

Greek and Roman Temples



Learning Outcomes

- 4.1. Discuss Greek and Roman temples using the correct terminology for common architectural features.
- 4.2. Analyse how the structure, design and sculptures of the studied temples impacted on the attendees' experience of visiting the temple.
- 4.3. Explore the roles, duties and expectations of the different kinds of attendees and officials present at ceremonies associated with each temple.
- 4.4. Comment on the political and civic importance of these temples and the rituals associated with them.

Temples to Study:

The Parthenon, the Erechtheion, The Pantheon, & The Temple of Vesta

Brief overview Greek Architecture and Temples

When asked where Ancient Greece was, it is often assumed to be the same geographical location of Modern Greece. However, this is a grossly mistaken assumption. From the time of Homer, the Ancient Greeks had founded many colonies in many places, including Spain, France, Sicily, Italy, the Balkans, Syria, Egypt, North Africa, and all around the Black Sea. The Greeks living on mainland Greece, the Aegean Islands, and in Ionian Greece (west coast of modern Turkey) did not see Greeks living in Tanais – which was in what is now modern Russia – or in Massilia (Marseille) as any less Greek than themselves. There was no united Greek nation; there was no one version of “Greeks”.

Greeks were in fact only Greek because of a common language, religion, certain customs such as hairstyles and clothes, and indeed because of their architecture and art. Even these were not universal – as Richter says: “Though Greek art, like all art, is a unity, it had many manifestations.” In truth, what made Greeks Greek was that they were not barbarians.

By the end of Greek political dominance – and the beginning of Roman influence in the ancient world – the Greeks had in fact founded kingdoms across Asia and Africa through the conquests of Alexander the Great and his successors. The Greeks spread their cultural influence far and made a particular impression on the Romans, which is why much of the same terminology can be used to describe both cultures.

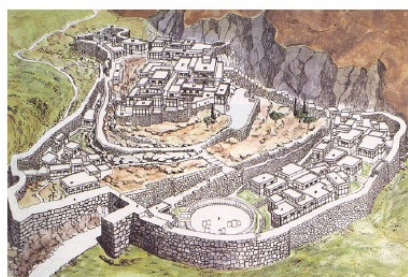
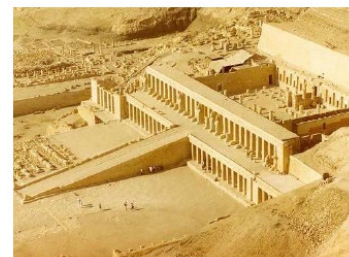
Note: The Greek word *barbarous* meant foreigner, not – at least initially – someone less civilized. In fact, the word refers to foreign languages which to the Greek ear sounded like they were saying “bar, bar, bar”.

What came before Greek Architecture?

What came before Greek architecture and art was the architecture of Ancient Egypt, Phoenicia, Babylon, and in particular the buildings of the pre-Greek civilizations that inhabited the Greek world: the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations. All these cultures would influence the *new* Greek architecture – Greek buildings when built, were *modern*.

What materials were used?

It is also important to look at the materials used, because just as Ancient Greek buildings were brand-new when built, they were also not in fact **all** made from stone; at the very least they did not begin that way.



Most Ancient Greek buildings would have originally been built with **sun-dried brick**, **wood**, **terra-cotta**, and **stone**. They began with bricks and wood, and only later – when the materials became more common and affordable – stones such as **hard limestone**, **conglomerate**, and **marble**. The reason we think of all Ancient Greek buildings as white marble is because it was these materials which survived the intervening millennia – and these were often the later buildings. Earlier wood and brick versions were either replaced with sturdy stone versions or simply did not survive. Some regions, such as Athens and the Aegean Islands, began using marble and limestone earlier because it was much more readily available – particularly from the *island of Paros*. Wood, sun-dried bricks, and terracotta could still be used in later buildings. Such as for crossbeams and the slates when constructing roofs of buildings – wood for the beams and terra-cotta for the slates.



Reconstruction of wooden temple in Assassin's Creed: Odyssey

Temple Structure

Before Temples, Ancient Greeks would only have built an altar to their gods. Eventually the Greeks decided to build temples to *house* an image to of gods. This gave the opportunity to the Greeks to be innovative and creative with their designing and decorative skills.

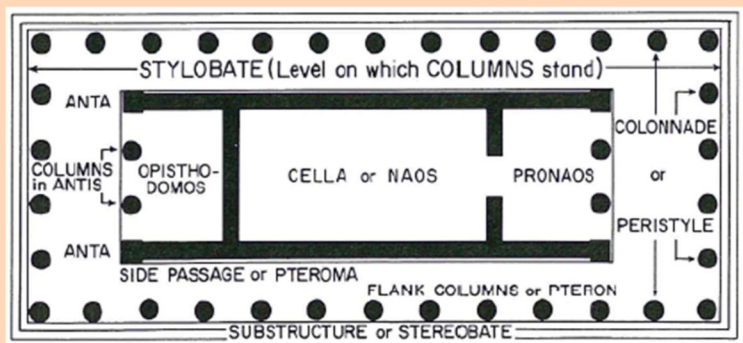
Their inspiration was the Egyptians, Assyrians, Minoans, and Mycenaeans – compare the pictures of these building etc. with pictures of Greek temples and you'll see the similarities.

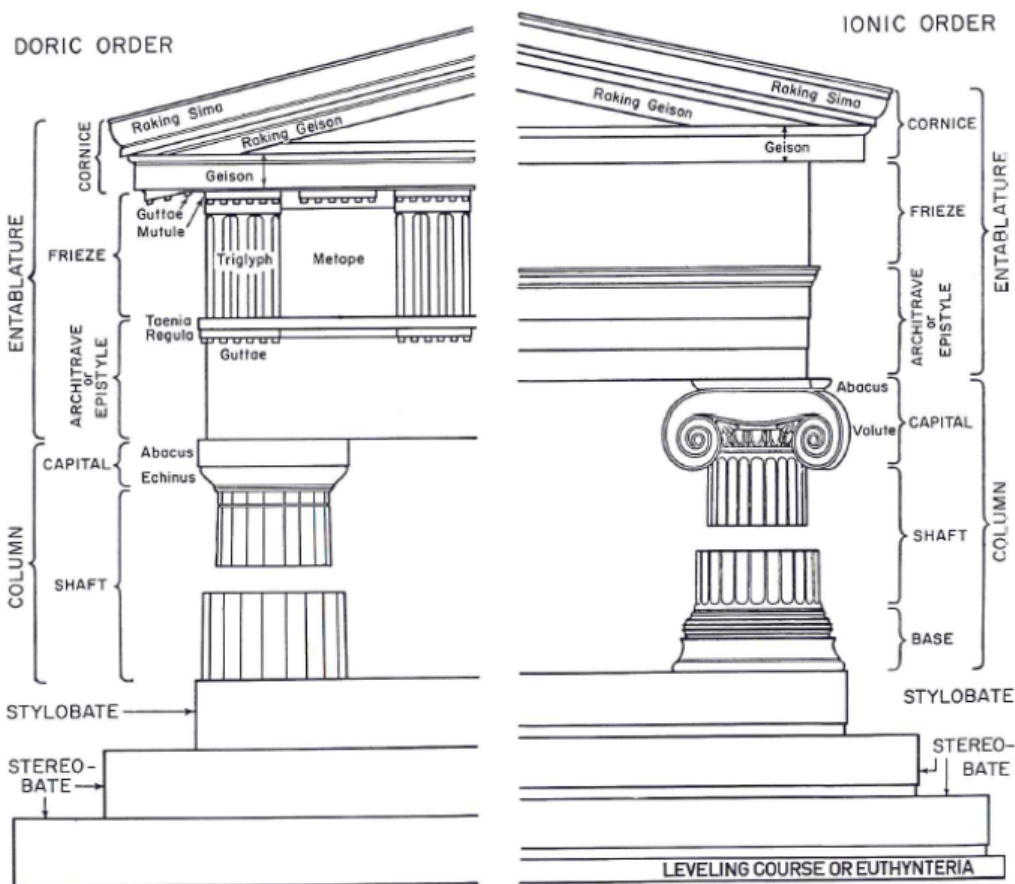
Direct inspiration for the plan, however, seems to have been the *megaron* room in the Mycenaean palaces. This standard plan was followed and elaborated upon.

