

Acropolis of Athens



The Acropolis of Athens (Ancient Greek: ἡ Ἀκρόπολις τῶν Ἀθηνῶν, romanized: *hē Akropolis tōn Athēnōn*; Modern Greek: Ακρόπολη Αθηνών, romanized: *Akrópoli Athinón*) is an ancient citadel located on a rocky outcrop above the city of Athens, Greece, and contains the remains of several ancient buildings of great architectural and historical significance, the most famous being the Parthenon. The word Acropolis is from the Greek words ἄκρον (*akron*, "highest point, extremity") and πόλις (*polis*, "city").^[1] The term acropolis is generic and there are many other acropoleis in Greece. During ancient times the Acropolis of Athens was also more properly known as Cecropia, after the legendary serpent-man Cecrops, the supposed first Athenian king.

EARLY SETTLEMENT

History

The Acropolis is located on a flattish-topped rock that rises 150 m (490 ft) above sea level in the city of Athens, with a surface area of about 3 ha (7.4 acres). While the earliest artifacts date to the Middle Neolithic era, there have been documented habitations in Attica from the Early Neolithic period (6th millennium BC).

There is little doubt that a Mycenaean megaron palace stood upon the hill during the late Bronze Age. Nothing of this structure survives except, probably, a single limestone column base and pieces of several sandstone steps.[5] Soon after the palace was constructed, a Cyclopean massive circuit wall was built, 760 meters long, up to 10 meters high, and ranging from 3.5 to 6 meters thick. From the end of the Helladic IIIB (1300–1200 BC) on,[6] this wall would serve as the main defense for the acropolis until the 5th century.[7] The wall consisted of two parapets built with large stone blocks and cemented with an earth mortar called emplekton (Greek: ἔμπλεκτον).[8] The wall uses typical Mycenaean conventions in that it followed the natural contour of the terrain and its gate, which was towards the south, was arranged obliquely, with a parapet and tower overhanging the incomers' right-hand side, thus facilitating defense.

Archaic Acropolis

Not much is known about the architectural appearance of the Acropolis until the Archaic era. During the 7th and the 6th centuries BC, the site was controlled by Kylon during the failed Kylonian revolt,[11] and twice by Peisistratos; each of these was attempts directed at seizing political power by coups d'état. Apart from the Hekatompedon mentioned later, Peisistratos also built an entry gate or propylaea.[12] Nevertheless, it seems that a nine-gate wall, the Enneapylon,[13] had been built around the acropolis hill and incorporated the biggest water spring, the Clepsydra, at the northwestern foot.

A temple to Athena Polias, the tutelary deity of the city, was erected between 570 and 550 BC. This Doric limestone building, from which many relics survive, is referred to as the Hekatompedon (Greek for "hundred-footed"), Ur-Parthenon (German for "original Parthenon" or "primitive Parthenon"), H-Architecture or Bluebeard temple, after the pedimental three-bodied man-serpent sculpture, whose beards were painted dark blue. Whether this temple replaced an older one or just a sacred precinct or altar is not known. Probably, the Hekatompedon was built where the Parthenon now stands.[14]

THE PERICLEAN BUILDING PROGRAM

The Periclean

After winning at Eurymedon during 468 BC, Cimon and Themistocles ordered the reconstruction of the southern and northern walls of the Acropolis. Most of the major temples, including the Parthenon, were rebuilt by order of Pericles during the so-called Golden Age of Athens (460–430 BC). Phidias, an Athenian sculptor, and Ictinus and Callicrates, two famous architects, were responsible for the reconstruction.[21]

During 437 BC, Mnesicles started building the Propylaea, a monumental gate at the western end of the Acropolis with Doric columns of Pentelic marble, built partly upon the old Propylaea of Peisistratos.[22] These colonnades were almost finished during 432 BC and had two wings, the northern one decorated with paintings by Polygnotus.[23] About the same time, south of the Propylaea, building started on the small Ionic Temple of Athena Nike in Pentelic marble with tetrastyle porches, preserving the essentials of Greek temple design. After an interruption caused by the Peloponnesian War, the temple was finished during the time of Nicias' peace, a Nike in Pentelic marble with tetrastyle porches, preserving the essentials of Greek temple design. After an interruption caused by the Peloponnesian War, the temple was finished during the time of Nicias' peace,

Construction of the elegant temple of Erechtheion in Pentelic marble (421–406 BC) was by a complex plan which took account of the extremely uneven ground and the need to circumvent several shrines in the area. The entrance, facing east, is lined with six Ionic columns.

HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN PERIOD

Roman Period

During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, many of the existing buildings in the area of the Acropolis were repaired to remedy damage from age and occasionally war.[31] Monuments to foreign kings were erected, notably those of the Attalid kings of Pergamon Attalos II (in front of the NW corner of the Parthenon), and Eumenes II, in front of the Propylaea. These were rededicated during the early Roman Empire to Augustus or Claudius (uncertain) and Agrippa, respectively.[32] Eumenes was also responsible for constructing a stoa on the south slope, similar to that of Attalos in the agora below.[33]

During the Julio-Claudian period, the Temple of Roma and Augustus, a small, round edifice about 23 meters from the Parthenon, was to be the last significant ancient construction on the summit of the rock.[34]