Museum. On the north side of the Parthenon we can perceive that the horizontal lines of the steps are not quite level, but are slightly curved, rising perceptibly in the middle. The columns, too, are not quite perpendicular but all lean slightly inwards. The architect of the temple was Ictinus, but the work was superintended by the great Pheidias, who also worked at the sculptures or at least drew the designs which were carried out by his pupils and assistants under his direction.

About 500 years after the birth of Christ the Parthenon became a Christian church, dedicated first to the Wisdom of God and afterwards to the Virgin. In 1456 the Turks converted it into a Mosque, and built a minaret in the north west corner. Remains of Christian frescoes can be seen on the west and north walls. Outside the Temple on the north east stood the great altar of Athena, on the place where the rock is not levelled. The altar was no doubt of large size, and was perhaps adorned with a frieze. The most beautiful altar with a frieze (now in Berlin) was found in Pergamon in Asia Minor. Of the altar that stood in front of the Parthenon nothing now exists and it was probably completely destroyed when the Parthenon was converted into a church.

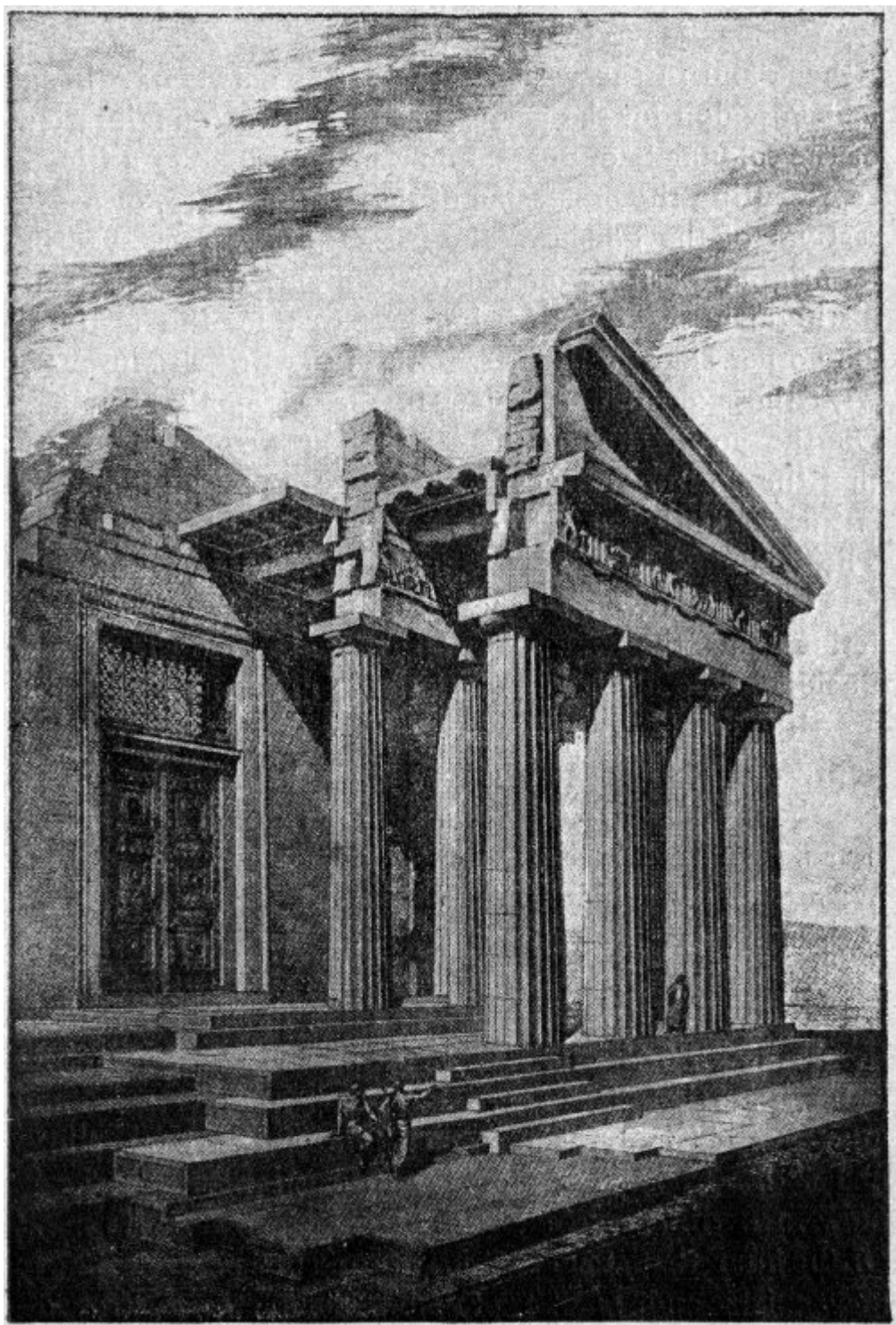


Figure 15.—The restored north-east corner of the Parthenon.



