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Primary Source Analysis Paper 1

The Parthenon and its Importance to the Athenians

The Parthenon was a beautifully constructed temple that the Athenians constructed, dedicated to the goddess, Athena. It was arguably the most ambitious Greek temple, but was unfortunately damaged due to a war between Venice and the Ottoman Empire (McKay). Despite the destructions we know that Athena was the influence of this building because it contained a 40-foot high statue of her made from ivory and gold. It is evident that the Parthenon was of high value to the Athenians due its dedication to their beloved Athena, the key location at the top of the Acropolis, and the carefully designed architecture.

Athena Parthenos was the inspiration for this magnificent temple. The name of the temple “The Parthenon” comes directly from her last name. She was known for being the most wise and most beautiful Greek deities. A sculpture of Athena was made in 447 B.C.E. But this was not like any other Greek god sculpture, it stood impressively at thirty-two feet tall, she was decorated beautifully with ivory, precious stones, and gold plates, and it weighed well over a ton (Hurwit 150). This statue was obviously important to them because of its large stature, it was seen as “the centerpiece of the Parthenon” (Neils 262).Not only was the Parthenon used as a temple for Athena, it also functioned as a treasury; housing a large amount of Athena’s assets. It is evident that a large amount of money and time was put into this monument, and they used it to honor their goddess Athena by building a magnificent temple to worship her.

The Parthenon was built atop a massive hill, dominating the skyline. This massive hill, better known as the Acropolis, was two hundred feet above Athens. The Parthenon was set in the direct center of the Acropolis. The Athenians built everything around the Parthenon, symbolizing just how important it was to them. Not only does this show the physical and spatial dominance of this building, but the thematic meaning. Visitors from afar could even see the great stature of the Parthenon looming over the other buildings atop of the Acropolis (Neils 9). The placement of this building in the dead center of a great hill shows that this monument was not just any other building, it was a key part of their daily lives.

Great detail was taken into this beautiful temple, every miniscule detail was precisely measured and created. This building was overseen by Phidias, the greatest artist of form from that time period (Wilson 23). Every aspect of the Parthenon was meticulously planned out. Architects usually aimed for a 4:9 ratio when yielding proportions, but since odd numbers were considered inappropriate to the Athenians, instead they used a 4:8 ratio when constructing the columns and their spacing (Neils 72). The columns were almost perfectly spaced at fourteen feet, varying up to a slim five centimeters (Neils 74). At a time when measurement was not as accurate as it is today, historians marvel at the accuracy of the architecture. The Parthenon was an amazing architectural feat; it took hard labor, time, money, and careful planning.

The architecture of Greece was mainly Doric, and the Parthenon showcased this style of art. There is one hundred and eight columns surrounding the Parthenon; one hundred and four of these are Doric, while the remaining four are Iconic (Wilson 68). While the Iconic columns are elaborately decorated, the Doric columns have a simplicity that illustrates a pure beauty. While from the naked eye these columns may seem elementary, there is so much meaning to them. Before stone columns were constructed trees would be used in buildings. The Doric columns symbolize the evolutions from tree trunks to stone columns. The deep lines on the shafts of the columns represented the bark of the trees, the concave surfaces represented the creases between the bark, and the decorative ring at the top of the column represented the copper collar that was put on top of the trunks to prevent the tree from splitting (Wilson 69-70). A seemingly simple piece of stone is actually a piece of history that is truly beautiful in all that it portrays.

It is simply amazing to imagine the labor and skill put into the construction of the Parthenon. At a time when resources and technology were not as easily accessible or in existence; the Athenians were still able to construct a magnificent temple. The dedication to their goddess, Athena, prime location on the Acropolis, and the beautiful architecture makes it obvious that the Parthenon was of great importance to them. It is no wonder why a city such as Nashville has made a replica model to embody the amazing history and culture behind the Parthenon.

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