

On Divine Wings and Mortal Backs:
Representations of Victory, Empire and Subjugation on the Acropolis

Jaris Darwin

The main theme of the Acropolis is victory, and its monumental structures project an image of Athenian superiority. Athens used sculpture to mark its own supremacy:¹ Athens commemorated Greek victories during the first and second Persian Wars, especially the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.E., and the Battles of Salamis and Plataea in 480/479 B.C.E., respectively, in the artistic adornments of buildings on the Acropolis. However, it did so in a specific, Atheno-centric way, framing itself as the most important Greek city-state who fought in the Persian Wars by associating these conflicts with four mythic episodes in the art of the Acropolis.² The Persians were assimilated to a different barbarian archetype in each narrative.³ The buildings on the Acropolis not only promoted the perceived importance of Athens among other Greek city-states but also bolstered the city's imperial identity and promoted its oppression of other city-states.⁴ Surveying evidence from both the Persian Wars and, especially, the actions of imperial Athens in the decades after these conflicts, it becomes evident that the Acropolis stood as a symbol of Athenian imperialism. Through the examination of iconographic examples which occur across the Acropolis, it is clear that its art and architecture promoted Athenian superiority, reinforced Athenian power, endorsed Athenian imperialism, and legitimated Athens' oppression of its allies.

¹ T. Leslie Shear, *Trophies of Victory: Public Building in Periklean Athens* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 118, doi:10.2307/j.ctt17xr50c.

² The terms *mythic episode* and *mythic narrative* will be used interchangeably throughout this paper, denoting stories from what the modern scholar would refer to as Greek myth. It is important, however, to remember that for the people of Ancient Greece, the lines between myth, history and religion were blurred, and what we call mythology would be viewed as events occurring in the far past. With this in mind, this paper uses the general term *myth* to denote stories which are not considered history by modern standards, and the term *history* to denote accepted historical events.

³ The term *assimilate* is used frequently throughout this paper and refers to the psychological and cultural association or equation of two different groups with one another. The way the author uses this term is common in historical work examining the ancient world.

⁴ Christopher Ratté, "Athens: Recreating the Parthenon," *The Classical World* 97, no. 1 (2003): 52, doi:10.2307/4352824.

Mythological Assimilation and Athenian Victory

The buildings of the Acropolis interweave mythic narratives through their art and architecture.⁵ The theme of victory pervades the Parthenon and the entirety of the Acropolis; victory is “repeated and varied and elaborated on throughout [its] iconography.”⁶ The monumental buildings of the Acropolis place the people of Athens at the level of monarchs and tyrants, attesting to the power of the Athenian *demos* (people).⁷ A recurring series of four mythic battles is found throughout its art: an Amazonomachy, a Centauromachy, the Trojan War, and the Gigantomachy.⁸ The specific way each of these stories is told in the iconography of the Acropolis highlights the idea of ‘victory’, in which Athens is the most important or only important player in the narrative. The art and architecture on the Acropolis consistently reframe stories, both historical and mythical, to highlight Athens, and thus project the city’s superiority through the marble of its most important structures. Athens tried to rewrite history by combining mythic and historical narratives.⁹ The major conflicts of the Persian Wars, including the Battles of Marathon, Plataea, and Salamis, all resulted in Greek defeat of the Persians. These victories were the result of the combined effort of multiple Greek city-states. The artistic elements of the Acropolis specifically assimilate the military victories of Athens in the Persian Wars, minimising the role of other city-states, to the four aforementioned mythical narratives. In doing so, the structures of the Acropolis elevate Athens to a heroic status. At the same time, each of the four recurring mythic episodes honours Athenian heroes, Athenian history, Athens’ patron goddess, Athena, or the city itself.¹⁰ Thus, although the

⁵ Sophia Psarra, *Architecture and Narrative* (London: Routledge, 2009), 19, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/10.4324/9780203639672>.

⁶ Jeffrey M. Hurwit, “Space and Theme: The Setting of the Parthenon,” in *The Parthenon: from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Jenifer Neils (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29.

⁷ Lisa Kallet, “Wealth, Power, and Prestige: Athens at Home and Abroad,” in *The Parthenon: from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Jenifer Neils (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 59.

⁸ Katherine A. Schwab, “Celebrations of Victory: The Metopes of the Parthenon,” in *The Parthenon: from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Jenifer Neils (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 167.

⁹ Psarra, *Architecture and Narrative*, 21.

¹⁰ Schwab, “Celebrations of Victory: The Metopes of the Parthenon,” 190.

outcomes of the Persian Wars were determined by a multiplicity of Greek city-states, the Acropolis is undoubtedly a monument to the triumphs of Athens and emphasises its superiority among Greek city-states.¹¹ The way this occurred will be examined below, with specific reference to each mythical episode.