Figure 16.—The Temple of Roma.

A short distance from the east side of the Parthenon are

the remains of a small round Temple of the goddess Roma built by the Romans. [Fig. 16](#). To the west, and near the south wall of the Acropolis, stood the Chalcotheca or armoury. ^[5]

To the south of the Parthenon, at the bottom of a pit, left open on purpose after the excavations of 1885-1890, remains of the ancient Pelasgian wall can be distinguished. Here can also be seen an ancient wall of «poros» stone and in it a stairway. This wall was built when the foundations of the Parthenon were laid on the south side: the natural rock falls away at this point and the foundations begin at a depth of 10 metres from the surface. The space between the foundations and the Pelasgian wall, and between it and the wall built by Cimon, was filled up with earth and thus the area of the Acropolis was enlarged.

On the west side of the Parthenon the steps carved in the rock served as stands for inscribed columns.

The Erechtheum.

[Fig. 9](#) shows the design for the Erechtheum as originally planned, but not carried out, in antiquity and its actual state. [Fig. 17](#) a view from the Propylaea. [Fig. 18](#) a section from east to west. [Fig. 19](#) a restoration (east side). [Fig. 20](#) a restoration (west side).

The idea of the Erechtheum was originated by Pericles, but it was not built till 421 B.C. The work was interrupted after 415 and the building was not completed till about 408. It was

devised to replace the ancient temple, the Hecatompedon or old temple of Athena, and took over its dedication.

The name Erechtheum is derived from Erechtheus, one of the most ancient gods in Greek mythology, who shared the temple with Athena. He is said to have descended from heaven as lightning and to have entered the earth. Earth, as mother of the Universe, gave birth to Erechthonios; the latter was thus the first man and ancestor of the Athenians, who were called Erechtheidae after him. The hole through which Erechtheus entered the Earth could be seen then as it is seen to day in the north Portico. In the roof above is an opening, as places where a thunderbolt was supposed to have fallen were customarily left uncovered.

