

## THE ROCK AND THE GODDESS

### The Rock

The Acropolis (Fig. 1; CD 001–003) is not the tallest hill in Athens – Mt. Lykabettos, not quite 2 kilometers to the northeast, is nearly twice as high – but it had the right combination of accessibility, usable summit, natural defenses, and water to make it the obvious choice for ancient Athens’s “high city” or “city on the hill” (for that is what *akropolis* means).<sup>1</sup> Almost every Greek city-state (or *polis*) had one, but no other acropolis was as successful as the Athenian: a massive urban focus that was always within view and that at various times throughout its virtually uninterrupted 6,000-year-long cultural history served as dwelling place, fortress, sanctuary, and symbol – often all at once.

The Acropolis is about 270 meters (885 feet) long at its longest and about 156 meters (512 feet) wide at its widest, but it is rugged and irregularly shaped, and the builders of its later, faceted walls merely regularized its essentially polygonal form (Fig. 2). They also created its flat-topped appearance: the rock actually slopes markedly from a ridge at its center down to the south (Fig. 3b), and only a long and complex series of retaining walls and artificial terraces on that side, together with a huge stone platform originally built to support a Parthenon planned decades before Pericles’s great building (Fig. 4), extended the natural summit in that direction. Originally, then, the Acropolis was most sheer on the north and the east, and these sides especially are marked by virtually perpendicular cliffs about 30 meters (100 feet) high: the fortification walls built by men



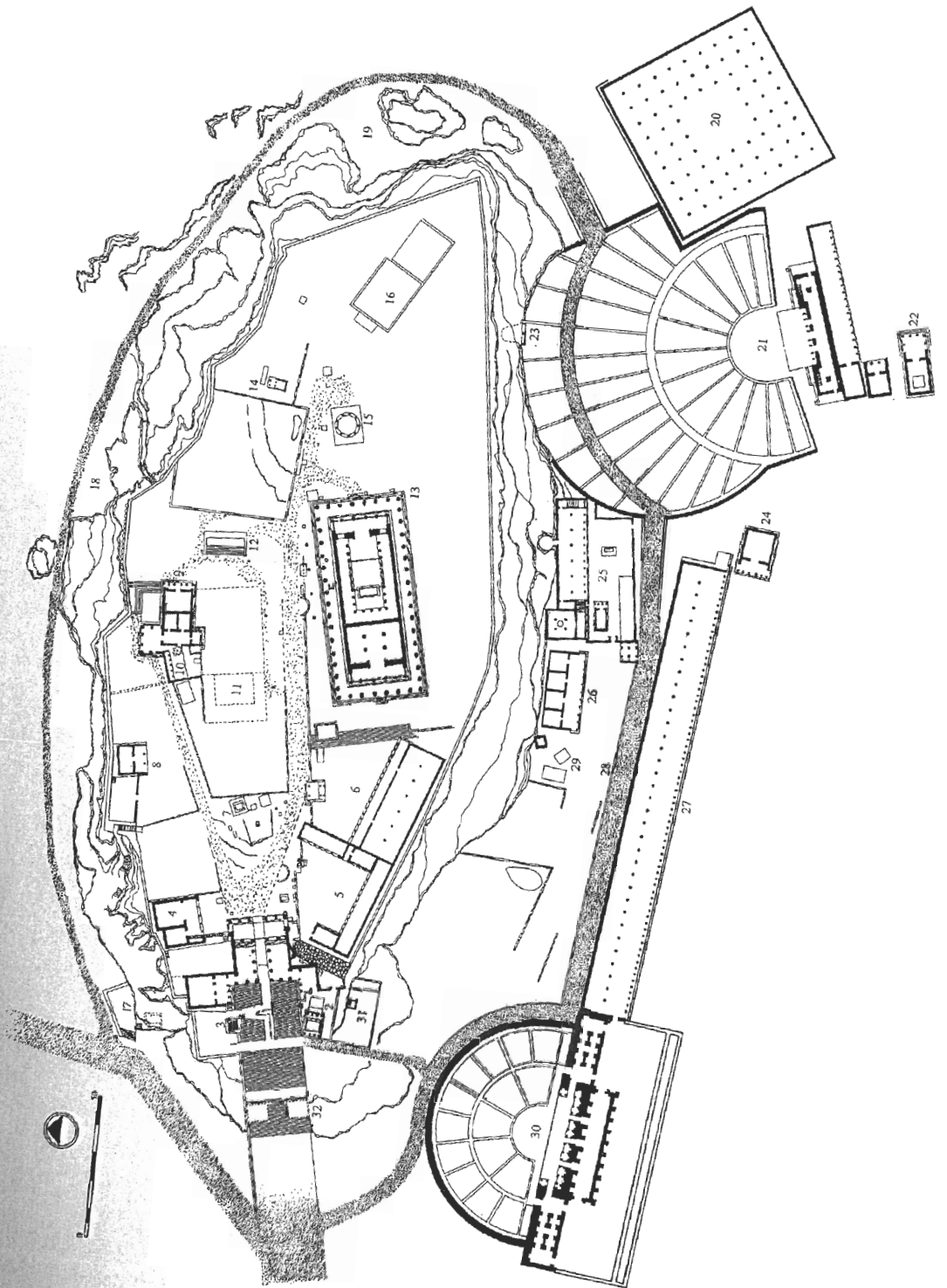
1. View of Acropolis from southwest; Mt. Lykabettos is seen in the distance, to the right of the Parthenon. Photo: author.

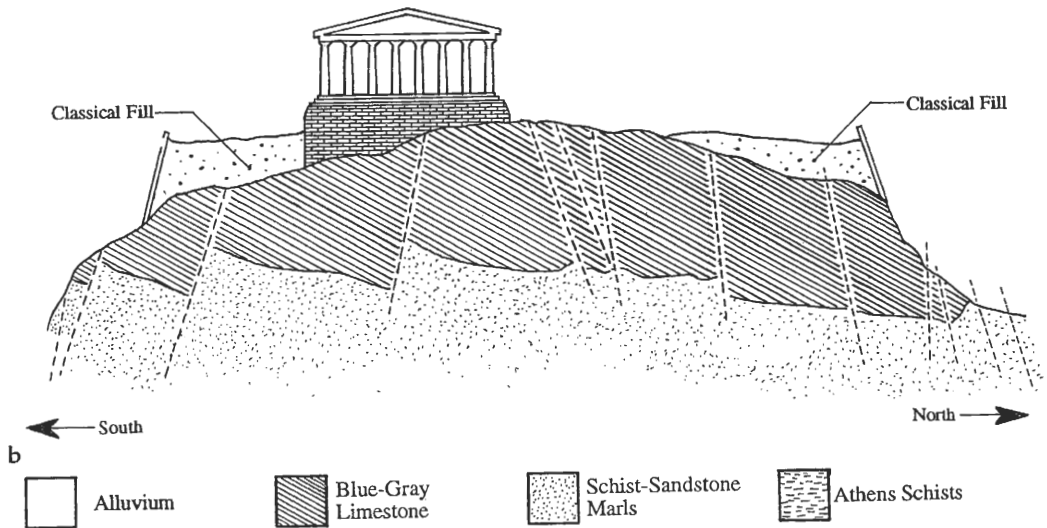
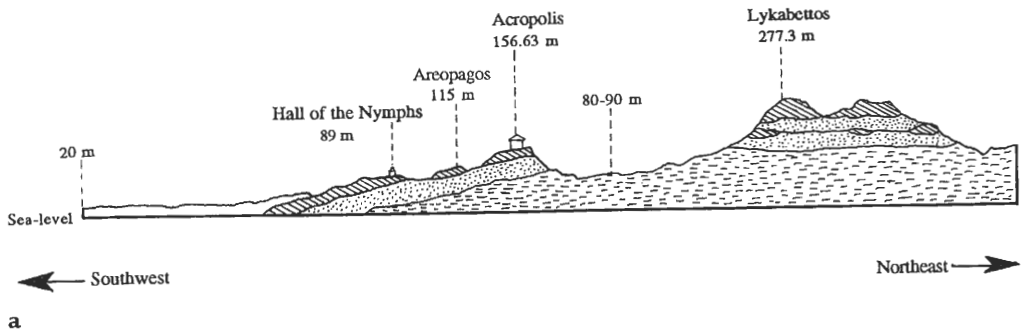
almost seem to emerge from them, as if the natural form had somehow transformed itself into architecture. But even the south side of the rock is marked by great rocky bulges and escarpments (Fig. 1; CD 001-002), and the only easy ascent was (and is) on the west side (Fig. 5), where the

2. (facing page). Plan of the Acropolis by I. Gelbrich (after Travlos 1971, Fig. 91, and Korres 1994b, 43), with revisions by author.

- |  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1 Propylaia                                  | 17 Klepsydra Fountain              |
| 2 Sanctuary of Athena Nike                   | 18 Shrine of Aphrodite and Eros    |
| 3 Monument of Eumenes II (later, of Agrippa) | 19 Cave of Aglauros                |
| 4 Northwest Building                         | 20 Odeion of Pericles              |
| 5 Sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia             | 21 Theater of Dionysos             |
| 6 Chalkotheke                                | 22 Temple of Dionysos              |
| 7 Bronze Athena                              | 23 Monument of Thrasyllus          |
| 8 Building III (House of the Arrhephoroi)    | 24 Monument of Nikias              |
| 9 Erechtheion                                | 25 Asklepieion                     |
| 10 Pandroseion                               | 26 Ionic Stoa                      |
| 11 Opisthodomos?                             | 27 Stoa of Eumenes II              |
| 12 Altar of Athena                           | 28 Boundary of the Spring          |
| 13 Parthenon                                 | 29 Temples of Isis and Themis      |
| 14 Sanctuary of Zeus Polieus                 | 30 Odeion of Herodes Atticus       |
| 15 Temple of Roma and Augustus               | 31 Sanctuary of Aphrodite Pandemos |
| 16 Building IV (Heroon of Pandion?)          | 32 Beulé Gate                      |





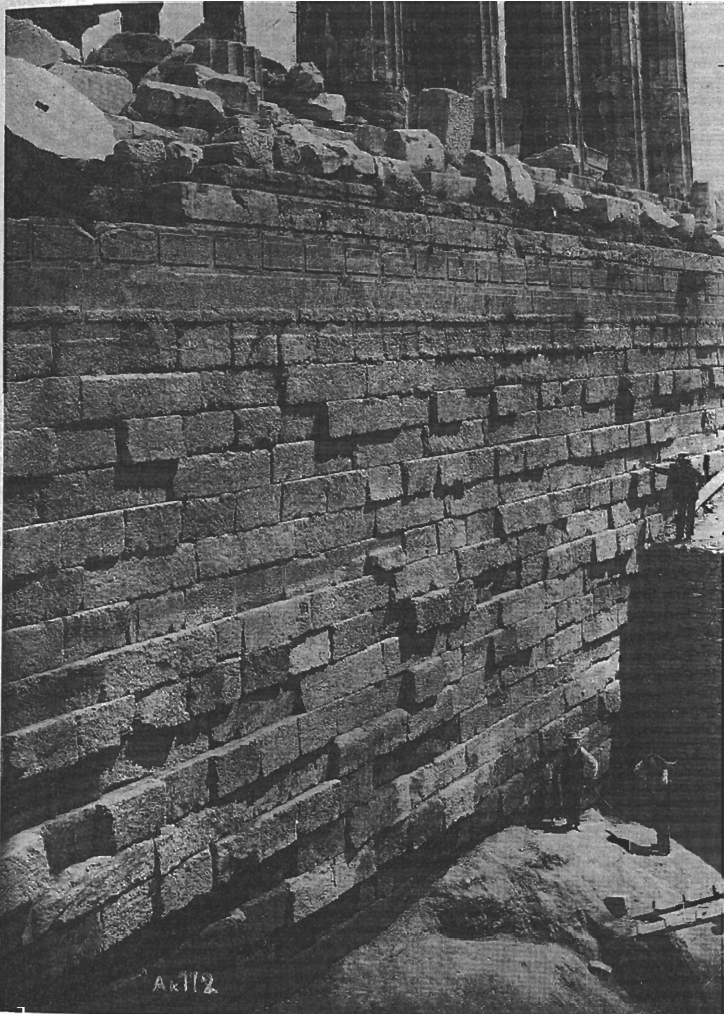


3. a. Section through the hills of Athens (after Judeich 1931, Fig. 7). b. Section through Acropolis (after Higgins and Higgins 1996, Fig. 3.4). Drawings by I. Gelbrich.

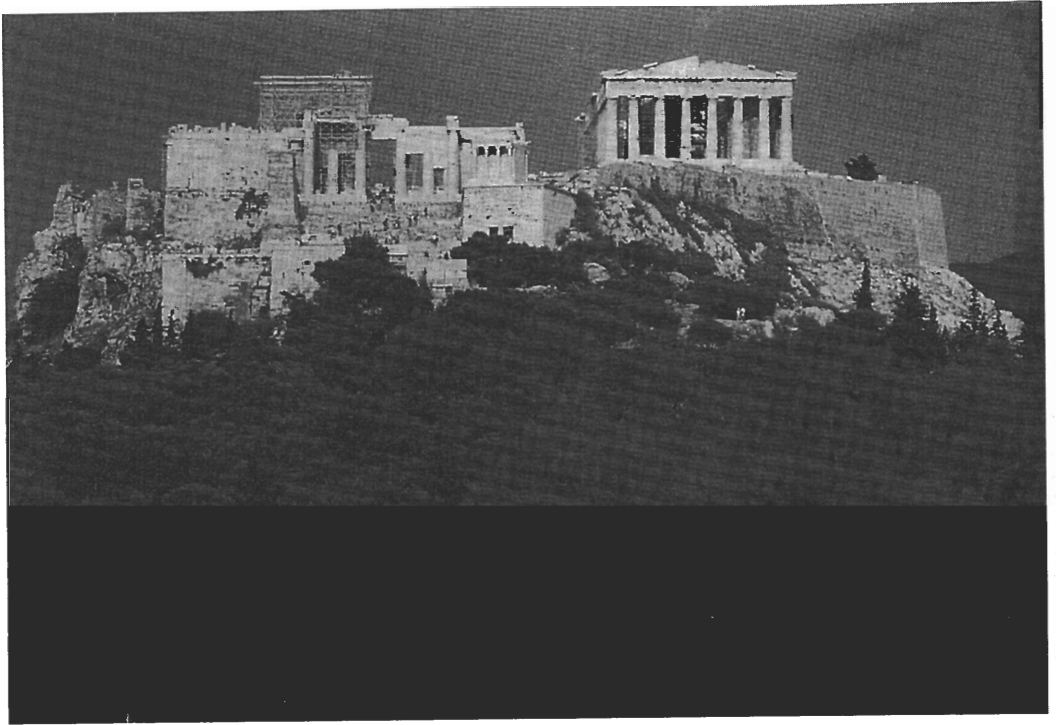
Acropolis is joined by saddles to lower, smaller hills nearby (above all, the Areopagos and the Pnyx, Fig. 6; CD 014) that would themselves play significant roles in the political history and civic life of Athens.