In order to describe and understand the purpose of a Temples, you must become familiar with some of the key terminology so that you can describe them accurately.

All Greek Temples followed a logical order or style to their design and construction: **Doric**, **Ionic**, or **Corinthian**. There is a diagram with an overview of the key terms and order of the Doric and Ionic order on the following page.

Task: A plan of a typical temple. Study this carefully. What do you think each of the terms means?





Fluted Columns	Columns with groves around the shaft.
Abacus & Echinus	The two sections that make up the Doric column capital.
Volute	The swirling design that decorates the Ionic columns capital.
Entablature	The upper section of the temple that sits on the columns.
Architrave/Epistyle	The first section of the Entablature – blank on the Doric and divided on the Ionic.
Frieze	The second section of the Entablature – divided between <i>metopes</i> and <i>triglyphs</i> on the Doric, blank on the Ionic.
Metopes & Triglyphs	Metopes = spaces for sculptures. Triglyphs = three groves placed between the <i>metopes</i> .
Taenia, Regula, Mutule, and Guttae	Mouldings that hang above and below the frieze.
Cornice	The third section of the Entablature – the roof and gutters.
Sima & Geison	The roof and gutters of the temples – some are raking (slanted) others flat.
Pediment	The triangular section to the front and back of the temple roof.
Akroteria	Elaborate designs or sculptures that sit on the three corners of the temples roof.
Crepidoma	The lowest part of the Temple (the steps) made up of the stereobate and the stylobate.

The Parthenon

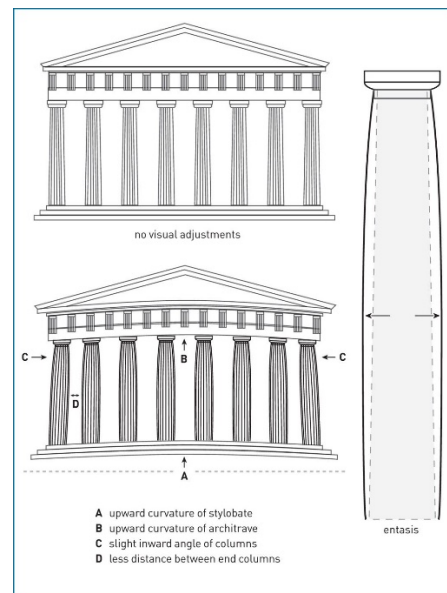


The Parthenon is the most famous Greek and Doric Order Temple surviving. Built between 447 and 438 B.C. at the height of Athenian power in the Greek World. It is situated at the very top of the city on the **Acropolis** (most Greek cities had a high point raised above the rest of the city – a hill or cliff). Some unique qualities of its design are the use of a 9:4 ratio throughout

the building (e.g. length to width/width to height); the curve throughout the building from side to side and front to back; the inward lean of the columns and the **entasis** or curve two thirds the way *up* each column. These make it a unique and unusual feat in Greek architecture. The architects of the Parthenon were Iktinos and Kallikrates and they had a challenge when building the Parthenon because they were to build it on uneven ground. Therefore, they had to attempt to add the illusion of perfection – the illusion of right angles – where it was not possible to achieve this through the usual approach. The optical illusions were an attempt by the Greeks to capture the semblance of perfection (the look of perfection) in their architecture. They knew that in order for something to look perfect/beautiful, it wasn't about perfect right angles but about angles and curves in the right places so that what we saw looked perfectly *divine*.

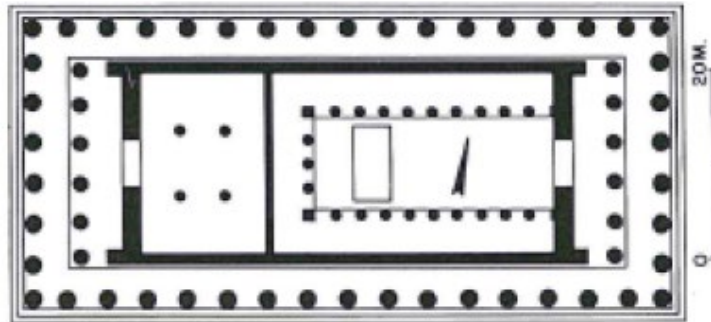
Material: **Pentelic Marble**, **Parian Marble** for the roof tiles, **limestone** for the foundations.

The crepidoma has a stereobate and a stylobate with a few steps up. 17 columns at the sides, 8 columns at the ends. 6 columns across the pronaos (forward entrance) and 6 across the opisthodomos (back entrance). An extra back room accessible from the opisthodomos was likely a treasury to hold the vast wealth of Athens during this period of empire. 23 columns surrounded the huge, gold and ivory cult statue of Athena in the centre of the cella. These columns supported a second storey allowing visitors to view the statue from all sides. The *poros* foundation of the statue is still visible in the cella where to wondrous gold and ivory statue of Athena once stood.



The exterior colonnade and entablature are Doric: Doric columns, plain architrave, metopes and triglyphs around the frieze, and a cornice and pediment – 6 akroteria, 3 at each end, on the angles of the pediments.

However, there were also some features of the ionic order: a continuous sculpted frieze around the top of the outer walls of the temple – behind the outer colonnade. Above this frieze there is a Lesbian kymation (Lesbian means the style of the island of Lesbos; and a kymation is a type of moulding found at the top of a wall). There is also four ionic columns in treasury room.



Plan of Parthenon

Pericles & Pheidias: Money, Empire, & the Parthenon Sculptures

5th century B.C. Athens was a radical democracy – the Athenians having suffered under the rule of harsh tyrants for the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. adopted a radical *direct democracy* in 507 B.C. with the help of a man called Cleisthenes. This was to the horror of the Spartans who had a mixed constitution and dual monarchy; it particularly terrified them because as a military society that oppressed the majority of their subject – who were called *helots* – to a state of slavery or serfdom, the radical Athenian constitution gave *a lot* of power to the much large parts of society.

