

Parthenon

Probably the most famous monument of Greek antiquity, the ruins of the Parthenon have been enthroned on the Acropolis near Athens for 2,500 years. The Parthenon is a temple that the Greeks built after their victory over Persia in the 5th century BC and dedicated to the goddess Athena in gratitude. Parthenon means "virgin's chamber". The term probably derives from a small room in the temple where four selected young girls served the goddess Athena.

The temple was built of marble in 15 years. It was about 70 metres long and about 31 metres wide. A building surrounded by columns was built on the three-tiered foundation. The columns formed the ring hall and the vestibule. There were two rooms in the building: the virgin's chamber and the cella, the sanctuary of the temple. Above the columns of the building, a frieze showed the assembly of the gods and a procession for the festival of Athena, the so-called Panathenae. Outside the temple was a frieze with scenes from the Persian Wars and processions. Both friezes were coloured. The colours blue and red were probably used. The pediments of the temple showed scenes such as Athena's birth or her fight with Poseidon for Attica.

In the middle of the cella stood the cult image of the goddess Athena. The statue, about 11.5 metres high, was made of gold and ivory. In the left hand the statue held a shield, in the right a figure of Nike, the goddess of victory. The statue of Athena was dressed by the girls in a richly decorated robe and a golden breast coat (Greek: aegis). According to legend, the aegis served the gods to produce thunderstorms, but also stood for protection. This is where the phrase "to be under someone's aegis (protection)" is still derived from today.

In the 5th century AD, the temple was converted into a church. In the process, the inner columns and some of the walls of the cella were removed. The statue of Athena and other sculptures disappeared. Their whereabouts were unknown for a long time. Under Ottoman rule from 1456, the Parthenon served as a mosque and in the 17th century as a powder magazine. During a war against Venice, the ammunition stored there exploded and severely damaged the building. At the beginning of the 19th century, parts of the statue and some other sculptures were rediscovered. Since then they have been exhibited in the national museums in London, Paris and Copenhagen.

There are numerous replicas of the Parthenon around the world. In Nashville, Tennessee (USA), there has been a replica made of plaster, wood and bricks since 1897, which was renovated in 1920 with concrete and coloured. In 1990, a copy of the Athena statue was added. The Valhalla in Bavaria is also modelled on the Parthenon. The building was constructed in 1842 and the façade was designed in the style of classicism. In 2016/2017, a Parthenon made of censored books from all over the world was created as part of the documenta 14 art exhibition in Kassel.