The Acropolis itself is a complex, soft mass of schist, sandstone, marl, and conglomerate capped by a thick layer of hard, highly fractured limestone formed in the late Cretaceous period, around the time the dinosaurs died off (Fig. 7; CD 010–011). The stone is fundamentally bluish to light gray in color, but it is also frequently tinged pink, and irregular streaks of almost blood-red marl or calcite course through it (CD 012–013). The brecciated, veined character of the stone is especially clear in those exposed portions of the rock that, over the centuries, have been heavily polished by feet. In places, the stone is nearly crystalline and its character thus approaches that of marble (because marble is simply limestone that has undergone a lot of high pressure and heated

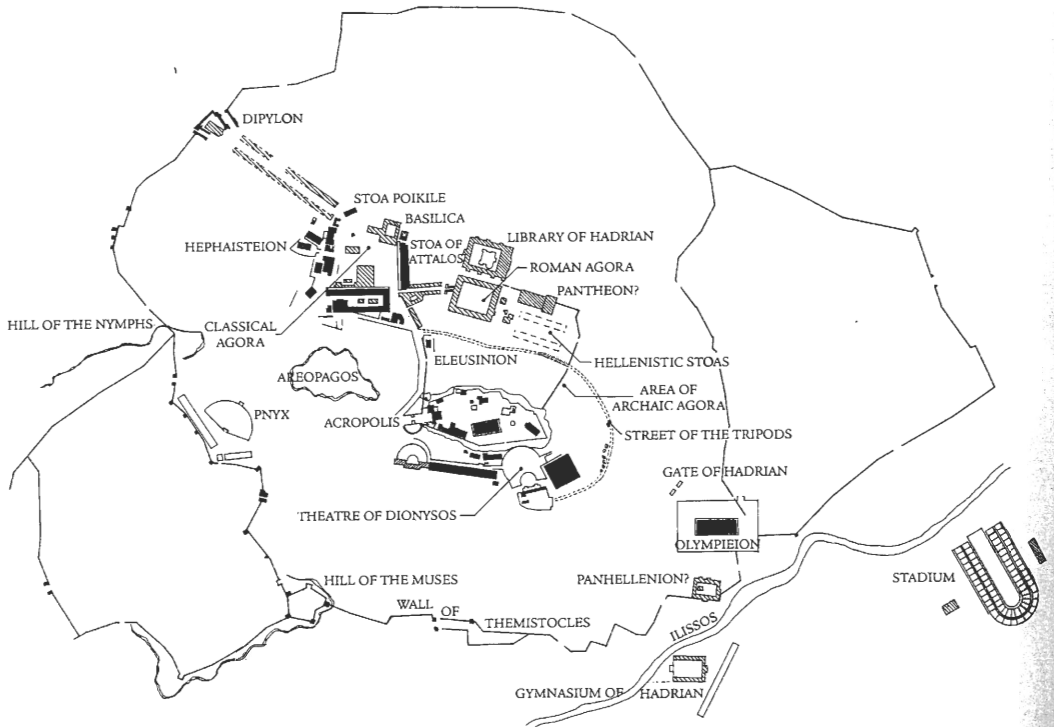
metamorphosis, the line between them is sometimes hard to draw). At all events, this same "Acropolis limestone" caps the other outcrops and hills of Athens (Fig. 3a; CD 014). Eons ago, they were all part of the same continuous physical feature, bumps on a long mountain ridge that was eventually broken down by such forces as earthquake and erosion. In other words, the Acropolis is basically an ancient mountaintop, a remnant of a once much greater limestone formation that, like the other hills of Athens, came to be partly buried by the levelling sediments that created the Athenian plain.



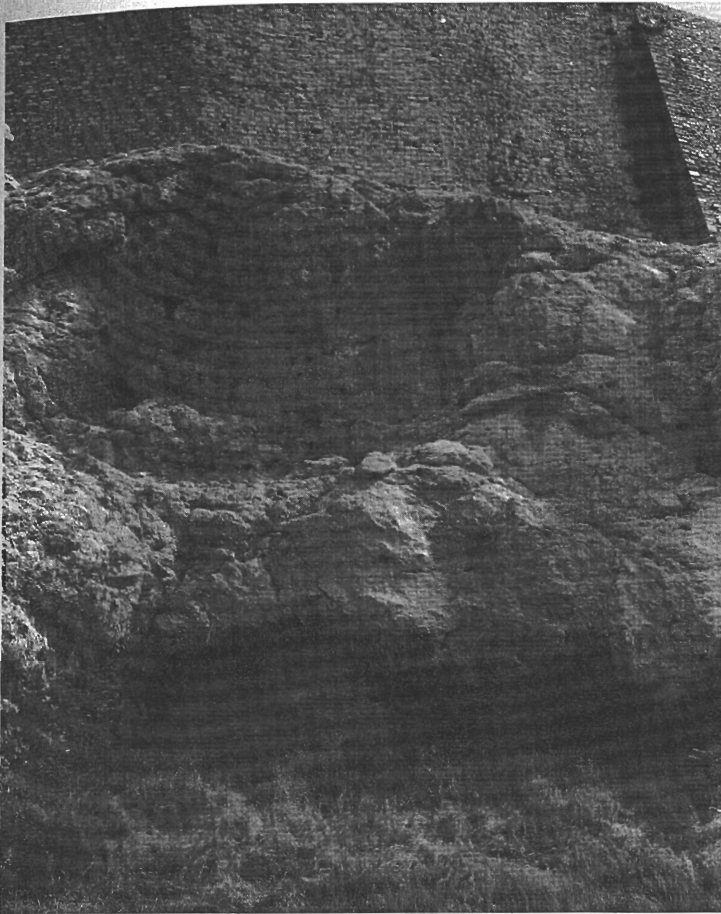
4 Foundations of Periclean Parthenon, originally built for Older Parthenon, 489–480. Courtesy DAI–Athens (Neg. Akr. 112).



5. View of Acropolis from west. Photo: author.



6. Map of Athens, by I. Gelbrich.

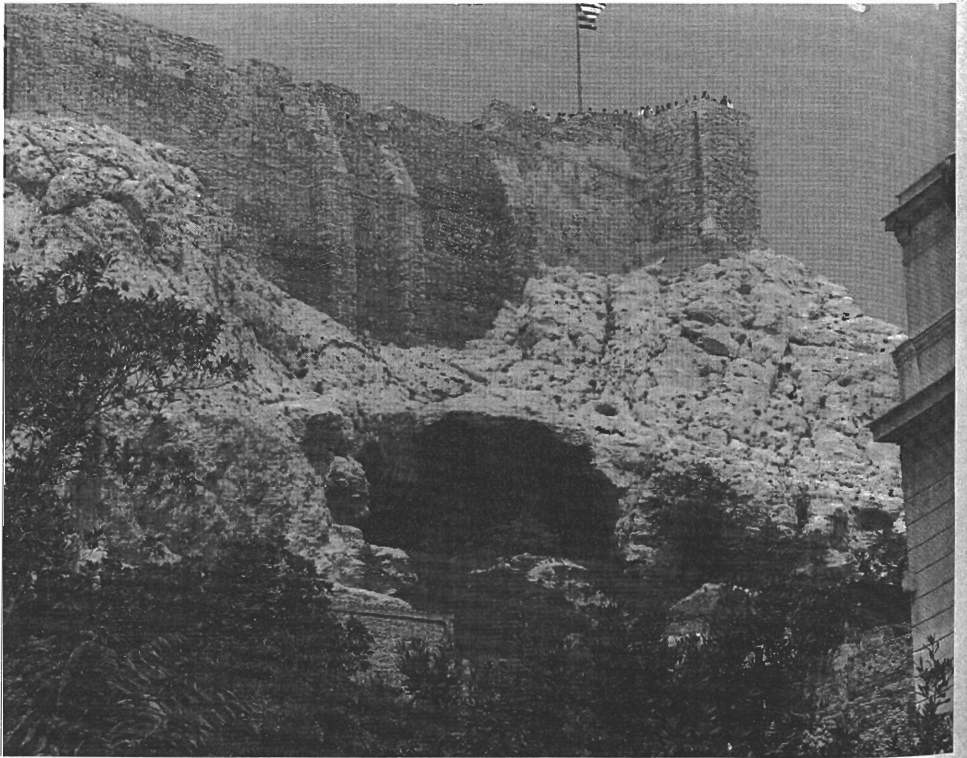


7. View of Acropolis limestone, south slope. Photo: author.

The rock is characterized on all sides by hollows and projections, by deep folds and fissures, and by caves large and small. A series of caves (once sacred to Pan, Zeus, and Apollo) marks its northwest shoulder (Fig. 8; CD 004). A high, deep cave gouges the middle of the north side (CD 005). A huge, rounded grotto – the Cave of Aglauros, as it is known – is the principal feature of the east (Fig. 9; CD 008–009). On the south, ancient architects, having shaved smooth the bulging face of the limestone, collaborated with the caves nature provided to create such structures as the Monument of Thrasyllus, built to commemorate the victor of a choral competition in the year 320/19 (Fig. 10). The effects of natural erosion are everywhere palpable, and the action of earthquakes, taken together with the seepage of water channeled through widening fractures in the limestone – in places the Acropolis has split or has been in danger of

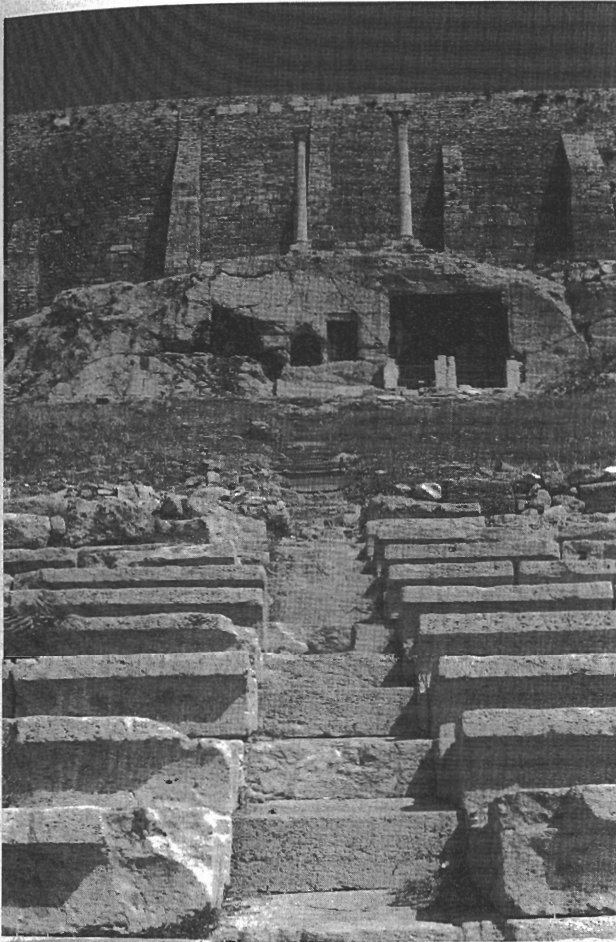


8. Northwest slope of Acropolis. The caves marking the slope were sacred to Apollo Pythios/Hypoakraios (Under the Long Rocks), Zeus Olympios, and Pan. Photo: author.



9. Grotto on east slope (Cave of Aglauros). Photo: author.

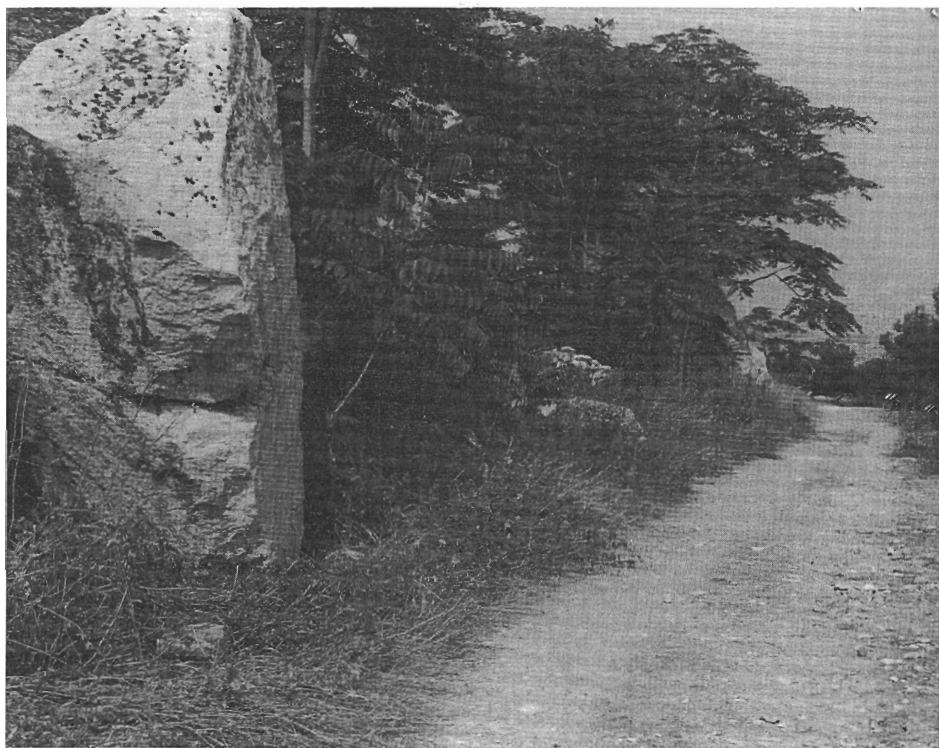




10. Monument of Thrasylos (320/19), above Theater of Dionysos. Photo: author.

splitting apart – have at various times sent great pieces of the rock to the ground below. An inscription marking the extent of the *peripatos*, the ancient roadway that encircles the Acropolis (Fig. 2), is carved on such a fallen boulder, for example (Fig. 11), and in the first century AD another large chunk smashed into the center of the paved court of one of Classical Athens's most splendid fountainhouses, the Klepsydra, on the northwest slope (Fig. 2; no. 17). The interior mass of the Acropolis now appears to be stable, and the citadel seems in no danger of splitting deep at its core.