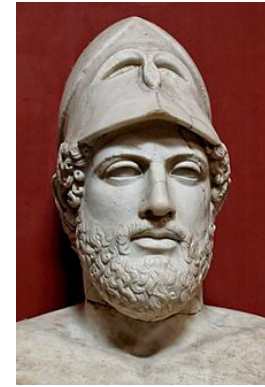


Athenian Empire

The Persians invaded twice – once in 490 B.C. and again in 481-478 B.C. – and the Athenian democracy allied with Sparta and other Greek states played a crucial role in several of the conflicts: Marathon (490 B.C.), Salamais (480 B.C.), and Mycale (479 B.C.). These wars saw the sacking of Athens and the *burning of the Acropolis*. The Athenians particularly played a vital role in the war at sea having acquired a vast fortune from their silver mines and built a navy of 200 ships. After the war ended the Spartans went home (along with many of their allies) and the Athenians gathered together the remaining allies (mostly those on the borders with Persia in Ionian Greece – Turkey – and the Aegean Islands). This alliance was called the Delian League. However, after the Persians were pushed back, the Athenians started to use this Delian League in a more imperialistic manner and soon the treasury of the League was moved from Delos to Athens and the Athenian Empire was formed (though

the Greek never called it this outright).

This is where the money came from that funded the vast amount of Athenian art and architecture in the latter half of the 5th century. This allowed a prominent and highly accomplished democratic politician by the name of **Pericles** to oversee the building of a new Acropolis and the Parthenon – the previous Acropolis having been burnt by the Persians.



Pericles

Besides the difficulties in constructing the Parthenon which led to its curved physique, as mentioned above, the Parthenon is particularly famous for its impressive collection of sculpture. All of these sculptures were overseen **Pheidias**.

The Western pediment sculptures represent the contest of Athena and Poseidon for dominion of Athens, the Eastern pediment the Birth of Athena. Reconstructions can be examined in Fig. 1.1 and 1.2. Fig. 1.3 and 1.4 show seated and reclining figures – Theseus and the ‘three fates’ – which formed a rhythmical design. Rather than reclining figures in the corners, the Eastern pediment had a bold figure of Helios the Sun, with his horses rising from the sea, and at the other corner Selene, the moon, descending with her horses. The quadrangular spaces of the metopes were occupied mostly by single combats – Lapiths struggling with Centaurs (Fig. 1.5), gods overcoming giants, Greeks fighting Amazons. Another series (little remaining) show the fall of Troy. There were 92 metopes reliefs in total. There is a realistic expression in some of the Centaurs (Fig. 1.6) exemplifying the interest in showing emotion. The frieze which was continuous and ran inside the colonnade showed the subject of the Panathenaia, an Athenian festival, showing various moments of the ceremony. The start was in the South-west corner with mounting of the riders, then along the North and South sides, came lively cavalcades of horsemen (Fig. 1.7) and charioteers, men bearing trays and leading animals for sacrifice; and on the East side was the solemn procession of maidens received by magistrates (Fig. 1.8) and the figures of deities sitting among the mortals (Fig. 1.9). The continuous frieze is lively with quiet poses intermingled.



Fig. 1.1 West Pediment



Fig. 1.2 East Pediment



Fig. 1.1 Theseus



Fig. 1.2 'Three Fates'



Fig. 1.5

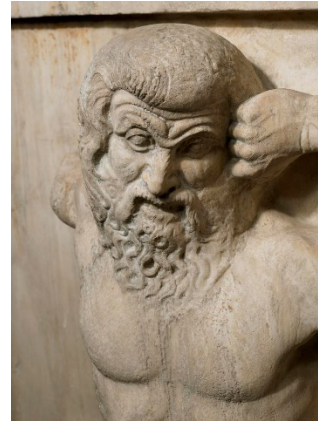


Fig. 1.6



Fig. 1.7



Fig. 1.8



Fig. 1.9

These sculptures were highly impressive for their time. The forms of the bodies have fully achieved *naturalism*, the folds of the drapery on the men, women, and gods, is wild and highly detailed – it is so thin that it is possible to make out the forms of the bodies underneath. There is also a highly effective use of *foreshadowing* which means to make

figures on a flat surface appear in front and behind each other or further away from each other. Most importantly there is a contrast in the composition of the sculptures – the **serene** juxtaposed to the **wild tumult**. These features are highly characteristic of the sculptures of the High Classical Period (450-400 B.C.)

An important note is to remember that *all* ancient sculptures were *polychrome* or painted with a variety of colours. Metopes and triglyphs for example would have been shades of blue and red, while the skins and clothing of the statues would have been painted in appropriate colours. The plain white marble look we are familiar with is due mostly to the fact the colours faded with time, the Renaissance – particularly Michelangelo who like the pristine white of marble – and modern impressions of the classical world seen most often from Hollywood.

The most wondrous Parthenon artworks were not on the frieze, the metopes, or the pediments, but the colossal statues of Athena both inside and outside the Parthenon. First was the *colossal* bronze statue of Athena erected on the Akropolis – between the Propylaia and Erechtheion. Second was the *Athena Parthenos* built from gold and ivory which stood inside the cella of the Parthenon. Neither survive unfortunately, but reconstructions have attempted which can give us an impression of the achievement.



What does remain of these statues are crude imitations in coins and miniature sculptures – nothing that can give us an impression of their magnitude – and finally a copy of one of the reliefs from the shield of the *Athena Parthenos* statues which can be seen in Fig. 10.

We can also get an impression of what these sculptures may have looked like from the written sources. Pheidias also built one of the Wonders of the World, the gold and ivory statue of Zeus in Olympia. Quintilian says of its beauty:

...[it] could be said to have added something to traditional religion, so adequate to the divine nature was the majesty of his work.

Evidently, Pheidias was a chief exponent of the idealising Classical Style that became dominant in Greek sculpture thereafter.

What is perhaps unique about the Parthenon as a temple is that it did not seem to be the centre of any major cult, priest or priestess. The achievements were entirely artistic and political – particular when we look at the treasury that was located at the back of the temple and the gold and ivory statue of *Athena Parthenos* which seems not to have instilled much religious fervour in the Athenians. In fact, the gold was said to be detachable if need by the state, indicating that it was less religious as political. The cult image of Athena made of olive wood, which would receive the dedications of the *peplos* that was traditional offering to Athena, was located in another temple on the north of the Acropolis or possibly in the Erechtheion.

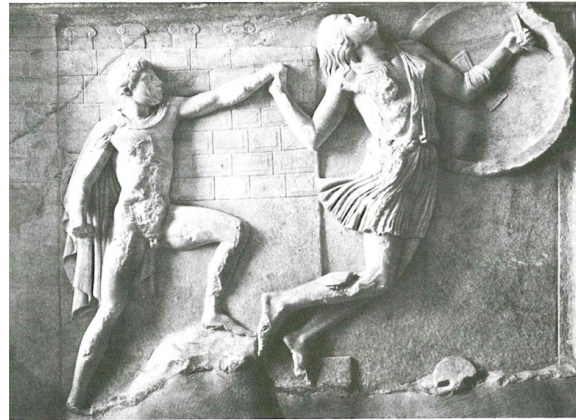


Fig. 1.10 Roman Copy of relief from Athena Parthenos statue

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The Erechtheion

The Parthenon is not the only unusual and wondrous temple on the Acropolis of Athens. Pericles' projects encompassed a range of wonderful art and architectural feats. However, Pericles did not survive to see many of these fully realised. Even though Plutarch tells us that the building projects of the Acropolis were particularly fast due to a drive in the builders, artist, and the Athenian public who were hungry for these works to be completed.

