

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 13 – Monumental Buildings - Athens

CLCS4007

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Athens as a Monumental City

“Suppose for example that the city of Sparta were to become deserted and that only the foundations of temples and buildings remained, I think that future generations would, as time passed, find it very difficult to believe that the place had really been as powerful as it was represented to be. ... If, on the other hand, the same thing were to happen to Athens, one would conjecture from what met the eye that the city had been twice as powerful as in fact it is.” -

Thucydides 1.10

Athens as a Tourist Attraction

“You come to the city of the Athenians. ... But the city is very dry and not well supplied with water; and because it is so old, the streets are very crooked. Most houses are of inferior quality, few are useful. When foreigners sees it for the first time, they might well wonder whether this is the famous city of the Athenians. But they will believe it after a short while. Some of the most beautiful sights of the inhabited world can be found here: the noteworthy theatre, which is large and beautiful. The magnificent sanctuary of Athena in its elevated position, and it is worth seeing – the so-called Parthenon lies above the theatre and fills the viewer with amazement.” - **Heraclides Criticus, Fragment 1.1.** (Third century BC).

The Acropolis



The Acropolis – From a Distance



The Acropolis – Closer Perspective

Destruction of Athens

“So spoke the herald, and went back again. When Mardonius heard that, he no longer desired to remain in Attica. Before he had word of it, he had held his land, desiring to know the Athenians' plan and what they would do; he neither harmed nor harried the land of Attica, for he still supposed that they would make terms with him. But when he could not prevail upon them and learned the truth of the matter, he withdrew before Pausanias' army prior to its entering the Isthmus. First, however, he burnt Athens, and utterly overthrew and demolished whatever wall or house or temple was left standing.” - **Herodotus 9.13.1-2.**

Rebuilding of Athens

- ▣ It is recorded in Diodorus (first century BC author) that the Greeks allegedly swore an oath at Plataea to, among other things, not rebuild the temples destroyed by the Persians but to leave it as a monument to what had been done.

“And when the Greek forces were assembled at the Isthmus, all of them agreed that they should swear an oath about the war... The oath ran as follows: "I will not... nor will I rebuild any one of the sanctuaries which have been burnt or demolished, but I will let them be and leave them as a reminder to coming generations of the impiety of the barbarians” – Diodorus Siculus *Bibliotheca Historica* 11.29.2-3.

