A366 Greek Architecture from the Archaic to the Roman Times as Reflected in the Monuments of Athens

INTRODUCTION
By Dr. Tassos Tanoulas

ESSAYS
10 Student Essays
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A366 Greek Architecture from the Archaic to the Roman Times as Reflected in the Monuments of Athens.

By Dr. Tassos Tanoulas

The topic of the my course A366 is Greek Architecture from the Archaic to the Roman Times as Reflected in the Monuments of Athens. The character of the course was defined initially in discussions with Kimon Yokariinis, who was then CYA's Academic Director. And he was very special, as everyone remembers!

The main objective was to present the development of monumental ancient Greek architecture, by profiting of the physical contact of the students with the Athenian monuments. This "hands on" concept of teaching was fairly innovative back in 1999. After the test of 18 years, it seems to still be appealing the introduction of young American students to the major architectural currents in the Greek World between the 6th c. B.C. and the 2nd c. A.D.

I have to admit that I allowed myself to learn from my students, that is, from my students' responses. In the first year, I took it for granted that the students would have an archaeological or architectural background but students taking my class do not share similar educational backgrounds, and most of them have to be initiated to the basics of ancient Greek architecture. This necessitates introductory lessons in a classroom. In addition, this made me find ways for grasping the attention of the students and keep them interested during the classroom sessions. If the students are patient enough in the classroom, they soon have their reward: going out on site is always thrilling, and it becomes more so, because now they can project the knowledge gained in the classroom on the real body of the monuments!

Very early I thought of asking students to write an essay on classical architecture before midterm. The topic would be free, the important thing would be the students to be interested in the topic they would choose to deal with. These essays allowed me to see through their personality, background and potential of each student. And they have been very helpful for tailoring accordingly my teaching in the second part of the semester. It seems that this system worked in some ways and I am happy to say that I have had the pleasure of seeing a number of my CYA students following relevant career paths, in the end.

There were always good, less good and mediocre essays from my students. But with the passing of time, I do not know how, the essays every year became better and the mediocre have almost disappeared, and this year, all of my ten students responded to my instructions regarding the essay: "I understand that all of you are studious and serious students. Now I want to see how you think, how you express yourself, and finally, to make me even more proud of you!" And they made me very proud indeed! They did, because each of the papers they wrote is different of all the others, they are lengthier than all previous classes, some of them are scholarly correct, some others are very intuitive, but all of them are nicely written, and, above all, very interesting, and original.

I will try to present a short introduction to each of the essays, in order to bring out what makes it good on its own, and in comparison to the others. The presentation will follow the alphabetical order of the surnames of the authors. The educational background of each author will be shown, because it is interesting to see if and how it relates with the contents of the essays.

The Acropolis
Eric focuses on the Acropolis. His background can be understood in the spontaneity with which he expresses his awe when experiencing the Acropolis, until then known to him only through readings. His background allows him to deal competently with the topography and history of the site, while he recognizes that now, having certain knowledge of the formal and structural data of the Acropolis, he has a new perspective added to his understanding. His style transmits to the reader his enthusiasm from the dreamed of object coming true.

02. Dickensheets, Caroline. Art History / Economics. Wellesley College

The Significance of the Propylaia in Ancient and Modern Times
Caroline chooses the Propylaia, and talks about the unique character of this building, the aesthetic qualities of the architecture, discussing it in relation to the functions it served originally and now. She writes in a refined, clear style, builds up the essay with clarity, creating opportunities to discretely show her knowledge of things. Her treatment of topics is distinguished by subtlety and a composite historic/social perspective. Although she deals with one building, she creates a text of her own invention, transmitting the emotion from having the physical contact with the building, enhanced by knowledge.

03. Ganske, Penelope. Economics / Philosophy. Bates College

The Lincoln Memorial: The Parthenon's Enduring Influence
Penelope discusses an important issue of rhetoric known since very early in human history: building a historic identity by using specific models from the Arts and Architecture of the past. The wider rhetorical metaphor discussed here is the identification of American Democracy with the Athenian Democracy; the narrower, so to say, piece of metaphor is the Lincoln Memorial as a parallel to the Parthenon, conceived as a metaphor of an identity the Americans share with the Athenians. In discussing the common elements of architecture the author shows her competence with classical details.

04. Gunn, Meghan. Art History / Creative Writing. Washington University in St. Louis

Walking through the Classical Architecture of the Acropolis
Megan's educational background is clearly reflected in her essay. Elegance of style, fluent development of arguments, subtle discussion of theoretical issues successfully related to a wide range of topics, depth of feeling, all work together to bring to value her main issue: the small details and intricate refinements are the par-excellence constituents of classical art, reflecting the pride of the ancient Greeks for their culture that connected them more than anything else.

05. Hawkesworth, Jordan. Greek and Latin. Tufts University

Classical Architecture
As Jordan admits at the beginning of the essay, he has, until now, focused on the linguistic and philological parts of the Classics field. The essay that follows shows that this background has equipped him with a strong systematic analytical thought that allows him to nicely explain that dealing with classical architecture is "one of the broadest and most diverse fields of study", demanding from the architectural historian a control over mathematics, archaeology, history, art and anthropology.
06. Levine, Nathan. Classics. Columbia University in the City of New York
Wood to Stone
To me, this is the most idiosyncratic of the essays. Nathan, inspired by the fact that the elements of ancient Greek architecture of the classical era translate in stone some elements which were formed originally in wooden structures. The laconic, almost cryptic, title summarizes very effectively what is the main issue in this essay: not only the architectural elements, but also the very subtle refinements of classical Greek architecture could be the product of a "natural" evolution of the original wooden structure. The style, the way the text and the arguments are built, construct a strong metaphor, that imposes itself imperceptibly: in spite of the lack of scientific data in this field, Nathan can be right, by poetic insight!

07. Odessy, Rachel. Physics. Scripps College
Untitled
Rachel's essay is on a similar perspective as Penelope's: the use of art and architecture to build historic identities. However, the whole concept and composition are totally different: as in a casual and pleasant walk in her home-city, that is, Washington D.C., she describes the classical buildings, the architectural features, functions, symbolic contents, in an elegant, relaxed manner, inventing subtle and discreet ways to show her knowledge of history, art history and classical architecture and a broad range of other topics.

08. Tougas, Kristina. Architecture. Columbia University in the City of New York
Greek Architecture as an expression of Greek Ideals
Kristina's essay stands apart from all the others. She admits, since the beginning, that by being a Greek-American she is interested in understanding the past and present of Athens and its inhabitants. She discusses classical architecture and the Acropolis relating them to topography, history, anthropology, sociology. She expresses her ideas with consciousness, clarity, style and feeling. She successfully brings out the sense of diachronic continuity experienced in the place (Athens), through the works and deeds of the local people (Athenians).

09. Trabaris, George. Economics / Classics. Tulane University
The Acropolis and Planning, or the Lack Thereof
There is an impulse of enthusiasm in this essay that makes it grasp essential elements in the making of these buildings. The issue presented by George is that the architects of classical buildings and, especially, the architects of the Acropolis, made decisions about design and structure at the spot, without preliminary design. How much of this is true even specialists know little, but George's argument is true at least as far as it concerns the visible results on site as defined by the author: the buildings become part of the natural environment, each of these two factors enhancing the other.

10. Wang, Jenica. Architecture / Art History and Archaeology. Washington University in St. Louis
Classical Architecture: The Manufactured Legacy of Icons
Jenica's educational background is obvious in this essay. It is not only the precision of discussing architectural matters but also the composite theoretical background which supports all the issues in the text. The essay is built as a solid body, in which architecture, history, arts and theory are bound together from the beginning to the end. The updated theoretical concepts and models of interpretation bring out the idea that the Acropolis is not just the buildings, but all the material and immaterial elements involved.
The Acropolis
3/18/2016

BY ERIC BOLTON UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Majoring in classical civilizations, I have done a great deal of reading about both the construction and the history of the Athenian Acropolis. So, after spending so many years reading countless passages and spending a massive amount of time studying the site, one can only imagine my delight and awe in actually seeing it. Now, I have very little experience in architecture, so some of the more technical points regarding the Acropolis were lost to me. However, after the past few months in this class I not only appreciate the history behind the Athenian Acropolis, but also the beautiful and complex architectural wonders it holds.