As the buildings rose stately in size and unsurpassed in form and grace, the workmen vied with one another that the quality of their work might be enhanced by its artistic beauty. Most wonderful of all was the rapidity of construction. Each one of them, men thought, would require many successive generations to complete it, but all of them were fully completed in the heyday of a single administration.

Pericles died in 429 B.C. after losing both of his sons to an epidemic of plague that hit the city in 430 B.C. – this plague was responsible between 75,000 and 100,000 deaths in Athens. Pericles overcome with grief that even his lover Aspasia – a influential woman and *metic* (foreigner), philosopher and companion of Pericles – could not comfort him. Later that year Pericles himself died from the Plague.

However, the building projects continued. One of the most unusual of these was **the Erechtheion**. Designed by the architect Mnesicles, whose name is inscribed on it. The masonry and sculptures would have come from the workshop of Pheidias. It was constructed over a period from 421-406 B.C. Material: **Pentelic Marble, Black Eleusinian Limestone.**

Note: The symbols most closely associated with Athena – the owl and the olive – are often depicted on Athenian coinage.

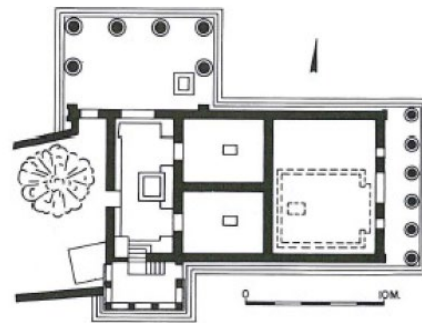


The mythology connected to this temple is probably the reason for its highly unusual design. The legend goes that Athena and Poseidon were both vying for the patronship of Athens. Both were connected with the city, and both wished their names to be given to the city. So, the gods both offered the citizens of the new city gifts or bribes. Poseidon picked up his trident and struck it into the ground and up sprung a fountain of water that would never cease – however, Poseidon being the god of the sea – the fountain was of salt water and useless to the city. Athena then offered the city the olive-tree. This tree was the staple of the Athenian economy as the harsh mountainous soil of Attic was little good for growing any other crop. The Athenians accepted the offering and named their city for the goddess.

The Erechtheion is an **Ionic Order** temple, but the plan is highly irregular.

There are 3 separate chambers on 3 separate levels due to the fact that the temple is built on a slope. There is a portico of 6 Ionic columns on the east side, a large door/portico with another 6 columns on the north side, and a porch with 6 caryatids instead of columns on the south (draped, sculpted females used as pillars).

The western façade had unusual partly engaged columns mounted on a high wall for the lower level. The eastern chamber is thought to have been the cella for *Athena Polias* or the *palladion* – this is small statue of Athena made from olive wood, a *xoanon*. This object was highly sacred to the Athenians who would revere this object as a presence of the goddess on earth. Most cities had similar statues kept secure in a sanctuary at the heart of the city; to lose this or for it to be destroyed would be a terrible omen. The central chamber was subdivided into two rooms. Some traces indicate the cistern that is associated with the salt sea of Poseidon and the three marks produced by Poseidon's trident. Doors led from the north, from the caryatid porch, and from the western anteroom into the central sanctuary. There were windows east and west.



The continuous frieze (like Ionic order) ran along the outside of the building, made from marble figures attached to slabs of black Eleusinian limestone. The architectural decorations are very elaborate. The north portico had guilloche patterns on the bases of the columns, the anthemion on the necking below the capitals, and the ornaments on the doorway. Gilding (metal shaped onto the surface), gilt bronze, and glass beads in four corners.

Picture Gallery: Erechtheion



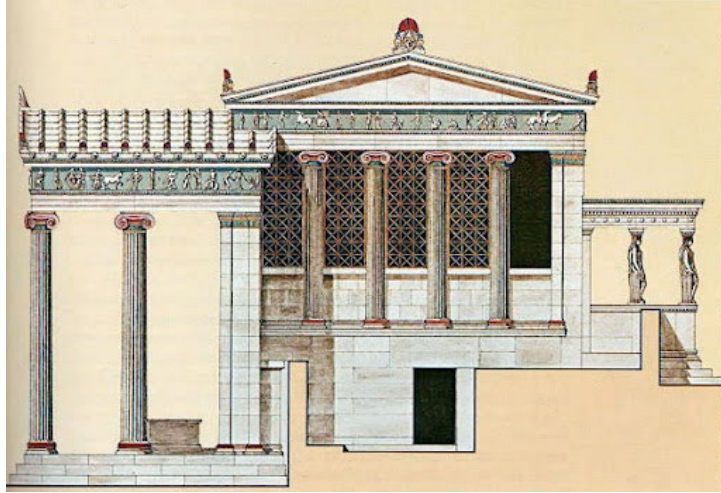
South portico with caryatids



North Portico with Black Eleusinian Limestone frieze



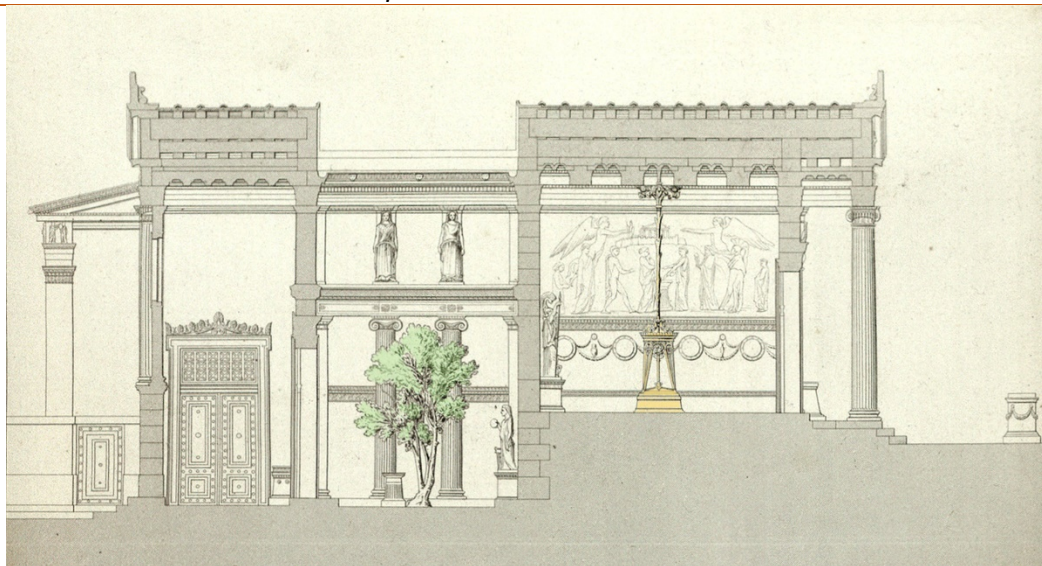
West Façade with partly engaged columns



Reconstruction showing all levels



East portico and main entrance



Erechtheion Inner Chambers

Note on Sculpture: Caryatids

Greek sculpture did not start finished. The Greeks had been sculpting large sculptures, miniature sculptures and relief sculpture for many centuries before the Parthenon and Erechtheion sculptures were crafted in the High Classical Period (450-400 B.C.). Sculptures in



Fig. 1.11 Caryatid

Greece were first influenced by the sculptures of Ancient Egypt. These sculptures, from what is called the Archaic Period, like the Egyptian, were standardised and somewhat simplistic – the statues stand still in a standard posture, the women are crudely portrayed with little folds in the drapery, and the body is unnatural and simplified.

