



NASHVILLE PARTHENON EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES



The “Other” at the Parthenon

The "Other" at the Parthenon

Mission: To educate the public concerning the Parthenon and the civilization that built it, both in Athens, Greece, in the fifth century BCE and in Nashville, Tennessee, from 1897 to the present. To exhibit, collect, and care for objects and information related to: fifth century BCE Athens, the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, and the rebuilding of the Nashville Parthenon. To exhibit, collect, and care for visual art and to educate the public concerning its various forms.

Title: The "Other" at the Parthenon

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Activity Time: Approximately 45 minutes

Age Levels: Grades 9-12 (upper level/advanced)

Date: Fall 2019

Overview:

At first glance, it may be difficult to realize that the Parthenon was more than just a religious structure or the home of the goddess, Athena Parthenos. However, the Parthenon was also a political propagandist structure that not only let the outside world know of Athens' greatness, but also reminded Athenian residents of the values and expectations of their government and society. The Parthenon clearly delineated the social hierarchy between gods and mortals, men and women and Athenians and barbarians. By looking more closely at some of the representations on the Parthenon, students can gain an insight into Athenian life and the social norms it promoted.

Big Idea: Depictions of Otherness help us learn about Athenian identity in ancient Greece.

Goals:

- Visitors will hear about Otherness on the Parthenon.
- Visitors will be able to identify mythological Others on the Parthenon.

Objectives:

- Visitors will acquire information about mythological representations on the Parthenon.
- Visitors will see any combination of Lapiths, Centaurs, Athena Parthenos, Pandora, Amazonomachy, Gigantomachy, Athena vs. Poseidon contest, or Birth of Athena scenes.

Age Level:

Grades 9-12 Social Studies

The Classic Civilizations of Greece and Rome: 1000-500 BCE

- AH.21 Describe early Greek society, with an emphasis on social classes, cultural traditions, and religious beliefs.
- AH.22 Compare and contrast the city-states of Athens and Sparta, explaining social structures, the significance of citizenship, and rise of early democracy.
- AH.25 Identify the significant developments and contributions of Greece to the following: architecture, art/drama, history, language, law, literature/poetry, medicine, philosophy, religious institutions, science, and technology

Background information:

- Definitions
 - “Otherness” – as discussed by Simone de Beauvoir, Otherness, or the Other, is a concept “as primordial as consciousness itself” (4). Otherness can only be defined and distinguished as the opposite or, perhaps, complement of “the Absolute” (4). The Absolute is essential, while the Other is incidental (4). The concept of Otherness is fluid and ever-changing because “the Other is posed as such by the One in defining [itself] as the One” (6).
 - For example, here, the Absolute are Athenian citizen men and the Other is anything that contradicts or subverts this norm, for example: the Amazons as foreign, barbarian, subversive, women, Athena as a virgin goddess, Centaurs as non-human, uncivilized, disorderly, creatures. - **deBeauvoir**
 - Propaganda – “dissemination of information – facts, arguments, rumours, half-truths, or lies – to influence public opinion” –**Britannica**
- Architecture
 - Pediment – a pediment is the triangular gable forming the end of the roof slope over a portico or a similar form used decoratively over a doorway or window. The pediment was the crowning feature of the Greek temple front. – **Britannica**
 - Metope – a metope is the space between two triglyphs of a Doric frieze often adorned with carved work – **Merriam-Webster**
- Greek Gods, Goddesses, and mythological creatures
 - Athena – Athena was a “highly androgynous figure, who involves herself in both masculine and feminine activities” (Blundell, 26). She was the Greek goddess who supervised “the most characteristic of women’s occupations [for] she was worshipped as a goddess of handicrafts, and in particular as the inventor of spinning and weaving” (26). She was often represented as an armed warrior as the goddess of warfare and strategy (26). Because of her fondness for schemes and strategy, she also earned the title of goddess of wisdom (27). - **Blundell**
 - Poseidon – Greek god of the sea, horses, and storms. Brother to Zeus; uncle to Athena.
 - Zeus – Known as the father to the Greek gods. King of the gods and god of sky, lightning, and thunder. Father of Athena and husband to Hera.
 - Lapiths – (pronounced: LAP-iths) legendary people thought to be the Greek’s allies in the Trojan war and natives of Thessaly, a region in Greece.
 - Centaurs- mythological hybrid creatures of half-men, half-horses. Known for being barbarous, uncivilized, and chaotic.
 - Amazons – “A race of warrior women..., who lived without men, wore masculine clothing and took part in activities – hunting, farming, and, above all, fighting – which among Greeks were normally exclusive to males” (Blundell, 58). Although there is no way of knowing whether Amazons were real people, “one set of narratives places the Amazon story in a specific historical context, that of the late fourth century BC” (58). The Greek term “amazon” can be split into two words “a” meaning without and “mazon” meaning breast, thus “amazon” means “without a breast,” which could refer to the perceived custom that Amazons mutilated the right breast of young girls so that their autonomy would not hinder their fighting (59). Currently, the most likely candidate for the Amazonian

