

Classics at the State Capitol

If you walk into the State Capitol Building, almost everywhere you look you will see the influence of ancient Greece and Rome. On the north side of the rotunda, for example, you will find a mosaic floor depicting the Acropolis in Athens with Athena and Erichthonius, the legendary first king of Athens. On the south side of the rotunda is a mosaic floor depicting the Roman god Jupiter seated on top of the Capitoline hill in Rome with his iconic eagle. The dome of the rotunda contains quotations from a pair of Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. Above the bench in the Supreme Court is inlaid a quote by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus. Even the exterior of the Capitol shows the influence of ancient Greece and Rome, as it is covered with statues representing a number of famous ancient Greeks and Romans, including Solon (the Athenian lawgiver), Plato (the Athenian philosopher), Socrates (the Athenian philosopher), Julius Caesar (the Roman general), and Marcus Aurelius (the Roman emperor and philosopher), among others. And classical influences can be found in many other rooms and on many other parts of the building, both inside and outside.

This paper will therefore examine the influence of ancient Greek and Roman themes, ideas, and imagery on the construction and decoration of the State Capitol Building. In particular, this paper will analyze the meanings behind the classical imagery, quotations, and architectural features of the Capitol, and thus highlight the significance and continuing influence of ancient Greece and Rome in the modern world.