The limestone that caps the Acropolis, though hard, is porous and water-soluble; the schist-sandstone foundation of the rock, though soft, is neither. Thus, water percolates down through the limestone only to be stopped by the impermeable layer below. It collects atop the seam and,

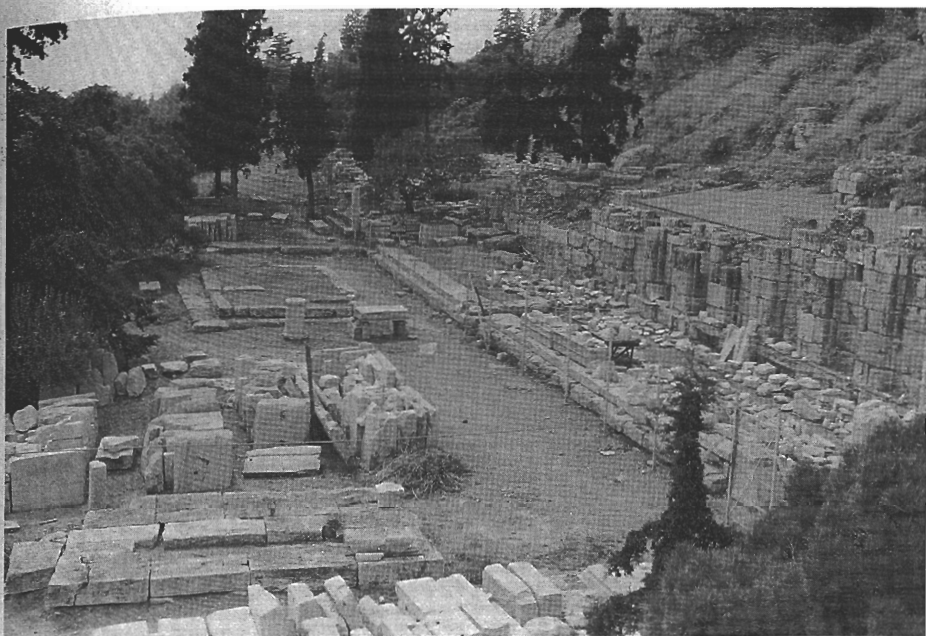


11. View of *peripatos* (north slope). The *peripatos* inscription is inscribed on the bottom of the upright block of Acropolis limestone at left. Photo: author.

as a result, it could be tapped at relatively shallow depths on the periphery of the Acropolis, where the limestone meets the schist-sandstone layer, where the forces of erosion have hollowed out caves or rock shelters, and where the water naturally emerges again in springs.<sup>2</sup> In essence, then, the lower slopes of the Acropolis were full of natural reservoirs, and it was this ready supply of water that early on made it an attractive site for human occupation. At the northwest corner of the rock, shallow artesian wells tapped the supply as early as habitation can be documented at Athens, in the Neolithic period, and this is the area that became the location of the Klepsydra. Midway along the north side of the rock, Late Bronze Age (or Mycenaean) Athenians dug a well at the bottom of a deep, hidden fissure and built a remarkable stairway of wood and stone to reach it.<sup>3</sup> On the south side, natural springs were thought sacred and played important roles in Classical cult (for example, in the Sanctuary of Asklepios [Figs. 12, 13; CD 153, 156]).<sup>4</sup>

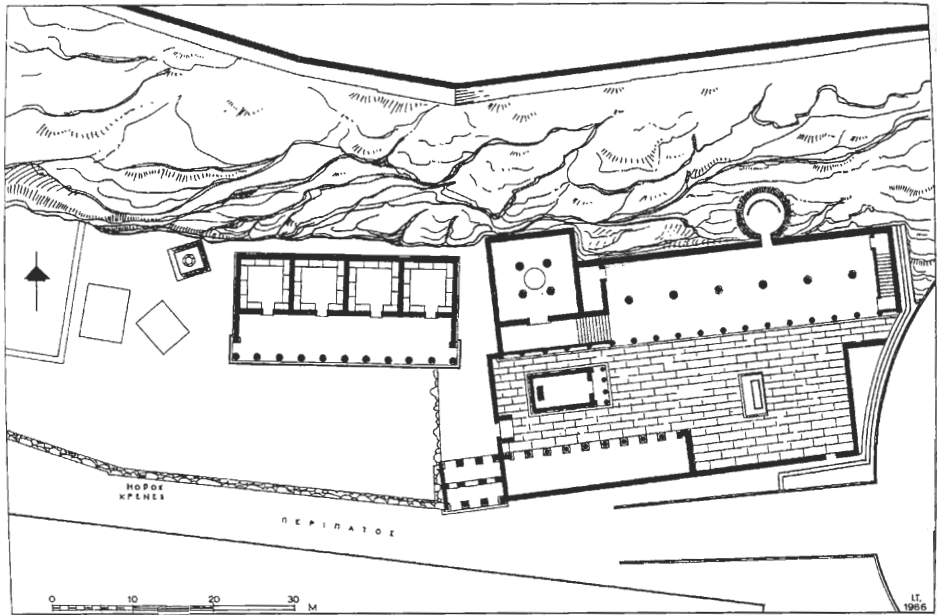
This, then, was the easily defensible, relatively water-rich rock that would dominate the political, military, religious, and cultural history of





12. View of Asklepieion from east. Photo: author.

Athens – the hub of what the oracle of Delphi knew as “the wheel-shaped city.”<sup>5</sup> Historical Athenians called it the “Acropolis” or even just “polis.”<sup>6</sup> What the prehistoric inhabitants of Athens called it (and what divinities they first worshipped upon it), we do not know. There was a Classical memory of a distant time when the Athenians themselves were known as the Kekropidai or Kranaoi, after their prehistoric kings Kekrops and Kranaos, though there is no memory of what they called the Acropolis then.<sup>7</sup> However, it is entirely plausible that they called it (and the small clusters of houses they eventually planted atop it and its slopes) *Athene* or, in the plural, *Athenai*, words that seem, etymologically, pre-Greek. If that is so, the rock lent its name to the patron deity who would be so particularly and strongly associated with it, the city goddess who was, in effect, imminent in the rock and whose principal sacred emblems or symbols – the owl, the snake, and the olive tree – dwelled or grew upon it. Some small trace of that primeval identity may, in fact, be preserved in Homer’s *Odyssey*<sup>8</sup> when *Athene* (an epic form of Athena) is said to travel to *Athene* (the city, in the singular): the words are the same and so, linguistically, the goddess visits herself. In short, it seems that Athena was in the beginning named after the rock. No matter what later myths, mythographers, and tragedians suggest, the city was not named after her.

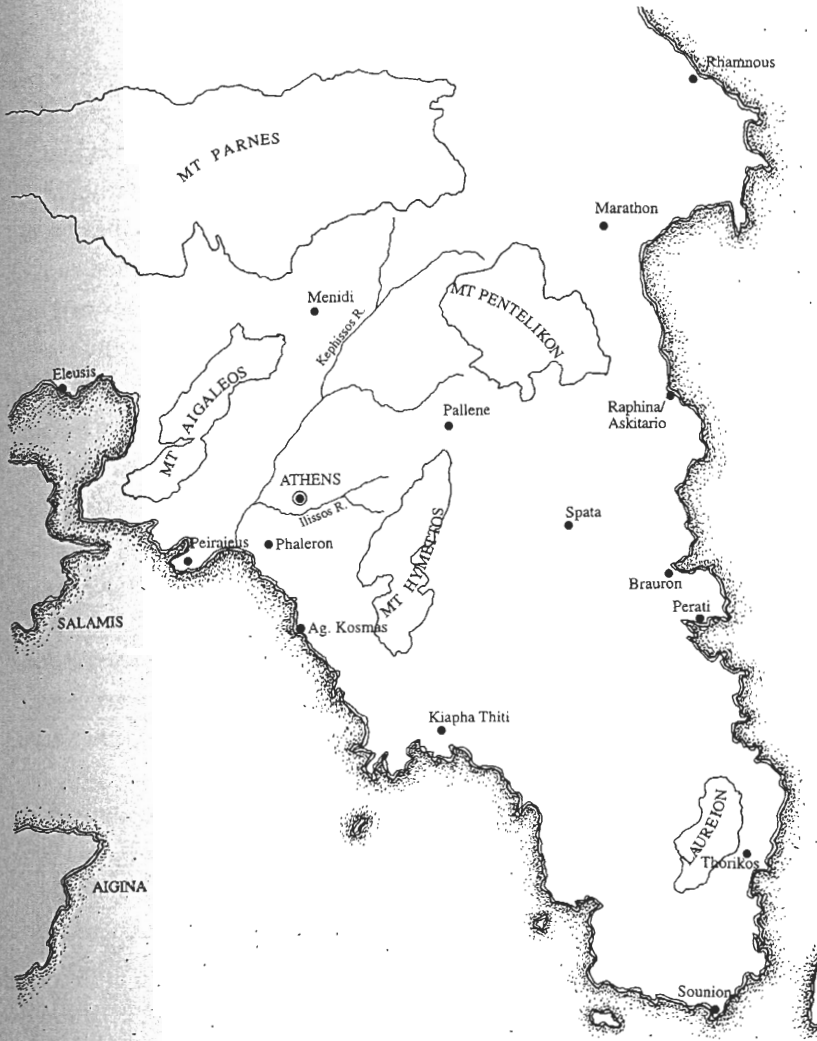


13. Plan of the Asklepieion. After Travlos 1971, Fig. 171. Reproduced by permission of DAI-Zentrale, Berlin.

And yet, in the end, who was named for what did not matter much. What mattered was the special relationship the city forged with the goddess and how completely Athena came to be regarded as Athens itself. The Athenians virtually spoke her name (*Athena* or *Athenaia*) every time they named their city (*Athenai*) and themselves (*Athenaioi*).<sup>9</sup> In fact, because the Athenian *polis* eventually encompassed all of Attica (Fig. 14) and not just the city itself, the Athenians might more accurately have called themselves *Attikoi* (inhabitants of Attika). That they did not do so suggests the strength of their special bond to their goddess. For although Athena was a goddess for all Greeks, the Athenians claimed her as their own, identifying themselves with her, and claimed for themselves many of the very qualities Athena herself embodied: military valor, boldness, love of the beautiful, love of reason and moderation, and knowledge. Athena was their guide and their security. She was the Athenian ideal and in the Athenian mind, where religious belief and secular patriotism dwelled so easily, so inextricably together, the goddess and the city were one.<sup>10</sup>

### The Goddess

We do not know where the Greek gods came from, but the conventional view is that most of them came from somewhere else. It is widely believed,



14. Map of Attika, by I. Gelbrich.

for example, that when the Indo-European people who would in time become the Greeks arrived on the mainland early in the Bronze Age, they superimposed their own system of "sky gods" (mostly male) upon a stratum of chthonic, or earthly, powers worshipped by the peoples they found in place - above all, fertility and earth-mother goddesses (such as Gaia, or Earth, herself) of Neolithic and even Palaeolithic origin, the very embodiments of fecundity. It was indeed typical of most ancient peoples to respect and absorb, or else co-opt, the gods of others rather than reject them. (Why take chances, and why fight holy wars?) And so, the Greek pantheon has often been considered the result of a Bronze Age blend



of more or less indigenous nature divinities (broadly responsible for the welfare and fertility of human beings, plants, and animals) and newly arrived Olympians, with their own more specific functions and limited spheres of action – “special department gods,” as they have been called.<sup>11</sup>

Things are not likely to have been that simple. Although the distinction between “earth gods” and “sky gods” was taken for granted even in antiquity,<sup>12</sup> the notion that one set of divinities (the chthonic ones) was “native” and the other set (the Olympians) consisted of “Indo-European invaders” is hard to prove. It is remarkable, for example, that only one of the canonical twelve Olympian gods can confidently be said to have an impeccable Indo-European pedigree, and that is Zeus, god of the shining sky and thunderbolt. Yet, some gods outside the canon (the sun god Helios, for example) are almost certainly Indo-European, too. On the other hand, Demeter, the principal goddess of the cultivated earth, is also an Olympian, whereas the canonical Aphrodite is probably a post-Bronze Age eastern immigrant to Olympus from Cyprus. (She is not nicknamed “the Cyprian” for nothing.) As for Athena, who is firmly entrenched as one of the Olympian twelve, her name at least seems to predate the arrival of the people who would worship her.

The formation of Greek religion was clearly a long and complex process, and the origins of individual divinities often cannot be precisely tracked. In fact, Greek religion had already undergone many centuries of combination, assimilation, and transformation by the time Athena (or her prototype) first enters the archaeological record. Interestingly, she first appears not in Athens or on its Acropolis but on the acropolis of Mycenae, the heavily fortified citadel that was the leading cultural and political center of Late Bronze Age Greece. She also appears in a cluster of images – a gold ring, a painted tablet, a fragment of fresco (Fig. 15) – that present her very much as later Greeks knew her: as an armed, helmeted, warrior goddess.<sup>13</sup> It is no surprise to find that the Mycenaeans – best known for their fortified citadels, weapons, and armor – worshipped a female deity charged (apparently) with the defense of the citadel and royal house. Warrior goddesses were commonplace elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. (The Mesopotamians, for example, had Ishtar or Astarte, the Egyptians had Neith.) There is no reason why such a goddess should not have figured in the pantheon of Bronze Age Greece.



a



b

115. a. "Shield Goddess" on painted tablet from Cult Center, Mycenae (Athens NM 2666). Late thirteenth century. Drawing after Rehak 1984, 537. b. Helmeted Goddess holding griffin. Drawing of fresco from Cult Center, Mycenae (Athens NM 11652). Late thirteenth century.



Whether Mycenaean Greeks actually called their warrior goddess “Athena,” we do not know. She may be mentioned – once – in the Bronze Age linguistic record, but the record is controversial, and it comes from neither Mycenae nor Athens but from Knossos on Crete. On a narrow clay tablet baked hard in the fire that destroyed the Palace of Minos (possibly around 1375, possibly later), two inscribed lines of Linear B (a syllabic script that is the earliest known form of written Greek) seem to record gifts issued to four deities.<sup>14</sup> The top line reads *a-ta-na-po-ti-ni-ja*, and that, as soon as the text was deciphered, rang a loud bell. The almost identical phrases *potnia Athenaia* and *potni’ Athana* (both meaning “Lady Athena”) are found many centuries later in Homer and, later still, on inscriptions from the Acropolis.<sup>15</sup> The trouble is that the title *potnia* (“lady” or “mistress” in the sense of “she who masters”) is apparently applied to more than one deity in Linear B (including one goddess who seems a *Potnia* par excellence),<sup>16</sup> and that when names are linked to it they are normally toponyms, or place names. So, *a-ta-na-po-ti-ni-ja* means not “Lady Atana” (that is, Athena) but “Lady of Atana,” and we have no idea whether the Atana referred to is “our” Athens or another one on Crete, or whether the lady of the place is Athena herself or some other goddess closely associated with it.

All in all, though, it is likely that the Greeks of the Mycenaean Age worshipped a goddess like Athena – a goddess of cities or citadels, at the very least – and it is a very good bet that Athena is what they called her after all. Although the goddess will not appear again in the archaeological record for some 500 years, that record was still Greek, and some degree of religious and linguistic continuity across the centuries is assured. It certainly seems more than coincidence that when an Archaic temple was built directly atop the ruins of the Bronze Age palace of Mycenae in the seventh century, it was (it seems) dedicated to Athena.