When I first arrived in Athens, I couldn’t wait to go to the Acropolis. I longed to see the site that I had read so much about in my studies. I only waited one day before I walked over to the site to see it. As I walked over, I was able to see the Parthenon rising above the rest of the city. While I couldn’t yet see the finer details of the structure, I could still tell that it was truly monumental. I had arrived especially early so that I could appreciate the Acropolis and so that the site would not be flooded with other people. I remember buying my ticket and making my way into the Propylaea and slowly walking up the marble steps. I walked directly to the top of the Acropolis- foolishly ignoring a great deal of structures- until I arrived at the base of the most famous structure of all, the Parthenon. I had done a great deal of research and reading about this particular building, but all thoughts escaped me as I gazed at the staggeringly illustrious edifice. I was unable to fully understand or appreciate the finer architectural details, but I was still able to tell how much effort and time had gone into making this building as prepossessing as possible. As I stood in the center of the Acropolis, I understood why so many empires fought to gain control of the site; it would unequivocally be the pinnacle of wealth and prosperity of any civilization.

It is incredible that the Acropolis is home to so much history through so many different times. It stretches from the Mycenaean, to the Romans, and even to the Ottoman Empire and the Turks. Before our first trip to the Acropolis, I had no idea that the Mycenaean had a presence in Athens. I find it amazing that surrounding the Athenian Acropolis were Mycenaean Cyclopean Walls. I had heard about Cyclopean walls in the ancient site of Mycenae, but never in Athens.

Much later in Antiquity, the Athenians decided to build on the Acropolis so that they could show off their wealth and prosperity. They built several marvelous structures, such as the Hekatompedon and the Old Temple of Athena. For the entire 6th century BC, buildings continued to be added to the Old Acropolis. Unfortunately, in 480 BC, the Persians sacked the city of Athens and burned and looted the Acropolis. The remains of the Acropolis were left untouched for decades, perhaps as a reminder of the Persian War. From around 460 BC to 430 BC- during the Golden Age of Athens- several of the major temples on the Acropolis were rebuilt by the order of the statesman Pericles. Among the first structure rebuilt was the Parthenon. One enters the Acropolis via the Propylaea, which is a large gate way into the Acropolis. It was designed by Mnesicles and constructed from 437 BC to 432 BC. Unfortunately, the Propylaea was never completed and remains unfinished today. For the remainder of the 5th century BC, the Acropolis continued its reconstruction (the Propylaea, the Athena Nike, the Erechtheion), resulting in several of the most impressive architectural achievements in history.

1. Fletcher pg. 196
The history of the Acropolis is fascinating, but so is the architecture. On the Acropolis, it is clear to see the difference between the old, pre-Periclean Acropolis and the new Acropolis built after the Persian War. In particular, it is easiest to see the differences in the ruins of the Parthenon. Prior to the Persian sack of the Acropolis, the Parthenon had fewer columns and was narrower. When Pericles decided to rebuild the Parthenon in 447 BC, he decided to do so with more columns- eight to be exact- in order to make the Parthenon wider (2). Each column is crowned by a heavy and sound capital and there is entablature above them.

The Parthenon itself is an architectural marvel. It is a Doric temple with Ionic architectural features (3). Each column is slightly curved convexly, so that from a distance the colonnade appears to be completely straight; this design is known as entasis (4). The building is erected on a stylobate, which contains three steps. All around the Parthenon lays a frieze, depicting important mythological or historically significant scenes. Also on each narrow side lies a pediment. On the east side, the pediment depicts the birth of Athena from Zeus’ head. On the west side facing the Propylaia, the pediment depicts a contest between Athena and Poseidon over control of Attica (5). The rest of the Parthenon was adorned with various sculptures and the structure was built as meticulously as possible- as was every other building in the Acropolis. Because the Acropolis was built to illustrate the Athenian empire’s vast power and affluence, all of the buildings were built to be as aesthetically pleasing as possible, so that visitors would be awestruck by what the Athenians could construct.

Being in this class has given me the opportunity to fully comprehend and take in the architectural genius of the Acropolis and its many buildings; they are all masterfully designed and created. While some of the more complicated points and a great deal of the vocabulary is still lost on me, I most definitely have a better understanding of what I am seeing when we have class on the Acropolis. I could have never imagined that I would regularly have class on the site that I read about so often and so passionately, but I am very grateful that this class gives me that unique opportunity. I have talked to some locals about the Acropolis, and many of them tell me that it does not impress them anymore. They see it so often that they have become jaded to its presence. I am positive that this will never happen to me, as I firmly believe that the Acropolis is one of the most important and impressive things ever constructed by human beings.

Bibliography

*Some of the more detailed information that may seem like it needs a source is from my memory. Most of the historical facts I simply recalled as I wrote.

2. Lecture February 15th
3. Fletcher pg. 192-193
4. Fletcher pgs. 193-195
Significance of the Propylaia in Ancient and Modern Times
3/23/2016

BY CAROLINE DICKENSHEETS WELLESLEY COLLEGE

The Acropolis of Athens serves as one of the city’s main wonders with its ancient monuments and glorious views. Visitors ascend the high rocky outcrop by climbing up the pathways and stairs that run around the base of the site. Their anticipation builds as the view of the monuments momentarily disappears before the ticket gates, but they know what lies ahead of their climb. Upon entering the site, the first building to come into the visitors’ field of vision is the Propylaia. This monumental gateway served a similar purpose back during its time of construction as it does today. While not originally a fortified gate, the structure guided the flow of traffic during the Panathenaic Procession, similar to how it now guides visitors from the gates up to the Acropolis. As a complex structure, the Propylaia was clearly designed to make a lasting impression for the arriving visitor and it continues to achieve this goal up till today.

In ancient times, the Propylaia was an impressive piece of architecture unable to be compared to any of its contemporaries with regards to its plan and structure. Less complex examples of this kind of building with a single entrance were known as propyla, but the Propylaia at the Acropolis of Athens is architecturally superior as it consists of multiple rooms serving different functions. Neither a rectangular nor a central plan, the complex gate provides a unique example of a Greek building that does not follow one of these typical plans. Designed by the architect Mnesicles, construction began in 437 BC and concluded in 432 BC before the building reached completion. Although it was not a finished work due to the interruption of the Peloponnesian War, the Propylaia was almost complete at this time. The main sign of its imperfection is located on the northeast wall of the building with the protrusions of the stones (bosses).

With its individualized plan, important location, variety of unusual features, the Propylaia is the unique product of Mnesicles that makes use of the standard architectural vocabulary of the time (post-and-lintel construction, Doric and Ionic columns, prostyle and in-antis colonnades). Because of the uniqueness of this building, it presents problems that perhaps were not previously encountered by Greek architects. Dealing with these new problems shows even more knowledge of the material and structures the architect worked, with further exemplifying Mnesicles’s intelligence.

The Propylaia is a building of the Doric order with six Ionic columns supporting the roof of the central building. It is almost entirely made of Pentelic marble with black Eleusinian stone used in a few particular instances for polychrome effects. (Dinsmoor, pg. 199) A wide inclined ramp guides visitors towards the central part of the Propylaia below the massive doors that are flanked by six Doric columns. Once inside the central hall, there are three Ionic columns on each side. Originally, these columns would have supported the weight of a massive ceiling and roof. The ceiling was made of large marble beams and coffered slabs decorated in vivid colors and were considered a great beauty after their original construction. Pausanias, the Greek traveler of the 2nd century AD, writes that “the Propylaia has a ceiling of white marble, which in the size and beauty of the stones remains supreme even to my time.” (Dinsmoor, pg. 203) Although these vibrant colors no longer remain, the marvel of this ancient roof can still be felt as one passes underneath and exits out past six more Doric columns to the east end of the building.
Walking directly through the central part of the Propylaia, all visitors actively experience the building rather than simply view it in comparison to other sites on the Acropolis. The imposing size of the columns is not only seen but felt as one passes underneath the building and emerges out of the eastern side. Visitors observe the magnificent columns up close, getting a near full view of the building as they bisect its central hall. Of the five buildings planned for the Propylaia, only three were completed. Independent wings stand on either side of the porch. On the northern wing, the Pinakotheke was originally planned to be used for banqueting after they sacrificed animals to the Gods. Ancient Greeks would lounge on benches while consuming the deliciously prepared meats. Similarly, it would not be uncommon for hungry tourists to enjoy this site before sitting themselves down to a delicious taverna dinner.