An Amazonomachy is the term given to any conflict between the Amazons (a mythic tribe of warrior women) and Greek soldiers. Amazonomachies were a common artistic subject in the centuries prior to the Persian Wars, and generally, Heracles was the main Greek hero in these stories.¹² Amazons as mythological figures exemplified the ‘Other’, and existed in myth as an archetype of ‘barbarian.’¹³ After the Greek victories against the Persians in the first two decades of the fifth century, B.C.E., the Amazons took on new meaning—specifically in an Athenian context—for Greek citizens.¹⁴ These warrior women became a useful metaphor for the Persian enemy. Amazons and Persians were seen as wild races who did not care about ordered Greek society; through assimilating Persians to Amazons, Athenians relegated “the ‘barbarian’ Other to the role of moral and social inferior without diminishing their own achievement.”¹⁵ A new mythological narrative around the Amazons, placing Athens in a prominent role, first appeared in the period when Athenian politics were dominated by Kimon (around 479-461 B.C.E.), the son of Miltiades, a major Athenian figure at the Battle of Marathon.¹⁶ The Amazons invaded Attica and set up a siege post on the Areiopagus, opposite the Acropolis, in order to rescue their sister, Antiope, from Theseus, who had raped, kidnapped, and married her. Ultimately, the Athenians were victorious against the Amazons, echoing the actual, historical battles between the Athenians and other Greeks, and the

¹¹ Mary Beard, *The Parthenon* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2002), 144.

¹² For an overview of the role Amazons played in Greek myth and art, see: Andrew Stewart, “Imag(in)Ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens,” *Poetics Today* 16, no. 4 (1995): 571–97, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1773366>. See also:

Hillary C. Shellnut, “The Grotesque versus the Heroic: An Examination of the Female Barbarian Warrior Motif in Ancient Greek and Latin Sources,” PhD diss., (Baylor University, 2014).

¹³ Barbarian was a term which ancient Greeks ascribed to anyone who was not of Greek origin.

¹⁴ Stewart, “Imag(in)Ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens,” 571.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 580.

Persians.¹⁷ This new Amazonian myth was likely created in part as an analogous mythical narrative for the Athenian victories at Salamis and Plataea, and quickly became a popular subject of art, poetry and rhetoric.¹⁸ It reflects the widespread occurrence in Athenian myth after the Persian Wars of Amazons doing the same things the Persians had done. As Herodotus discussed, the Persians had actually besieged the Acropolis from the Areiopagus.¹⁹ Persian details entered into Athenian and other Greek depictions of Amazonomachy scenes, while at the same time, Persian figures in Greek discourse adopted Amazonic characteristics. Throughout the fifth century B.C.E., the way Persians were represented in art reflected past depictions of Amazonomachies, using similar postures, ethos, and details such as tights with traditional ‘Amazonian’ patterns and wicker shields.²⁰ The Amazons and Persians are thus explicitly connected, allowing Athens to transform “the mythological conflict between Greeks and Amazons into an archetype, with profound patriotic significance,” focusing on the Greeks’ and especially Athenians’ subjugation of the Persian barbarians.²¹

The Centauromachy (fought between the centaurs and the Lapiths, a mythical Greek tribe) is another of the four major mythical episodes found throughout the Acropolis and was an especially popular subject for sculpture in the fifth century B.C.E.²² While centaurs represented a plethora of things in the minds of Ancient Greek citizens, in the context of the Acropolis, they were assimilated to the Persian enemy.²³ This created a cyclical pattern of association, where Persians and centaurs were considered interchangeable versions of barbarian peoples. Myths about centaurs frequently highlighted their role as creatures in direct opposition to Greek culture; centaurs were depicted as hostile to legal marriage, an

¹⁷ Stewart, “Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens,” 582.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Edith Hall, “Asia unmanned: Images of victory in classical Athens,” in *War and Society in the Greek World*, ed. John Rich and Graham Shipley (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 115.

²⁰ Hall, “Asia unmanned: Images of victory in classical Athens,” 115.

²¹ Ibid. 114.

²² Hilda E. Westervelt, “The Centauromachy in Greek Architectural Sculpture,” PhD diss. (Harvard University, 2004), 4.

²³ For a detailed examination of the meaning associated with Centaurs in Classical Greece, see: Westervelt, “The Centauromachy in Greek Architectural Sculpture.”

institution that was at the heart of ordered, Greek life, and used to represent Greek culture itself.²⁴ One of the most prominent myths featuring centaurs, the Centauromachy, described the centaurs' drunken disruption of the wedding of Pirithous, and their subsequent conflict with their hosts, the Lapiths.²⁵ The centaurs' disregard for marriage, and therefore Greek society as a whole, remains on prominent display, while their chaotic nature as creatures of lust and extremism (for example, their drunken rampage) is also emphasised. The Greeks considered the Persians to be uncivilised, citing Persian destruction of Athenian olive trees as an example of their uncivilised nature. This emphasis on Persian incivility allowed Athenians to equate them with wild centaurs—creatures with no regard for the rules of Greek society.²⁶ In casting the Persians as centaurs, the Athenians also represented their 'barbarian' enemy as beasts controlled by appetite rather than reason.²⁷

Both the Amazonomachy and the Centauromachy portrayed in the iconography of the Acropolis were analogous to the Athenian victories over the Persians: Athens' defeat of a barbarian people represented the focal point of these mythological and historical narratives. Athenian subjugation of the Amazon and Centaur barbarians mirrors the Persian losses at Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea, and in doing so connects myth to history.²⁸ In each story, mythical and historical, the Greeks, and in the versions presented on the Acropolis, specifically the Athenians, were victorious over a group of barbarians, either Amazons, centaurs, or Persians. The repeated depiction of the Amazonomachy and the Centauromachy throughout the iconography of the Acropolis ensures this message of Athenian superiority, at the cost of a barbarian group, was on full display. The combination of these myths allows the victorious Athenians to define themselves in opposition to two mythical versions of barbarian

²⁴ Page duBois, "On Horse/Men, Amazons, and Endogamy," *Arethusa* 12, no. 1 (1979): 35, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26308196>.

