

The Parthenon's Interior

It was Pheidias who designed the Parthenon's interior. There are many things about the Ancient world's greatest sculptor that we do not know for sure; and it is the same in case of his most important artwork: the statue of Athena Parthenos, and its whereabouts. The statue was about 11,5 m high, made of gold and ivory, and might have costed as much as the sanctuary itself. It is thought that the artwork was stolen in late Roman time and brought to Constantinople; but there, its trace is lost.

Roman copies and ancient authors' testimonies, however, have helped to reconstruct Athena Parthenos' representation up to the smallest detail. Her left hand was holding the buckler, her right one a small winged sculpture of Nike, the goddess of victory. Athena Parthenos' clothing was extensively adorned and consisted of the peplos (robe) and the aegis (golden pleura). The golden goat fur was used by Zeus as well as by Athena and Apollo in order to produce thunderstorms. It was Hephaistos, the divine blacksmith, who transformed it into a buckler of such power that not even Zeus' lightnings were able to destroy it. Formerly belonging to Zeus, it later on got to be Athena's. The Gorgo is a mythological character who petrified with her view whoever looked at her. The best known among the Gorgo sisters is Medusa, who was decapitated by Perseus.

The extraordinary of the sanctuary's architecture consisted in the necessity to adapt it to Athena's statue. The Cella was therefore designed especially broad but very short. Also, the columns are characterised by their quite unusual arrangement: 46 columns are divided into groups of 8 at the frontside, and groups of 17 at the long side. They form a ring hall around the cella, that opens into four halls of 6 columns each one. From the saddle-shaped roof, rain water was directed to the waterspouters. Of the both rooms, the smaller one was used as treasure room.

Parthenon West Pediment

The west pediment faced the Propylaia and depicted the contest between Athena and Poseidon during their competition for the honor of becoming the city's patron. Athena and Poseidon appear at the center of the composition, diverging from one another in strong diagonal forms with the goddess holding the olive tree and the god of the sea raising his trident to strike the earth. At their flanks they are framed by two active groups of horses pulling chariots, while a crowd of legendary personalities from Athenian mythology fills the space out to the acute corners of the pediment.

The sculptures of the Parthenon pediments are some of the finest examples of classical Greek art. The figures are sculpted in natural movement with bodies full of vital energy that bursts through their flesh, as the flesh in turn bursts through their thin clothing. The thin chitons allow the body underneath to be revealed as the focus of the composition. The distinction between gods and humans is blurred in the conceptual interplay between the idealism and naturalism bestowed on the stone by the sculptors.



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West Pediment of Parthenon Picture of
Reconstruction from the Acropolis Museum

The sculptures were finished all around even though parts of them were placed against the back wall of the pediment never to be seen. Finishing the figures even in areas unseen was a necessary task in order to ensure the high degree of realism that the artists were aiming at. It would be extremely difficult to sculpt the front without the accurate reference of the back. It is also possible that the statues were exhibited freestanding before they were hoisted 16 meters above ground and placed at the pediment.

The overall character of the pediment sculptures was very energetic as the figures were placed in a dense arrangement with many overlapping bodies and limbs. As a result, the negative space between the figures acquired a complexity analogous to the one found on the statues themselves, while glimpses of the flat background, which would allow the eyes to rest, were minimized. The space beyond the building was pulled into the pediment composition cleverly as the figures often reached out beyond the imaginary plane of the temple's façade.

Parthenon East Pediment

The east pediment represented the birth of Athena. According to Greek mythology Zeus gave birth to Athena after a terrible headache prompted him to summon Hephaestus' (the god of fire and the forge) assistance. To alleviate the pain he ordered Hephaestus to strike him with his forging hummer, and when he did, Zeus' head split open and out popped the goddess Athena in full armor. The sculptural arrangement depicts the moment of Athena's.

Unfortunately, the center pieces of the pediment were destroyed before Jacques Carrey created his drawings in 1674, so all reconstructions are subject to conjecture and speculation. The main Olympian gods must have stood around Zeus and Athena watching the wondrous event with Hephaestus and Hera probably near them. The Carrey drawings are instrumental in reconstructing the sculptural arrangement beyond the center figures to the north and south.



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East Pediment of Parthenon Picture of
Reconstruction from the Acropolis Museum

The birth of Athena took place at dawn, and this precise chronology is depicted by the heads of the horses that appear at the south corner of the pediment. The horses of Helios (sun) are depicted as if they are about to rise above the horizon pulling behind them the life giving sun. The horse's faces are depicted in vigorous activity and full of energy, in contrast to the group of horses at the other end (the north) that appear fatigued and labor with bulging eyes, open mouths, and tense muscles to end their journey below the horizon. The horses of Selene (moon) are tired for they are at the end of their journey across the night sky.

The poses of the statues are mostly relaxed and exhibit moderate interaction with each other, while the formal elements of the drapery of the clothes provide most of the visual drama as they are carved in deep relief that provides high contrast between light and shadow. The figures at the center exhibit moderate movement, while the ones at the corners are reclined to accommodate the limited space, and to accurately depict the activity level during the early hours of the morning when most gods and mortals alike await the for the sun to rise.