In a sense, the Greeks did not worship one Athena; they worshipped many. Like any Greek god or goddess, Athena was a force of multiple powers, with many roles and manifestations, with the capacity to intervene in human life in a variety of ways. The wide range of her associations with special spheres of human activity is reflected in the dozens of epithets or titles by which Athena was known. Athena loomed large in the lives of Greeks other than the Athenians, of course. At Sparta, for example, she was worshipped as *Chalkioikos*, Athena of the Bronze House, and she is

### The Statue of Athena Polias

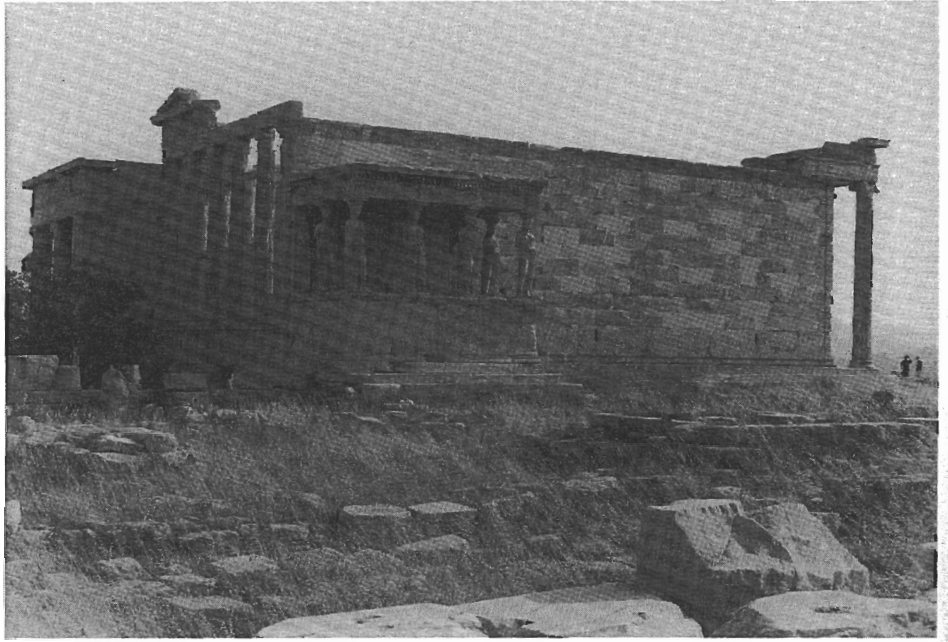
The cult image of Athena Polias was so old that the Athenians themselves were not sure where it had come from, and so simple that one later Christian author (a hostile witness, to be sure, writing when the statue had probably deteriorated) called it "a rough stake and a shapeless piece of wood."<sup>19</sup> According to one tradition, it had miraculously fallen down from heaven. According to others, either the legendary Kekrops or Erichthonios had it made when he was king of the city. However it got there, it was surely among the oldest cult-statues to be seen anywhere in Greece. Although there is the possibility that the statue was a Bronze Age or Mycenaean relic – a prehistoric fetish that somehow survived the centuries – and whereas we can be confident that throughout its long history, it always inhabited a series of shrines built on the north side of the Acropolis, culminating in the late fifth-century building we call the Erechtheion but whose official title was "the temple on the Acropolis in which the ancient image is" (Figs. 16–17), we know, strangely, very little about it. We think it was life-size or less because we can infer from a variety of evidence that it was evacuated from the Acropolis in 480 just before the Persians came, and that women could dress it, undress it, and possibly even carry it around like a mannequin as part of various festival rituals. Several inscriptions inventory an impressive array of ornaments somehow attached to the statue – "a diadem [or crown] which the goddess wears, the earrings which the goddess wears, a band which the goddess wears on her neck, five necklaces, a gold owl, a gold *aigis*, a gold gorgoneion, and a gold *phiale* [a shallow libation bowl] which she holds in her hand."<sup>20</sup> But, we are not sure when or over how long a period she acquired the

items, and she may also have worn a bronze helmet that (because of its relatively poorer material) did not make it into the inventories. We do not even know for sure whether the statue was seated or standing. There are a number of small painted terracotta seated goddesses from the Acropolis that might crudely imitate the Athena Polias (cf. Fig. 18), but there are standing terracottas that might imitate her, too, and it is likely that the ancient statue stood postlike, rigidly upright, with a gold *phiale* in one hand and an owl in the other.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it is just possible that it – or something like it – was represented in south metope 21 of the Parthenon (Fig. 19).<sup>22</sup>

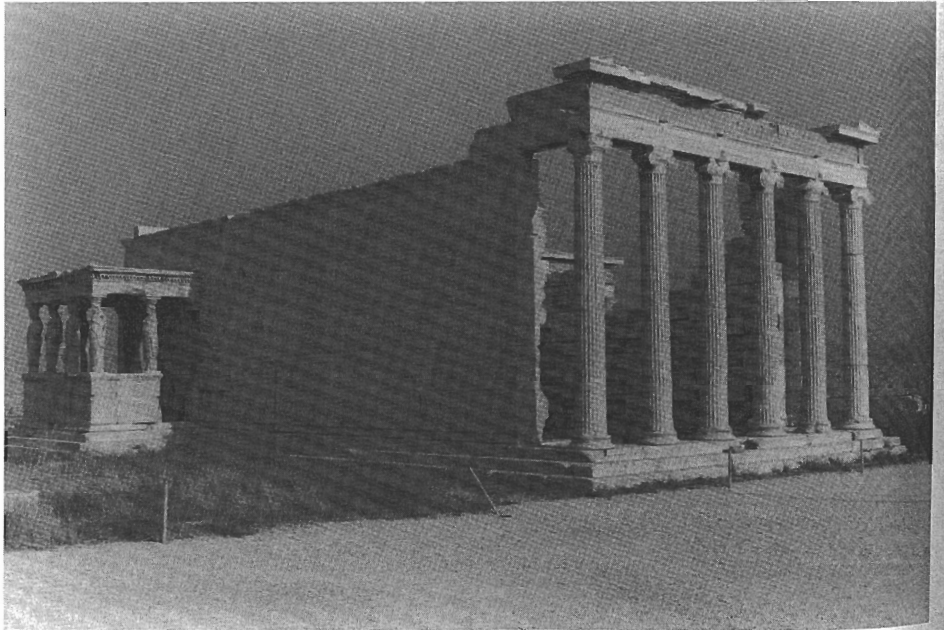
It is certain, however, that the statue wore cloth as well as gold. Every year, the statue was dressed in a new saffron-colored woolen robe or *peplos* (measuring perhaps 5 by 6 feet) woven by select Athenian girls and women and principally decorated (in contrasting purple) with inwoven scenes from the battle between the gods and giants, the savage sons of Earth (Gaia) who tried to overthrow the Olympians. (There are a few hints that other subjects, such as chariots and Athenian soldiers, appeared as well.) No detailed representation of the *peplos* survives (though the cloth depicted in the center of the Parthenon's east frieze is probably it; Fig. 20; CD 092), but it must have been an especially grand version of the sort of richly figured garments worn by women in many vase-paintings, by Athena herself in a late statue in Dresden, and (their paint now mostly faded) by Archaic Acropolis *korai* (cf. Fig. 45).<sup>23</sup> At all events, the presentation of a new *peplos* to Athena Polias was the highlight of the grand midsummer civic festival known as the Panathenaia.

The fate of the statue is unknown, but it is likely to have finally crumbled or been destroyed by the early fifth century AD, after serving as the focus of the most important cult on the Acropolis for a thousand years or more.





16. View of Erechtheion from southwest. Photo: author.

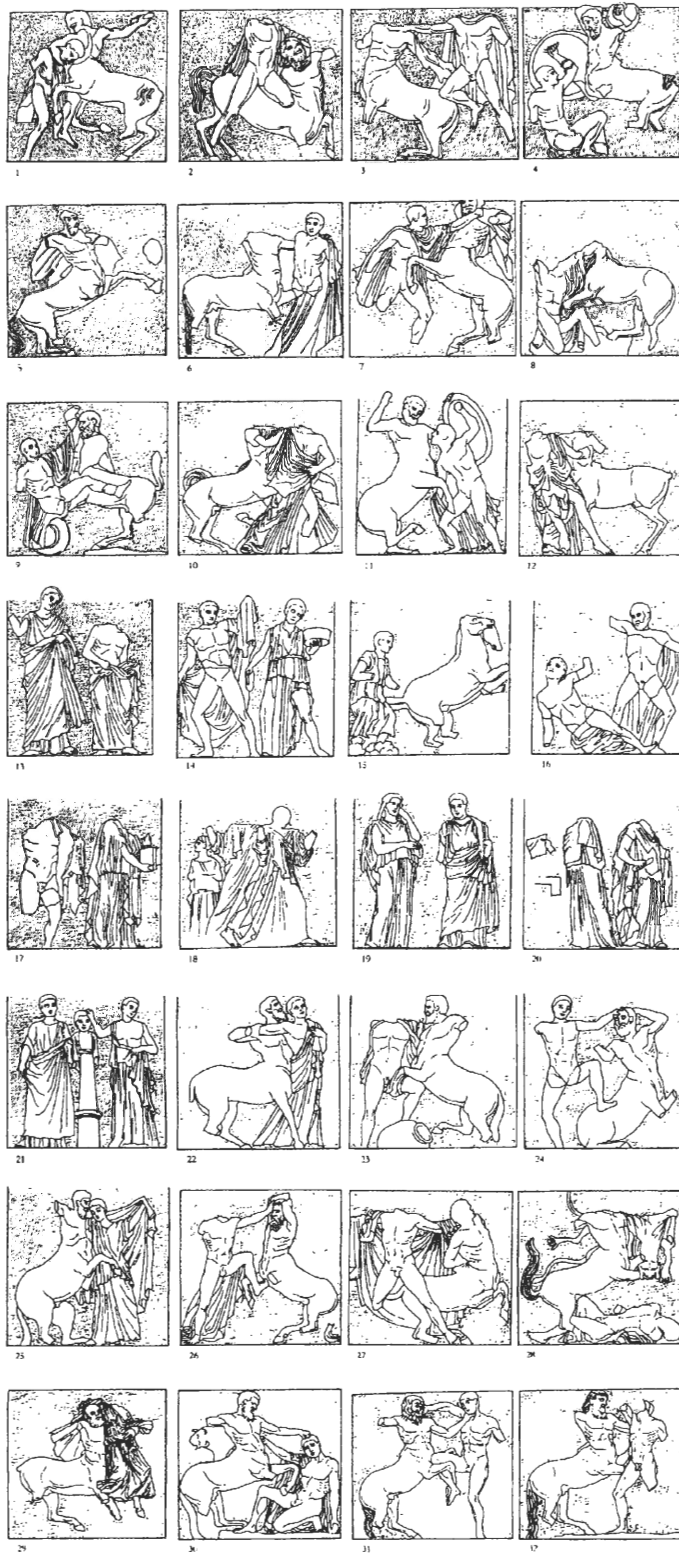


17. View of Erechtheion from southeast. Photo: author.

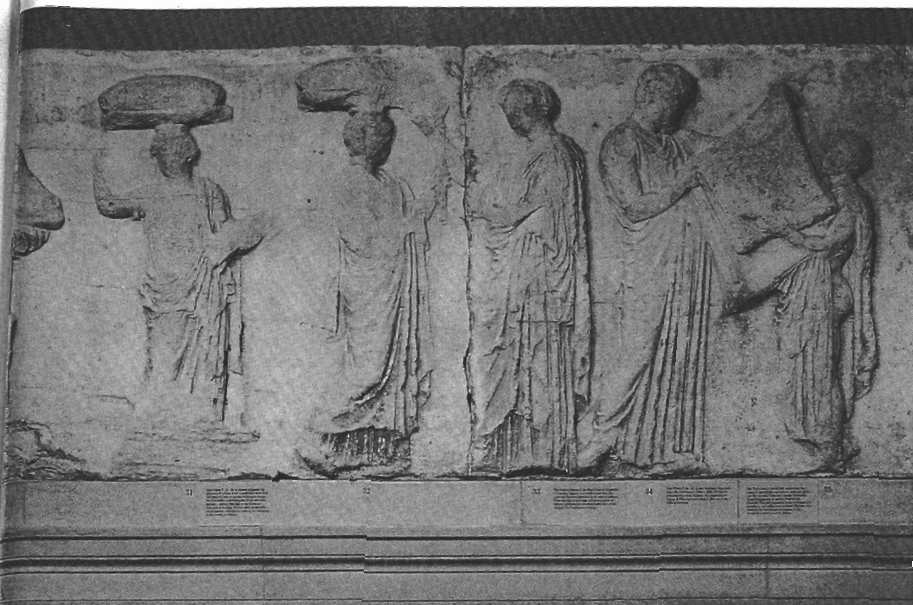




18. Terracotta seated figurine of Athena, possibly as Polias. Acropolis 10895, c. 500.  
Courtesy Acropolis Museum.



19. Parthenon, south metopes. From Boardman and Finn 1985, 236-237 (after Carrey drawings), used by permission.



20. The central scene of the Parthenon's east frieze. Courtesy Trustees of the British Museum.

the second most popular Olympian on the vases of Corinth.<sup>17</sup> However, it is in Athens and on the Acropolis that her cultic persona was most developed. There she was Athena Polias (originally, perhaps, “she who dwells on the [acro]polis,” later “[guardian] of the city”).<sup>18</sup> Athena was called “Polias” in cities other than Athens, but Athena Polias was, along with Zeus Polieus, Athens’s principal civic deity. This was the Athena who was honored at the midsummer Panathenaia, the major festival in the Athenian religious calendar. She was embodied in an ancient olivewood statue that was always the holiest image on the rock (cf. Fig. 18). However, the goddess was also Athena Parthenos (Fig. 21; CD 099–100, 102) and Pallas Athena (or sometimes just Pallas). Parthenos means “maid” or “virgin” but we do not know what Pallas means (and it is not certain that the Greeks did either) (cf. Fig. 22).<sup>24</sup> At all events, Athena’s virginity – so crucial to her mythology and Athenian ideology, as we shall see – was inviolable and pugnacious, and so it was a symbol for and guarantor of the impregnability of her citadel: to breach the walls of the Acropolis would be to violate Athena herself. She was Athena Promakhos (“fighter in the forefront” or “champion”), a goddess who delights in battle (cf. Fig. 72). And she got results, for she was also Athena Nike, goddess of victory (cf. Fig. 76).<sup>25</sup> Still, though a warrior goddess, she is mostly the

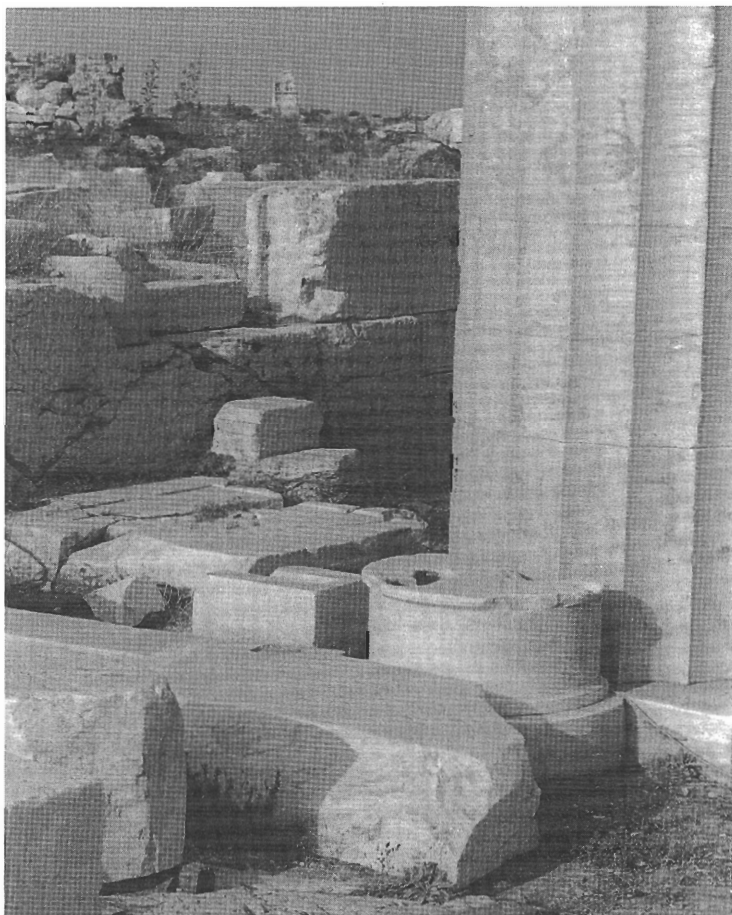


21. Athena Parthenos, reconstruction by Alan LeQuire in Nashville, Tennessee (1990). Photo G. Layda for the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County. Courtesy Wesley Paine and the Nashville Parthenon.

goddess of tactics, not the goddess of the wild chaos and rage of war (that domain is proper to Ares, the brutish and bloodthirsty god she despises in Homer).<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, in a more peaceful vein, she is Athena Ergane, the Work Woman,<sup>27</sup> and Athena Hippias, goddess of the horse,