Statue of Athena Promachos

Parthenon

Propylaea

Chalcotheke

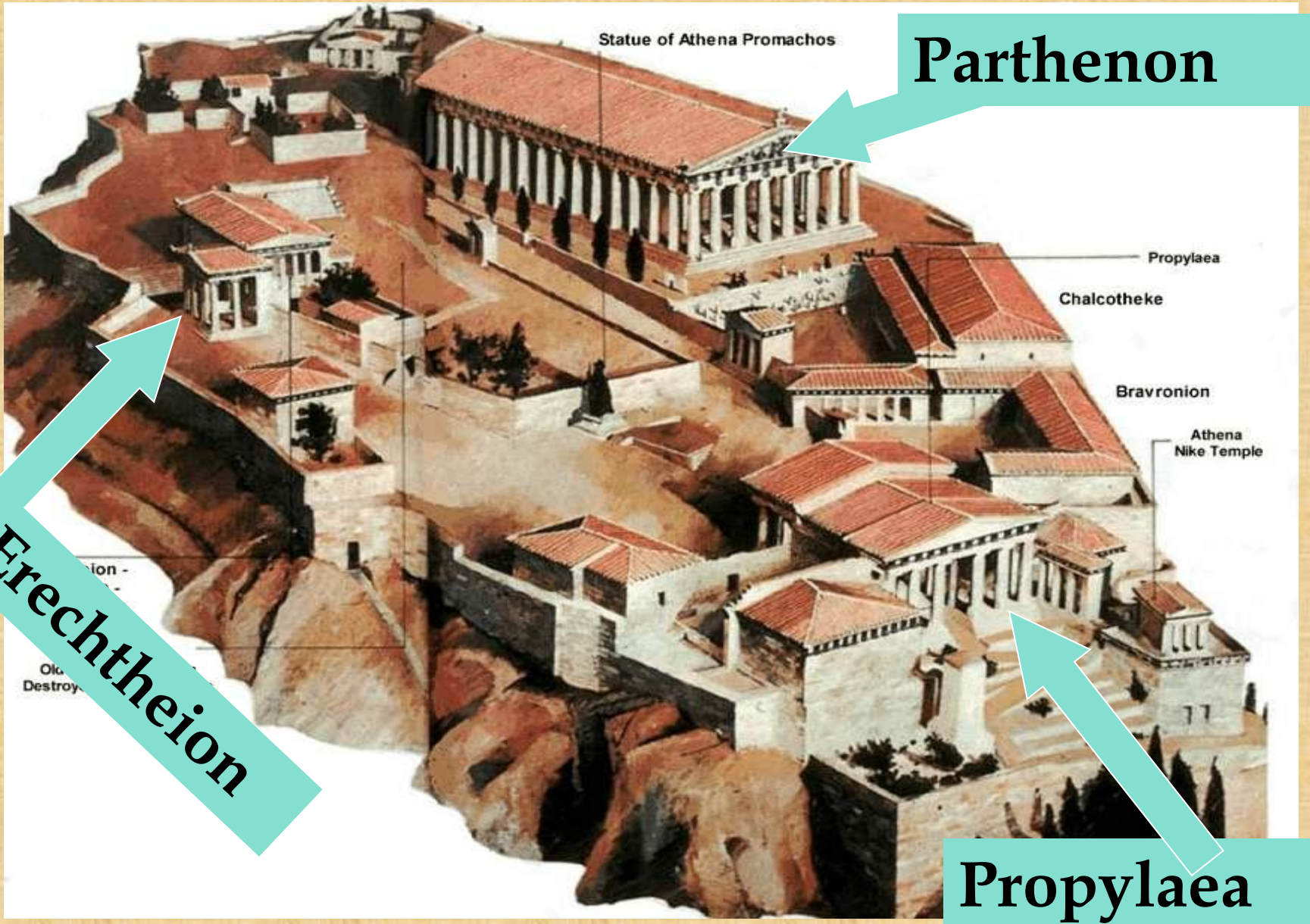
Bravronion

Athena
Nike Temple

Erechtheion

Propylaea

ion -
Old
Destroy



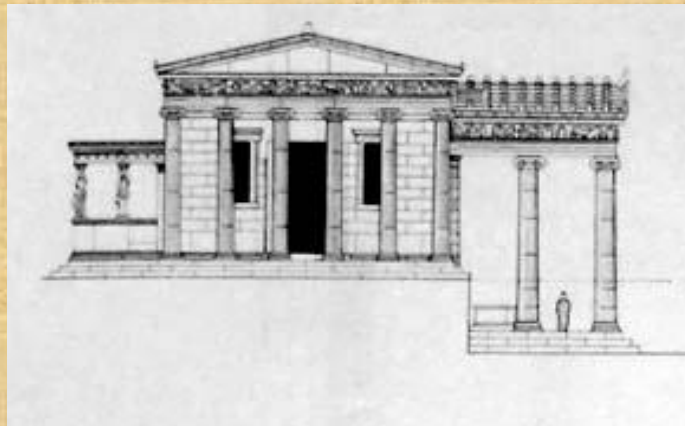
The Propylaea

- ▣ Architect: Mnesicles;
- ▣ Begun 437, left unfinished 432.
- ▣ Entrance to the Acropolis
- ▣ Architect had to cope with sloping ground – essentially two buildings on different levels.