²⁵ duBois, "On Horse/Men, Amazons, and Endogamy," 37.

²⁶ Michael Vickers, "Persepolis, Vitruvius and the Erechtheum Caryatids: The Iconography of Medism and Servitude," *Revue Archéologique*, Nouvelle Série, no. 1 (1985): 13, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41736230>.

²⁷ duBois, "On Horse/Men, Amazons, and Endogamy," 43.

²⁸ Shear, *Trophies of Victory: Public Building in Periklean Athens*, 118.

culture.²⁹ The metopes of the Parthenon feature varying characters carved in relief, and are a major example of mythical narratives depicted prominently in the marble of the Acropolis. The western metopes, although badly damaged, likely presented the Athenian hero Theseus leading his companions into battle with the Amazons.³⁰ The specific Athenian version of an Amazonomachy is presented, with Theseus' presence highlighting the importance of Athens. The same story is depicted again on the shield of the Athena Parthenos, a monumental, chryselephantine (gold and ivory) sculpture that stood in the Parthenon during the Classical period.³¹ The Amazons climb the rock of the Acropolis, while Theseus leads a group of Athenians to attack them from above (See Appendix A).³² The western pediment sculpture of the Temple of Athena Nike also featured a battle between the Amazons and the Greeks. On this temple, the Amazonian episode shares artistic space with the actual battle at Marathon—illustrated on the south frieze of the Temple of Athena Nike—allowing for further assimilation between the two narratives.³³ The southern metopes of the Parthenon famously depicted the conflict between the Lapiths and the centaurs. This episode was also repeated on the Athena Parthenos, found around the soles of the goddess's sandals.³⁴ Another monumental statue that stood on the Acropolis in antiquity, the Athena Promachos, featured the Centauromachy as well, carved into the goddess's shield.³⁵ The Athenian hero, Theseus, plays an important role in versions of the Amazonian and Lapith myths, leading his Athenian companions into battle against the Amazons, and fighting against the centaurs on behalf of his Lapith hosts.³⁶ The centrality of an Athenian hero in two of the myths depicted on the

²⁹ duBois, "On Horse/Men, Amazons, and Endogamy," 43.

³⁰ Ibid. 108.

³¹ Schwab, "Celebrations of Victory: The Metopes of the Parthenon," 167.

³² Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens," 586.

³³ Martin-Mcauliffe, and Papadopoulos, "Framing Victory: Salamis, the Athenian Acropolis, and the Agora," 356.

³⁴ Schwab, "Celebrations of Victory: The Metopes of the Parthenon," 167.

³⁵ Frank B. Tarbell, "Centauromachy and Amazonomachy in Greek Art: The Reasons for Their Popularity," *American Journal of Archaeology* 24, no. 3 (1920): 226, <https://doi.org/10.2307/497687>.

³⁶ Shear, *Trophies of Victory: Public Building in Periklean Athens*, 119.

buildings of the Acropolis ensures that when they are assimilated with Greek history such as the Persian Wars, the role of Athens is held in the highest regard.

The Trojan War was a conflict fought by the Trojans of Asia Minor on one side and a collection of Greek city-states on the other and was often depicted in art and literature. Athenian versions of this war changed during the fifth century B.C.E. Just as the Amazonomachy and Centauromachy had become orientalized during this period,³⁷ so too were Greek depictions of the great battle at Troy.³⁸ Before Greece's major conflicts with Persia, Trojans and Greeks were depicted in similar ways in literature. Homer's Trojan and Greek characters worship the same gods, speak the same language and adhere to similar sets of social and political values.³⁹ After the king of Persia, Xerxes, invaded mainland Greece and his subsequent losses in 480 and 479 B.C.E., the Trojan episode was modified to reflect the Greek-barbarian dichotomy, something which Athenian tragedy particularly emphasised.⁴⁰ Athenian playwrights assimilated Troy to the Persian archetype, while, at the same time, Troy became an equivalent term for luxury, despotism and feminised men.⁴¹ The tragedians of Athens focused on the cultural, linguistic and political differences of the Trojans, often framing them in Persian terms.⁴² Fragments of Sophocles' plays show Trojans using Persian linguistic forms:⁴³ in *Poimenes*, one of the characters is addressed using an oriental honorific, *iō balēn*, the same term that would have been used for the Persian king Darius; in *Troilus* a 'barbarian lament' *iai* was used, and the Persian title, *orosangai*, was also

³⁷ Orientalization denotes the adoption of traditionally Eastern characteristics into Western concepts, seen in the context of this paper in the ancient Greek representation of barbarians using Near Eastern markers of identity. Often this process involves stereotyping and emphasising negative characteristics. See Ilia Xypolia, "Eurocentrism and Orientalism," in *The Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Sangeeta Ray, Henry Schwarz, José Luis Villacañas Berlanga, Alberto Moreiras and April Shemak (Blackwell Publishing, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119076506.wbeps126>. For the general concept of Orientalism, see Edward William Said, *Orientalism* (United Kingdom: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1994).

³⁸ Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 102.

³⁹ Johannes Haubold, "Xerxes' Homer," in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium*, ed. Emma Bridges, Edith Hall, and P.J. Rhodes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 48.

⁴⁰ Haubold, "Xerxes' Homer," 49.

⁴¹ Hall, "Asia unmanned: Images of victory in classical Athens," 114.

⁴² Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, 102.