The Optical Illusions That Make the Parthenon Perfect

[John Leonard](#) | January 12th, 2018

The Parthenon's architects, Ictinus and Callicrates, and its chief sculptural artist, Phidias, have incorporated numerous "hidden" devices within its marble construction and carved decorations that were designed to trick the viewers' eye, to make us believe we are witnessing something perfectly regular, sensible and balanced in all its aspects.

This enormous temple appears at first glance to be a giant rectilinear construction, all of whose lines are straight! And does it seem sensible to the rational mind that the base of the temple – its stepped pedestal or stylobate – is actually domed, not flat?

The four corners of the pedestal droop gracefully downward, such that if one were to stand on the top step and look lengthwise along the building at someone else also standing on the same step at the opposite end, these two observers would only see each other from about the knees up. This doming of the temple base was reputedly done to avoid an optical "sagging" of the building's middle that would have been perceived along its east and west ends and especially along its long north and south sides, if its lines were actually designed and built to be perfectly straight.

Additional refinements in the Parthenon include the slight inward leaning of all the columns in the Doric colonnade surrounding the building. The corner columns are slightly larger in diameter than the others and lean inward in two directions; that is, diagonally to the corner. They also are set in such a way that there exists a smaller space, or intercolumniation, between them and the next column.

Meanwhile, the columns themselves are not straight along their vertical axes, but swell in their middles. This phenomenon, called "entasis," intended to counteract another optical effect in which columns with straight sides appear to the eye to be slenderer in their middles and to have a waist. Furthermore, the whole superstructure of the outer facades of the temple, above the level of the columns (the "entablature"), also curves downward at the corners, to mirror the stylobate and carry upward the temple's overall domed curvature.

CONSERVATISM IN RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

The optical adjustments made to the Parthenon were not unique, but represented the culmination of many generations of architects' efforts to establish a standard code or "canon" traditionally required for the design of Greek temples.

Visual "corrections" were already known in many other temples throughout the Greek world. A domed stylobate, for example, existed in the Archaic or early Classical temples of Apollo at Corinth and Athena (pre-Parthenon) in Athens. The columns of temples in Aegina, Tegea and Nemea were already leaning inward to some degree in the 6th c. BC, while the swelling of columns was evident at sanctuaries including Olympia and, most noticeably, Paestum in Magna Graecia (southern Italy).

In the Parthenon however, architects and artists combined forces to produce the most refined and perfect example of a Greek temple known to date.

Because the Parthenon had few straight lines and right angles, its designers and builders had to hand-craft each individual piece, among a total of over 70,000 architectural members, so as to fit them into their own specific place within the temple's structure. Differences amounting to as little as a few millimeters often distinguish these members.

The Odyssey

Ten years have passed since the fall of Troy, and the Greek hero Odysseus still has not returned to his kingdom in Ithaca. A large and rowdy mob of suitors who have overrun Odysseus's palace and pillaged his land continue to court his wife, Penelope. She has remained faithful to Odysseus. Prince Telemachus, Odysseus's son, wants desperately to throw them out but does not have the confidence or experience to fight them. One of the suitors, Antinous, plans to assassinate the young prince, eliminating the only opposition to their dominion over the palace.

Unknown to the suitors, Odysseus is still alive. The beautiful nymph Calypso, possessed by love for him, has imprisoned him on her island, Ogygia. He longs to return to his wife and son, but he has no ship or crew to help him escape. While the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus debate Odysseus's future, Athena, Odysseus's strongest supporter among the gods, resolves to help Telemachus. Disguised as a friend of the prince's grandfather, Laertes, she convinces the prince to call a meeting of the assembly at which he reproaches the suitors. Athena also prepares him for a great journey to Pylos and Sparta, where the kings Nestor and Menelaus, Odysseus's companions during the war, inform him that Odysseus is alive and trapped on Calypso's island. Telemachus makes plans to return home, while, back in Ithaca, Antinous and the other suitors prepare an ambush to kill him when he reaches port.

On Mount Olympus, Zeus sends Hermes to rescue Odysseus from Calypso. Hermes persuades Calypso to let Odysseus build a ship and leave. The homesick hero sets sail, but when Poseidon, god of the sea, finds him sailing home, he sends a storm to wreck Odysseus's ship. Poseidon has harbored a bitter grudge against Odysseus since the hero blinded his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus, earlier in his travels. Athena intervenes to save Odysseus from Poseidon's wrath, and the beleaguered king lands at Scheria, home of the Phaeacians. Nausicaa, the Phaeacian princess, shows him to the royal palace, and Odysseus receives a warm welcome from the king and queen. When he identifies himself as Odysseus, his hosts, who have heard of his exploits at Troy, are stunned. They promise to give him safe passage to Ithaca, but first they beg to hear the story of his adventures.