As the ancient Greeks would have made their Panathenaic Procession up to the Acropolis, so do thousands of tourists. The difference today being the higher frequency and secular manner of the modern visits. As the parade would have reached the foot of the Acropolis, only citizens were permitted to pass this point and continue up to the Erechtheion similar to how today's visitors must pause to purchase their ticket before continuing up. For the ancient citizens of Athens, the Propylaia marked the boundary between the civil world of the city and the spiritual world of the Acropolis. Even today the Acropolis allows for a particular experience that could be considered as spiritual for many. Although the pagan rituals of the ancient Greeks have long been out of practice, many people see the Acropolis as a symbol of the origins of civilization. Furthermore, with all the beautiful architecture and astounding vistas of the city below, one cannot help but be inspired by this historic place of activity.

In some way, Mnesicles nods to the Parthenon through the structure and unique accents of the Propylaia. The triglyphs and metopes have a crowning ovolo on top of the fascia, mirroring the Parthenon (Dinsmoor, pg. 201). Both structures make use of the Doric order, although they both incorporate Ionic columns. These subtle features associate the two buildings and demonstrate how the buildings of the Acropolis were not built independently of each other. Rather, the Acropolis was built on a master plan so that these buildings related to one another. This relationship continues today with visitors walking around all of the monuments making stops to learn and appreciate the architecture rather than just appreciate one in particular.

Personally, the Propylaia proved a pleasant surprise as I ascended up its slope for the first time in January 2016. I had mostly been taught in previous architectural history classes about the Parthenon and Erechtheion, which I do not doubt is common place in most entry level courses. However, I was amazed at how clearly significant the Propylaia was architecturally and monumentally to the Acropolis. Being greeted to the site by such a large and masterly planned building shows how significant the Propylaia would have been in ancient times. The greatest initial impression that the Propylaia had on me was its abandonment of the basic rectangular or central plan that exists in nearly every other Greek building that I have studied. Ultimately, this is due to the unique purpose this building has, but it remains a refreshing specimen to study its unique plan. While ancient Greeks might not have had as much exposure to other contemporary buildings across the country, I do not doubt that the massive size and complexity of the Propylaia would have demanded their admiration.

While the Parthenon might gain a majority of the attention given by Acropolis visitors, the Propylaia is essential with its impression of grandeur presented to ascending visitors. In addition to its complex layout, this building proves to be more architecturally superior. One could nod to the lack of decorative sculpture as an acknowledgment of this. As the first and last building one experiences when visiting site, the Propylaia remains ingrained in one’s mind. It is the building that forms one’s first impression of the site and bids them farewell as they head back down to base of the hill.
The Lincoln Memorial: The Parthenon’s Enduring Influence
3/23/16

BY PENELlope GANsKE Bates College

The architecture of the Athenian Acropolis is universally admired. The architectural feat is associated with artistic ingenuity. Athenian democracy, and with the clout of monuments in general. It is no wonder, then, that the architecture of the Acropolis, and of the Parthenon in particular, has a lasting influence on modern architecture. You can see Doric influence in many buildings such as the Second Bank of the United States in Philadelphia, the Federal Hall National Memorial in New York, the original building at Moscow University, the Walhalla in Germany, the third Indiana state court house, and the Lincoln Memorial. The Lincoln Memorial, a building dedicated to Abraham Lincoln in Washington D.C., was designed by architect Henry Bacon. Bacon designed the Lincoln Memorial with the Parthenon in mind. He believed that a monument that was dedicated to a proponent of democracy should be modeled after the style used in the land where democracy began. He chose the Parthenon in particular because it is widely viewed as a crowning example of Doric architecture. The memorial is a three-chambered building. One chamber holds the statue of Abraham Lincoln and the other two hold tablets discussing the historical significance of Lincoln and of the building. Construction began in 1912 and took ten years to complete. The monument is dedicated to Lincoln’s presidency and his part in emancipation and in maintaining the union. Its basic plan is based on the Parthenon. Though Bacon took lots of artistic license, its resemblance to the Parthenon is still evident.

There are several similarities between the Parthenon of the Athenian Acropolis and the Lincoln Memorial of Washington D.C. The buildings seem to have been built in similar spirit. Like the Acropolis is made of materials from around Greece, the Lincoln Memorial is made of materials from around the United States. The walkway to the memorial is made of stones from the Potomac River and granite from Massachusetts. The exterior walls are made of marble from Colorado, the columns and the interior is made from limestone from Indiana, and the floor is made of pink marble from Tennessee. Henry Bacon wanted the materials to unite the national products as Lincoln had united the nation. Both monuments are in honor of beings that protect their city/country. Athena is worshiped there as the protector of Athens and Lincoln is remembered as a president that kept the union together.

There are also many structural similarities between the two buildings. Both buildings are made in the Doric style with fluted baseless columns with square capitals. Both buildings have three large steps at the base; however, the Lincoln Memorial also has a section of smaller steps for easy access for visitors. Both buildings have architraves, friezes with triglyphs and metopes and cornices. They also both have guttae on the bottom side of the cornice. The buildings also have similar subtleties. Part of the ingenuity of the Parthenon is the slight subtleties in the construction that make the building even more aesthetically pleasing. Henry Bacon sought to copy these subtleties. Both buildings have columns that tilt slightly in. They also both have floors that are raised slightly in the middle. The architects chose these slight alterations to make the building straighter and aesthetically pleasing to the eyes of the viewer. The columns tilt in so the buildings do not appear to bulge at the top and the floors are raised in the middle so the floors appear flat.
All this being said, there are a fair amount of differences between the two buildings as well. For one thing, the Lincoln Memorial has a Roman style attic, or upper story. Henry Bacon structured the building this way in order to maintain the structural integrity of its three chambers. Additionally, while the Parthenon has two fully decorated pediments, the Lincoln Memorial has an attic decorated by repeating bas-reliefs. The pediment of the Parthenon is triangular where as the attic of the Lincoln Memorial is rectangular and it does not have a raking cornice. The entablature instead continues upwards with a horizontal wall displaying the list of the states that entered the union after Abraham Lincoln’s death. The two buildings display different designs on their friezes. The Parthenon’s friezes are covered with depictions of famous scenes of the Athenian history and of Greek myths. The Lincoln Memorial’s attic is filled with the names of all of the 36 states that were a part of the union upon Abraham Lincoln’s death. Yet another variance is that the entrance to the Lincoln Memorial is on the long side rather than the short side. Henry Bacon decided upon this alteration because he wanted the entrance to face the National Gardens, and the size of the land plot necessitated that side to be longer. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the Lincoln Memorial is made with many different materials, which means it is comprised of less marble than the Parthenon.

While the two buildings are far from being the same, the similarities show that Henry Bacon had a clear goal to imitate the Parthenon. Bacon realized that the Parthenon symbolizes governmental achievement, innovation in architecture, democracy, and much more. I believe that this is the reason why you can see influences of Doric architecture all around the world. Even in my hometown of Cleveland, buildings, governmental buildings in particular, have marble steps, Doric fluted columns, and/or entablature resembling the Doric style. Despite how much time has passed, Classical architecture is still highly relevant and still has a connotation of success, clout, and beauty.
Walking through the Classical Architecture of the Acropolis
3/23/2016

BY MEGHAN GUNN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY ST LOUIS

The classical architecture of Greece is known all over the world, as it is symbolic of the flourishing culture of the Hellenic people. The buildings of ancient Greece are known for being dynamic, for interacting with the viewer through light and shadow, and for seemingly having life. These structures gleam in the Mediterranean sun, every detail accentuated exactly in the way that the original sculptors wanted. In accordance with this, the ancient Greeks melded their architecture with nature, and their works therefore seem to have a relationship with the Earth. In addition, each structure has extreme attention to detail, and every element is well thought out by the architects. These awe-inspiring classical structures have withstood the test of time as the prototype of great architecture and the remnant of a thriving culture of the past.