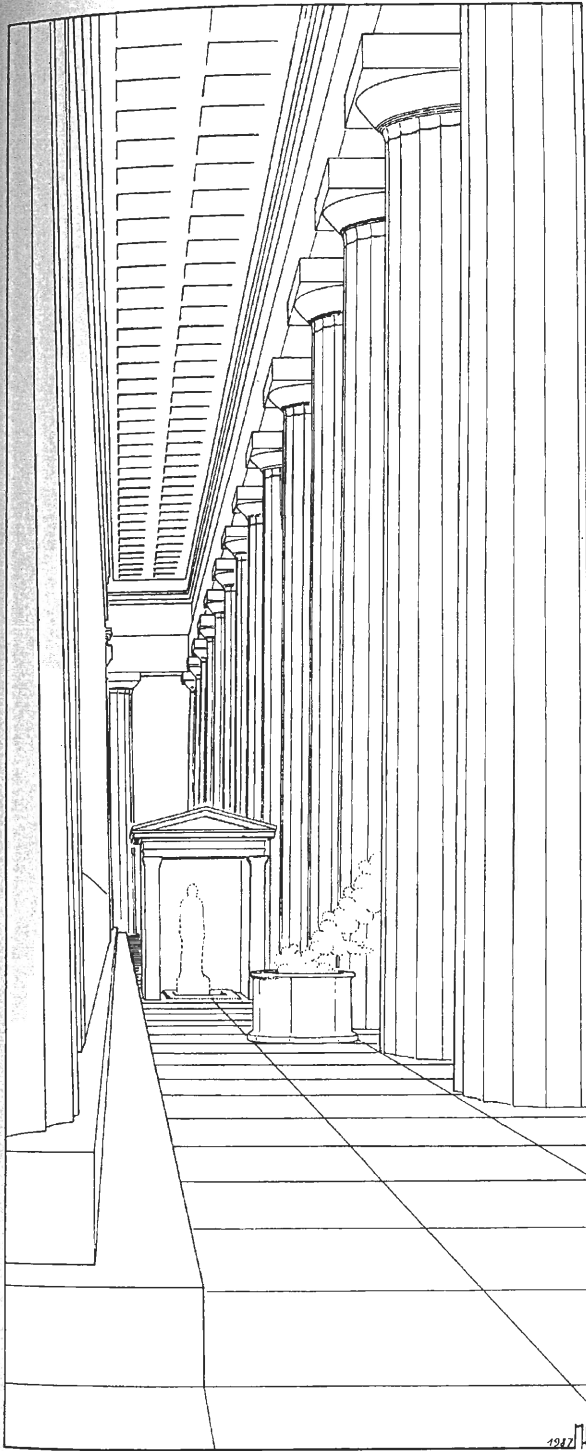
22. Bronze Palladion (figure of Pallas Athena) from Acropolis, Athens 6457, c. 575–550. Courtesy DAI-Athens (Neg. Nr. NM 5119).



23. Shrine of Athena Hygieia. Photo: author.

and Athena Hygieia, goddess of health. Most of these and the other epithets by which she was known on the Acropolis and in Athens designated her as an object of cult, as the focus of particular patterns of worship and ritual: Athena Hygieia, for example, had her own little shrine abutting the southernmost column on the eastern facade of the Propylaia (Fig. 23; CD 111–112), and Athena Ergane may have had a small, older shrine preserved in the north colonnade of the Parthenon (Fig. 24). And it is clear that she acted by means of many interventions. Still, many of her roles in Greek life are subsumed under her overarching functions as goddess of *tekhne* (skill or craft) and *metis* (intelligence, ingenuity, or craftiness), and in Greek art and legend she functions above all as the active patron of heroes.

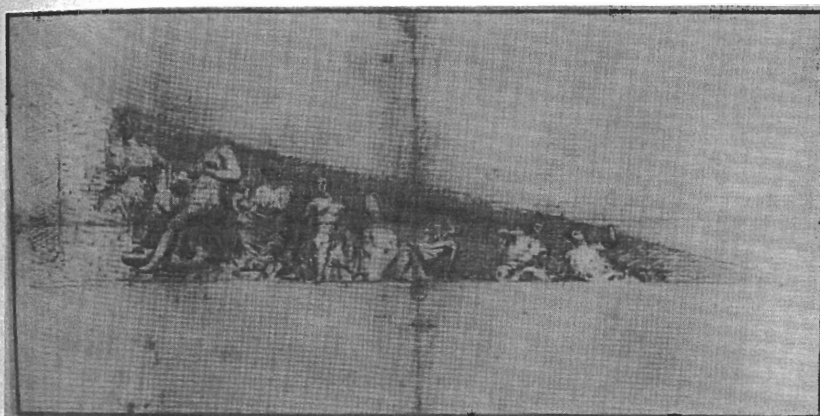
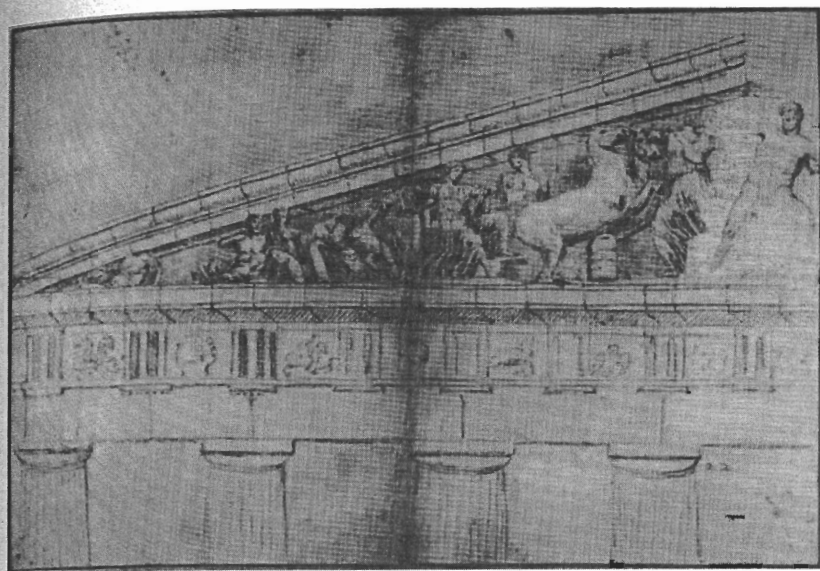




24. Pre-Periclean *naiskos* ("little temple") preserved in north colonnade of Parthenon. Drawing by M. Korres, used by permission.

“I am famed among all the gods for my *metis* and tricks,” Athena tells her protégé Odysseus, who is no slouch in the *metis* and tricks department himself.<sup>28</sup> And it is by her *metis* that we principally know her. The word denotes “intelligence” both cunning and practical: it is the quality that guarantees success in many different fields of action (for example, in the *agon* or athletic competition).<sup>29</sup> And Metis, personified, is in some accounts Athena’s mother (though of a special sort, as we shall see). Athena is, at all events, not only the goddess of wiles and artifice but also the goddess of invention and technology, and so she can intervene in a variety of domains or divine departments that are not strictly her own. She is sometimes associated with agriculture, for example, but she is not fertility or grain goddess like Demeter: she is the inventor of the plow, the instrument by which the soil is exploited for the benefit of mortals.<sup>30</sup> The earth is Demeter’s natural province, but it is Athena’s technology that tills it. Similarly, the sea in all of its power and unpredictability is Poseidon’s, but Athena is, according to various myths, the designer of the first ship, the goddess of shipwrights, and the guide of seagoers like Odysseus’s son Telemakhos and pilots like the Argonaut Tiphys. She is not a sea goddess; she is the goddess whose craft and *metis* makes the sea navigable. She is, again, called Hippias (“of the horse”), but she is not so much goddess of the beast itself (the animal in all of its wild, fiery passion is properly Poseidon’s, and he was called Hippios) as she is the inventor of the bridle and bit that bring the beast under control and the chariot and wagon that allow men to harness its power.<sup>31</sup> Athena Hippias means, we might say, “Athena, tamer of the horse,” whereas Poseidon Hippios is the god of the animal untamed, its wild spirit. It cannot be accidental, then, that statues of horsemen were common dedications on the Acropolis or that on the west pediment of the Parthenon, where Athena (goddess of the *agon*) and Poseidon competed for rights to Athens, rearing horses were so prominent (Figs. 25, 28; CD 047), or that on the Parthenon’s west and south metopes the violence of wild horses is associated with Amazons (Fig. 29; CD 060) and embodied in centaurs (Figs. 19, 30; CD 064–070), while on about half of the Parthenon frieze horses of nearly demonic force are mounted and ridden around the building by youths who seem to control them as much with the power of their intellects as with reins (Fig. 31; CD 075–076, 083). The horse, then, is itself a major theme of the Parthenon sculptural program. Through it, the power of

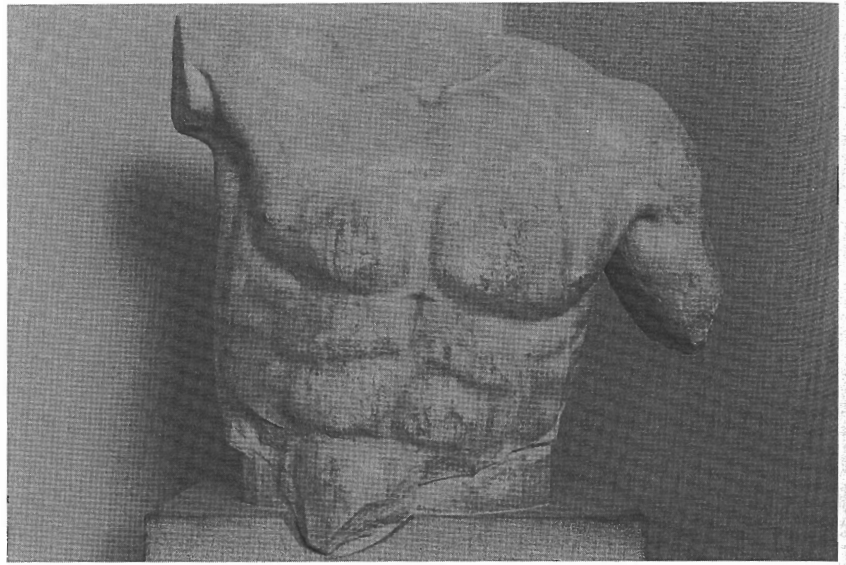




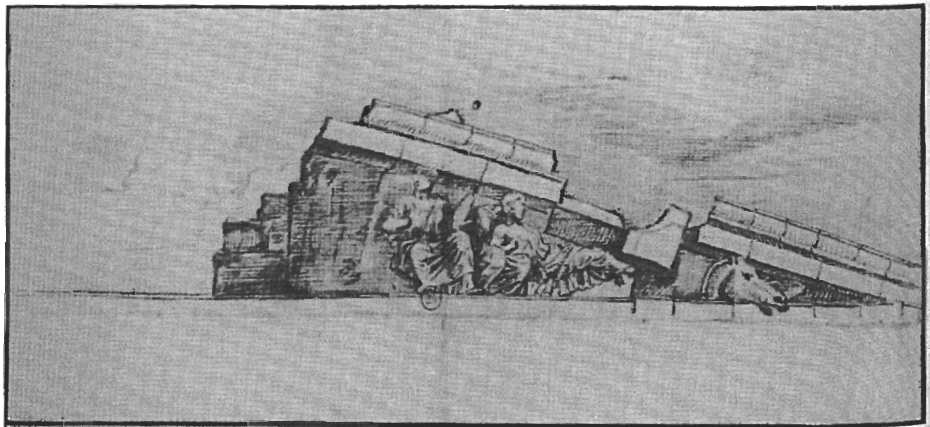
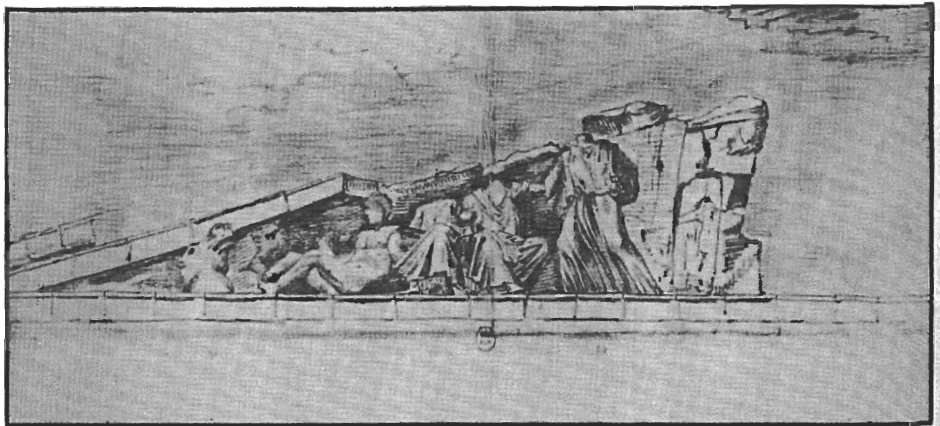
25. Drawings by Jacques Carrey of Parthenon west pediment. After Omont 1898, pls. II and III.

Athena Hippiia (and, perhaps, her superiority to Poseidon Hippios) is made visible.