⁴³ Hall, "Asia unmanned: Images of victory in classical Athens," 114.

recovered in the fragments.⁴⁴ Sophocles incorporated Persian cultural and political ideas into his Trojan framework, effectively orientalizing the Trojan people. Similarly, Aeschylus and Euripides, the two other major Athenian tragedians in the fifth century B.C.E., also used orientalizing language and association in their portrayal of Trojan, and Trojan-adjacent characters.⁴⁵ Aeschylus refers to Persia as a place of terror, irrationality, excess and demonic ideas in *The Persians*, creating a negative stereotyped vision of the East.⁴⁶ In *The Bacchae*, Euripides explicitly connects Dionysus and his cult to Asia and the dangerous overindulgence of Oriental mysteries.⁴⁷ The assimilation of Troy and Persia in the cultural consciousness of fifth century Athenians was further solidified through the artistic association of the two conflicts. The Stoa Poikile, built following Greece's victories against the Persians and located in the Athenian agora, was painted with depictions of both the fall of Troy and the Battle of Marathon.⁴⁸ The Trojan and Persian conflicts would already have been associated in the minds of Athenians through their exposure to the dramatic works mentioned above. By sharing artistic space, the connection between these two episodes is made even clearer. An Amazonomachy was also painted on the Stoa Poikile, and thus two differing types of mythical barbarism were offered as antecedents to the Persian barbarian. In a similar manner to the Amazons, Trojans were also shown in Persian clothing throughout other fifth century B.C.E. art.⁴⁹

The Gigantomachy (fought between the Olympians [a subset of Greek gods] and the Giants) is the final mythical episode depicted on the Acropolis which acts as a mirror to the Persian Wars. Classical Athenians used what they saw as the impiety of the

⁴⁴ Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, 120.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 120-121.

⁴⁶ Masoud Farahmandfar, "Against their forren foe that commes from farre": Shakespeare and Orientalized Persia," *Postcolonial Interventions 1*, no 2 (2016): 135-152.

⁴⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 51.

⁴⁸ P. J. Rhodes, "The Impact of the Persian Wars on Classical Greece," in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium*, ed. Emma Bridges, Edith Hall, and P.J. Rhodes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41.

⁴⁹ Rhodes, "The Impact of the Persian Wars on Classical Greece," 37.

Persians—demonstrated when they wrecked Greek temples—to equate them with the Giants, monstrous beings who are defeated by the gods.⁵⁰ This mythical conflict was interpreted as a metaphor for the triumph of order (the gods) over chaos (the Giants) before the fifth century B.C.E.; however, just like the three other mythical episodes examined, the Gigantomachy took on new meaning after the Persian Wars, becoming yet another example of a Greek victory over a barbarian group.⁵¹ The Gigantomachy still represented the conflict between order and chaos, but chaos took on a new, barbarian likeness. Depictions of Giants shifted in the fifth century B.C.E., the same way images of Amazons and Trojans also changed. Early representations of Giants showed them in traditional Greek armour and using Greek weapons.⁵² There was no visual code which emphasised their barbarian nature. This changed in the fifth century when the barbarism of Giants was increasingly highlighted.⁵³

The Trojan War and Gigantomachy were both portrayed in the iconography of the Acropolis, adding two other episodes for Athenians to assimilate the Persian Wars to. The northern metopes of the Parthenon likely depict the Trojan War.⁵⁴ This illustration of the Trojan defeat avoids any imagery of rampage or slaughter. Instead, a number of Olympians are in attendance, which implies the fall of Troy is divinely ordained. Therefore, the victory of the Greeks over a barbarian group was sanctioned by the gods.⁵⁵ On the eastern metopes of the Parthenon, ten different scenes of one-on-one battles between the gods and the Giants are depicted; in each scene, the god is victorious.⁵⁶ The patron goddess of Athens, Athena, is highlighted on the metopes, bringing victory to the other gods, and in the process of being

⁵⁰ Michael Vickers, "Persepolis, Vitruvius and the Erechtheum Caryatids: The Iconography of Medism and Servitude," *Revue Archéologique*, Nouvelle Série, no. 1 (1985): 13, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41736230>.

⁵¹ Debbie Felton, "Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (United Kingdom: Ashgate, 2012), 111.

⁵² Felton, "Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome," 112.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 109-110.

⁵⁵ Shear, *Trophies of Victory: Public Building in Periklean Athens*, 118.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 108.

crowned by a Winged Victory.⁵⁷ The Temple of Athena Nike also depicts the Gigantomachy.⁵⁸ The Athena Parthenos repeated this episode, with the interior of Athena's shield carved to represent the Olympian war against the Giants.⁵⁹ The Gigantomachy acts as a divine archetype for the other battles. Athena, another representation of Athenian supremacy, is also a focal point.⁶⁰ Athens' status is elevated by the emphasis of victory, but also by the assembly of the twelve Olympians, something which may be seen as the ultimate symbol of Athenian superiority. Although interpretations of this part of the Parthenon are highly contested, with scholarly opinion on the subject of the frieze ranging from human sacrifice to a yearly festival, if the frieze depicts the Panathenaic procession (an annual celebration in Athens with its most important iteration, the Great Panathenaea, occurring every four years), then the full gathering of Olympians demonstrates that this was an event worthy of divine attention.⁶¹ The Olympian presence may subtly suggest the "apotheosis of all Athenians by virtue of their faithful worship at Athena's festival."⁶² Different contexts for an assemblage of Olympians, as either a newly ended conflict, in the previously discussed scenes from the Trojan War, or a yearly festival, in the case of the Panathenaea, both enforce an Athenian position of authority and superiority.