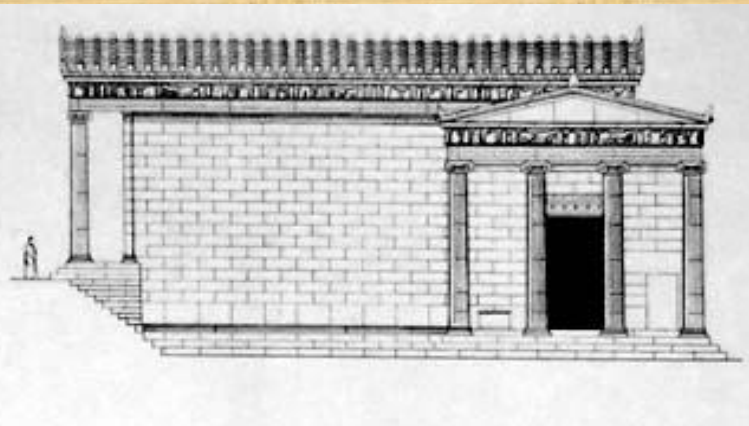


The Erechtheion

- Begun perhaps 431, finished 406 (architect not named, perhaps Mnesicles).
- A complex building, on two levels (east/north parts higher), irregular shape for a number of cults and memorable places.



East Side



South Side

▣ **The Erechtheion:**

- ▣ Ionic style, very highly decorated.
- ▣ Gap in the foundations, probably to leave the space for the site of the tomb of one of the heroes.
- ▣ housed the cults of a number of gods:
 - Athena Polias with the ancient cult image.
 - Poseidon Erechtheus (note salt water well, marks of trident).
 - A number of heroic figures linked to the earliest mythical past of Athens. Mythical kings Cecrops, Erechtheus; daughters of Erechtheus.
 - The sacred snake (linked to Erechtheus) lived in the foundations of the temple.
 - The sacred olive tree in the courtyard.



- ❑ Caryatids – maidens of Caryae in Laconia – possibly dancers who performed in honour of Artemis (**Pausanias 3.10.7**).
- ❑ Six of them on the Erechtheion.

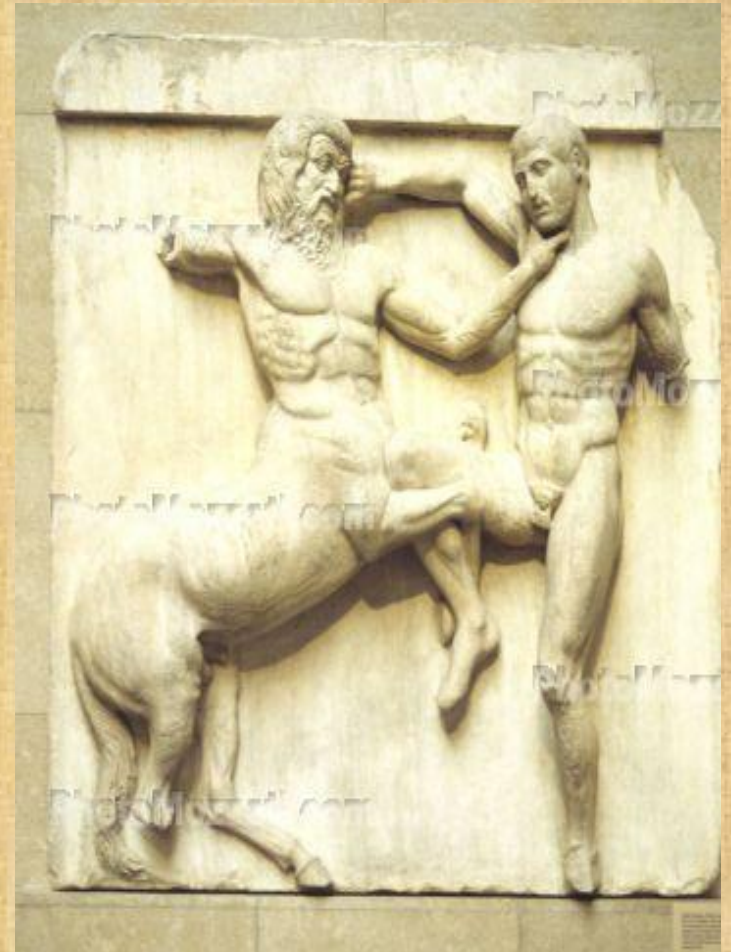
The Parthenon

- ▣ Architects: Ictinus & Callicrates, sculptures: Phidias; started 447 BC, finished 338, decoration and statue finished 432.
- ▣ very sophisticated version of a Doric temple.
 - all in marble (including roof tiles).
 - pentelic marble – local stone from Mt. Pentelikon.
 - most of the lines which seem straight are actually very slightly curved.
 - considered to have achieved perfect proportions.