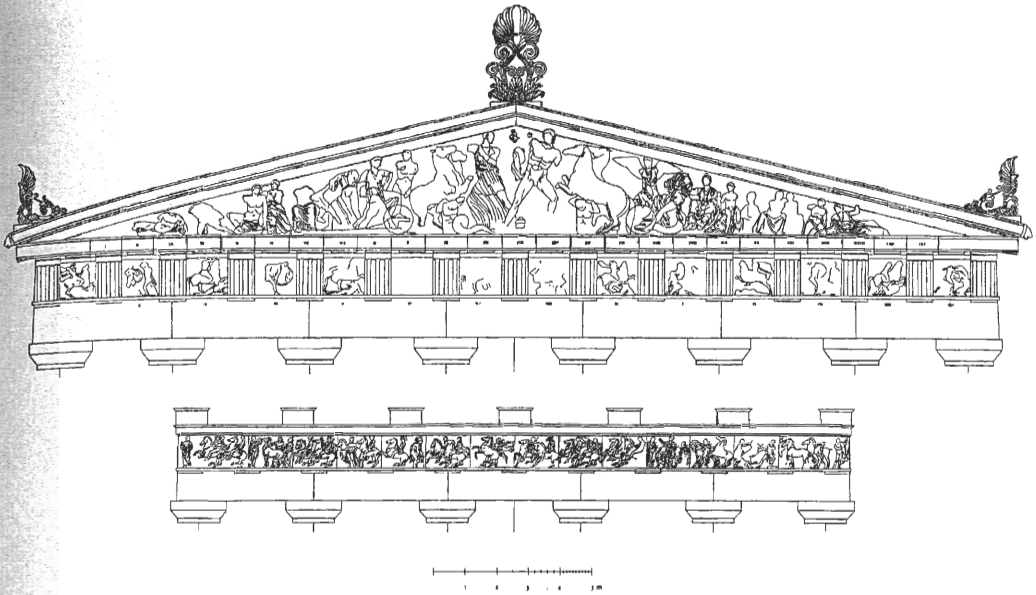
When in the *Odyssey* Athena boasts of the fame of her *metis*, it is in the shape of a “tall, beautiful woman, skilled in splendid handiworks” – in other words, it is as Athena Ergane – that she speaks.<sup>32</sup> Athena’s “cunning intelligence” extends to the practical, mundane realms of domestic craft and commercial industry, and she (along with Hephaistos, with whom she is closely associated in art, myth, and cult [Fig. 32; CD 094]) is patron of both professional artisans and women who work at home. Athena



26. Torso of Poseidon, from Parthenon west pediment (Acropolis 885 and British Museum). Photo: author.



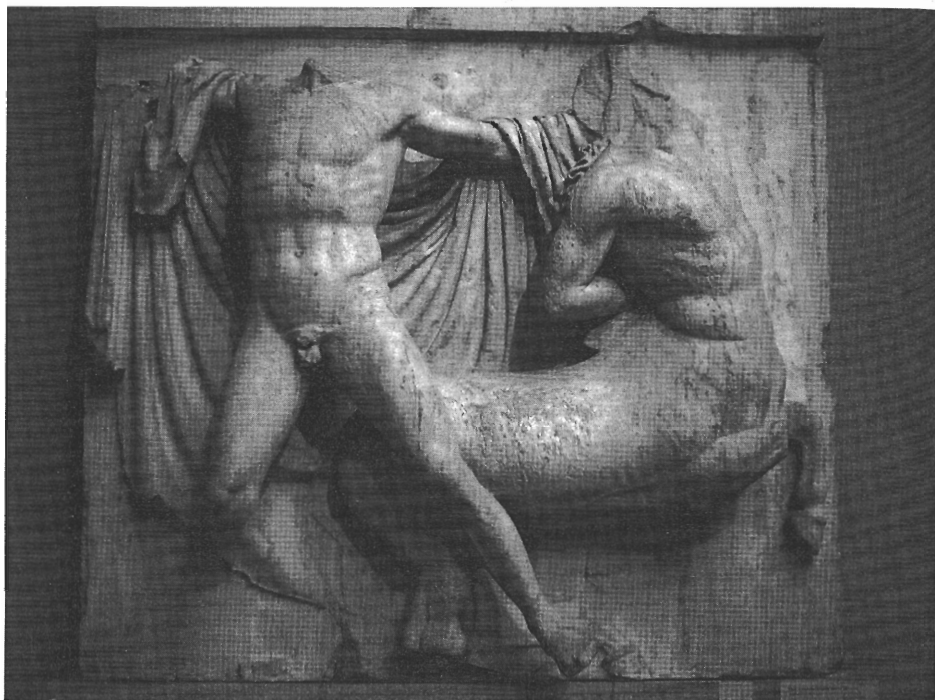
27. Drawings by Jacques Carrey of Parthenon east pediment. After Omont 1898, pl. I.



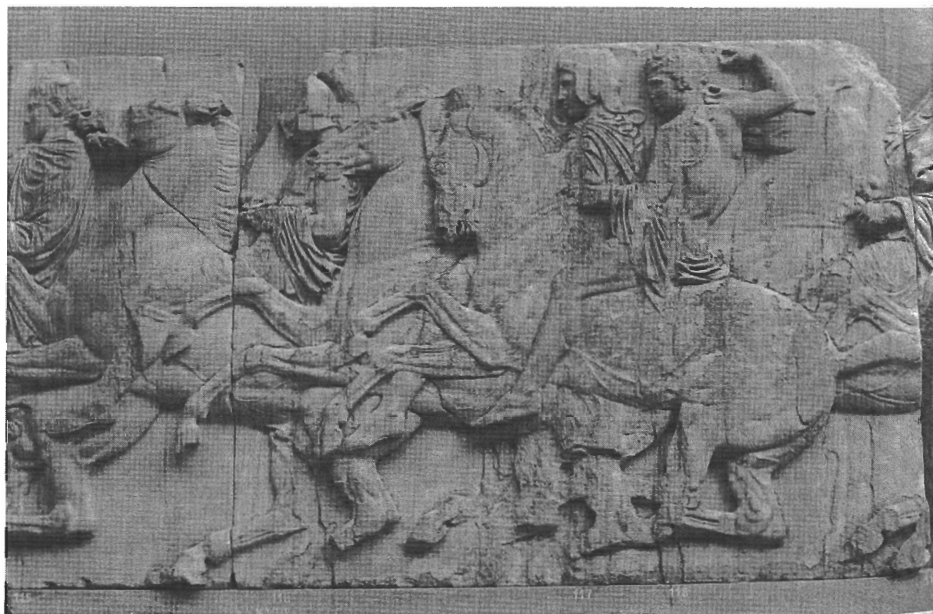
28. Parthenon, west pediment and frieze. Reconstructions from Berger 1977, Faltrafel III. Used by permission of *Antike Kunst*.



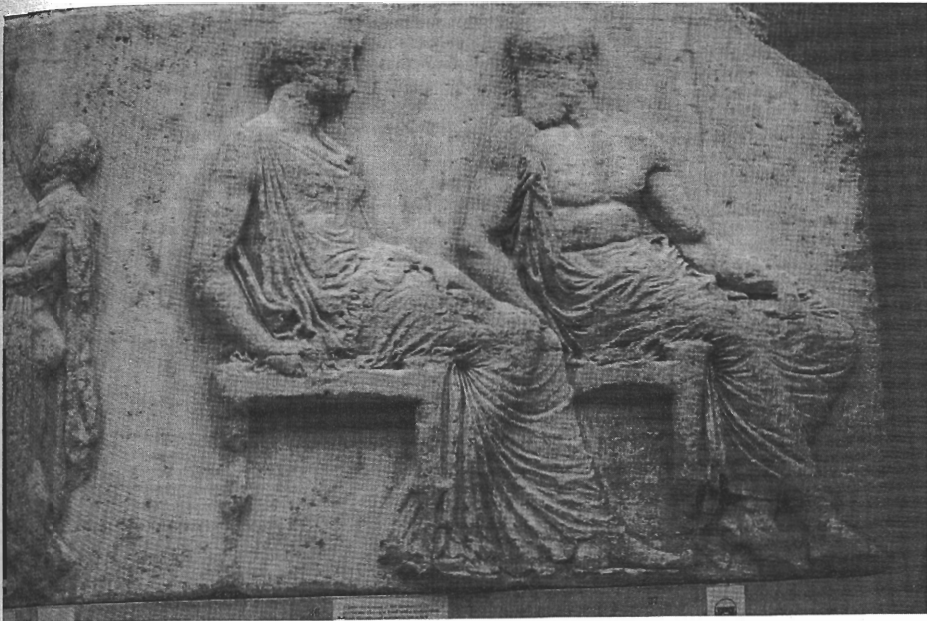
29. The Parthenon, from the west. Photo: author.



30. Parthenon, south metope 27 (British Museum). Photo: author.



31. Horsemen, north frieze (British Museum). Photo: author.



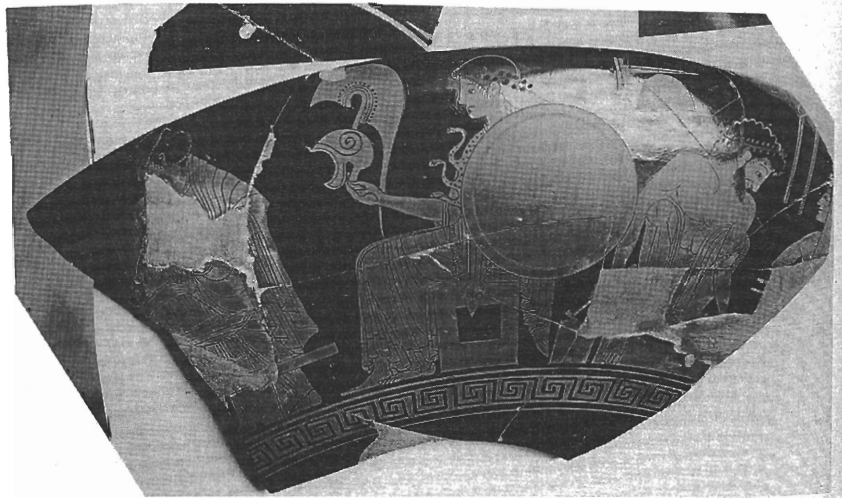
32. East frieze, detail: Athena and Hephaistos (British Museum). Photo: author.

Ergane is the goddess of those who work “on the anvil with heavy hammer,” as Sophokles said.<sup>33</sup> An old potter’s song begins with a prayer to Athena to come and hold her hand over the kiln for protection.<sup>34</sup> When a metalsmith works gold and silver, Homer says, it is with the skill (*tekhne*) taught to him by Athena and Hephaistos.<sup>35</sup> The Rhodians, Pindar says, excel all others in art because of Athena’s gift.<sup>36</sup> It is Athena Ergane who, on a relief from the Acropolis (Fig. 33), receives an offering of some kind from an artisan seated behind his workbench, and it is she who sits amid potters, sculptors, and metalworkers on a fragmentary cup (dated c. 515–500) from the Acropolis (Fig. 34). And whether it is a metalsmith’s or a potter’s studio that is shown on a famous vase in Milan, the goddess arrives with a band of Nikai (Victories) to crown the artisans, winners of some competition or other.<sup>37</sup> In myth, Athena helps Epeios create the Trojan Horse, the wooden stratagem that epitomizes both her practical skill and her cunning, her *metis* and her trickiness (the results were to be seen on the north metopes of the Parthenon [Fig. 35]). There are even portraits of the goddess as a young artist. On a vase in Berlin, for example, Athena is shown in a workshop (tools hang behind her) modeling a horse (Fig. 36); here, she is both Athena Ergane because she makes and Athena Hippias because of what she makes.

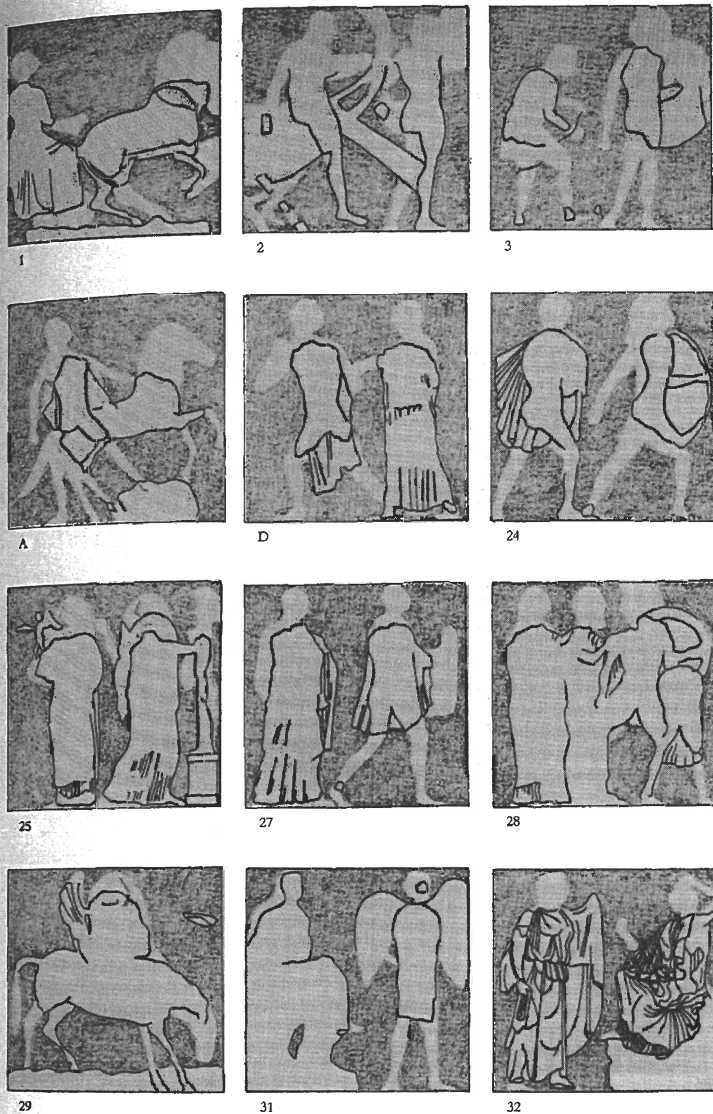




33. Relief, Athena receives offering from craftsman. Acropolis 577, c. 480-470. Courtesy Acropolis Museum.

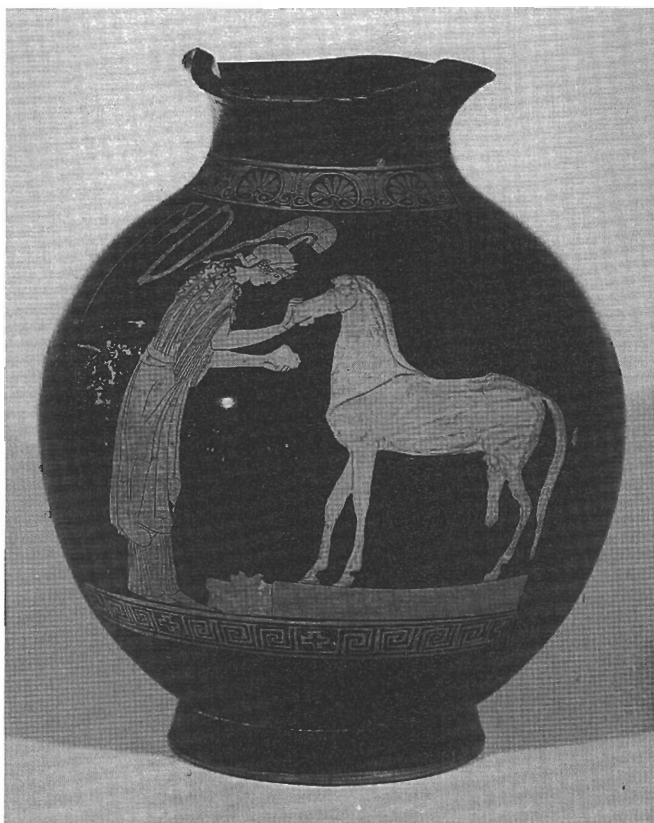


34. Red-figure cup by Euergides Painter (Acropolis 166), c. 515-500. Courtesy DAI-Athens (Neg. Nr. Ak. V 805)



35. Parthenon, north metopes. From Boardman and Finn 1985, 234 (after Carrey drawings). Used by permission.

Still, the craft with which she is most intimately associated is weaving. This is, after all, a goddess who makes her own clothes (as well as garments for other goddesses), and who may actually be shown spinning wool on a series of terracotta votive plaques from the Acropolis (Fig. 37).<sup>38</sup> Penelope knows beautiful crafts and the famous trick of her loom (the symbol of her own formidable *metis*) because of the knowledge Athena bestows upon her, and the women of Phaiakia have received the same benefits.<sup>39</sup>



36. Athena fashioning horse. Berlin F 2415, c. 470. Courtesy Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

The art of weaving, a silvery dress, and an intricate veil are Athena's gifts to Pandora, the first mortal woman, at her creation, which happens to have been depicted on the base of the statue of Athena Parthenos (cf. Fig. 21).<sup>40</sup> A fine woven, human-scaled robe, or *peplos* (an object that becomes nearly an attribute of Athena) was offered to Athena Polias annually at the Panathenaic Festival (cf. Fig. 20; CD 092) and clothed her old olivewood image; a far grander tapestry (also known as a *peplos* but as large as a ship's sail) was presented to her and displayed every four years at the Greater Panathenaia.<sup>41</sup> Athena herself presents a robe to her favorite, Herakles, upon his retirement from labor and struggle.<sup>42</sup> She is, in short, the goddess who provides human beings with the technological power to control their environment and the skill to manufacture images, utensils, and necessities.