Empire and Subjugation

The Acropolis, and especially the Parthenon, is undoubtedly associated with empire. The specific form the Athenian empire took shifted over time, and is briefly explored below. Overarching artistic depictions of Athenian triumph emphasise its power as an empire and

⁵⁷ Ibid. 117.

⁵⁸ Samantha L. Martin-Mcauliffe, and John K. Papadopoulos, "Framing Victory: Salamis, the Athenian Acropolis, and the Agora," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 71, no. 3 (2012): 356, doi:10.1525/jsah.2012.71.3.332.

⁵⁹ Schwab, "Celebrations of Victory: The Metopes of the Parthenon," 167.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 120.

⁶¹ Ibid. 131.

⁶² Shear, *Trophies of Victory: Public Building in Periklean Athens*, 132.

city-state.⁶³ In 478 B.C.E., the Delian League, united under Athens, formed to exact their revenge on the Persian Empire, and prevent Persian influence and power from growing again in the Aegean Sea. Membership was initially voluntary, and allies contributed to the war effort in the form of ships and men, or *phoroi* (monetary tribute).⁶⁴ The Delian treasury was eventually moved from Delos to Athens in the late 450s B.C.E., and the tribute sum “was fixed every four years by the Athenian *ekklēsia* (assembly), which summoned all the allies at the time of the great Panathenaea, in order to reveal to them the sum that they were to pay annually.”⁶⁵ The Delian League was a starting point for the Athenian Empire. Scholarly debate is ongoing over who contributed to the Parthenon, and how much they contributed. Still, the fact remains that Athens’ allies gave payment to the city, and so the Parthenon was the result of empire, in one form or another.⁶⁶ Indeed, the Parthenon represents the resources and power of the Athenian Empire.⁶⁷ The layout of the Parthenon was unusual because a place was needed to house the city treasury. An extra room was added and called the *Parthenon*, or ‘room for the virgin.’⁶⁸ It was here that the *phoroi* of the Delian allies were placed.⁶⁹ The Parthenon was funded by the imperial tribute and a section of the temple was built to store this tribute. Thus, the Parthenon was built from and for the empire. The columns of the *Parthenon* room were fashioned in the Ionic style, and incorporated into a Doric edifice. The fact that two separate architectural styles, the Ionic order and the Doric order, were brought together in the architecture of the Parthenon may symbolise Athens’ belief in their power as a unifying imperial force.⁷⁰ This combination is a physical demonstration of

⁶³ Psarra, *Architecture and Narrative*, 37.

⁶⁴ Azoulay, *Pericles of Athens*, 52.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 53.

⁶⁶ Mary Beard, *The Parthenon*, 47.

⁶⁷ William Blake Tyrrell, and Frieda S. Brown, *Athenian Myths and Institutions: Words in Action* (Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1991), 187, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ubc/detail.action?docID=241327>.

⁶⁸ Azoulay, *Pericles of Athens*, 65.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 65.

⁷⁰ Robin Francis Rhodes, *Architecture and Meaning on the Athenian Acropolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 36.

Athens' control over a mainly Ionian league.⁷¹ The inclusion of Ionic architecture and elements in the otherwise Doric structure of the Parthenon may also be an allusion to the Delian League, and Athens' position as the hegemonic head of this collection of Ionian allies.⁷²

The iconography of the Parthenon frieze also amplified and commemorated Athenian hegemony. The inclusion of specific Greek deities in the sculpture of the Parthenon can be seen as emphasising Athens' preeminent role among Greek city-states, many of which it would eventually oppress. Two major Ionian gods, Apollo and Poseidon, are located beside three other Greek deities, Artemis, Aphrodite, and Eros. This grouping may symbolise the Delian league and Athens' hegemonic power in the Aegean.⁷³ Apollo and Artemis were born on Delos and had a large cult following on the island. Aphrodite also had a major cult presence on Delos—according to classical sources, the mythical hero Theseus set up a religious cult dedicated to Aphrodite on the island. Theseus was also credited with introducing the worship of Aphrodite under the epithet *Pandemos* to Athens.⁷⁴ Aphrodite *Pandemos* was invoked to guard citizen unity, and thus her inclusion with this group of Olympians on the Parthenon frieze might further symbolise Athens' belief in its own power as an imperial force with the goal of unification.⁷⁵ Land and sea are also juxtaposed through the gods of the Parthenon frieze, further bolstering Athens' hegemonic position. Poseidon, Apollo, Artemis, and Aphrodite were all associated with the sea and were worshipped at Attic ports. As mentioned, Apollo and Artemis were intrinsically linked to Delos, while Aphrodite was born from the sea, and called upon by sailors for safe passage across the waters in her

⁷¹ Ibid. 66.

⁷² Jenifer Neils "“With Noblest Images on All Sides”: The Ionic Frieze of the Parthenon,” in *The Parthenon: from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Jenifer Neils (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 220.

⁷³ Gregory S. Jones, "The Sculptural Poetics of Euripides' Ion: Reflections of Art, Myth, and Cult from the Parthenon to the Attic Stage," *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 88, no. 4 (2019): 744, doi:10.2972/hesperia.88.4.0727.