By the time the Greeks were sculpting for the Parthenon and Erechtheion decorations they had developed a completely independent style from the Egyptian origins. They had achieved *naturalism* in the anatomy of the sculptures, the faces had been given more *serene* and idealised emotions, the stances and postures of the sculptures varied considerably, and the drapery of the female statues (called *Kore*) were highly detailed with dramatic folds almost chaotic. There was no schematic approach; each sculpture was unique.

The sculptures on the Erechtheion are called caryatids. These are female sculptures which act like columns; you can see the crown on the head of the female figure in Fig. 1.11 which acts like the echinus of a column capital and is attached to an abacus on top.

The drapery is highly detailed and sits lightly on the female figure revealing her body beneath – something which earlier statues would not do.



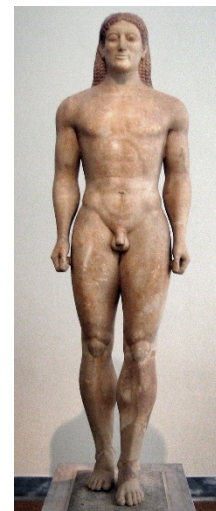
Egyptian Statue



Early Archaic Male



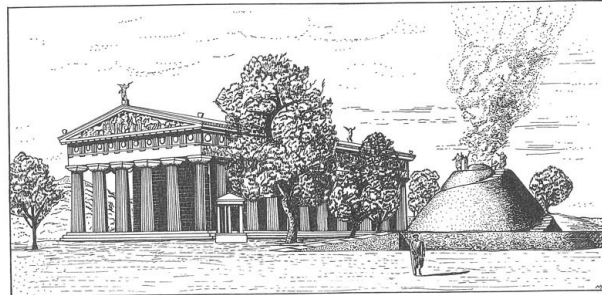
Mid-Archaic Kore



Late Archaic Male

Note on Greek Religious

Greek religion did not have a central priest class or unified doctrine like modern religions. And so, religious practices were entirely regional. Certain role of priests and priestess could be decided by a local election of a magistrate or certain festivals could be held by particular families. There were also no authoritative spiritual texts but rather the sanctity of the religion lay in the traditions of the society. Stories of the gods and heroes could change over time or from place to place – some with their own unique gods or versions of a god. As these changed so too could the religious practices of the society.



Altar of Zeus

Greek rituals and ceremonies were mainly performed at altars which were usually located near a temple which housed the image of a god. Votive offerings could be left at these altars, such as food, drink, and precious objects. There were also sacred groves dedicated to particular gods and goddesses where Greeks would also make similar votive offerings – there are some relief sculptures that placed in these sacred locations. The simplest offering would be a libation of some wine made everyday life or at the altars and sacred locations. This meant pouring out some wine from one's cup in honour of a god.

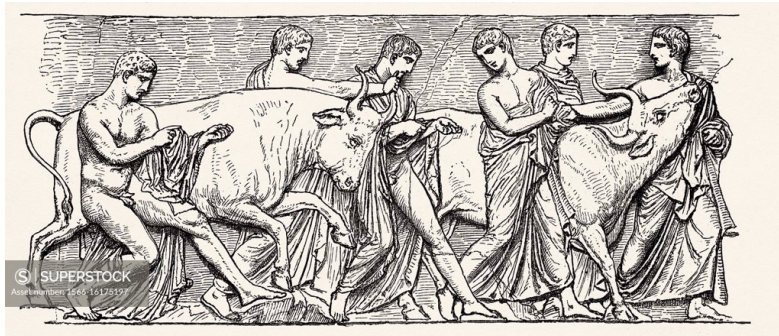
Sacrifices were also made at these altars. The animal – usually a bull, oxen, cow, sheep, pigs, poultry or goats – would be dressed in garlands and led to the altar; a girl with a basket on her head concealing the sacrificial knife would led the parade. After some rituals were performed, the animal would be slaughtered. Its blood would be collected and poured over the altar. It would be cut up on the spot and various organs, bones, and fat would be burnt as the gods portion of the offering. The meat would be prepared for the participants to eat. The altar of Zeus at Olympia was said to be several feet high from the amount of blood and burnt animal parts sacrificed there.



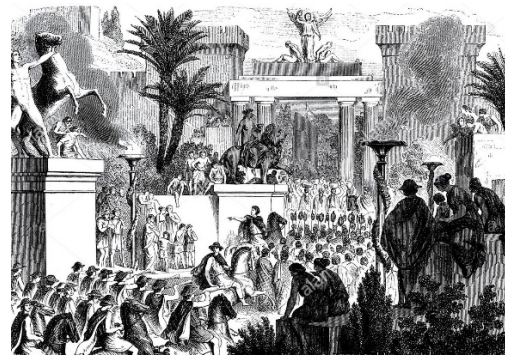
The Parthenon and the Erechtheion were on the Acropolis which was the centre of Athens civic and religious life. Many sacrifices and offerings to the gods would be made there. Among these the offerings to the palladian or statue of Athena Polias in the Erechtheion of a *peplos* (dress).

Other events such as festivals would also have likely happened on the Acropolis – included would be processions and parades with music and dancing and sacrifices of animals (probably in quite large quantities). An example of one of these festivals is the *Panathenaia* festival which is depicted on the frieze of the Parthenon and happened every 4 years. This festival was in honour of Athena Polias, so we can assume that the statue of Athena in the Erechtheion may have featured. The festival would have included a parade to the Acropolis

and a range of activities in honour of Athena – there were music and poetry contests and athletic games including boxing, running, wrestling, pancratium (mixed martial arts), a boat race, music competitions, pentathlon (which included: javelin, discus, jump, race, and wrestling), and chariot racing. These festivities were essential to Athenian religious and civic life, providing the Athenians with respite and opportunities to achieve high honours and *kleos* – doing honour to themselves and the gods – particularly, Athena.