prototype are the Sauromatian women, who according to Herodotus, would engage in riding, hunting, and finishing before they married (Blundell, 61). "The Amazons are a group of mythological mortal women who clearly depart from the norm of female passivity" (Blundell, 190). - **Blundell**

- Pandora – "a figure... in Hesiod and in one of the version of the myth, this is the name of the first woman. Made by Hephaistos and Athena (later helped by other gods), the first woman is a seductive young girl: an artifice, a manufactured product, a trap to awaken men to their status as sexual beings. Pandora comes from no particular city, and yet her 'birth' is represented at the feet of the Parthenos on the Acropolis" (Loroux, 26). Pandora is a punishment for mortals for their acquisition of fire from Prometheus (Blundell, 22). According to the myth from Hesoid, "From her comes all the race of womankind,/ The deadly female race and tribe of wives/ Who live with mortal men and bring them harm" (*Theogony* 590 – 592). She is later named Pandora, or "All gifts," because she is given as a gift by the gods and she, herself, possesses all gifts (Blundell, 23). "In the *Theogony* her appearance represents the final phase in the establishment of a separate identity for the human race" (Blundell, 23). – **Loroux and Blundell**
- Mythology in The Parthenon's Architecture
 - The West Pediment depicts the myth of the naming of Athens through the competition between Athena and Poseidon. As you might be able to tell, Athena won the competition with her offering of an olive tree to the Athenians, while Poseidon lost with his offering of salt water. According to myth, the vote was nearly split with all men voting for Poseidon and all women voting for Athena. However, one woman broke the tie to lead Athena to victory. As a consequence for the win of Athena and the women of Athens, Athenian women lost the right to vote and confirmed their secondary status to men. **SOURCE: Castriota, 35 - 37**
 - The East Pediment depicts the myth of Athena's birth from the head of Zeus. To avoid the fate of his father and grandfather, Zeus ate his wife, Metis, who was pregnant with Athena. One day, Zeus had terrible headaches and asked Hephaistos to cut his head open with an axe to see what was wrong. When Zeus' head with struck with the axe, Athena jumped out already grown and in full battle armor. By not allowing his wife to bear his child, Zeus did not have to defend his position as King of the Olympian gods and he avoided the fate of his father and grandfather. **Source: Castriota, 36**
 - The metopes on the Athenian Parthenon depict four different battles: the Lapithes versus the Centaurs, the gods versus the Giants, the Greeks versus the Trojans, and the Athenians versus the Amazons. The Nashville Parthenon has the same depiction on all sides: the Lapithes versus the Centaurs. The Lapithes were thought to be the Greek's allies in the Trojan war and natives of Thessaly. Their counterpart and neighbors were the Centaurs, a band of half-men, half-horses, who were known for being uncivilized and disorderly. As a sign of goodwill, the Lapithes invited the Centaurs to the wedding of Pirithous, King of the Lapithes. Unaccustomed to wine, the Centaurs got very drunk, exposed their true chaotic nature, and attempted to abduct Pirithous' bride, which lead to a fight between the Lapithes and the Centaurs. The Lapithes were victorious.
 - "The story of [the Amazons'] battle with the Greeks... often appeared side by side with that of the Lapiths and centaurs.... There is a striking

contrast in the two episodes between women who are active and women who are passive, between women who fight and women who are fought over. These polarities were matched in the narratives by opposing outcomes, for the Amazons were beaten by the Greeks, while the Lapith women were rescued and restored to an ordered existence. Again, marriage can be seen as one of the themes that links the two scenes: women who are active and refuse to marry (as the Amazons did) are ultimately overpowered by men, while women who are passive are rewarded with male protection within marriage and the blessings of civilised life" (Blundell, 190). - **Blundell**