The Parthenon – Sculptural Decorations

- ▣ Metopes:
- ▣ 92 fight scenes:
- ▣ east – gigantomachy (gods fighting giants),
- ▣ west: amazonomachy (Athenians vs Amazons),
- ▣ south: centauiromachy (Lapiths vs centaurs),
- ▣ north: possibly Trojan War.



▣ The Parthenon Frieze:

- on the inside of the colonnade, above the columns.
- row of horsemen, probably an idealised representation of the dead of Marathon.



- ▣ **The Pediments:**
- ▣ There were two pediments.
 - the East pediment depicted the birth of Athena;
 - the West pediment depicted the contest of Athena and Poseidon over who gets dominion over Athens.



Statue of Athena Parthenos

- ❑ Sculpted by Phidias.
- ❑ Statue of Athena – very large, wooden structure, covered in gold and ivory (probably also semi-precious stones).
- ❑ The gold alone weighed 40 talents or about 1,040 kg.
- ❑ The whole statue is estimated to have cost about 700 talents.
- ❑ The Parthenos was the warlike Athena and was depicted with spear, helmet and shield.

Replica at Nashville, Tennessee



Acropolis Costs

“[Pericles] asked them to be confident, pointing out that the average yearly contributions from the allies amounted to 600 talents, then their still remained in the Acropolis 6,000 talents of silver coin’. The reserve fund had been 9,700 talents. It had been drawn upon to pay for the Propylaea and other public buildings... and he informed them that they might yet use the ornaments of gold on the goddess herself which weighed 40 talents [1,040 kg]...” – Thucydides 2.13.3-5