Oxen led to sacrifice - Panathenaia



Panathenaia procession to Acropolis



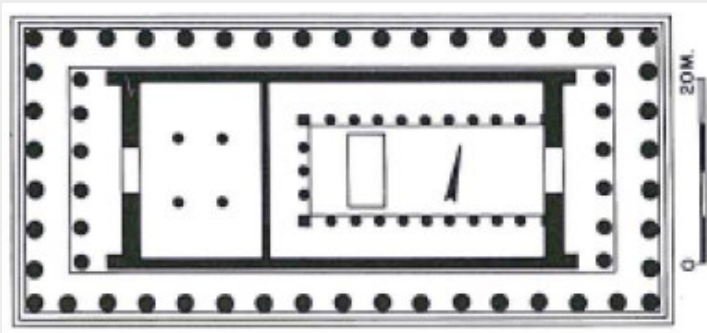
Parthenon Friezes



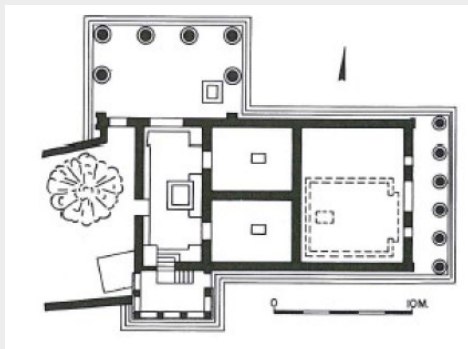
Torch Race – part of Panathenaia

Questions

- I. Examine the image below. Using the correct architectural terms describe the design and decoration of the Parthenon.



- II. Describe the political and religious role the Parthenon played in Athenian Society.
- III. Compare the design and decoration of the Parthenon with that of the Erechtheion.
- IV. Examine the image below. Using the correct architectural terms describe the design and decoration of the Parthenon.



- V. Explain the civic and religious role the Erechtheion and its attendants would have played in Athenian society.

Brief overview of Roman Architecture

Much of Roman art and architecture is a direct evolution on Greek architecture, however, there are some important and significant difference – particular with regards engineering and decoration.

The Greek temples used the “post and lintel” architecture to keep their buildings erect. However, the limitations to this style are obvious: if you make the span too large across the posts the lintel will collapse. Using alternate materials for lintels such as wood, causes its own problems in sourcing tall trees. The use of steel would allow people to reintroduce this engineering practice centuries after Rome’s fall. However, in the meantime the Romans would make great use of the Arch to ensure that they could create large and more open spaced interiors.

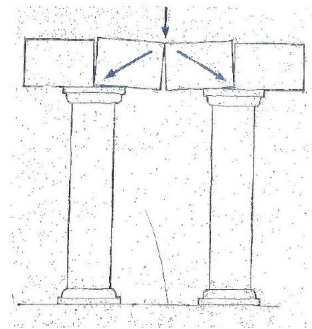
The Arch is quite simple: wedge-shaped stones (voussoirs) are arranged so as to direct the heavy load pressure to the sides. The sides can then be reinforced with additional masonry called buttresses. When crossing multiple archways across each other or side to side, the Romans could create barrel vaults and groin vaults. And when the groin vault is extended in theory further the Romans could create domes.

We saw the extent to which the Romans put these engineering achievements when we looked at the *Theatre of Aspendos*, the *Circus Maximus*, and the *Colosseum*. All use a variety of vaulting systems using barrel vaults and groin vaults and archways to support massive buildings which provided for large windows allowing light into the buildings and opening up the *internal* space in a way that no Greek Temple or building could have done.

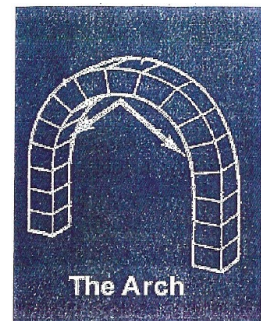
Other examples of this style of architectural engineering are evident from some of the most practical buildings in the Roman Empire: aqueducts which use archways to bring huge quantities of water to the cities; and basilicas which were very huge buildings with wide inner spaces used for public meetings, markets, and courts.



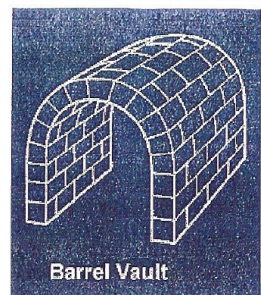
Aqueduct and Basilica



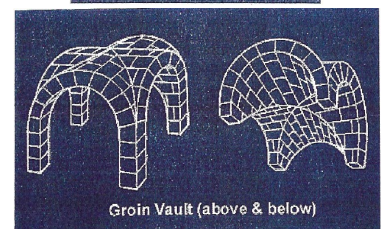
Lintel and Post



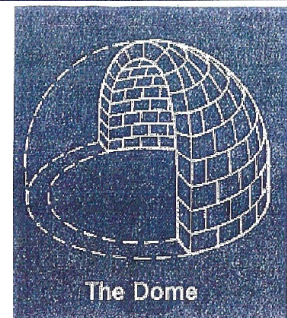
The Arch



Barrel Vault



Groin Vault (above & below)



The Dome

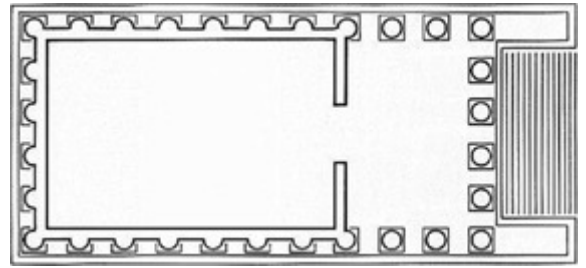
Roman Temples

The traditional design for the Roman temple differs greatly from the Greek temples – possibly due to influence from the Etruscan civilization to the north.

Instead of colonnades circling the entire building there is a portico with a peristyle of columns surrounding and partly engaged columns along the walls of the temple – sometimes no columns are attached to the wall.

The temple is also raised on a platform with temples leading up to the portico from the front. The entrance to the cella or inner chamber would often have doors.

The general decoration of the temple however could be very similar to the Greek Orders: Doric (sometimes called Tuscan on Roman buildings), Ionic, or Corinthian. More often the Corinthian columns would be used to a greater extent reflecting the later Hellenistic temples which made greater use of this more embellished style. However, for the most part the Romans inverted what the Greeks did – they focused their attention on elaborate interior decorations rather than the exterior and the Order.



Pantheon

Without a doubt, the zenith of Roman temple buildings was the Pantheon, in Rome. Pantheon is from the Greek πανθεον which means ‘all the gods’. It was built around 126 A.D. under the patronage of emperor Hadrian. These days the exterior of the temple is thoroughly uninspiring. Almost built on top of, in the intervening centuries, and with rising ground level, the Pantheon looks squashed.

However, even in contemporary Rome, with its white marble like **stucco veneer** and copper roof, the exterior would not have inspired.

It looks like two temples stuck together. An orthodox rectangular portico morphed on to a circular domed central structure. This was exactly what it was! The portico came from a much earlier temple dedicated by Marcus Agrippa – confidant, general, brother-in-law, and right-hand man of the first emperor Augustus. The inscription on the Pantheon still shows the dedication from Agrippa:

M.AGRIPPA.I.E.COS.TERTIVM.FECIT

“Marcus Agrippa, the son of Lucius, three times consul, built this.”



