

The Parthenon as a Symbol of Cultural Identities in Athens

The Parthenon in Athens is most associated with its original construction as a temple to its patron goddess Athena in 447 BCE, however, the building has shifted in both structure and function in different eras of history. In its time since construction, the Parthenon saw use as a Church to the Virgin Mary, as well as a mosque and gunpowder storage location under the Ottomans before becoming a historic site under a renewed, independent Greece. Each of these eras of change also reflect a larger shift in the identity of the Athenians' that it represented. Its changes under the Romans, Byzantines, and Ottomans attempted to direct cultural identity through shifts in religious representation, but the value it held to citizens still remained personal. By examining primary source documents, archaeological evidence, and scholarly research, I argue that changes in the Parthenon's structure and function throughout eras represent a larger shift in cultural identity for citizens that looked to it as a symbol. Overall the changes in how the Parthenon was culturally presented and represented underscored the ways in which Athenians' own identities were themselves being re-understood under new rulership.