Fate of the Parthenon

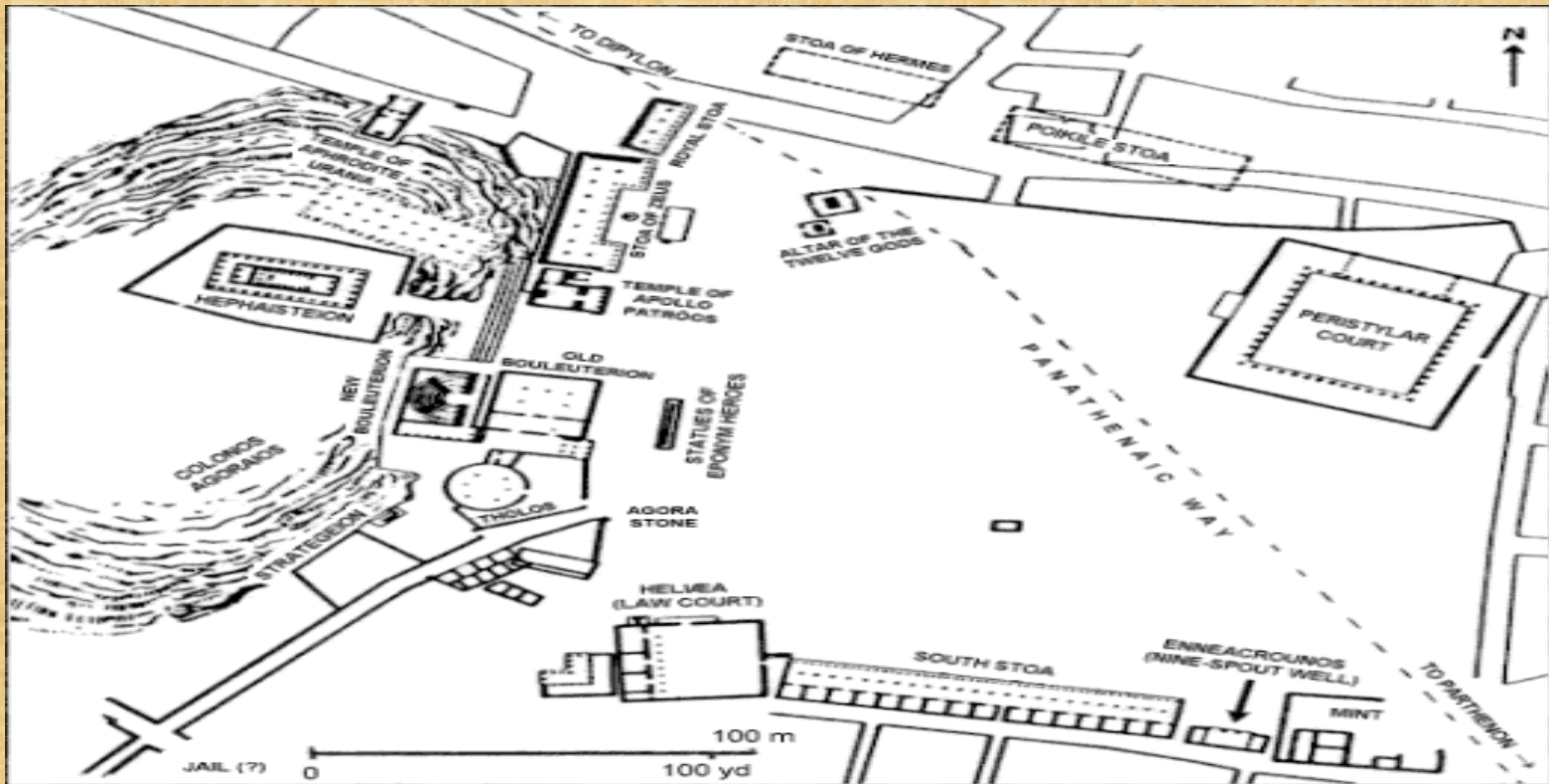
- ❑ Emperor Theodosius II – banned paganism and shut down cult sites.
- ❑ Later converted into a church and then a mosque.
- ❑ Heavily damaged in AD 1687 when Venetian were besieging the Ottoman Turk forces in Athens. Turkish stored gun-powder inside the Temple.
- ❑ Much of the Sculpture removed by Lord Elgin and brought to London between 1801-12.

The Agora

The Athenian Agora



Arial Plan of the Agora



- The agora was an open space in the centre of Athens
- It functioned as an official social, political, religious and economic meeting place from c. 600 BC.

South End of the Agora

- ❑ **Tholos** – built c.470 BC round building which served as the headquarters of the *prytaneis* (executive committee) of the *boule*.
- ❑ Identification of site based on account of Pausanias.