It is as an interior that the Pantheon amazes its visitors to this day. It is 43 metres in height and 43 metres in diameter with a semi-circular dome. If you continued the dome and made it into a sphere it would just touch the floor. The interior contains eight recesses. One is the entrance. The other seven would have housed the seven planetary gods. Between each recess – except the entrance – there are four columns. Two are rounded. Two are squared. All are fluted and Corinthian. However, it is the huge domed ceiling that is the real masterpiece. It is **coffered** – gradual recessions which take away from the apparent weight of the huge dome. Originally there would have been a bronze star at the centre of each of the coffers, representing the cosmos. In the centre of the dome is an 8m wide opening as an **oculus**. This is the main source of light in the building and represents the centre of the universe: the Sun. The great dome exerts an enormous amount of pressure on the walls carrying it; so much in fact that they are 6m thick.

The portico never looks comfortable moulded on to its cylindrical partner. In 202 A.D., it was added eighty years after the rotunda, by Emperor Severus, using pieces from Agrippa's earlier temple. The columns, of which there are eight across the front with two groups of four behind; they are 14 metres high and almost 1.5m thick. At a much earlier time the wall at the back of the portico held statues of Caesar, Augustus, and Agrippa. The pediment above the door contained a bronze relief of the battle of the Titans, which is now in New York. You need a lot of imagination to see the external bronze tiled roof glimmering in the Roman sunshine; its dull undercoat now chokes in the Roman smog.

Some suggest that it was dedicated to the seven planetary gods, known at the time – Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Sun (Apollo), the Moon (Diana). Some modern scholars have suggested that it was in fact not exactly a temple at all – at least in the sense of being 'a house of a god' – but was in fact a dynastic sanctuary; part ruler cult of Augustus and dedicated to Julius Caesar. The Pantheon is aligned on axis, across a long stretch of open fields called the Campus Martius (to the north of the walls of Rome) with Augustus' mausoleum (tomb) which was completed only a few years before the original Pantheon was built by Agrippa. The statues of multiple gods, statues of Augustus, Caesar, and Agrippa, and this alignment would suggest that it was about an alliance of the gods with the rulers of Rome. At any rate, it seems clear the name *Pantheon* was more of a nickname (this is made clear by Cassius Dio).

By the time of Hadrian and Trajan the temple was primarily associated with the divine power of the emperors and the gods. The symbolism of the great dome adds weight to this notion. The coffers are divided in 28 sections, equalling the number of large columns below. 28 is a "perfect number," a whole number whose summed factors equal it (thus $1+2+4+5+7+14 = 28$). Only four perfect numbers were known in antiquity (6, 28, 496, and 8128) and they were sometimes held – for instance by Pythagoras – to have mystical, religious meaning in connection with the cosmos. Additionally, the **oculus** was the interior's only source of direct light. The sunbeam traced an ever-changing daily path across the wall and floor of the rotunda. Perhaps when the sunbeam marked solar and lunar events, or simply time. The idea fits with Cassius Dio's notion that the dome is a canopy of the heavens and that the rotunda itself is a microcosm of the Roman world beneath the starry heavens with the emperor presiding over it all with the support of all the gods.

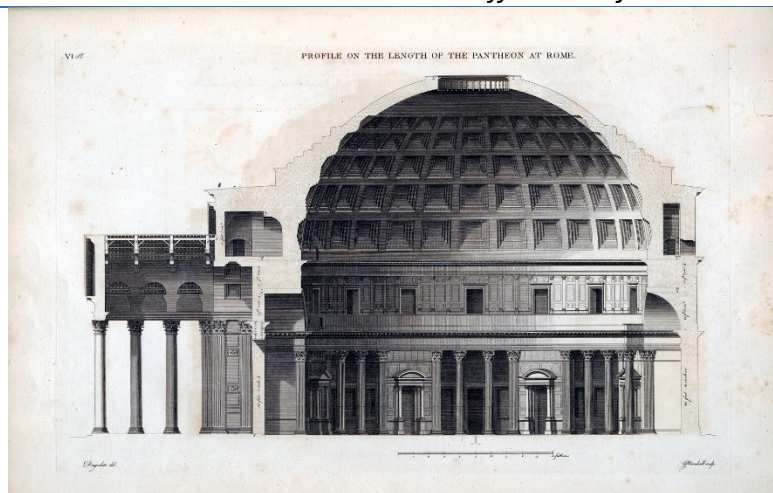
Gallery of Pantheon



Pantheon Portico



Pantheon interior with coffered roof



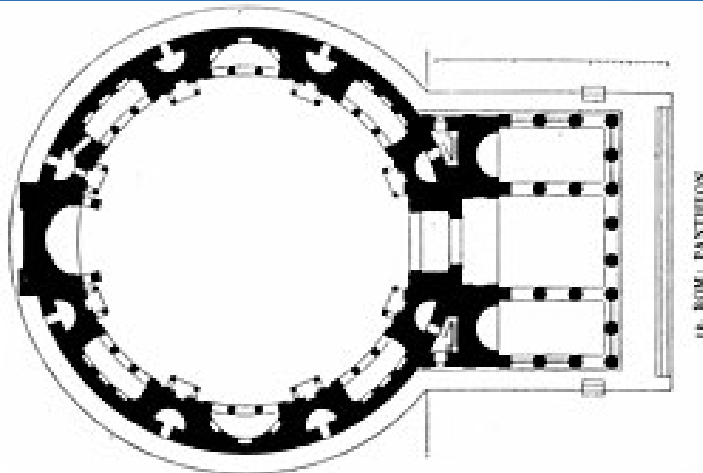
Plan of Pantheon



Pantheon reconstruction

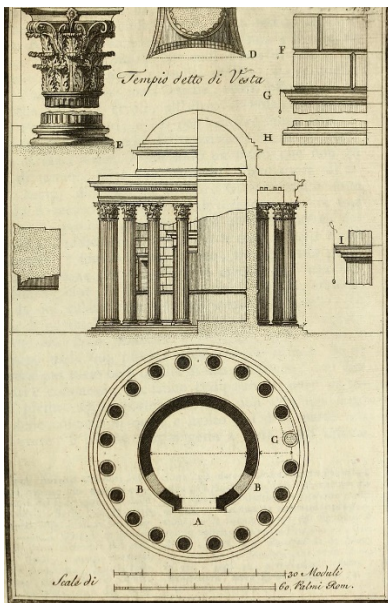


Pantheon today



Floor Plan

Temple of Vesta



Vesta (or Hestia in the Greek) is not a goddess which features all that much in our knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology. And so, it is often our mistaken assumption that she was not important to the Greeks and Romans. However, this is certainly a wrong assumption on our part. Vesta was the goddess of the domestic fire or hearth – that is the central fire in every home, in every family. This was attended to by the *materfamilias* along with the family gods. The family was much more significant in the Roman world than in our own. Roman families led by the *paterfamilias* had the rights to deal judgement and punishments (even death) on family members that broke custom. They would dictate the actions and careers of family matters. And so, the family hearth was the centre of much of the Roman/Greek world.