⁷⁴ Jones, "The Sculptural Poetics of Euripides' Ion," 744.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

guise as Aphrodite Euploia (of the safe voyage).⁷⁶ On the other hand, the grouping together of the Greek deities Dionysos, Demeter, Hermes, and Ares on the frieze was representative of the land: Demeter and Dionysos were associated with agriculture, and the grapevine, respectively; in one of his forms, Hermes was the god of herdsmen, and he was linked to the land through Herm shrines spread across Attica; and, Ares was the patron of bloody, earth-bound hoplite battles.⁷⁷ These divine clusters both commemorate past Athenian victories over Persia by land and sea and also bolster Athens' position at the time as the hegemonic power of the Delian League.⁷⁸ As Thucydides records the alleged words of Perikles, "we have forced every sea and land to be the highway of our daring."⁷⁹

Athenian re-interpretation of longstanding myths and symbols extends beyond simply elevating the status of Athens and promoting the city as an imperial leader.⁸⁰ Certain architectural and artistic features of the Acropolis are arguably representations of, and allusions to, Athens' subjugation of its Ionian allies. The first major example of such representation can be found in the Caryatids of the Erechtheum, six female statues built as architectural supports for this monumental temple structure on the Acropolis (see Appendix B). The first century B.C.E. Roman architect and architectural historian, Vitruvius, describes the historical event linked with the Caryatids.⁸¹ He states that the city-state of Caryae in the Peloponnesus submitted to the Persians during their invasion. After the Greeks emerged victorious in the Persian War, they killed the men of Caryae, left the city to ruin, and sold the women into slavery.⁸² Scholars have often dismissed Vitruvius's account of the Caryatids' origins as a fabrication.⁸³ However, as professor Michael Vickers argues by drawing on

⁷⁶ Neils, "Reconfiguring the Gods on the Parthenon Frieze," 11.

⁷⁷ Neils, "Reconfiguring the Gods on the Parthenon Frieze," 11.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 11-12.

⁷⁹ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* II.43; see Neils, "Reconfiguring the Gods on the Parthenon Frieze," 12.

⁸⁰ Rhodes, *Architecture and Meaning on the Athenian Acropolis*, 36.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture* 1.I.5

⁸³ Vickers, "Persepolis, Vitruvius and the Erechtheum Caryatids," 4.

Herodotus, there is no reason to doubt Vitruvius's historical accuracy.⁸⁴ Herodotus reports, without listing them all, that many Peloponnesian cities "in effect [medized] by remaining neutral."⁸⁵ Medizing meant that a Greek city-state allied with, or gave fealty to, the Persian Empire. Thus Vitruvius may have been implying that after the Battle of Plataea, the Hellenic League took control of Caryae and punished it for what they claimed was medism.⁸⁶ The iconographic symbolism of the Caryatids reflects Persian architectural traditions, a reality that establishes a visual precedent for oppressive actions manifesting themselves in the architecture of imperial powers. Symbols that represent subjects or conquered enemies are frequently found in Achaemenid (Persian) architectural imagery: carved bulls and winged felines, representing people subjugated by the Persian Empire, are used to support roofs, while impost-block griffins function in a similar manner, existing as physical depictions of Persian control over the Central Asiatic goldfields.⁸⁷ The motif of service and (imperial) control is thus strongly evident in animals or human figures sculpted as architectural supports.⁸⁸ Indeed, the Caryatids are women forced to stand in disgrace.⁸⁹ Vitruvius notes that they are depicted in long robes, which denote their position as married women, and acknowledges that they are forever locked in a state of slavery, forced to bear the weight of shame and atone for the medism of their city-state.⁹⁰ Vitruvius' arguments, coupled with an Ancient Near Eastern visual syntax evident in the discussed examples, can be used to better understand the negative symbolism which accompanies the Caryatids.

Even though the decision to decimate Caryae cannot be securely placed on Athenian shoulders with the minimal evidence available, the Caryatids remain an uncomfortable

⁸⁴ Michael Vickers, "The Caryatids on the Erechtheum at Athens. Questions of chronology and symbolism," *Miscellanea Anthropologica et Sociologica* 15, no. 3 (2014): 122, DOI: [10.5604/20842937.1134336](https://doi.org/10.5604/20842937.1134336).

⁸⁵ Herodotus, *The Histories* VIII.73

⁸⁶ George Huxley, "The Medism of Caryae," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 8, no. 1 (2003): 30.

⁸⁷ Vickers, "Persepolis, Vitruvius and the Erechtheum Caryatids," 11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 16.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture* 1.I.5

representation of Greek subjugation of other Greeks. Importantly, this theme reflects the Athenian subjugation of many different ally city-states, as they played out their imperial ambitions in the Classical period. The story of Caryae's decimation itself has a number of Athenian parallels. In 476 B.C.E., Athens attacked the island of Skyros on claims of piracy and enslaved its population.⁹¹ In 421 B.C.E., Athens besieged and recovered Scione, killed all men of military age, and enslaved the women and children.⁹² 416/15 B.C.E. marked another Athenian atrocity when Athens attacked and conquered Melos; even though the island had surrendered, the Athenians killed all of the men and sold the women and children into slavery.⁹³ Each of these events likely stems from Athenian imperial ambitions, as any city-state in the Athenian sphere of dominance that stood against, or simply apart from, Athens' imperial power was violently put in its place. The Erechtheum has not been securely dated, but if it was completed by the late date of 412 B.C.E., as Vickers postulates, then these instances of Athens' subjugation of its allies may perhaps find expression in the Caryatids.⁹⁴ If the Erechtheum was finished sometime earlier in the fifth century B.C.E., the Caryatids still take on a multitude of new meanings following the many instances of Athenian oppression.