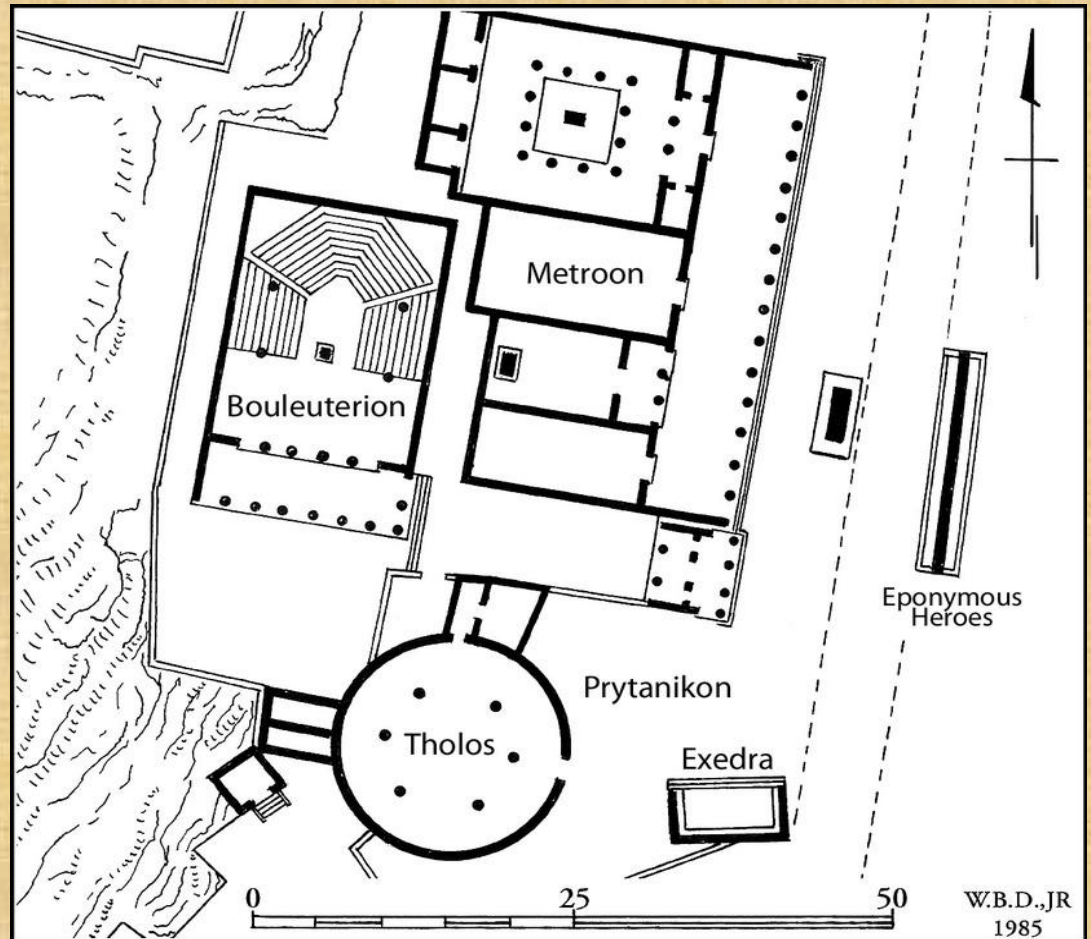
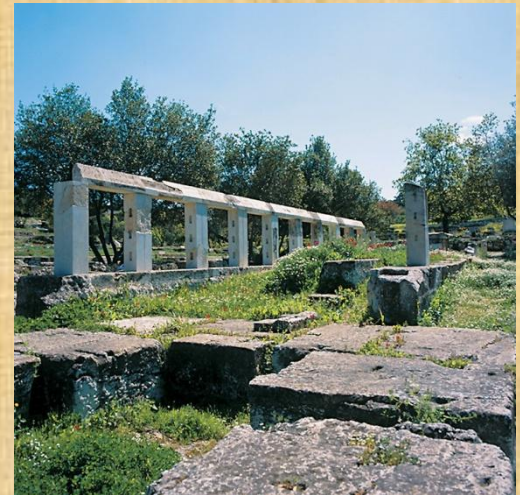


Image from <http://www.agathe.gr/>

- ▣ **Metroon** – both a sanctuary to the mother of the Gods and a storehouse for official records. Present remains are Hellenistic.
- ▣ **Bouleuterion** – meeting place of the *boule* (council). Rebuilt during the last quarter of the fifth century BC.
- ▣ **Monument of the Eponymous Heroes** - Ten bronze statues representing the heroes of the ten tribes. Initially erected in 420's BC.



Temple of Hephaistos

- Doric order temple, dedicated jointly to Hephaistos and Athena.
- Dates to second half of fifth century BC.
- The Labours of Herakles occupy the east facade, while the labours of Theseus adorn short sections of the long north and south sides

