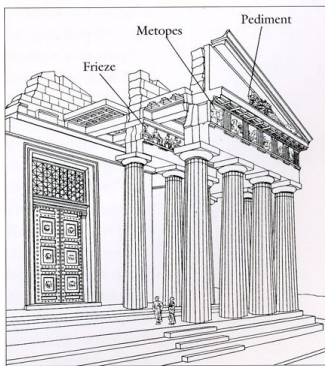


**KEY**

- HIGHLIGHT
  - DATES
  - NAMES (PEOPLE/PLACES/VOCAB)
  - FUN FACTS

**THE PARTHENON**

By around 500 B.C.E. 'rule by the people,' or democracy, had emerged in the city of Athens. Following the defeat of a Persian invasion in 480-479 B.C.E., mainland Greece and Athens in particular entered into a golden age. In drama and philosophy, literature, art and architecture Athens was second to none. The city's empire stretched from the western Mediterranean to the Black Sea, creating enormous wealth. This paid for one of the biggest public building projects ever seen in Greece, which included the Parthenon.

The temple known as the Parthenon was built on the Acropolis of Athens between 447 and 438 B.C.E. It was part of a vast building program masterminded by the Athenian statesman Perikles. Inside the temple stood a colossal statue representing Athena, patron goddess of the city. The statue, which no longer exists, was made of gold and ivory and was the work of the celebrated sculptor Pheidias.

**Parthenon sculptures**

The building itself was decorated with marble sculptures representing scenes from Athenian cult and mythology. There are three categories of architectural sculpture. The frieze (carved in low relief) ran high up around all four sides of the building inside the colonnades. The metopes (carved in high relief) were placed at the same level as the frieze above the architrave surmounting the columns on the outside of the temple. The pediment sculptures (carved in the round) filled the triangular gables at each end.



### Marble metope from the Parthenon

The sculpted decoration of the Parthenon included ninety-two metopes showing scenes of mythical battle. Those on the south flank of the temple included a series featuring human Lapiths in mortal combat with Centaurs. The Centaurs were part-man and part-horse, thus having a civil and a savage side to their nature.

The Lapiths, a neighboring Greek tribe, made the mistake of giving the Centaurs wine at the marriage feast of their king, Peirithoos. The Centaurs attempted to kidnap the women, with their leader Eurytion trying to carry off the bride. A general battle ensued, with the Lapiths finally victorious.



### Fragment from the frieze

This block was placed near the corner of the west frieze of the Parthenon, where it turned onto the north. The horsemen have been moving at some speed, but are now reining back so as not to appear to ride off the edge of the frieze. The horseman in front twists around to look back at his companion, and raises a hand (now missing) to his head. This gesture, repeated elsewhere in the frieze, is perhaps a signal. Although mounted riders can be

seen here, much of the west frieze features horsemen getting ready for the parade, shown on the long north and south sides of the temple.

Horsemen from the west frieze of the Parthenon, c. 438-432 B.C.E., 100cm tall, Acropolis, Athens © Trustees of the British Museum



### Pediment sculpture

The east pediment of the Parthenon showed the birth of goddess Athena from the head of her father Zeus. The sculptures that represented the actual scene are lost. Zeus was probably shown seated, while Athena was striding away from him fully grown and armed.

Only some of the figures ranged on either side of the lost central group survive. They include these three goddesses, who were seated to the right of centre. From left to right, their posture varies in order to accommodate the slope of the pediment that originally framed them. They are remarkable for their naturalistic rendering of anatomy blended with a harmonious representation of complex draperies.

Figures of three goddesses from the east pediment of the Parthenon, c. 438-432 B.C.E., 233 cm long, Acropolis, Athens © Trustees of the British Museum

The figure on the left is on the point of rising and tucks her right foot in to lever herself up. To the right another figure cradles a companion reclining luxuriously in her lap. They are perhaps, from left to right, Hestia, goddess of the hearth and home, Dione, and her daughter Aphrodite. However, another suggestion is that the two figures on the right are the personification of the Sea (Thalassa) in the lap of the Earth (Gaia).

**Questions:**

1. When was the Parthenon built?

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2. Who masterminded the Parthenon building?

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3. What was the statue of Athena made out of (that was inside the Parthenon)?

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4. Who was the sculptor of the statue?

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5. What are the three categories of architectural sculpture in the Parthenon?

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6. What story is being told in the metopes?

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7. What does the east pediment of the Parthenon show?

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8. Which goddesses are probably shown in the picture for the pediment?

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