37. Terracotta plaque (Athena Ergane or her devotee), Acropolis 13055, c. 500. Courtesy Acropolis Museum.

We can tell a lot about a goddess by the company she keeps and if in life Athena was friend to artisans; in myth and art she is, above all, friend to heroes. In art even more than in literature, she enjoys a particularly close relationship with Herakles, which is a mild surprise, because his mighty and unsubtle heroism largely consists of superhuman strength and endurance rather than the sort of mental agility we might expect from a protégé of Athena. Herakles relies on his biceps, not his *metis*. However, it is *metis* that Athena regularly supplies him (in the *Iliad*, she even complains that Zeus sent her down to help the hero every time his labors proved too much and he cried out to heaven),<sup>43</sup> and it is Athena who is his constant ally in battle against assorted villains and monsters and who eventually leads him to godhead upon Mt. Olympos.

Athena frequently keeps the company of other heroes who, like her, have tricks up their sleeves, or who accomplish their tasks through the good counsel, artifice, or tools she provides. At the very beginning of Greek literature, for example, in the first book of the *Iliad*, an enraged Achilles prepares to draw his sword to slay Agamemnon when Athena suddenly appears (to Achilles alone), grabs him by the hair, looks at him with flashing eyes, and talks him out of it: here, she is Intelligence personified, and the little conversation goddess and hero have (a dialogue no one else can hear) is a representation of the victory of reason over wrath.<sup>44</sup> She is almost an actor in the play of his mind. The time for fighting and vengeance will come, though, and when it does Athena covers Achilles with her shield-like *aigis*,<sup>45</sup> causes fire to blaze from his head, and adds her terrible war cry to his own. Goddess and hero nearly fuse; it is almost a case of possession.<sup>46</sup>

The roster of Athena's heroes includes Perseus, whose hand she guides when he severs the Gorgon Medousa's head (he, in turn, awards it to her and she places it either in the middle of her shield or upon her *aigis*) (cf. Fig. 91; CD 099).<sup>47</sup> There is Bellerophon, who captures the winged horse Pegasus (Medousa's offspring) with a golden bridle Athena provides and who appropriately builds an altar to Athena Hippiia in thanks.<sup>48</sup> There is Jason, whose marvelous ship, the *Argo*, was built to Athena's specifications.<sup>49</sup> There is Theseus, the quintessential Athenian hero, who, though he is rarely linked to Athena in extant literature, is nonetheless seen with her from time to time in art. There is, above all, Odysseus, her closest mortal counterpart, a hero who lives by his wits and deviousness, whose special affinity with Athena is a major theme of the *Odyssey* and whom she could never abandon because, she says, he is a smooth-talker, shrewd, and always keeps his head – a man after her own heart.<sup>50</sup> In short, virtually wherever there is a hero in Greek legend or art, Athena, the special patron of heroes, cannot be far away. It was this relationship that the military hero Peisistratos may have exploited in the middle of the sixth century when he drove through the city in a chariot beside an Athena impersonator to confirm his second tyranny – a new hero for Athens.<sup>51</sup> It must have been Athena's flair for action and her inventiveness that appealed most to the Athenians themselves. Their natural affinity with this innovative and manipulative goddess

was close and apt. If we can trust the words Thucydides puts in the mouths of Corinthian ambassadors to the Spartans, it was sensed even by Athens's foes: the Athenians, the Corinthians say, are "innovative and quick both to plan and to execute in deed what they plan."<sup>52</sup> She was their intellectual and spiritual "mother" and they – adventurous, daring, and restless – were, in effect, chips off the old block.

#### Four Myths

Besides playing an important supporting role in the careers of many heroes, Athena is, of course, the principal character in a large mythological corpus of her own. As far as the art, cults, and ideology of the Acropolis are concerned, four stories are particularly significant: the myth of her birth, the story of her role in the battle of the gods against the giants, her contest with Poseidon for patronage rights to Athens, and the myth of her relationship to Erichthonios/Erechtheus. As is the case with most Greek myths, these stories are known in several versions, not all of them reconcilable in detail. Myth is not dogma.

All versions of the myth of Athena's birth, however, agree that she was born miraculously from the head of Zeus and had no mother in the conventional sense. Still, her conception was not exactly immaculate, either. Hesiod tells the tale:

Zeus, king of the gods, took Metis as his first wife,  
 she who knew more than gods and men.  
 But when she was about to give birth to the bright-eyed goddess,  
 Athena, then he, deceiving her mind with treachery  
 and wily words put her inside his belly,  
 as Earth and starry Heaven advised.  
 They counseled this, so that none but Zeus  
 should ever be king of the gods who live forever.  
 For from her it was destined that wise children be born:  
 first, the bright-eyed girl, Tritogeneia,  
 her father's equal in strength and wise counsel.  
 But next she would bear a son, with overbearing heart,  
 to rule as king over both gods and men.  
 But Zeus put her in his belly first,  
 so that the goddess might ponder for him both good and evil.<sup>53</sup>

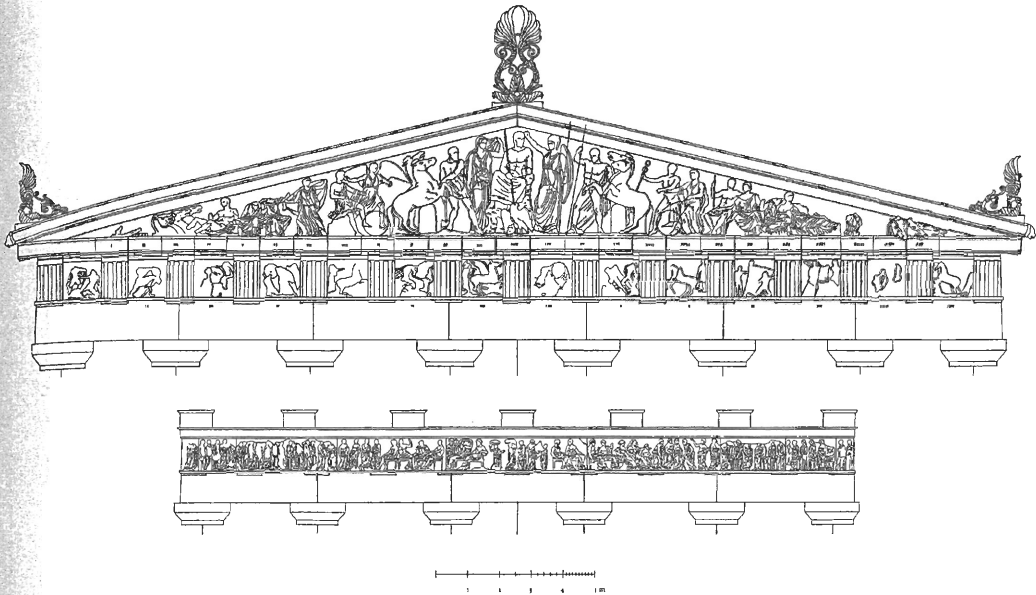


So Metis apparently grew large with child in Zeus's belly, and the gestation period lasted while Zeus married a series of other goddesses (first Themis, last Hera) until, somehow, Athena passed from Metis's womb to Zeus's stomach to his skull and popped out fully formed:

Zeus himself, from his own head, gave birth to bright-eyed Tritogeneia, the terrible one, rousing the battle din, leader of armies, unwearied *Potnia*, who delights in war-noise, wars, and battles. . .<sup>54</sup>

Elsewhere Hesiod, Stesikhoros, a *Homeric Hymn to Athena*, and other sources add the details that Athena was born beside the banks of the river Triton (perhaps a rationalization of her perplexing epithet, Tritogeneia, "Triton-born");<sup>55</sup> that she leapt from Zeus's head doing an armed dance (the *pyrrhike*), shaking her shield and raising her spear; that Metis, despite being swallowed up in Zeus's belly, nonetheless fashioned the armor Athena was born wearing; that the immortal gods looked upon the birth with awe; and that Olympos shook, the earth cried out, and the sea heaved. It is Athena's militarism and ferocity that these accounts emphasize, not her wisdom or craftiness, and there is nothing allegorical about the goddess of *metis* emerging from Zeus's brain: for the early Greeks, the seat of wisdom was located elsewhere, in the diaphragm. At all events, Greek art – vase paintings above all, but possibly the East Pediment of the Parthenon, too (Fig. 38) – informs us that Hephaistos, Athena's future colleague as patron of craft and industry (and a god whose own reputation for cunning was as old as Homer), split Zeus's laboring head open with his axe to allow the mighty, already mature goddess to escape.<sup>56</sup> For Hephaistos, god of *tekhne*, to practice obstetrics in this way may be fitting, but there is a chronological problem: according to the *Theogony*,<sup>57</sup> an angry Hera, jealous of the child Zeus brought forth by himself, conceived Hephaistos all on her own, without intercourse, and gave birth to him only after Athena appeared. (Hephaistos's lameness is a sign of Hera's inferiority as a single parent.) Again, it is not always possible to reconcile the variants of Greek myths, but the anachronisms and contradictions probably did not bother the average Greek very much.

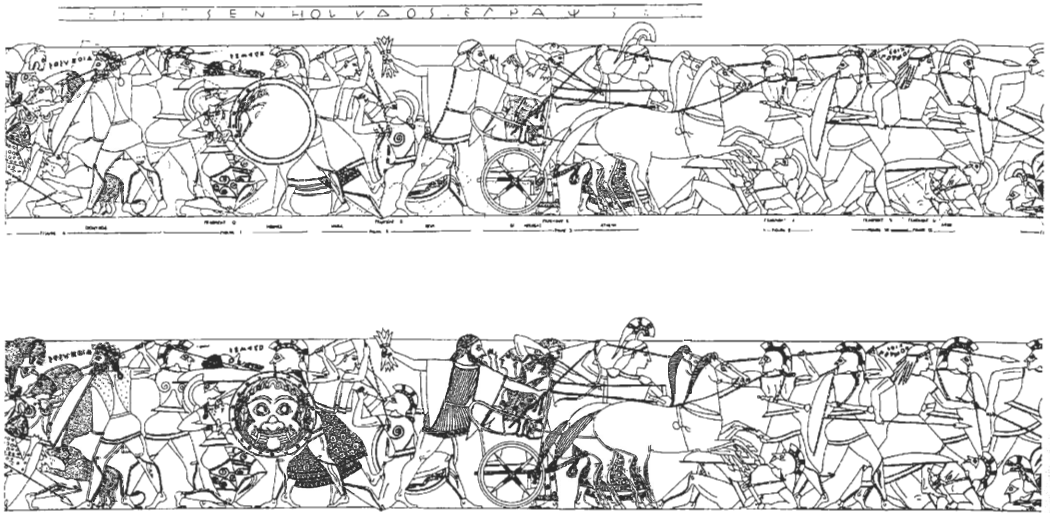
Even if Hephaistos did help, we should still think of Athena as fighting her way out of Zeus's head: she was, after all, born shaking her spear and terrifying the cosmos. Sometime afterward (with mythological time it is hard to tell how long), she put her martial arts to good use against the



38. Parthenon, east pediment and frieze. Reconstructions from Berger 1977, Faltafel II. Used by permission of *Antike Kunst*.

giants, sons of Gaia, who attempted to overthrow the Olympian gods. Though literary references to the giants appear as early as Homer and Hesiod, the most complete account is found in the *Library* attributed to Apollodoros (probably written in the first century AD). This mythological compendium tells how the gods (according to an oracle) could not defeat the giants, huge and fearful, hairy and scaly, without the aid of a mortal; how Athena enlisted Herakles as their ally; and how, at Phlegra or Pallene (in the Chalkidike peninsula of northern Greece), the gods took on the giants one on one. Zeus, with help from his son Herakles, killed their ringleader Porphyrion; Herakles, following Athena's advice, disposed of Alkyoneus; Athena herself killed Enkeladus by throwing Sicily at him and then flayed Pallas and used his skin as armor; Hephaistos threw red-hot iron at Mimas; and so on.<sup>58</sup>

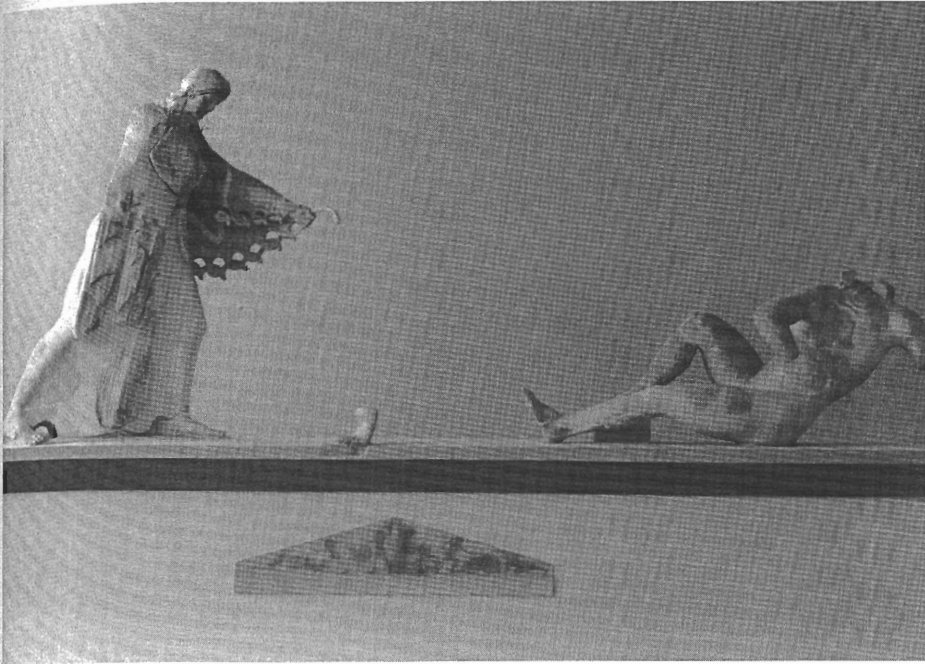
Although the myth would be a popular subject for artists elsewhere in Greece, nowhere was it more popular (or more important) than on the Athenian Acropolis. In fact, the city's greatest festival, the Panathenaia, which culminated in the presentation of the new *peplos* to the olivewood statue of Athena Polias, may have celebrated not Athena's birth (as is usually assumed) but the gods' victory over the giants: the Gigantomachy, again, was woven into the *peplos* as its principal decoration. It was also in



39. Reconstructions of portion of Gigantomachy on fragmentary black-figure dinos by Lydos, c. 550 (Acropolis 607). Drawings by Mary B. Moore, after Moore 1979, Figs. 1 and 2, used by permission.