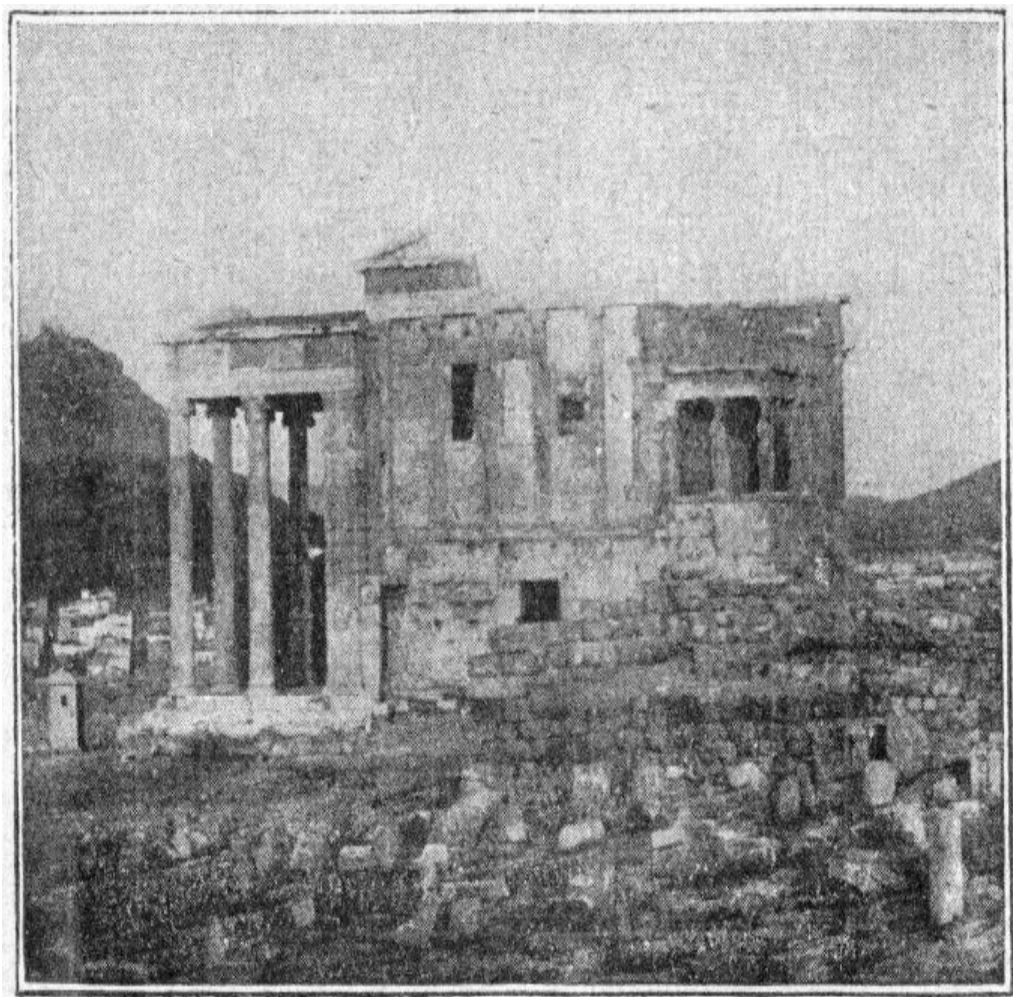


Figure 17.—A view of the Erechtheum.

Later on Erechtheus was identified with Poseidon, and the cleft in the rock was shown as the spot struck by the trident of Poseidon. From this spot a spring of salt water was said to have welled up and this was shown on the site of the mediaeval reservoir seen from the north door.

Outside the Erechtheum to the west was the small temple of

Pandrossos, a form of Mother-Earth. Within the enclosure of this little temple was the sacred olive-tree produced by Athena in her contest with Poseidon; by this precious gift she vindicated her claim to the possession of the city.

Looking at the temple from the east we can just distinguish traces of a Christian church.

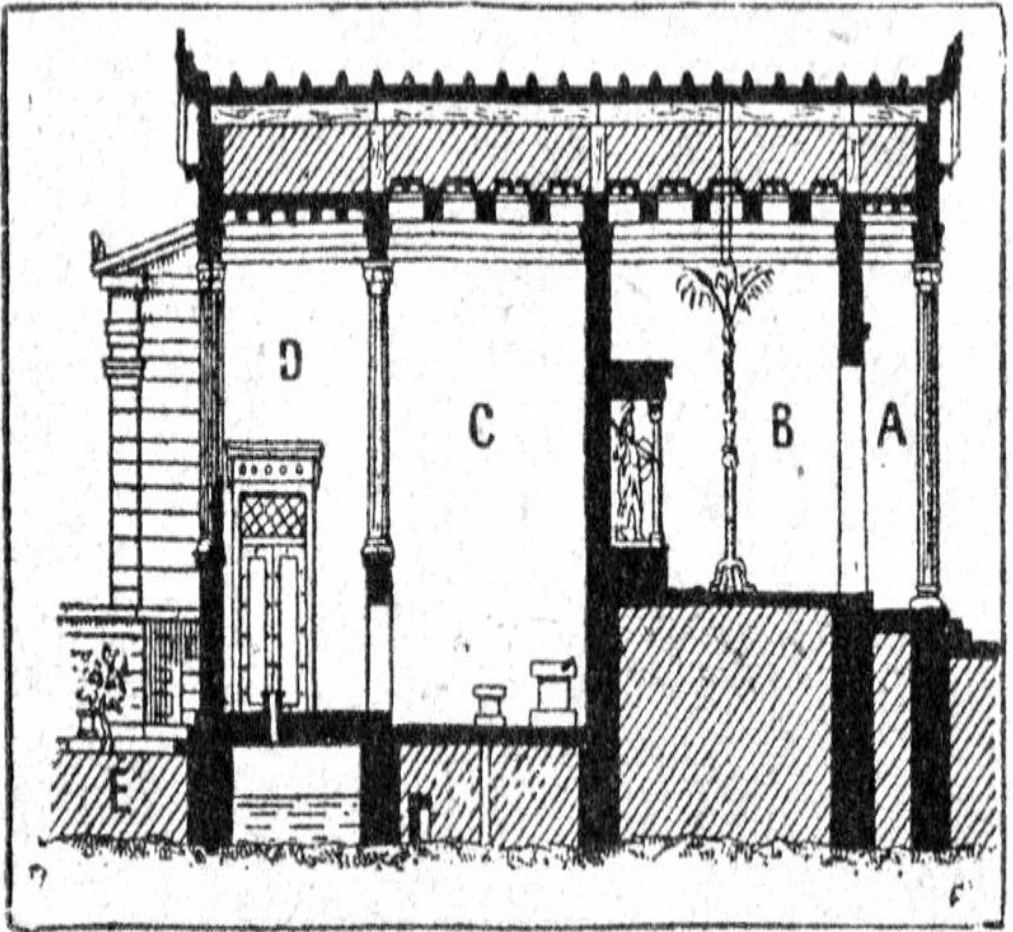


Figure 18.—The interior of the Erechtheum.