In Ancient Rome, Vesta had more than just a place in the family home. She had one of the most important temples in Ancient Rome – in the physical heart of the city, the Forum, and a metaphorical heart of the civic life in Rome. The temple design is fairly simple and yet unique. Like the Pantheon it is a circular temple. There are engaged columns on the inner walls and the outer colonnade has 20 fluted Corinthian columns supporting the round entablature. The roof was likely a dome but none of it survives so we cannot know for certain how it would have looked. All that survives is the architrave that sits on three

of the remaining columns. The 20 columns are placed on pedestals that jut out from the podium on which the temple is built with wide steps leading up to the entrance. The columns are 52cm in diameter with a base 1.6m in circumference. The radius of the temple is about 6.19m. the interior wall is 60cm thick and the diameter of the temple is 8.6m. This inner sanctuary would have been where the sacred fire of Vesta was kept burning by the Vestal Virgins.

This temple was traditionally said to have been built by Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome. He apparently also built the house of the Vestal Virgins and probably established the order or at least the order as it stood. It is also said that the *palladium* (small wooden statue of Minerva) which Aeneas brought from Troy as it burned was kept in this temple and cared for by the Vestal Virgins.

The temple was burned down on several occasions. In 390 B.C. when the Gaul sacked the city, the temple was burned. 241 B.C. possibly from the sacred fire, but Lucius Caecilius Metellus,

the Pontifex Maximus (high priest of Rome) went into the building to save the sacred objects, he was blinded which the Romans believed was because he had broken the tradition that men should not enter the temple (see Ovid *Fasti* 6). It was destroyed by fire in 201 B.C. and again in the 1st century B.C., and the great fire of Rome in 64 B.C. being rebuilt by Augustus and Nero in turn. It was burned down in 191 A.D. to be rebuilt for the final time by Septimius Severus.

The care of the temple was the responsibility of the Vestal Virgins – 6 priestesses who were tasked with the care of the sacred fire of Vesta that was to burn eternally in the temple. They were also responsible for producing and storing the special blend of salt and grain – the *mola salsa* – that was used in every sacrifice inside and outside Rome. This was made from slightly unripe spelt, harvested between the 7th and 14th of May each year, and boiled salt and hard salt. It was made only twice a year on the Vestalia in June and September. This was essential to sacrifices, being sprinkled on the sacrificial animal's forehead between the horns, on the altar, and into the sacred fire. Servius (4th century commentator) calls it *pius* and *castus* (sacredly prepared and pure).

The 6 priestesses were also bound by an oath of chastity – they were forbidden to marry or have sexual relations with any man. This oath was to last for 30 years when they would be given the choice to marry – most chose not to. A Vestal Virgins 'career' would usually last from 6 to 36.

The selection process is described by Aulus Gellius in *Attic Nights* 1.12.L. The priestess would usually be selected by the Pontifex Maximus at a ceremony called the *captio* 'the taking'. She must be between the ages of 6 and 10 with a mother and father still living, have no mental or physical defects, and be born to a free-born Roman. Originally, they would only be selected from the patrician class, but later it was opened to the plebeians and even the *libertus*. The new priestesses would be selected by lot from a group of 20 candidates with their families present and other Roman citizens. When selected by the Pontifex Maximus he would say these words:

I take you, Amata, to be a Vestal priestess, who will carry out sacred rites which it is the law for a Vestal priestess to perform on behalf of the Roman people, on the same terms as her who was a Vestal on the best terms.

- Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, 1.12.L.9

From this point on she would be bound for life as a priestess in the temple and a life of chastity. However, aside from this life of sacred duty, the Vestal Virgins enjoyed unusual honours for



Note: The latin *immolare* which literally means "to put the *mola* on" came to mean 'to sacrifice' – the word immolation comes from this.

Note: The *Pontifex Maximus* was the head priest in Rome and the priest of Jupiter. He was elected to this position. The most famous priest was Julius Caesar. It is also the official title used for the Pope.

women in Ancient Roman society. They had special reserved seating at the theatres and were sacrosanct – meaning they could not be killed or violated. They could also give asylum to any supplicants. They were also considered incorruptible and so were entrusted with keeping wills and state documents such as treaties; and they would not be required to take an oath when giving evidence. Furthermore, they could free a condemned person or slave by merely touching them.



The clothing of the Vestal Virgins was a *vittae*, a band worn in the hair that was also worn by matrons, and a *stola* or *palla* (the long dress), and *suffibulum*. These all resembled the clothes worn by matrons, indicating that they were chaste, while the Vestal Virgin's hair was kept in a way that resembled a bride.

However, these perks to the job did come with a heavy price. In 91 A.D., the chief of the Vestal Virgin named Cornelia Vestalis Maxima was led, tied and gagged, in her own funeral procession through the Colline Gate to a small opening in a ridge just outside the city. She would be forced down a couple of short steps where there was a small cot and a few jars on the floor of oil, milk and water, and some lumps of bread on the ground. Then the passageway would have been closed and she would have been left to decide how she would die – slowly stretching her supplies for as long as possible or to smash all and end it quickly. This brutal death was reserved for any Vestal Virgin who broke her oath of chastity and had sexual relations with a man. Cornelia's supposed lover, Valerius Licinianus, was merely exiled (this would often be punishment by beating) and went to Sicily where he became a teacher so Pliny tells us (*Epistulae* 4, 11). Pliny also believed Cornelia to be innocent:

There, with a wickedness just as monstrous as the crime which he pretended to be punishing, he declared her guilty of incestum (treachery), without summoning her before him and giving her a hearing... Cornelia invoked in turns the aid of Vesta and of the rest of the deities, and amid her many cries this was repeated most frequently: "How can Caesar think me guilty of incestum, when he has conquered and triumphed after my hands have performed the sacred rites?"... she continued to utter them until she was led to the place of execution, and whether she was innocent or not, she certainly appeared to be so. Nay, even when she was being let down into the dreadful pit and her dress caught as she was being lowered, she turned and readjusted it, and when the executioner offered her his hand, she declined it and drew back, as though she put away from her with horror the idea of having her chaste and pure body defiled by his loathsome touch. Thus, she preserved her sanctity to the last and displayed all the tokens of a chaste woman, like Hecuba, "taking care that she might fall in seemly wise."

This was a highly unusual punishment for the imperial period, but the emperor Domitian was a cruel character and very conservative. On other occasions, the Vestal Virgins would have been merely beheaded for breaking their vows – in 82 B.C. Domitian allowed two Vestal

Virgins choose their own means of execution. Breaking the oath of chastity was not the only reason Vestal Virgins might be killed. In 114 B.C. a Vestal Virgin named Helvia was killed by lightning. This was interpreted as a sign that some of the Vestal Virgins had broken their oaths of chastity and three were executed. Another severe punishment was a beating with rod in the dark to preserve the modesty of the priestess. This was for when the sacred fire went out which was seen as a severe omen foreboding ill-times and that the gods had abandoned the city and the priestesses their duty. Thus, the blame would be laid on the presiding Vestal Virgins.

Questions

- I. Describe the architectural features and decoration of the Pantheon using the correct terminology.



- II. What role did the Pantheon play in the political, civic, and religious life of Ancient Rome?
- III. What impression would the decoration and design of the Pantheon have upon those visiting the temple?
- IV. Briefly describe the architectural and decorative features of the Temple of Vesta.



- V. What religious and civic role did the Temple of Vesta, and the Vestal Virgins play in Roman Society?
- VI. Describe the life of a Vestal Virgin.