- Pandora – The presentation of Pandora with all the gods' gifts is on the pedestal upon which the statue of Athena Parthenos stands. Pandora, herself, is on a pedestal on the center and she is flanked on either side by the gods.
- The shield of Athena has two depictions on it – one on the inside and one on the outside. The inside painting shows the Gigantomachy, the battle between the Giants and the Olympian gods. The Olympian gods were triumphant and the Giants were cast into Tartarus in the Underworld. The outside painting shows the Amazonomachy, the battle between the Amazons and the Greeks. The Amazons were a mythological tribe of warrior women, who spurned male company and enjoyed hunting and fighting. Here, we see the Greeks victorious over the Amazons.
- Athenian society
 - Women's status in ancient Greece was below men and women had little to no public life. Women were not allowed to vote or voice their opinions publicly.
 - The Citizenship Law of 451 BCE passed by Pericles, the man who oversaw the rebuilding of the Parthenon after the Persian War, declared that in order for a man to qualify as an Athenian citizen, he had to be of Athenian parentage on **both** his father and mother's sides. Before this law, Athenian citizenship was granted to a man with at least one Athenian parent. This law was meant to deter Athenian citizens from marrying non-Athenian women and strengthen the kinship bonds that tied oikoi (families) with the polis (the city-state/Athens). In actuality, this law led to more stringent policing of Athenian women's behavior. Women were watched more closely, and their behavior was more restricted. At the time that the Parthenon was being built, adultery became a public offense. **SOURCE: Blundell, 48**
 - The Oresteia by Aeschylus (457 BCE) was a trilogy of Greek tragedies that told the story of Agamemnon's return from the Trojan war, Clytemnestra's deceit, and Orestes' revenge and triumph. The Oresteia is composed of *Agamemnon*, *the Libation Bearers*, and *the Eumenides*. SUMMARY:
 - In *Agamemnon*, King Agamemnon of Mycenae returns home with Cassandra, a prophetess who is cursed with the gift of seeing the future that no one believes, to his wife, Queen Clytemnestra. Before he left, Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia. In retaliation for her husband's crime, Clytemnestra plots to kill Agamemnon with the help of her lover, Aegisthus. Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon as soon as he returns and establishes a tyranny in Mycenae. Fearing for his life, Orestes, their son, escapes his home.

- In *The Libation Bearers*, Orestes returns home many years after his father's murder to seek revenge on his mother and her lover. During his journey home, Orestes runs into his sister, Electra and they plot the murder of their mother with encouragement from the god, Apollo. Orestes successfully exacts his revenge, but he becomes the target of the Furies, a horrifying trio of monstrous sisters that punish those that kill family members, so he flees the palace.
- In the *Eumenides*, Orestes is pursued by the Furies for killing his mother. He eventually escapes them momentarily with the help of Apollo and manages to arrive at the temple of Athena in Athens, who Apollo claims will be able to help Orestes. The Furies find Orestes at the temple and Athena attempts to intervene by calling a vote to decide whether or not Orestes deserves to be tormented by the Furies for killing his mother. The vote by the Athenian citizens is tied. Athena acts as the tiebreaker by explaining that a mother is not a true parent and, thus, the Furies have no jurisdiction. Athena, as a goddess born from a male god, states that mothers are merely vessels for citizen sons and the more heinous crime belongs to Clytemnestra for killing her husband, rather than to Orestes for killing his mother. Orestes is pardoned.
 - In Athena's speech in support of the father being the only true parents, she states: "There is no mother anywhere who gave birth/ and, but for marriage, I am always for the male/ with all my heart, and strongly on my father's side" (*Eumenides*, 736 – 738)
- *Oresteia* – ANALYSIS: Through Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Marriage can be understood as "an element of stability not just within the polis, but within the cosmos as a whole" (Blundell). Marriage is deemed a "civilizing force" for women (Blundell). Clytemnestra is a quintessential example of how women are not supposed to behave. She is the antithesis of an ideal wife and made an example of as a woman too much in the public sphere. Furthermore, through Athena's ruling that Orestes does not deserve to be punished by the Furies for the murder of his mother, women's role as mothers is further diminished and minimized. Men as fathers are seen as the one true parent and the life force that allows for the furtherance of the Athenian population. **SOURCE: Blundell, 48-49**

How does this program tie to your gallery content and the museum?

This program highlights the Athenians and reinforces the concept that Greek city-states were unique governing entities, and that the Parthenon is an Athenian—not Greek—monument. Through discussion of the Other mythological figures, such as Medusa, Amazons, Lapith, Centaurs, and Greek mythology on the pediments, program participants can begin to learn about ancient Athens and its identity compared to external, Other cultures.

Ideas for Initiating Interaction:

- This program will take place in the Treasury in front of the West Pediment. Alternatively, it can be outside in front of the West Pediment.