The most ideal examples of these buildings lie on the Acropolis. When one approaches the Acropolis, she/he is immediately struck by the monumental nature of its gateway, the Propylaia. This structure is the doorway to the ancient city on a hill, the birthplace of classical Greek architecture. Walking up the stairs is walking through thousands of years of tumultuous history, from the city’s Mycenaen control to the Venetian siege. The Propylaia has seen the Greek, Roman, and Byzantine periods, surviving severe damage from gunpowder explosion in 1687. Yet it still stands, guiding millions of viewers towards the ancient monuments that stand at its peak, despite the sackings, natural disasters, and adaptations throughout time. These monuments have influenced not just antiquity, but contemporary architecture as well. All over the Western world, buildings have been built in neo-classical style, influenced by the Acropolis monuments.

To the right of the Propylaia, on the bastion at the southwest corner of the plateau, a small temple of Pentelic marble glistens in the sunlight. It is the temple of Athena Nike, dedicated to the city’s patron goddess. The temple of Athena Nike is the earliest Ionic temple on the Acropolis, completed in 420 BC. It was positioned in such a way so that the Athenian people could worship Athena and pray for victory in . In regards to its architecture, the temple’s tetrasyle and colonnaded porticoes draw the eye, and the viewer can note the impeccable symmetry of each facadethat is emblematic of classical architecture. While it is the smallest structure on the Acropolis, the temple of Athena Nike’s intricate beauty is immediately recognized as classically Greek.

Continuing on the path through the Propylaia and towards the center of the Acropolis, one will see the Erechtheion to the left with its renowned Caryatids, and the Parthenon to the right. The marble structures stand strong amidst ancient ruins, perfectly proportioned and sculpted. Although under reconstruction, they look mostly as they did to the ancient Greeks centuries ago. The entire city of Athens lies beneawar-timesth the monuments on the Acropolis, sprawling across the mountainous plain. While circumnavigating the Acropolis, one can look over the edge of the old walls and see the sea- the intertwining of nature and architecture again irrevocable.
What is remarkable about the Parthenon, however, are not only the proportions, monumentality, and symmetry, but especially the Greeks’ remarkable attention to detail. There are several architectural refinements, created solely for the purpose of aesthetics and the viewing pleasure of the audience below the acropolis. For example, there is a subtle curvature on the stylobate, which one could only notice by bending down and observing straight on; however, this small adaptation gives the impression of monumentality to the viewers below the hill, in Attica.

The sculptors were obviously interested in visual illusions, playing with shadow and light. The Doric columns of the peristyle of the Parthenon are tapered with entasis, meaning they curve slightly. The entasis create tension between the columns and the roof, giving the building an even more monumental visual aspect.

In addition, the four corner columns on the Parthenon have a slightly larger diameter than the other columns along the periphery. This seems to be the sculptors’ solution to the bright light of the sky, which would make the corner columns look thinner and further apart than the middle columns. The architects were obviously paying attention to the natural world around them, and using their observations to contrive space and light in the Parthenon, even through the slightest adaptations. They used high contrasts of light and shadow to create emotion and energy within the structure. The natural world is also emphasized in the Parthenon through the anthropomorphic statues adorning it, again connecting the structure with nature. Therefore, through its detail, the Parthenon becomes a dynamic, seemingly living Doric temple, when its massiveness and heaviness could potentially have caused it to seem static.

In the Temple of Athena Nike, the Erechtheion, and the Parthenon, there seems to be a tension between idealistic and naturalistic values, which the architects sought to reconcile in the work. This is seen through the perfect proportions of the architecture, melded with attention to sky and sun, which work as the backdrops of each structure. The ancient Greeks labored to make each structure perfect, but also to make sure the structures kept their naturalistic qualities that connect them to the land. This takes true knowledge of the landscape, as well as architectural mastery in regards to mathematical principles. Classical architecture maintains its conventions, such as pediments and concepts like the preference for symmetrical plans, but what truly makes this work stand out is the attention to detail.

I believe that small details and intricate refinement such as the ones seen in the Acropolis are what constitute classical art. While classical art is most famous for its monumental Doric and Ionic components, what is most fascinating to me are these subtleties that work together to make each part of the architecture cohesive, and extremely beautiful. These details epitomize the idealism of the ancient Greeks. They had a major drive to create a culture not only of strength, but also of aesthetic beauty. I also believe the subtleties in their work are what make ancient Greek architecture so dynamic. Every aspect of the architecture was meant to create the aesthetic of the piece and cause the viewer to feel something greater than his or her self. The fact that the Greeks created each work extremely carefully so that every Athenian could have a relationship with the architecture is a very powerful concept to me. I believe this art emphasizes the pride the ancient Greeks had for their culture, and the interconnectedness of their society. The Athenians definitely resonated with their cultural identities, and this architecture connected them culturally as well as politically.
Classical Architecture
3/23/2016

BY JORDAN HAWKESWORTH TUFTS UNIVERSITY

Although I am a classics major, I admit I’ve always focused more on the linguistic and philological parts of the field. I have dabbled in archaeology however, and there I received a brief introduction to classical architecture. After all, the two fields go hand in hand. It would be impossible to fully comprehend either the Parthenon or the Pantheon without a knowledge of the different techniques used in each structure, nor could I claim to have knowledge of Crete without knowing the floorplans of their palaces. But it has a much broader application, and my experience here in Greece certainly would not be the same without it. For architecture is more than just a lens to view archaeology through; it is an accumulation of various fields of study into one which allows its wielder to critically analyze the world around them. Just as classics combines elements of philology, archaeology, history and other fields, classical architecture draws from mathematics, archaeology, history, and art, as well as religion, anthropology, and many others, depending on your focus and your site. The breadth of topics that falls under architecture’s wide umbrella is truly astonishing.

Mathematics is perhaps the most important aspect of architecture in general, and yet the least relevant in the study of classical architecture. This is probably because the study of classical architecture is less concerned with constructing buildings and more so with those already built. Mathematics is still crucial, however. Obviously the buildings studied could not have been constructed without it, but it’s more than that. To truly appreciate the Parthenon, for example, one must understand the significance of its curvature and how it matches the curvature of the human eye. Mathematics is important in understanding the small intricacies of structures and how complex some of them actually are. It does however seem to remain in the background of classical architecture (It is possible that my exposure to architecture and its lack of mathematics simply causes things to look this way to me).

Archaeology clearly plays a large part role in the study of classical architecture, and vice versa, but I believe this is because there is so much overlap it can be difficult to distinguish the two fields. One could say that archaeologists uncover buildings and architects analyze them, but this would drastically simplify things. In fact, when it comes to ancient structures, I don’t consider there to be a difference between archaeology and architecture. Both bring to the surface ancient buildings, or what’s left of them, and attempt to gain as much information as possible from them by utilizing a wide variety of sources, as well as perhaps attempting at least a partial reconstruction. It’s possible an archaeologist and an architect might focus on different aspects of a building, but this is by no means a certainty, nor is it relevant, as this could also occur among individual archaeologists or architects. A situation like this is probably not unique, but I think it’s remarkable that a field of study is so broad it can completely encompass another in certain situations.