Further artistic links to Athenian domination can be seen throughout the Acropolis. In an attempt to hide the imperial nature of its conquest of Skyros, Athens recited an oracle calling for the city to exhume the bones of Theseus on the island, and the recovery of these bones "justified [Athens'] absorption of Skyros."⁹⁵ It must also be remembered that Theseus played an important role in versions of both an Amazonomachy and a Centauromachy, two of the mythic narratives found throughout the Acropolis. Therefore, one can note connections

⁹¹ Raphael Sealey, *A History of the Greek City States: Ca. 700-338 B.C.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 249.

⁹² Sealey, *A History of the Greek City States*, 340.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 350.

⁹⁴ Vickers, "Persepolis, Vitruvius and the Erechtheum Caryatids," 21.

⁹⁵ Tyrrell, and Brown, *Athenian Myths and Institutions: Words in Action*, 168.

between imperialism, subjugation and myth by examining together the depictions of, and allusions to, Theseus found throughout the Acropolis and the Caryatids of the Erechtheum. Such associations are made even clearer through continued exploration of the iconography of the Acropolis. The west pediment of the Parthenon depicts Athena's victory over Poseidon in this myth's first known artistic representation.⁹⁶ The significance of this episode is marked by the political reality of Athen's empire status.⁹⁷ Athena, in her representation on the west pediment, is a surrogate for Athens, while Poseidon acts as a stand-in for the sea. Therefore, the myth calls to mind Athens' position as the primary naval power in the Aegean, in its role as 'mistress of the sea.'⁹⁸ But Athenian influence in the Aegean and its imperial aims manifest further in the conquest of fellow Greeks. In 447/46 B.C.E., a Euboean revolt was put down, and cleruchies, specialised Greek colonies common especially during the period of the Delian League, were established on the island.⁹⁹ The Histiaeans on Euboea were expelled from their homes, and their territory was occupied by Athenians.¹⁰⁰ The city-state of Mytilene was forced back under Athenian rule in 427 B.C.E., and Lesbos was repressed.¹⁰¹ Athens used Miletus' call for assistance in their conflict with Samos as an excuse to attack the Samians, who had defected from the Delian League.¹⁰² Athenian intervention ended in Samian defeat, and, perhaps, the crucifixion of their rebel leaders. Finally, at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War (fought between Athens and its allies and Sparta and its allies in the latter half of the fifth century B.C.E.), Perikles expelled the Aeginitans from their island, even though, according to Plutarch, they did not revolt.¹⁰³ Such a move is telling, for Aigina was a longtime naval rival, and as demonstrated by Athena's victory over Poseidon, Athens was

⁹⁶ Shear, *Trophies of Victory: Public Building in Periklean Athens*, 120.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Shear, *Trophies of Victory: Public Building in Periklean Athens*, 120.

⁹⁹ Vincent Azoulay, *Pericles of Athens*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 53, doi:10.2307/j.ctt5vjvgq; see The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), s.v. "Cleruchy."

¹⁰⁰ Azoulay, *Pericles of Athens*, 57.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 53.

¹⁰² Ibid. 58.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 60.

looking to control, not share, the sea.¹⁰⁴ Base A under the Temple of Athena Nike may be the missing base of the Tetrastylon, taken from the Sanctuary of Aphaia and brought to Athens after the defeat of Aigina.¹⁰⁵ A symbol of Athenian victory would then have literally been built on a corresponding symbol of Aiginitan defeat.

Conclusion

The symbolism of the Acropolis is clear—Athens is *the* Greek city-state par excellence. The overarching architectural and artistic aesthetic of the structures of the Acropolis elevated Athenian power and status, and supported Athenian imperialism, through the repeating motifs of victory and subjugation. The mythic narrative of the Parthenon and the surrounding buildings frames Greek victories against the Persians in an Atheno-centric manner, and in so doing, situates Athens above its allies. The Acropolis follows the general fifth century pattern of assimilating Persians to different types of barbarians, with Athens taking on the role of the victorious party in each episode depicted in the iconography of the Acropolis. The Athenian position as the leader of the Delian League was likely never far from an ancient observer's mind. The aesthetic elements of the Parthenon present justification for the Athenian empire through divine manifestations of the earth and sea; its combined Doric and Ionic features further highlight Athenian imperial power, emphasising Athens' ability to unify its allies, but also to rule them. Depictions of and allusions to Athens as a hegemonic power are coloured by the fact that this imperial leader did not shy away from the harsh treatment of its allies. Indeed, the subjugation of other Greek city-states is both implicitly and explicitly represented in the Acropolis's artistic portrait. The Acropolis is a place with rich history and holds an important place in modern Greek culture. This makes it

¹⁰⁴ Azoulay, *Pericles of Athens*, 61.

¹⁰⁵ Martin-Mcauliffe, and Papadopoulos, "Framing Victory: Salamis, the Athenian Acropolis, and the Agora," 356.

all the more important that every aspect of its history, and the multiplicity of meaning behind its marble, is examined and discussed.

Appendix A



The Strangford Shield, 200-300 AD, marble, 43.18 cm by 45.72 cm., British Museum, London.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ This is a Roman copy of the original shield, now lost.

Appendix B



Jaris Darwin. *Caryatids and Erechtheum*. Photographed July 26, 2022. Athens, Greece.

