

THE PARTHENON

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They say that the **first time you see** something extraordinary it leaves you the most lasting impression. I have seen the **Parthenon** many times and walked on the hallow grounds of the Acropolis with friends from around the world, but none of these sightings were as dazzling as the very first time I saw the **Parthenon**. It was in the summer of 1950.

As a 15 year old boy scout, I was parading by Constitution Square in Athens at the end of the **International Jamboree** at Mt. Penteli [*from where the marble for the Parthenon came*]. A fellow camp fire participant was teenager Prince Constantine, [*who eventually became king, but his reign was cut short by the military regime of 1967*]. The Jamboree was held in Greece to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the **Boy Scout** movement. I got a glimpse of the Parthenon and could not take my eyes off of it. I was nudged back into line!

Ever since, I have been in love with that most famous in the world temple built in honor of **Athena Parthenos**



[παρθενος means **Virgin**], Goddess of wisdom, letters, culture, and patron of **olive trees**. The Parthenon is an architectural marvel, of both the ancient and modern world, a symbol of the ingenuity of the **Golden Age of Greece**, when titans of human intellect emerged from the chaos and the ruins left by the **Persian Wars** at the beginning of the 5th century BC. Socrates [*teacher*], Pheidias [*architect, sculptor*], Praxiteles [*sculptor*], Pericles [*politician*], Aeschylus [*tragedian*], Democritus [*atom scientist*], Sophocles [*dramatist*], Plato [*philosopher, political scientist*], Aristophanes [*satirist*], Herodotus [*the father of History*], Euripides [*dramatist*], Kleisthenis [*political innovator*], Thucydides [*historian extraordinaire*], Aristotle [*scientist*], **just to name a few who lived at that time**. Perhaps America's **20th century**, in terms of innovation, defense of Liberty, political progress, alliances, dominance of the western world, democracy, prosperity, comes the closest to the **5th Century BC of Greece**.

Under the shadow of the Parthenon, Athens became the epicenter of civilization pioneering unprecedented strides in the development of sciences and **anthropocentric** philosophies that became the foundation of democracy in the **West**. **Synchronously**, in the **East**, oriental giants of intellect **Confucius** [*Kung Fu-tse*] in China, and Siddhartha Gautama [*Buddha = the enlightened one, virtuous*] in the Indian subcontinent were originating **theocentric** philosophies that became the foundation of the **Oriental culture** and oligarchic governance. In the 5th century, there was only **East** and **West**. [*Up North, communicating was rudimentary at a time in Greece Plato was writing his treatise on the ideal governance by meritocracy, and the future teacher of Alexander, Aristotle, was one of his pupils on the university campus Plato founded; see again the movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" for a quote*].

Periclean democracy began and ended in the 5th century BC, reappearing only in 1974 when the military junta collapsed, and Greece became a multi-party parliamentary republic. In the East, the **oligarchy** of the emperor was replaced in 1949 by that of the communist party in China. India became the **largest democracy** in the world after getting its independence from the British in 1945. Economically and technologically, from **Japan** to **Singapore** to

Lebanon, empowered by the ideals of **Platonic meritocracy**, the **East** is progressing to the point of challenging the **West** for **global hegemony** after **25 centuries of incubation**.

THE ELGIN MARBLES!

Lord Elgin bribed the Sultan in Constantinople in the late 18th century, and got permission to remove the fabulous sculptures on the 92 metopes of the Parthenon. He wanted to preserve them as a **world cultural heritage**. So he cut the statues [*he left the head of a horse; see pic*], loaded them into boats, and sold them to the British Museum in London where they are being **displayed prominently** as the “*Elgin Marbles*”. This act of larceny of our cultural heritage was the theme of the 1991 Leontis Distinguished Lecture at OSU. This annual lecture series was endowed by the late Dr. **Tom Leontis** who served as President of our Greek community in the 1970s, while his wife Anna started our church bookstore that **Helen Tornik** runs



now. The speaker that year was history professor **Dr. R. Browning**, a distinguished **British scholar**, who headed a committee of intellectuals from around the world, which campaigned worldwide to return the “*Elgin Marbles*” to their rightful owner, Greece.

In the Metropolitan Museum of New York, I saw a model of the Parthenon showing the statues on the frieze in their original color. The expressiveness and the composition of the figures are stunning. I made a special trip to Nashville, TN, to see the exact replica of the Parthenon. It is located in the middle of the Centennial Park, in down town, and even though it is not top of an impressive rock, as is the Acropolis of Athens, it stands by itself in the middle of the park. It is a massive, magnificent, emotional sight [*see foto collage*]. Those of you attending the Clergy-Laity Congress in 2006, you will get a chance to see it and see the statue of Feidias for Athena, inside. It was added in the last few years. Unfortunately, the Parthenon was not open in winter for visitors. Fortunately, we have Professor Fullerton giving us the story on that famous piece of art on page 8.



Today, those unique sculptures of the Parthenon are in London. The late **Melina Mercouri**, the world famous Greek actor of the “*Never on Sunday*” fame, as Minister of Culture in the Greek government in the 1980s, initiated a worldwide effort to get the statuettes back. She built a special museum on the Acropolis to display them prominently. There was hope that they would be returned in time for the **2004 Olympics**. The British continue to scorn the request of Greece for the **repatriation** of the “*Parthenon Marbles*”. **We shall overcome!**

MAN OF THE CENTURY!

For the 20th Century, **Albert Einstein** was voted, and rightly so, as the “*Man of the Century*” by TIME magazine. Astute politicians, like Presidents F D **Roosevelt** and Bill **Clinton** received substantial votes. For the “*Man of the 5th Century BC*”, it would have to be politician **Perikles of Athens**.

Interestingly enough, Pericles legacy, like that of Roosevelt and Clinton, is tainted also with girlfriend episodes. Pericles, a genius, an eloquent and visionary democratic leader, outmaneuvered enigmatic **Cimon**. Cimon was the son of war hero **Miltiades** of the **Battle of Marathon** and a vicious nemesis of **Themistocles** the war hero of the **Battle of Salamis**.

For 30 years, **460-430**, Pericles steered Athens from the economic ruins of the previous decade into its pinnacle of unprecedented economic prosperity and true democracy based on **full and transparent debate** of all public issues. After him, Athens got involved into the **Peloponnesian War**. Pericles was responsible for the phenomenal growth of the arts, philosophy, sciences and for completing in **438** an exquisite temple, a stunning achievement, one of the wonders of the world, the **PARTHENON!**

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