One of the sources both architects and archaeologists often turn to is history. Often many questions can be answered by simply referring to the history of a place. For example, it seems odd at first that the Ancient Athenians incorporated old, damaged column drums into the walls on the Acropolis, and that from the inside you could clearly see they were damaged. But history tells us of the Persian sack of Athens, and it becomes clear that the Greeks were using these drums to remind their citizens of the destruction and inspire hatred against the Persians. Knowing the history of a place and its former inhabitants is perhaps one of the most essential components to understanding a site.
There is one element of a structure I have not touched yet: art. Art can be found in former temples, palaces, and villas, just to name a few sources, and so a classical architect must be well versed in the field. And whether it’s in the form of a mosaic or a frieze, it has significance. When one looks at the oak leaves surrounding the door frame of the Erechtheion, they must also see the religious symbolism behind them. In many ways, an architect must use art as they use history, to provide context.

We have context about a site itself and its art, but what about the people who once lived there? That is where anthropology comes in. The people who visited a temple can be just as important as the temple itself, and so an architect must be familiar with this field as well. Through it one can truly comprehend every aspect of a structure, from the people to the art and the area itself.

I believe classical architecture is one of the broadest and most diverse fields of study. It encompasses an immense range of topics, from math to art and everything in between. I think that is what attracted me to it the most, how varied the different elements are and how one’s understanding of a site only grows and grows with the more you learn.
Over the past months I have had the opportunity to visit the Acropolis of Athens biweekly, and I have come to feel at home with its Classical architecture, represented primarily by the partially restored remains of the Propylaea, the Erechtheum and the Parthenon. It is easy to take for granted the familiar forms of the Acropolis’ Classical orders—the fluted columns, the Doric entablature, the Ionic volutes, etc.—and it is easy to forget that these forms are the product of sophisticated innovation and adaptation to changing materials, requirements, and economies. The elements of Classical architecture create a unique esthetic impression—and this is their greatest value—but they are also historical documents. Although there is no single key to the evolution of Classical architecture and the reasons for its unique appearance on the Athenian Acropolis, I will focus on the theory of a wooden origin to the Doric order, which posits that the stone Doric (and later Ionic and Corinthian) temples with which we are so familiar are translations or adaptations into stone of earlier wooden prototypes. Although the degree to which the Doric order is indebted to wooden prototypes is unclear (since we have no surviving wooden temples and must rely entirely on conjecture), the basic premise of the theory is now universally accepted (Fletcher, 202). The best evidence for the wooden-origin theory consists of Doric ornamental features that appear to be relics of wooden structural elements, and yet I (perhaps without sufficient evidence or precedent) find the theory to be an equally elegant explanation for some of the more subtle enduring qualities of the architecture of the Acropolis and Classical architecture in general, from its curvature and flexibility to its interaction with its natural topography.

On our first day on the Acropolis, Professor Tanoulas declared, “There are no straight lines in the Greek architecture.” This statement struck me as impossible at first—the Parthenon appears to be thoroughly rectangular. Upon further investigation, however, I have come to see the truth of his words. From the entasis (tapering) and tilt of the columns to the subtle convexity of the crepidoma (foundation) which extends to the entablature, the Parthenon is in fact entirely curved. The Doric order, despite bearing an apparently simpler appearance, is in fact more subtle and complex than its more ornamental, delicate cousins the Ionic and Corinthian because it exhibits such refinements more thoroughly. Although these characteristics may be explained as an elaborate system of optical correction (in order to counteract the possible illusions of sagging and undesirable curvature in a rigidly straight building), and although “we have...definitive evidence that the Ancient Greeks believed such illusions required correctives” (Dinsmoor, 165—I assume Dinsmoor is referring to Vitruvius? ), I find it interesting to consider that these subtle refinements may have been translated from wooden prototypes along with other more obvious features.

It is likely that wooden beams-ends and pegs are the origin of such elements as the metope, mutule and gutta (in fact some early Doric temples exhibit stone guttae inserted into the mutules much as wooden pegs would be inserted into wooden plates beneath the rafters of a wooden temple).
It is the living, elastic nature of wood, however, which may have inspired the more subtle curvature of the Doric order. The obvious wooden precursor to stone columns are tree trunks, which are naturally tapered (and possess a distinctive grain which may have translated into column flutes), accounting for the particularly pronounced entasis of the Doric column. Wood naturally bends, warps, expands and contracts, and it is natural that a wooden facade initially built rigidly straight might curve into a subtle concavity over time, while a wooden floor may develop a degree of convexity. All of these subtle curvatures are present in the Parthenon and in other Doric architecture. I am not suggesting that the Greek stonemasons blindly translated such peculiarities of wood into stone, but rather that when these artisans noticed the esthetic qualities of the natural curvature of wood, they capitalized on them and brought them to perfection in stone, a material over whose final form they had more control.

Wood not only warps and twists to resist rigid ground-plans, but it is itself inherently flexible. We have learned that although their preferred binding element was pure friction, the Greeks locked their stone column drums together with a wooden socket and peg (called the empolion and polos) and when necessary fastened their stone blocks together with iron dowels and “double-T” brackets sheathed in lead. This lead sheathing is malleable and allows for a certain give and take, providing structural integrity in the face of earthquakes (and may be responsible for what remains on the Acropolis in the wake of the gunpowder explosions of the 17th century AD). In the 6th c. BC, these clamps and dowels were used only at the very tops of temple walls, and by the time of the Parthenon in the 5th c. BC they had moved farther down the wall to provide greater security. In later times, the Romans used such means of locking and fastening in excess, placing clamps and dowels around every block in their walls and adding four extra empolia between each column drum, with the result that their monumental architecture was far more rigid and in fact possessed less structural integrity than that of the Greeks. I suggest that since the Greeks of the Classical period were not so distant from the age of wooden architecture, they recognized the value of the natural flexibility of timber and sought to replicate it in stone. The wooden empolion and lead-sheathed brackets are the perfect solution, balancing integrity with flexibility. Whereas a stonemason unfamiliar with wood might seek to conquer the earth’s seismic activity with the sheer weight and rigidity of stone, an architect who had experience designing the wooden prototypes from which the Doric order was derived would be familiar with the advantages of flexible engineering when first contracted to design in stone.

Doric architecture not only exhibits the esthetic refinements of subtle curvature and the structural refinements of natural flexibility, but it expresses a keen awareness of and response to its environment. In contrast to typical Roman architecture, for example, which is want to impose itself over its environment and to impress more than to respond, the Parthenon is constructed entirely in response to its context on the plateau of the Acropolis. Because it is not arbitrarily positioned front and center before the Propylaea but rather cooperates with the topography of the plateau, the participant in its architectural environment approaches the structure asymmetrically from below, behind, and to the left. Walking down the main avenue of the Acropolis takes the participant on a sweeping arc rising steadily from the Parthenon’s West face all the way around the North face to the entrance at the Eastern face.
This experience is dramatic, to say the least. Moreover, the Parthenon and the Propylaea are the only buildings on the Acropolis built on a parallel axis. Clearly the primary concern of the architects was to not to force the plateau into a grid-form as the Romans may have done, but rather to accommodate it. It is only natural that this tendency should have grown from wood, which is far lighter than stone, more accommodating of the natural features of the landscape, and grows from the very earth itself. Just as a timber forest grows in inevitable harmony with its environment, just so the Greek temple—an ordered forest of stone columns—seeks to situate itself in a natural context. Many if not most Doric temples are built over previous wooden prototypes, most notably the Heraeum at Olympia (Robertson, 62), and as such reflect an awareness of landscape tailored specifically to their wooden pre-structures—in other words, the location and orientation of the typical Doric temple was chosen for a wooden prototype. I suggest that construction in wood lends itself more naturally to harmony with natural topography than other more rigid materials, and that therefore the Greeks’ use of stone to accommodate rather than conquer their landscape reflects earlier practices in wood.

Dinsmoor quotes Percy Gardner.