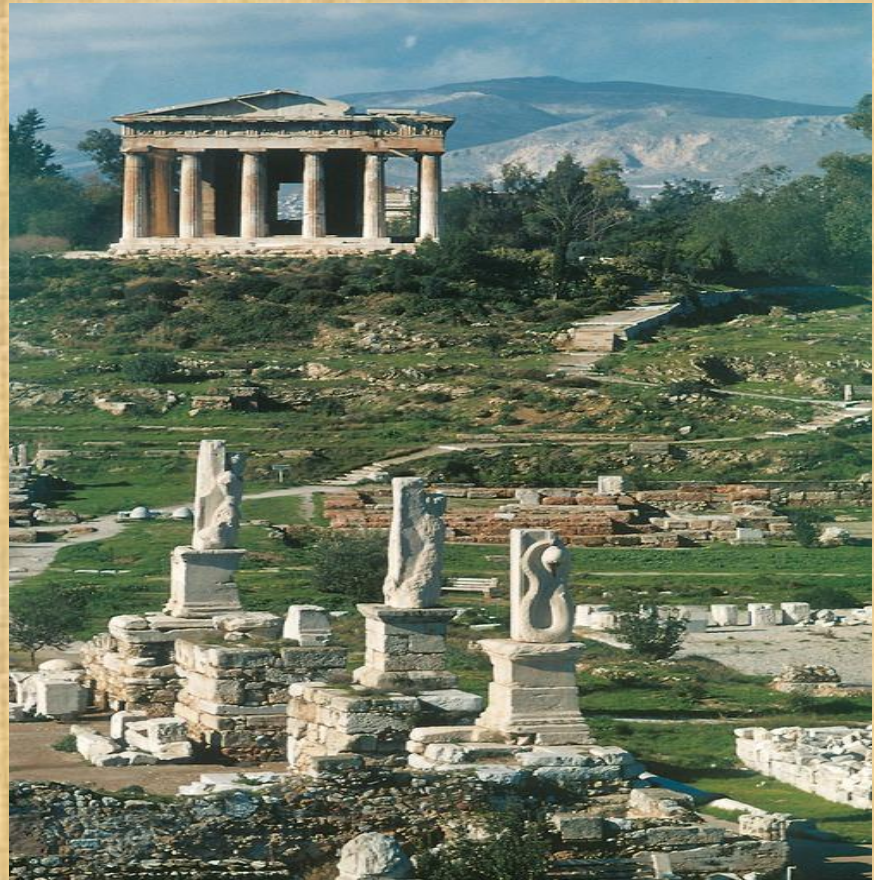
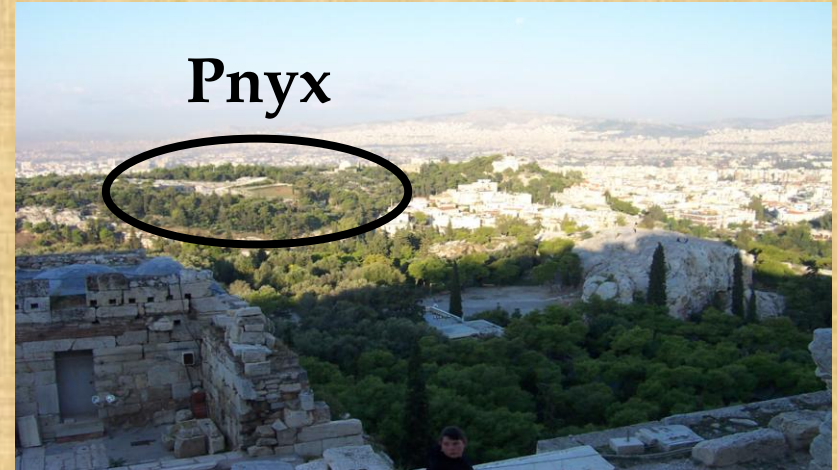


Image from <http://www.agathe.gr/>

Pnyx

- ▣ Meeting place of the *ekklesia* (assembly).
- ▣ Developed at different stages over time, including in Roman period.



Speakers platform c. 4th century BC
Image from <http://www.agathe.gr/>

Useful Sources

- ▣ **The American School of Classical Studies at Athens –**
<http://www.agathe.gr/>
- ▣ Ratté, C. (2003) 'Athens: Recreating the Parthenon' *The Classical World* 97 (1): 41-55.
(available on JSTOR).