Odysseus spends the night describing the fantastic chain of events leading up to his arrival on Calypso's island. He recounts his trip to the Land of the Lotus Eaters, his battle with Polyphemus the Cyclops, his love affair with the witch-goddess Circe, his temptation by the deadly Sirens, his journey into Hades to consult the prophet Tiresias, and his fight with the sea monster Scylla. When he finishes his story, the Phaeacians return Odysseus to Ithaca, where he seeks out the hut of his faithful swineherd, Eumaeus. Though Athena has disguised Odysseus as a beggar, Eumaeus warmly receives and nourishes him in the hut. He soon encounters Telemachus, who has returned from Pylos and Sparta despite the suitors' ambush, and reveals to him his true identity. Odysseus and Telemachus devise a plan to massacre the suitors and regain control of Ithaca.

When Odysseus arrives at the palace the next day, still disguised as a beggar, he endures abuse and insults from the suitors. The only person who recognizes him is his old nurse, Eurycleia, but she swears not to disclose his secret. Penelope takes an interest in this strange beggar, suspecting that he might be her long-lost husband. Quite crafty herself, Penelope organizes an archery contest the following day and promises to marry any man who can string Odysseus's great bow and fire an arrow through a row of twelve axes—a feat that only Odysseus has ever been able to accomplish. At the contest, each suitor tries to string the bow and fails. Odysseus steps up to the bow and, with little effort, fires an arrow through all twelve axes. He then turns the bow on the suitors. He and Telemachus, assisted by a few faithful servants, kill every last suitor.

Odysseus reveals himself to the entire palace and reunites with his loving Penelope. He travels to the outskirts of Ithaca to see his aging father, Laertes. They come under attack from the vengeful family members of the dead suitors, but Laertes, reinvigorated by his son's return, successfully kills Antinous's father and puts a

stop to the attack. Zeus dispatches Athena to restore peace. With his power secure and his family reunited, Odysseus's long ordeal comes to an end

The Frogs Summary

Frogs, or *The Frogs*, is one of Aristophanes's greatest comedies and is justly celebrated for its wit and keen commentary on Athenian politics and society. It is the last surviving work of Old Comedy and is thus also notable for heralding a passing era of literature. While it is a comedy, it is also a trenchant political satire and expresses Aristophanes's views on Athenian democracy, the value of poetry. The play begins with Dionysus, dressed up as Heracles, and his servant Xanthias, riding a donkey, traveling to Heracles' house. Heracles is amused at Dionysus's costume. Dionysus asks him how they can get to the underworld to fetch the poet Euripides for Athens, and what sort of obstacles they might expect to encounter. Heracles provides them with information, and the travelers depart.

Dionysus is ferried across the lake by Charon, but Xanthias has to travel around because he is a slave. Along this journey, a chorus of frogs bursts out into song, annoying Dionysus. However, the god then joins in their boisterous song.

Dionysus and Xanthias join up on the other side of the lake, but before they can go very far they encounter the monster Empusa. Dionysus is extremely frightened and soils his clothing. The Chorus of Initiates, part of the Eleusinian Mysteries, enters and sings a song to Iacchus, Demeter, and her daughter Persephone.

Arriving at Pluto's house, Dionysus and Xanthias knock on the door. Thinking he is Heracles, the doorman, Aeacus, curses him. Dionysus tells Xanthias to wear his disguise, but asks for it back once a beautiful woman comes outside and invites "Heracles" to a banquet with other ladies. The innkeeper and Plathane come out and lambast the supposed Heracles as well, prompting Dionysus to once more give the costume back to Xanthias.

Aeacus returns and orders the seizure of Heracles for past his bad deeds. Xanthias-as-Heracles says Aeacus ought to torture his slave (Dionysus) to prove his own innocence. Eventually both claim to be gods, and Aeacus tortures both to see if this is true. Both Xanthias and Dionysus feel pain but pretend not to, as gods normally are not supposed to feel bodily pain. Finally, Aeacus says he will see if Pluto and Persephone will vouch for their divinity.

Inside, Aeacus talks to Xanthias about how Aeschylus and Euripides are fighting over who is the most accomplished tragic poet. Aeschylus already possesses the chair but Euripides is challenging him for it. Pluto calls a contest and Dionysus is made the judge. Both poets criticize each other, and then pray to their respective gods. The competition begins.

In a series of contests, Aeschylus and Euripides discuss who is better at prologues, lyrics, and making their audience better citizens. Euripides claims to have slimmed tragedy down from its ponderousness and made it more accessible to the common person. He also says Aeschylus is verbose. Aeschylus, for his part, criticizes the meter of Euripides' work and claims that his verse is wanton.

Dionysus cannot seem to come to a conclusion, so he orders the two poets' verses to be weighed. Because he refers to lofty things such as death and rivers, Aeschylus wins the weighing.

Finally, the two poets are asked to comment on how the Athenians should deal with the statesman Alcibiades. Dionysus decides Aeschylus is the overall winner, and he, the poet, and Pluto return to Pluto's house for a banquet. Aeschylus tells Pluto to give his chair to Socrates once he departs for the upper world. The chorus praises Aeschylus and proclaims that it hopes he will assist Athens with sound advice.