The whole building [the Parthenon] is constructed, so to speak, on a subjective rather than an objective basis; it is intended not to be mathematically accurate, but to be adapted to the eye of the spectator. To the eye a curve is a more pleasing form than a straight line, and the deviations from rigid correctness serve to give a character of purpose, almost of life, to the solid marble construction. (Dinsmoor, 164)

I do not seek to debunk such an appreciation of the subjective esthetics of the finest examples of Classical architecture by claiming that they originate in wood; rather, I hope to impart the perspective that the Doric order is indebted to wooden prototypes not only for its beautifully strange elements such as the mutule, gutta and metope, but for its subtle refinements of curvature and inclination, its supple flexibility, and its harmonious relationship with its natural environment. To claim that such refinements serve to correct optical illusions may be fair, but it does not explain how the Greeks came to the specific solutions that they did: wooden prototypes are an elegant explanation. To clarify, I am not suggesting that the Doric order is a mere imitation of wooden prototypes, but rather that through familiarity with wooden architecture, Greek stonemasons were able to grant to stone, seemingly the most rigid of materials, many of the qualities of a truly organic material. The Greeks gave life to their stone, and it is characteristic of their genius that they succeeded in combining the vivacious, even human qualities of wood with the monumental, imperishable qualities of stone. The very possibility that so many subtle refinements of wooden architecture carried over into the Doric order is a testament to the Ancient Greeks’ typical blend of conservatism with the contrary and equally powerful instinct to innovate.
3/23/2016

BY RACHEL ODESSEY SCRIPPS COLLEGE

I grew up in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. and spent my childhood surrounded by the marble columns of government buildings that tried to look like ancient Greek and Roman temples. The colonnades and pediments were a language of power and wealth; they reminded me that I lived in a wealthy country, that my life was stable and governed by rational powers. The architecture was beautiful, too. I spent many afternoons behind the Ionic façade of the National Gallery of Art learning about famous artists, or walking around the monuments to American heroes that dotted the downtown area of the city. The city's use of classical architecture was a very intentional and effective way of asserting legitimacy for what was, when its monuments were built, a very new nation, using classical styles to impart an image of power as well as culture to a new country that had little of either.

When many of the classical buildings in Washington were built, the city was the capital of a new and untested type of country. Unlike Britain, from which the young United States had just cut its ties, the U.S. did not have a history of governance to draw on, and the lawmakers who drew up the constitution had few predecessors in democracy to draw on. It makes sense, then, that they chose to associate with the Ancient Greeks, the founders of democracy and also another group of states that decided to band together for their mutual interest. Associating with them gave the new U.S. a cultural heritage that, as a nation of immigrants, they needed; additionally, it gave legitimacy to the idea of democracy as a viable system of government. Many of the seats of power around the city draw inspiration from Greek architecture; it imparts a sense of stability to the country, as if this brand-new nation was simply a logical extension of the ancient, great cultures. The Ionic columns on the White House remind us that, like the ancient Greeks, as Americans we have a voice in choosing our leadership. They strive to house the elements that help our democracy function in styles taken from the birthplace of democracy. The imposing colonnade on the Treasury Building reminds us that, like the Ancient Greeks, we live in a country with the wealth to provide its citizens with stability and a high quality of life. The Supreme Court House, with its tall columns and high pediment depicting Liberty with the Scales of Justice speaks to the U.S. government and system of justice as rational. Every building with Greek architecture places itself alongside the ancient tradition of democracy, as if America weren't a brand-new country struggling to justify the system of government it had devised.

On top of asserting a heritage in government, DC's classical architecture tries to connect the US to ancient classical cultural heritage, which was important for a very new country made of immigrants. The city is dotted with monuments to American icons in an ancient style, from the obelisk dedicated to George Washington to the rotunda dedicated to Thomas Jefferson, its round roof and striking façade reminiscent of the Colosseum. Perhaps the most striking is the memorial to Lincoln, which is modeled after the Parthenon. While most of DC's Greek-styled buildings are built to imitate Ionic style, the Lincoln Memorial uses Doric order, with an octastyle elevation on its shorter ends, taking its cues from the Parthenon. The same way Athenians built temples to gods and heroes of their myths and worshipped statues inside, so too do American tourists pay homage to the statues of their mythologized heroes in the temples built in Washington, D.C.
Additionally, state-funded museums like the National Portrait Gallery or the National Gallery of Art use Greek styling—the entrance of the National Portrait Gallery is styled as a Doric octastyle elevation built in marble—another reference to the Parthenon. The National Gallery of Art uses an Ionic colonnade to welcome tourists to spend a day looking at paintings. The United States continues to struggle to justify its existence in the face of people who say that as a nation of immigrants, the country does not have its own culture or heritage—but by connecting not only through government but through the halls of its culture to the Ancient Greeks, the country can claim heritage of a culture that has influenced all of European culture.

I never paid much attention to the specific architecture of the monuments and galleries where I had gone on so many walks throughout my childhood. After spending so long paying attention to the finer details of the Acropolis, however, I found myself looking back through pictures of the spaces where I had spent so much time and noticing new details—Doric columns with shallower fluting on the National Portrait Gallery, with triglyphs spaced out along the entablature, or the deeper fluting on the Ionic columns of the White House.

However, with all the similarities I notice between Washington's architecture and the ancient architecture of the Acropolis, there are many, many, differences. Buildings on the Acropolis incorporated the chosen order of the building in all aspects of its construction, from the slightly curving floor of the Parthenon, through the immaculately carved drums of the columns, to the guttae reminiscent of old wooden temples. The Greek and Roman elements of Washington's architecture are incorporated with heavy Georgian wings to accommodate the actual content of the buildings, and often lack the detailed metopes and pediments of the Ancient Greek buildings, leaving that storytelling space blank. All of the neoclassical buildings in Washington are very serious, serving as memorials or art galleries or houses of government. The Ancient Greeks' buildings were important to them, too, but they used the space in a much more colorful way than Washington uses its neoclassical architecture. In Washington, neoclassical spaces are a workplace, or somewhere to pay homage to the country's history, or somewhere to spend an afternoon in thought. Ancient Greek festivals were rife with singing, eating, and sacrifice. The differences that I note in the architecture reflect that, too. The colonnades and pediments on most of the office buildings mainly served as decorations to the heavy, square wings of offices, where in Greek architecture every element of the building worked together to create a spiritual space. The neoclassical architecture is often more serious, leaving possible spaces for decorations, like pediments and metopes, blank. The roof of the Lincoln Memorial is solemnly flat where the Parthenon's roof was sloped and decorated with palmettes. Perhaps the biggest difference is that while ancient Greek temples were painted in gaudy colors, the neoclassical buildings of Washington are left in their stark cement or marble, reinforcing their seriousness in opposition to the colorful use of the pagan buildings.

Washington's neoclassical buildings create spaces where people can think about famous men, surround themselves with the best art of the day, or interact with the institutions that govern their lives—much like the Ancient Greeks' use of temples for worship, or to look at famous paintings like in the Propylaea. Washington's neoclassical architecture gives it the cultural and political foothold it needs by connecting it to a site rich in history and democracy.
Greek Architecture as an Expression of Greek Ideals  
3/20/16  
BY KRISTINA TOUGAS COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY NY

Throughout our class sessions at the Acropolis, one thing that has really stood out to me is the way that a city's personality can be reflected through its architecture. As a Greek-American, I have found myself comparing many of the qualities of the Acropolis to the Greek people themselves, and have found interesting similarities. The more time I spend in Athens understanding both, its people and its ancient architecture, the more clear it becomes how the ancient monuments of Athens, particularly the Parthenon and the Propylaea, embody characteristics of the Greek people both past and present.

As nearly every visitor to the Acropolis surely notices, the first aspect of the Acropolis that strikes me is its grandeur and attention to detail. Though the monuments are only parts of what they once were, the care with which the Athenians built them, and their desire for perfection, is still quite clear. One way this is shown is through the slight adjustments that have been factored in to the curvature, or entasis, of the column shafts of the Parthenon, and similarly the upward curvature in the center of the stylobate, in order to account for the natural optical effects the eye can apply to straight objects. The ancient Greeks were quite knowledgeable in mathematics, and used this knowledge to find the ideal curvature such that the Parthenon could achieve optical perfection. The Greeks’ devotion to this effect proved their obsession with precision. It was not simply enough for the builders to know that the dimensions were perfect, but it was crucial that every visitor could know as well simply by looking. I find this pride in one’s work to be a very prominent quality in Greek people today as well. As very social and outgoing people who are constantly accepting and welcoming others, be it family, friends, strangers, or even refugees, it is always important to the Greek people to make a good impression on others and show them the very best parts of their city and their work. The care with which the designers of the Acropolis built these monuments continues to be reflected in the pride of the Athenian people and their desire to please other people.

