

## Gendered Architecture: Female Form on the Classical Athenian Acropolis

The Periklean renovation of the Athenian acropolis produced grand buildings that have become the most iconic achievements of Classical architecture in Greece to-date. This paper will investigate unique material representations of the female image as they appear in two of these preeminent structures, the Erechtheion and Parthenon. These two sanctuaries present manifestations of the female image that are not immediately identifiable either as myth or history. In attempting to understand how these buildings conveyed ideas of non-deified femininity to the Classical Athenian viewer, this paper will explore the themes and motifs shared between the Karyatids of the Erechtheion and the enigmatic Parthenon frieze.

The Karyatid porch of the Erechtheion—an uncommon component of Classical temples—constitutes a striking and conspicuous architectural display of the female body. Though these sculptures are noteworthy in their own right, scholars have observed distinct similarities between the Karyatids and the maidens depicted on the east frieze of the Parthenon (Hurwit 2004). In fact, it is this east section of the Parthenon frieze—displaying female forms in prominent roles—that serves as the focal point in the debate concerning the meaning of the whole frieze. Despite a recent lack of consensus in this debate, many have agreed for centuries that this sculptured frieze provides a glimpse into 5<sup>th</sup>-century Athenian “consciousness” (Connelly 2014), thereby emphasizing its preeminent role among the Parthenon’s artworks. This paper will draw upon both traditional approaches and contemporary ideas, including scholarship by Joan Connelly and Margareth Lagerlöf, in pursuing an understanding of the female identity as revealed in these architectural features.

Ultimately, the paper will address questions concerning the historical and architectural significance of the two sanctuaries, the iconography and execution of the sculpted elements in question, and the female role in the religious cult of Athens in order to craft a cohesive reading of the messages conveyed via the art of the acropolis. The interpretation of the non-deified female image as depicted through the Karyatids and the Parthenon frieze will grant insight into the Classical Athenian understanding of gender as materially revealed through the city's most iconic buildings.

#### Bibliography

Connelly, Joan Breton. *The Parthenon Enigma*. New York: Vintage Books, 2014.

Hurwit, Jeffrey M. *The Acropolis in the Ages of Pericles*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.