[Fig. 18](#) shows the interior of the temple as it was in antiquity. At the east end, where the floor-level was much higher than in the rest of the building, was the sanctuary of Athena with her ancient wooden image, the Palladion. This sanctuary had a door and two windows to the east. The lower western portion of the building contained the sanctuary of Erechtheus-Poseidon divided in two compartments. It was entered by the north portico and door. The mediaeval cistern, which in ancient times contained the «Sea of Poseidon» was covered with flagstones and communicated with the temple by a well head. The west front of the Erechtheum had windows with wooden railings; under the Romans some modifications were made in the original of design of this portion.

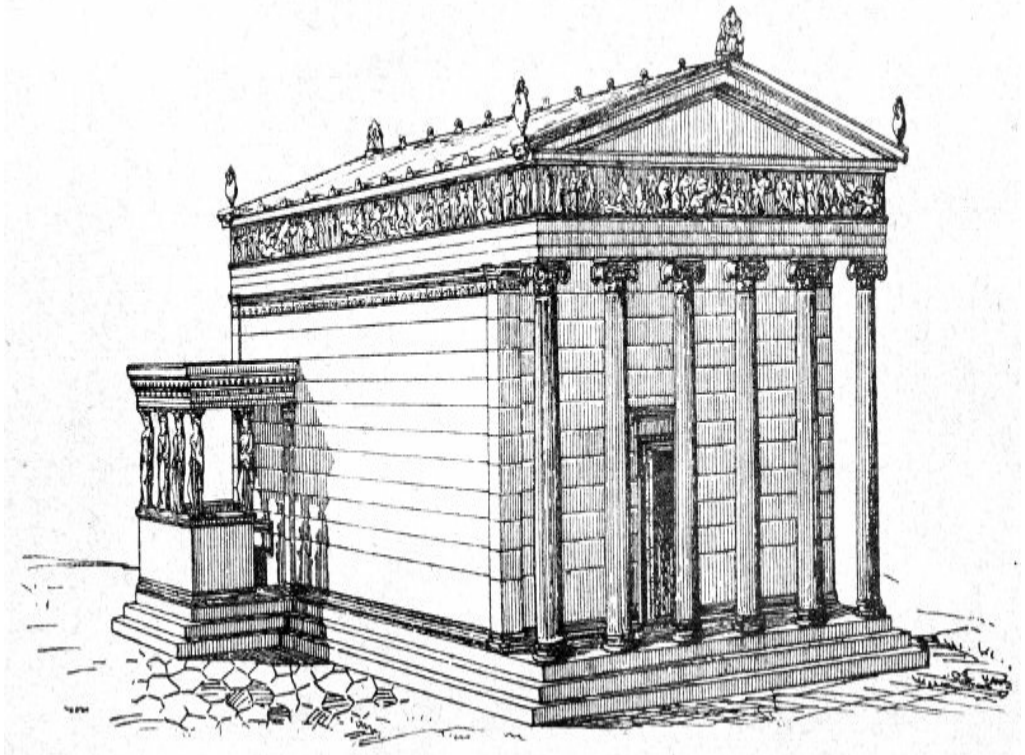


Figure 19.—The Erechtheum restored (East side).