Another element of the Acropolis that embodies Greek personality and ideals is the use of ruins from older temples and memorials in the walls of the Acropolis. After the Persians destroyed parts of the Acropolis in the Persian War, marble and column capitals from the Archaos Naos were incorporated into the new retaining walls on the north side of the Acropolis, called the Themistoclean Wall, in order to serve as a reminder to the people of Athens of what the Persians had done ("Circuit Walls"). As the Acropolis is a site that can be seen from nearly anywhere in Athens, this gesture would have served as strong propaganda against the Persians, and continues to be a sign of the Athenian’s pride in their city and devotion to protecting it. This design decision represented defiance and a strong bond between the people and their city, something that was evident both in ancient times and today in the face of the current economic crisis. Athenians today, just as in the past, directly tie their identity to their city, and are passionate about the city of Athens. I see the construction of this wall as a literal manifestation of the personality of the Athenians that will continue to send a powerful message for centuries to come.
Even the walk up the Acropolis from school, which my classmates and I take to class each morning, is filled with symbolism. The journey begins on the road circulating the Parthenon, part of the Panathenaic Way, which contains many people, both locals and tourists, making their way to and from the Acropolis. As you get closer you pass the Theatre of Dionysos, where people throughout history, and even today, gather for plays, concerts, and other forms of entertainment. From here, people of from all over the world are funneled through the entrance to the Acropolis, and are greeted by the Propylaea, which guides visitors to the very symbol of the city of Athens, the Parthenon. Throughout this journey, the architecture of the Acropolis, be it the pathways to the entrance or the Propylaea itself, guide visitors of all origins towards the heart of the city of Athens.

I notice strong symbolism in this path to the Acropolis, in that I find it especially reflects the hospitality of the Greeks, both ancient and modern, and the pride they take in showing the city they love to people of all origins. I think that Greece is a place that brings all people together in the same way that the Acropolis brings its visitors together for one shared experience of its greatest treasure. I see this reflected also in Greece's acceptance of refugees in the modern day.

I find in Greece a sense of understanding, perhaps due to the centuries of history it contains, that there is something larger that binds all people, and therefore people should be hospitable and welcoming towards one another. The inviting walkways, theaters, and singular path up to the Parthenon serve as a metaphor for this coming together of people that is a big part of Greek life.

The final aspect of the Acropolis I will discuss in its relationship to the Greek personality and way of life can be seen in the care the Greeks have taken in reconstructing and refurbishing the various monuments of the Acropolis. I have heard various people comment that the construction detracts from the experience and appearance of the Parthenon, and though I once thought it was unfortunate that the construction was occurring, I now view it in a different light. After physically entering the Parthenon, and understanding the complex and involved processes that go into reconstruction, I have a much greater appreciation for the process that is the preservation of one of the world's greatest existing treasures from the ancient times. The active duty the Greeks feel towards preserving their history at all costs shows just how important it is to their identity, and once again, how much pride they take in being the home to such a monument.

A desire for one's legacy to live on is something that stems back to the Greeks in Homer's Iliad and the Odyssey, and we can see this tendency carried on through the dutiful reconstruction of the Acropolis so that it may be enjoyed for ages to come.

In these ways, I have seen a connection between the features and experience of the Acropolis, and the personalities and ideals of the Greek people as a whole. It is fascinating to note these similarities, and even more interesting that they apply both thousands of years ago as well as today. Being able to experience this first hand by visiting the Acropolis these past few weeks has really brought this interplay to my attention, and allowed me to see this very special connection that the people of Athens always have, and will continue to share with their monuments.

Bibliography

The Acropolis and Planning, or the Lack Thereof

3/23/2016

BY GEORGE TRABARIS TULANE UNIVERSITY

How is it that the most important and impressive feat of architecture in antiquity could arrive without a solid plan in place? The Parthenon and the Propylaea above the others manage to impress and inspire without prior intentions. The architects of the building of the Acropolis, Mnesicles in particular, managed to construct not only very unique buildings, but without prior considerations. They figured it all out as it went along. I am going to examine each of these two buildings in detail to demonstrate how impressive this feat was. But beyond these two, I will look at a couple of specific elements of the temple to Zeus, the Athena Nike, and Erechtheion. Were these buildings all absolutely original? Definitely not, there were some basic concepts that originated from older temples and ideas. However, when I first walked up to the top of the Acropolis, I was simply blown away by the pure majesty of all of the structures and their orientation. There is just such an organic feel to them all, as if they were simply a part of nature. They all conform to the natural phenomena around them, it is not man combating nature, but working alongside it. The concept of building around natural obstacles instead of trying to compete with them is something that in the field of architecture and urban planning has been lost only incredibly recently.

The organic nature of the Acropolis is most evident in the very first structure visible on the way in, the Propylaea. Since it was built, instead of trying to conform the slope to the plan, the building was built with the slope in mind, this being the epitome of all the sentiments I most respect in ancient Greek architecture. The use of the Ionic order in the lower sections of the building allow for the same height of ceiling, since the Ionic columns tend to be slimmer and elegantly longer. The inner Ionic colonnade comprises of taller columns than the Doric ones, which is reflected in the fact that the building was built on a slope. To pull this off there was some measuring beforehand of the ordering of the marble, while the architect on site would have to decide on the spot how much material to use mostly. Mnesicles decided on the spot all of this, which just is beyond comprehension how someone could be so creative and yet methodical. After the Ionic elements, the main artifice consist of three rooms, all now in the Doric style. But again some compensation had to be accounted for of the natural sloping of the Acropolis. So, the western end of the Doric central room includes the regular whole entablature. However, on the eastern edge of the western hall that leads to the center of the Acropolis, is missing much of the entablature. This clearly illustrates again the very nature of the irregular, spontaneous plan. If this was to be a plan fully formed according to the building rules there is no way any of the entablature would be sacrificed, instead most likely the floor would be changed in some way. And this would ruin the entire building’s appeal. It is an uneven building, but by design, because the floor is uneven. The roof needs to be level for the entire geometry, so why not even it out with a slighting of a side of the entablature? The effect of this makes the building feel almost like an extension of the acropolis rock, as opposed to a fighter of it.

The southern wing is organic in a very different, historical, way. It was designed to be level with the northern wing, the picture gallery (even though it did not hold pictures until Roman times). It is uneven because of the many changes that took place to the building during the original construction and during Frankish occupation. At the edge of the wing there existed at that time a defensive Mycenaean wall which cut into the edge of it. When Greece gained control of Athens once again in the 19th century, they decided to return the entire acropolis to its classical Greek roots. This meant destroying the so called Frankish tower, but the wing still is somewhat incomplete. It almost is a scar to remind of how much reuse the Acropolis had undertaken throughout its history. But the scar of the southern portico wing of the Propylaea is not the only part of the Acropolis that remained unchanged throughout time and is an important piece of its history that lends itself to being part of the landscape. It improves on what is already there, not combating the natural elements.
Once passing through the Propylaea, immediately my gaze was struck by the magnificence of the Parthenon. The placement of the temple upon a larger krepidoma foundation adds a level of monumentality and along with the downward sloping of the entablature aids the viewer. The Doric elements of the colonnade and peripteral entablature add an appearance of simplicity and elegance because of the unadorned nature of the Doric capitals. Also, the metopes and triglyphs are relatively standard. But the structure could not be further from the term "simple." Every single column leans inward, with the corners also leaning towards the center. This does not become apparent until observed very closely. This curving of the entire structure gives it more architectural soundness similar to a pyramid. This is not even visible to the naked eye from any somewhat far distance. Along with this is the entasis of the individual columns. Not only is this done for structural support, since higher element by nature must be lighter than lower ones, but it also helps to make the columns seem perfectly straight even with their curving elements. This optical illusion arises because of the perspective of the viewer below, he or she can see the slimming but not the curve. The culmination of all of these elements creates a structure that is greater than the sum of its parts. The final product simply could not be planned ahead of time. The plan would seem incorrect from all of the curvature. Plans tend to overestimate the value of straight lines, because these lines look most impressive on a sheet of paper. The final product of the Parthenon could only be described as a work of genius, the antithesis of a plan. It reveres the landscape around it, accentuating the height provided by the acropolis to become visible in all of Athens. Every time I see the Parthenon from the street, I am simply awestruck at its pure magnificence.