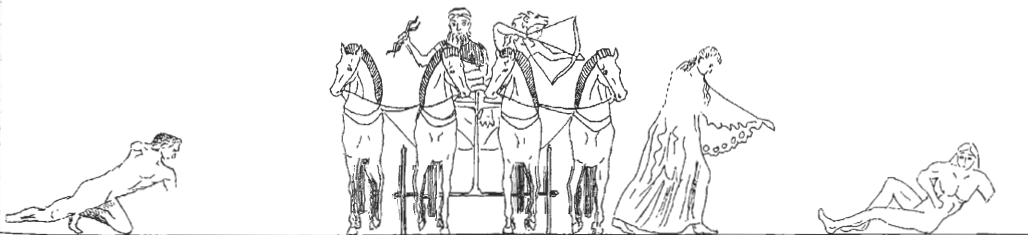
this battle that she apparently earned the epithet “Nike.”<sup>59</sup> The earliest indisputable representations of the Gigantomachy, in fact, decorate a series of large black-figure vases dedicated on the Acropolis beginning around 560–550, not far from the traditional date of a major reorganization of the Panathenaia in 566/5 (Fig. 39). By the end of the sixth century, the battle filled one pediment of a large temple of Athena Polias on the north side of the Acropolis (the *Archaios Neos*): the aggressive figure of Athena, holding her *aigis* outstretched, striding mightily over a fallen giant, stood (according to one reconstruction) to the right of a central group of Zeus riding in a frontal chariot (Figs. 40–41; CD 027–028).<sup>60</sup> At least one smaller Archaic pediment (or freestanding narrative group) and several Archaic marble reliefs depicted excerpts from the battle.<sup>61</sup> The Gigantomachy was a recurrent theme on the Classical Acropolis, too. By the end of the fifth century, the visitor to the Acropolis would have seen Athena and the other gods defeating the giants over and over again: in relief on the east metopes of the Parthenon (where, in metope 4, a flying Nike crowns a fighting Athena – the same Nike the statue of Athena Parthenos, presumably after the battle, held in her hand [Figs. 21, 42; CD 062, 099]); inlaid on the inside of the shield of the Athena Parthenos; and, inside the Classical Erechtheion, woven onto the woollen *peplos* that dressed the ancient statue of Athena Polias. If all the *peploi*, large and small, periodically presented to Athena Polias were stored or





40. Athena and Giant, from west pediment of *Archaioi Neos* (c. 500). Photo: author.

displayed like tapestries in the Erechtheion,<sup>62</sup> the visitor would have been presented with scores of variations on the theme at once. This array of Gigantomachies received a particularly grandiose addition around 200, when a Hellenistic king of Pergamon dedicated a huge group of 1-meter-tall historical and mythological foes of civilization, including the giants, against the wall of the Acropolis southeast of the Parthenon (cf. Fig. 131). Gigantomachies were thus added constantly to the narrative inventory of the Acropolis, the theme undergoing nearly constant reinterpretation in a variety of media over a very long time. No better example exists of how a particular theme endures – of how the imagery of the Classical Acropolis echoes the imagery of the Archaic or the Hellenistic or the



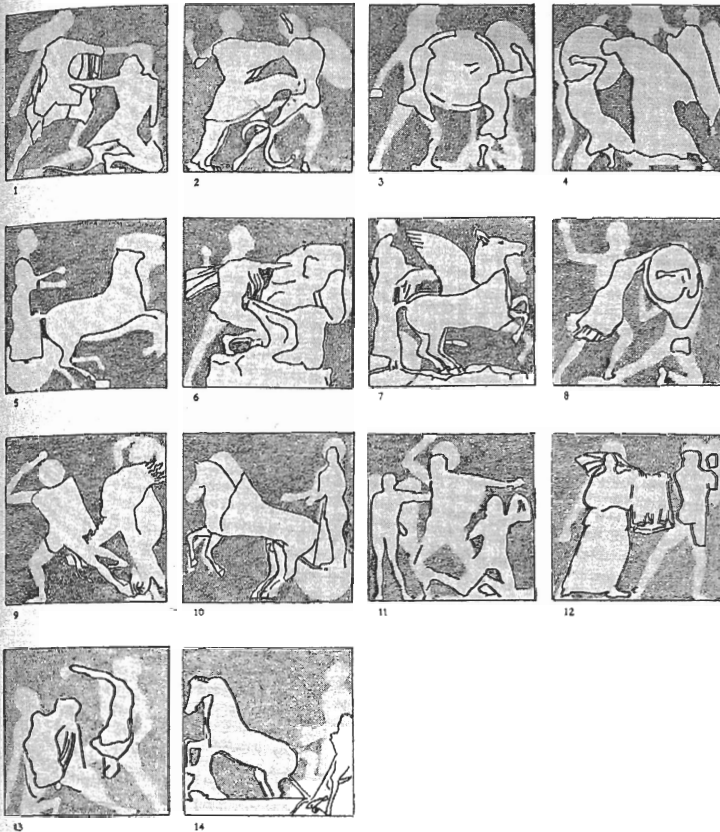
41. Restoration of Gigantomachy Pediment based on M. B. Moore 1995, Fig. 7. Drawing by D. Scavera.



Classical – or how the same theme could be seen in different versions, in different inflections, at any one time. The spectator's experience of the place would have reverberated with different tellings of the same tales, over and over.

The victory over the giants assured the gods' domination of the cosmos, but Athena's victory over her own uncle, Poseidon, god of the sea and earthquake, assured her right to Athens and guaranteed her preeminence in the self-representation of the city. The famous contest between the two gods, it was said, took place on the Acropolis during the reign of Kekrops, the first king of the city who – born miraculously from Earth – was part man and part snake. However, the variants of the myth do not agree whether Kekrops or the Olympian gods judged the contest (Kekrops serving merely as chief witness), or whether the prize was supposed to go to the divinity who merely won a race from Mt. Olympos to the Acropolis, or to the god who was judged to have created on the rock the better gift or the more eloquent token of their power, or to the god who won a popular vote of the Kekropidai, the primordial inhabitants of the land. The confusion on all these points is odd if the myth, as some think, is a fifth-century invention. But, the earliest literary reference to the story is, in fact, Herodotos,<sup>63</sup> and the earliest known representation of the contest was the west pediment of the Parthenon, completed in the 430s (Figs. 25, 26, 28; CD 045–052). Even here, it is not clear exactly which version of the myth, or what point in the narrative, the pedimental sculptures depict. The fullest description of the contest, however, is once again found much later, in Apollodoros:<sup>64</sup>

In [Kekrops's] time, they say, it seemed best to the gods to take possession of cities where each would receive his own honors. Therefore Poseidon came to Attica first, and striking his trident on the middle of the Acropolis, he produced the sea which they now call the Erechtheis. But after him came Athena and, making Kekrops witness to her claim of possession, planted an olive tree which can still be seen in the Pandroseion. When the two of them argued over the land, Zeus separated them and appointed as judges, not Kekrops and Kranaos, as some have said, nor Erysichthion, but the twelve gods. When they gave their verdict, the land was judged Athena's, since Kekrops testified that she was the first to plant the olive. Athena therefore named the city Athens after herself, and Poseidon, furious, flooded the Thriasian plain and placed Attica under water.



42. Parthenon, east metopes. After Boardman and Finn 1985, 235. Used by permission.

The olive tree, the salt spring, and the marks of Poseidon's tridents were some of the most venerable and sacred spots on the rock (though Pausanias was not terribly impressed with the spring),<sup>65</sup> and they were certainly regarded as marvelous signs of the primeval contest. (The tree, burned by the Persians in 480, was said to have miraculously sprouted a cubit-long shoot overnight, a sign of continued divine favor.)<sup>66</sup> The earliest Classical traditions seem to agree that they were merely tokens of priority, and that the inherent value of the olive and the salt sea – or, rather, their value as symbols of Athenian agricultural or naval power (which would be judged to be better for Athens?) – was not the point. If Apollodoros is right that Poseidon did indeed reach the Acropolis first, then he was robbed, or else his claim was disallowed because no one saw him arrive – something that Athena made sure did not happen to her by enlisting Kekrops as her witness (the goddess of *metis* in action again). In any case,

the west pediment seems to have shown Athena arriving first, dashing for Kekrops (shown in the left angle of the pediment) to claim her victory after the olive tree has sprouted, with Poseidon about to hurl his trident just seconds too late.

Despite his imminent loss, Poseidon (if we can fairly judge from a famous seventeenth-century drawing of the pediment) seized the center of the composition and Athena was, slightly, in the background (Fig. 25). The focus seems to have been on the god, and the question arises why this should be so on the temple of the goddess. It is true that the two divinities fought on the same side at Troy and, obviously, against the giants. Poseidon's name (*po-se-da-o*) appears with "Lady Athena" (*a-ta-na-po-ti-ni-ja*) on that Linear B tablet from Knossos.<sup>67</sup> They often appear together (with no apparent hostility) on sixth-century Athenian vases. As we have seen, they also shared an association with horses. Nonetheless, in myth they are more often antagonists than allies. Athena's protégé Perseus, again, decapitated Medousa, yet Medousa had been Poseidon's lover,<sup>68</sup> and Athena wore her head as a trophy on her *aigis* or shield (or both) – a constant, bristling reminder. In the *Odyssey*, Poseidon's wrath drives much of the plot in opposition to Athena, and torments her most simpatico hero. In addition, in the fabulous myth he makes up in his dialogue *Kritias*, Plato pits Athens, the city of Athena, against Atlantis, the city of Poseidon.

However, no god as powerful as Poseidon could be ignored, and the centrality of the sea god in the west pediment may be, after a fashion, an expression of gratitude to the divinity who, told by Zeus to stop his floods, held no grudges and still granted Athens naval supremacy, ensuring their victory over the Persian armada in the waters of Salamis in 480. It may be, in fact, that a cult of Poseidon was first installed on the Acropolis in the 470s to thank (or appease) him. The myth of the contest between Athena and Poseidon may actually have been invented or reformulated in the fifth century as a way of expressing the immense significance of Salamis and the importance of the maritime empire Athens built in its aftermath, and of acknowledging the god who, despite his quarrels with Athena, had nonetheless looked favorably upon her city. There is no way to be sure about all this, and the possibility that Poseidon was the subject of an Acropolis cult before the Persian Wars remains.<sup>69</sup> But, whatever their relationship before Salamis, by the end of the fifth century



43. Inventory of the treasures of Athena and the Other Gods for 398/7 (IG II<sup>2</sup> 1392, NM 1479), with relief of Athena and Erechtheus. Photo: author.

at least Poseidon and Athena Polias (as well as several other divine figures) shared the same temple on the north side of the Acropolis: the Classical temple called the Erechtheion though officially known, presumably like its late sixth-century predecessor, as the *Archaios Neos*, the Old Temple of Athena (Figs. 16–17; CD 120–129).<sup>70</sup>

The temple takes its nickname from Erechtheus, a hero (and, according to mythological genealogies, the sixth king of Athens) with whom Poseidon shared an altar and priest and whose very identity Poseidon seems to have absorbed. Around 450 (long before the construction of the Erechtheion), two brothers dedicated a marble basin to “Poseidon Erechtheus” (as if the names were hyphenated, or the god had taken on the hero’s name as an epithet).<sup>71</sup> Erechtheus is himself a shadowy figure, though. Herodotos says it was during his kingship that the Athenians first took that name (*Athenaioi*) for themselves, and he is said to have

fought an early war against Eleusis and its ally Eumolpos, the son of Poseidon, who tried to avenge his father's loss to Athena by invading Athens. The battle was evidently represented in a statue group located near the Erechtheion, and the war may even have been alluded to in the angles of the Parthenon's west pediment.<sup>72</sup> Compelled to sacrifice a daughter for the public good (other daughters are said to have committed suicide in solidarity – so ends the lesson for all good, patriotic Athenian girls), Erechtheus slew Eumolpos, but was in turn killed by Poseidon (who then subsumed his identity). The myth represents a continuation of Athena's rivalry with Poseidon by other means, through heroic proxies, and the fusion of Poseidon–Erechtheus in cult may have been another fifth-century attempt at reconciliation.

Erechtheus's identity also seems to have been fused or confused with the even more mysterious Athenian king Erichthonios (the similarity in names, if they are not simply variants, obviously contributed to the confusion). The careers of the two kings are (as later mythologies reconstructed them) distinct and, according to Apollodoros, Erichthonios, the fourth Athenian king, was even Erechtheus's grandfather. But there can be no doubt that at some point early in the tradition, Erechtheus and Erichthonios were one and the same: their names mean essentially the same thing (“very earthy” or “very earth-born”), they are said to have married the same woman (Praxithea), and they share the remarkable circumstance of being the virgin Athena's foster child.<sup>73</sup>

On the one hand, Homer says that the grain-bearing earth bore great-hearted Erechtheus and that Athena raised him, installing him in her own temple on the Acropolis where he himself became the object of cult and annual sacrifices (the rock of Athena, then, was also the hill of Erechtheus, and Athena and Erechtheus are sometimes shown together in Acropolis art [Fig. 43]).<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, later literary sources and vase paintings substitute Erichthonios – he does not seem to have taken mythological shape before the early fifth century – and it is as if Erechtheus's infancy and youth were taken from him and given over to that other hero, a supposedly earlier king.<sup>75</sup> But, Erechtheus always seems to have been first in the hearts and minds of the Athenians (which is why they could call themselves “Erechtheidai” but never “Erichthoniadaí”).<sup>76</sup> And his story – his birth, his war with Eumolpos, perhaps even the



sacrifice of his daughter – may have been the subject of a portion of the sculptured frieze of the Erechtheion (cf. Fig. 120; CD 131–132).

The fullest version of the tale is told once again in Apollodoros. According to some, he says, Erichthonios was the son of Hephaistos and Athena:

Athena once came to Hephaistos, wanting him to forge her new weapons. But he, having been abandoned by Aphrodite, was filled with desire for Athena and chased her. She ran away. But when with great effort (for he was lame) he got near her, he tried to make love with her. She, being chaste and a virgin, would not yield, but he ejaculated on the leg of the goddess. In disgust she wiped off the sperm with some wool and threw it on the ground. As she fled and the sperm hit the ground, Erichthonios was born. She brought him up without the knowledge of the other gods, wishing to make him immortal, and putting him in a basket she gave him to Pandrosos, the daughter of Kekrops, forbidding her to open the basket. But the sisters of Pandrosos [Aglauros and Herse] opened it out of curiosity and saw a snake coiled around the baby. Some say they were killed by the snake itself, but others say that they were driven mad by Athena's anger and threw themselves down from the Acropolis. But having been reared in the sacred precinct [presumably on the north side of the Acropolis] by Athena herself, Erichthonios drove out Amphictyon and became king of Athens. And he set up the *xoanon* [wooden image] of Athena on the Acropolis, instituted the Panathenaic festival, and married Praxithea, a nymph, by whom his son, Pandion, was born.<sup>77</sup>

To put all this another way, Hephaistos, Hera's lame fatherless son, sired Erechtheus/Erichthonios, and Athena, Zeus's mighty motherless daughter, raised him as her own. In myth, this passes for parentage. Thus, the hero, though "autochthonous" (that is, "born of the earth"), was at the same time the child of the gods and, by extension, so were his "descendants" – the Athenians themselves, the "sons of Hephaistos" (as Aeschylus calls them)<sup>78</sup> and of Athena, too. Autochthonous and of Olympian descent at once, the Athenians, ever resourceful, had it both ways.

Myth was central to the self-definition and self-representation of any Greek city-state, and the proper understanding of the Acropolis and its complex of buildings and images in large measure depends on the use, power, and resilience of the myths of the birth of Athena, the



Gigantomachy, the contest with Poseidon for the possession of the land, and the birth of Erechtheus/Erichthonios. Taken together, the myths confirm and validate Athena's role as a mighty warrior goddess and deserving patron and protector of Athens – as, in fact, the “mother” of her country.<sup>79</sup>

# THE ACROPOLIS IN THE AGE OF PERICLES

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