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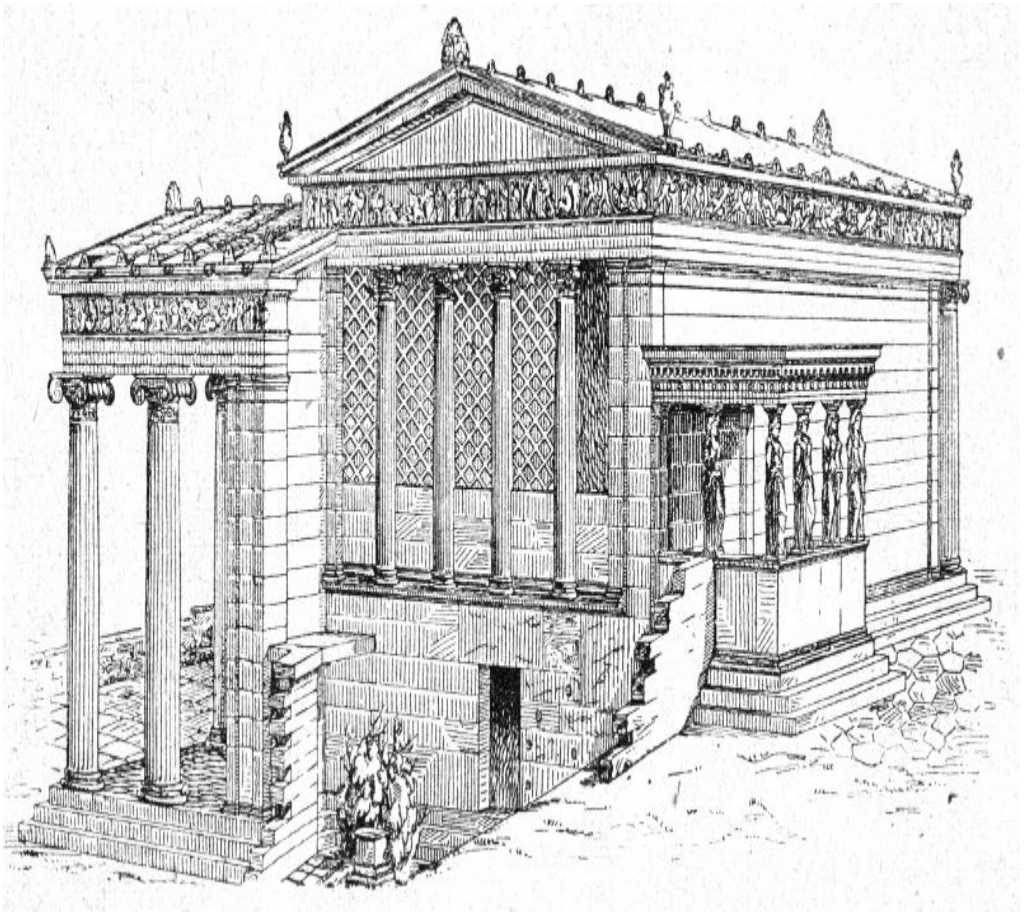


Figure 20.—The Erechtheum restored (West side).

The southern balcony with the six female figures—one, now in the British Museum, is replaced by a plaster copy—is generally known as the Porch of the Caryatids, but the figures were by the ancients simply designated the «Maidens». The baskets on their heads recall those borne by the girls of

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Athens represented in the frieze of the Parthenon as carrying sacrificial offerings at the Panathenaic procession, and it was these Maidens that the artist intended to represent. Beneath this porch was the tomb of Cecrops, the first king of Athens. The style of the Erechtheum is Ionic: the richness and grace of its order form a worthy counterpart to the austere and noble Doric of the Parthenon. The columns are slender and graceful while the richly carved capitals and the details of the epistyle were enhanced with painting. The frieze of blue stone had attached to it a series of small figures in white marble representing a festal procession in honour of Athena. The details of the north portico and doorway—a perfect example of a classical entrance—are very sumptuous, while the maidens of the southern porch are incomparable sculptures of the finest period of Greek art. Their pose of easy dignity renders them almost lifelike, and they seem hardly to feel the burden they support.

East of the Erechtheum can be seen a stair leading up from a small gateway in the north wall to the prehistoric palace. Of this building two bases of «poros» stone (enclosed by iron railings) are preserved on the site of the old temple of Athena; they originally supported columns of wood.

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West of the Erechtheum are two other stairways in the north wall; one of these is very ancient; the fragmentary steps of the other date from the mediaeval or Turkish period. To the west of the Erechtheum are to be seen some prehistoric walls belonging to the Mycenaean palace and other Mycenaean buildings which once stood on the Acropolis. Close to the wall are other ruins which form part of a portico and other unidentified buildings dating from the classical period. Lower down are some ancient cisterns not far from the projected north hall of the Propylaea. Here in the sixth century B.C., it is

possible that the palace of Peisistratus stood. Within the area of the projected hall of the Propylaea are the remains of a Frankish church. Below the north western wall of the Acropolis are the caves dedicated to the worship of Apollo and Pan. The adjoining cliffs of the Acropolis were known in antiquity as the Long Rocks. The slope below is described by ancient authors as covered with rich green grass and flowers.

FOOTNOTES

[1] metre—3 feet, 3 inches, approximately.

[2] See [Figure 1 page 18](#) which represents a view of the Acropolis showing the principal monuments of the classical age.

[3] £ 400,000.

[4] See [Figure 6](#).

[5] See [Figure 1 page 18](#).

Transcriber's Notes

- Silently corrected a few typos.
- Retained publication information from the printed edition: this eBook is public-domain in the country of publication.
- In the text versions only, text in italics is delimited by underscores.

[The end of *The Acropolis and Its Museum: Part I--The Acropolis* by George Sotiriades]