While nothing of the Temple of Zeus Polieus survives, it is clear that it lacked in comparison to the Parthenon. However, it was built on top of the very tallest part of the Acropolis. This allowed for the largest temple to a technically more minor god. While the structure paled in comparison, Zeus will always get his place at the highest point of the most important element of Athens.

The Athena Nike is reconstructed beautifully, but its Ionic tetrastyle amphiprostyle plan makes this building more standard than the others. Instead, what really stuck out to me, was its reverence to the older temple directly below. Instead of ignoring their past creations or reusing the materials for something else, the Ancient Greeks left the older temple exactly where it was and revered the location enough to build at the very same spot. The Erechtheion in its own right also does a particularly impressive job to conforming to its surrounding, but in this case with much more emphasis on the particulars of these surroundings. For instance the tomb of Kerkrops is underneath the building but, instead of building around it, they simply placed the building on top. In order to access the tomb, a larger than usual block of marble is used as the foundation of the superposed structure at that spot, so that below, an unobstructed entrance to this tomb could be observed. Also on the northern portico, a hole exists for ritual function. But neither of these diminish the building as a whole, and both add to the complexity of the structure.

The beauty of the Acropolis cannot be expressed by observing each of its elements separately. Instead, the true beauty is in the whole, the location of everything is completely sporadic. It arrives as a result of what nature has provided, not what a planner in the modern sense would have wanted. The very unsymmetrical nature, while seemingly contradictory to common artistic belief, adds to the beauty of it all, and does not detract. All of the buildings become part of the whole of the natural bedrock of the acropolis, something which a well-designed plan could simply never accomplish. The very nature of the organic approach to building only adds to impressiveness, and to the durability of the construction too; this means that as a whole the Acropolis can stand as a testament to men working with nature. When working with nature, humankind can achieve so much more, and with much better results; one must only look at the Acropolis to see why.
Classical Architecture: The Manufactured Legacy of Icons

3/23/2016

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The Acropolis, the highest point in the city, has had great cultural significance and influence since the Bronze Age. Besides its physically commanding presence on a rocky outcrop towering over the city, it is the beacon and magnet for cultural, political, and national pride. Its repeated encounters with tumultuous and violent sieges, invasions, and fall of entire civilizations have left behind a far richer physical history than meets the eye. The Acropolis, which consist of the surviving buildings of the Propylea, the Erechtheion, the Temple of Athena Nike, and most famous of them all, the Parthenon, can be best appreciated in the context of its anomalies, quirks, and ruins, but also critiqued in its last manufactured icon status. The discussion of its significance as a beacon of classic architecture becomes more nuanced as one determines why — and how — it is such an icon.

When one looks at the Acropolis and its surviving iconic buildings, the assumption is that it epitomizes classical Greek architecture. In particular, the Parthenon, whose silhouette is seemingly plastered on every form of tourist paraphernalia in Greece, is graphically represented as a rectilinear, glaringly white classical structure. However, it was neither fully white nor straight — its pediments were painted bright blue and red (and some might argue quite gaudily) and every element of it subtly curved or tilted. The entasis on the columns, the outward leaning of the metopes, the parabolic curvature of the stylobate, and the leaning towards where one would have first seen the Parthenon (west pediment) all are highly technical architectural elements that require a deep understanding of optical illusions and manipulation. When one looks at the inner friezes and learns that most of it was almost totally hidden due to its height and the darkness in the peristyle, it seems odd to have included it at all. The fact of the matter is the Parthenon was full of oddities and anomalies. Its organizational structure was not “iconic” of classical architecture, as its 8x17 column structure differentiated from typical 6 x13 peristyle Doric temples, and a two-roomed cela with Ionic elements was also atypical.

Such details and delicate elements of the Parthenon are easy to miss, especially when compared to its monumentality and sheer display of wealth and power. The building project under Pericles started after the Persian War, and spared no expense. Great names, including Phidias, were involved in the building of the Parthenon. Almost full relief sculptures of every Athenian legend dotted the pediment, requiring blocks of marble being dragged up the Acropolis from the nearest quarry — 10 km away. The surviving structure of the Parthenon and the Acropolis has been painstakingly restored to the vision it was from the era of Pericles. Its history as a church and a mosque (which was actually used longer than it as a temple of Athena) is only casually mentioned in history books and the Acropolis Museum. While it can be argued that this forcible rebranding and eventual brutal — and almost total — destruction by the Venetians cannot be considered classical, it is still part of the immensely rich history of the Parthenon. After the Persian Wars, the Athenians intentionally left remnants of a destroyed plaza on the Acropolis as a reminder of the destruction, choosing to be nondiscriminatory to history — even its less honorable moments. Pieces and drums of the old temple before the Parthenon have been recycled and reused. Whether not that was an intentional reminder of the Acropolis’ history or just a practical reuse of marble is unclear, but regardless, it shows the rich history of the Parthenon that goes beyond its façade, which usually seems to be the only thing represented and reproduced today.
The picking and choosing of facts is applicable to other architectural elements as well. For example, people tend to forget that Greek temples were dark, as they were covered in roof tiles with few sources of illumination. Modern day versions of the Parthenon like to point out other facts, like that it was the first all marble temple in mainland Greece, or also the biggest of its time. It seems to be emphasized over and over again in iterations of city guides, history books, and plaques that I have experienced throughout the years.

However, I believe the beauty and history of the Acropolis buildings lay in its anomalies, and sometimes, even its imperfections. For example, the Propylea, also under the direction of Pericles, was never fully completed. Like the Parthenon, it utilizes both Ionic and Doric elements, along with a complex, asymmetrical and multi-leveled plan. This contradicts the symmetrical, monumental, and orderly image of classical architecture, but nevertheless, it is a significant. The unfinished marble blocks and experimentation with grey accent stone highlight the genius of the Propylea, built by the architect Mnesciles. Juxtaposed with the fully Ionic Temple of Athena Nike, the Erechtheion, the Propylea and the Parthenon begin to take on a rather interesting group, as they all resemble different variations of classical architecture, all responding to the natural rocky slopes of the Acropolis in drastically different ways. They represent a hybridization of different techniques and styles, making classical architecture truly the culmination of centuries of artistic and technical experimentation.

The Parthenon is a living, breathing building whose weight never appears static; rather, it moves with the sun as light bounces of its carefully carved flutes, sometimes almost seemingly emanating out of the very rosy marble it is made of. As it is oftentimes described as a living being, its history should also be treated as such. History that is conveniently included or omitted detracts from the realness of the buildings, as sometimes questions — like the subject of the procession frieze — can’t be answered for certain. Like architecture, history is constantly breathing, expanding, and up for reinterpretation. This critique of the manufactured icon status of the Parthenon does not in any way detract from the validity or greatness of the building. Instead, I choose to highlight more nuanced subtle elements of the Parthenon to show the meticulous and technical achievements of classic Greek architecture that makes effort so effortless.

To me, the classical architecture of the Acropolis is the pinnacle of technological and architectural ingenuity of its architects. However, classical architecture is also what was chosen to be history, and was chosen to be left out. Classical architecture is not the perfect, all white marble image that has been popularized. Rather, its achievements lie in the unknown and the buried, in what it covered but also exposed. The Acropolis, a platform of millennia of great city-states and civilizations, has risen and fallen, burned and rebuilt. Its imperfections, unfinished elements, and subtleties are what classical architecture is about — a simultaneous refinement of technique and loosening of strict definitions and orders.