Bibliography

- Azoulay, Vincent. *Pericles of Athens*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014. doi:10.2307/j.ctt5vjvqg.
- Beard, Mary. *The Parthenon*. London: Profile Books Ltd., 2002.
- duBois, Page. "On Horse/Men, Amazons, And Endogamy." *Arethusa* 12, no. 1 (1979): 35–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26308196>.
- Farahmandfar, Masoud. "Against their forren foe that commes from farre": Shakespeare and Orientalized Persia." *Postcolonial Interventions 1*, no 2 (2016): 135-152.
- Felton, Debbie. "Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, 103-131. United Kingdom: Ashgate, 2012.
- Hall, Edith. "Asia unmanned: Images of victory in classical Athens." In *War and Society in the Greek World*, edited by John Rich and Graham Shipley, 108-133. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Hall, Edith. *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- Haubold, Johannes. "Xerxes' Homer." In *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium*, edited Emma Bridges, Edith Hall, and P.J. Rhodes, 31-45. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Herodotus. *The Histories*. Edited by Robert B. Strassler. New York: Anchor Books, 2009.

- Hurwit, Jeffrey M. "Space and Theme: The Setting of the Parthenon." In *The Parthenon: from Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Jenifer Neils, 9-33. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Huxley, George. "The Medism of Caryae." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 8, no. 1 (2003): 29-32.
- Jones, Gregory S. "The Sculptural Poetics of Euripides' Ion: Reflections of Art, Myth, and Cult from the Parthenon to the Attic Stage." *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 88, no. 4 (2019): 727-62.
doi:10.2972/hesperia.88.4.0727.
- Kallet, Lisa. "Wealth, Power, and Prestige: Athens at Home and Abroad." In *The Parthenon: from Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Jenifer Neils, 35-65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Neils, Jenifer. "Reconfiguring the Gods on the Parthenon Frieze." *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 1 (1999): 6-20. doi:10.2307/3051284.
- Neils, Jenifer. "'With Noblest Images on All Sides': The Ionic Frieze of the Parthenon." In *The Parthenon: from Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Jenifer Neils, 199-223. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Martin-Mcauliffe, Samantha L., and John K. Papadopoulos. "Framing Victory: Salamis, the Athenian Acropolis, and the Agora." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 71, no. 3 (2012): 332-61. doi:10.1525/jsah.2012.71.3.332.
- Psarra, Sophia. *Architecture and Narrative*. London: Routledge, 2009.
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/10.4324/9780203639672>.

- Ratté, Christopher. "Athens: Recreating the Parthenon." *The Classical World* 97, no. 1 (2003): 41-55. Accessed December 7, 2020. doi:10.2307/4352824.
- Rhodes, Robin Francis. *Architecture and Meaning on the Athenian Acropolis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Rhodes, P. J. "The Impact of the Persian Wars on Classical Greece." In *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium*, edited Emma Bridges, Edith Hall, and P.J. Rhodes, 31-45. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Said, Edward William., Said, Edward W.. *Orientalism*. United Kingdom: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1994.
- Schwab, Katherine A. "Celebrations of Victory: The Metopes of the Parthenon." In *The Parthenon: from Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Jenifer Neils, 159-197. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Sealey, Raphael. *A History of the Greek City States: Ca. 700-338 B.C.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- Shear, T. Leslie. *Trophies of Victory: Public Building in Periklean Athens*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016. doi:10.2307/j.ctt17xr50c.
- Shellnut, Hillary C. "The Grotesque versus the Heroic: An Examination of the Female Barbarian Warrior Motif in Ancient Greek and Latin Sources." PhD diss. Baylor University, 2014.
- Spivey, Nigel. *Greek Sculpture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ubc/detail.action?docID=1182923>.

- Stewart, Andrew. "Imag(in)Ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens." *Poetics Today* 16, no. 4 (1995): 571–97. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1773366>.
- Tarbell, Frank B. "Centauromachy and Amazonomachy in Greek Art: The Reasons for Their Popularity." *American Journal of Archaeology* 24, no. 3 (1920): 226–31. <https://doi.org/10.2307/497687>.
- The Strangford Shield*. 200-300 AD. Marble. 43.18 cm by 45.72 cm. British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1864-0220-18
- Tyrrell, William B., and Frieda S. Brown. *Athenian Myths and Institutions: Words in Action*. Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1991. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ubc/detail.action?docID=241327>.
- Vickers, Michael. "The Caryatids on the Erechtheum at Athens. Questions of chronology and symbolism." *Miscellanea Anthropologica et Sociologica* 15, no. 3 (2014): 119-133. DOI: [10.5604/20842937.1134336](https://doi.org/10.5604/20842937.1134336).
- Vickers, Michael. "Persepolis, Vitruvius and the Erechtheum Caryatids: The Iconography of Medism and Servitude." *Revue Archéologique, Nouvelle Série*, no. 1 (1985): 3-28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41736230>.
- Vitruvius. *The Ten Books on Architecture*. Translated by Morris H. Morgan. London: Humphrey Milford Oxford University Press, 1914.
- Westervelt, Hilda E. "The Centauromachy in Greek Architectural Sculpture." PhD diss. Harvard University, 2004.
- Xypolia, Ilia. "Eurocentrism and Orientalism." In *The Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Sangeeta Ray, Henry Schwarz, José Luis Villacañas Berlanga, Alberto Moreiras

and April Shemak. Blackwell Publishing, 2016.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119076506.wbepts126>.