Props:

- Microphone

- Program Bag
- Olive tree figurine (in box)
- Poseidon figurine
- Program tracking sheet with pencil
- Clicker counter

Advance Preparation:

- Set up program bag with olive tree figurine, Poseidon figurine
- Gather Microphone

Gathering: “Hello! Welcome to the Parthenon. We will be discovering mythological creatures—mysterious Others—all around this level. Meet me by Athena, we’re starting in 42 seconds.”

Program Script:

Hello, come on up! Welcome, everybody! Today we are talking about the myths on the Parthenon—but focusing on the Other mythological creatures and what they would have meant to the ancient Athenians. My name is _____ and I work/volunteer/intern here at the Parthenon.

Has anyone ever heard of the “Other”? **(model raising hand)** I’m saying Other with a capital “O” here. It’s a concept of identity. For example, I live in Nashville—maybe you live somewhere Other. I don’t have to know exactly where you live, I just know it’s not as great and glamorous and wonderful and ideal as my place, Nashville. When thinking about ancient Athens—not all of Greece—just the city-state of Athens—they thought about who they were by defining themselves and Others, something opposite. “Athenian” meant Athenian citizen men and their Other was anything that contradicts or subverts this norm. We’re going to look at the Other on display here at the Parthenon.

So let’s get started with this colossal Greek goddess. When you look at this huge statue **(gesture to Athena)** can you figure out who this is? **(Allow for response.)** Yes, this is Athena! She is a virgin goddess, and a highly androgynous figure who involves herself in both masculine and feminine activities. What things is she in charge of? **(Allow for response.)** Yes, war, strategy, wisdom, weaving, arts, crafts, and more.

But let’s look lower. Notice her sandals—what creature is galloping across her platform sandals? **(Allow for response.)** Yes, centaurs. What are centaurs? **(Allow for response.)** Yes, half-man, half-horse creatures. The main area where you can see centaurs on the Parthenon is outside on the square metopes all around the building. On the ancient Parthenon there were four different battles-- Lapiths vs. Centaurs, Gigantomachy, Greeks vs. Trojans, and Amazonomachy—but here we only have the best preserved, the Centauromachy. If you’ve never heard of the Lapiths, they were allies with the Greeks in the Trojan War and natives of northern Greece. As a sign of goodwill, the Lapith king (Pirithous) invited the Centaurs to his wedding, despite their reputation as being uncivilized and disorderly. But the Centaurs had too much fun, got drunk on wine, exposed their chaotic nature, and attempted to abduct the King’s bride, which lead to a fight between the Lapiths and the Centaurs; the Lapiths were victorious. So the moral of the story—don’t attempt to abduct the bride at weddings. The Athenians here are identifying with their allies, and telling you what not to do next time you go to a wedding.

Let's look lower. Notice this small figure standing on a box, surrounded by Greek gods? Who could this be? **(Allow for response.)** Yes, Pandora! Who is Pandora? **(Allow for response.)** Yes, the first woman in Greek mythology. She was made by Hephaistos and Athena as a seductive young woman, but was more a manufactured product than autonomous human. She was from no city-state, and really was only created as a punishment for mortals' acquisition of fire from Prometheus. So, not really a figure to look up to—Athenians are telling you women are secondary.

Let's go look at the shield. An entire battle is taking place here—Athenians vs. Amazons, or Amazonomachy. Has anyone here heard of the Amazons? **(Model raising hand.)** Who are the Amazons? **(Allow for response.)** The Amazons were the best and bravest warriors in the ancient world—and were conquering city-state after city-state until reaching Athens when they were defeated by the Athenians. So, who really were the best warriors then? The Athenians are telling you a story here—one that they want to tell. Amazons lose because they are the Other--warrior women who lived without men, wore masculine clothing and took part in masculine activities (hunting, farming, fighting). By losing, it says their civilization- way of life, gender roles- was lesser than that of the Athenians. Athenian women had little public life—they were not allowed to vote—and were in charge of the household and its industries, like weaving and crafting household supplies.

Stories about Amazons and Centaurs often appear nearby each other. There is a striking contrast in the two stories “between women who are active and women who are passive, between women who fight and women who are fought over. These polarities were matched in the narratives by opposing outcomes, for the Amazons were beaten by the Greeks, while the Lapith women were rescued and restored to an ordered existence. Again, marriage can be seen as one of the themes that links the two scenes: women who are active and refuse to marry (as the Amazons did) are ultimately overpowered by men, while women who are passive are rewarded with male protection within marriage and the blessings of civilized life” (Blundell, 190). In 451 BCE, the Athenian general Pericles, who also oversaw the Parthenon construction less than five years later, passed “The Citizenship Law” of 451” declared that in order for a man to qualify as an Athenian citizen, he had to be of Athenian parentage on both his father and mother's sides. Before this law, Athenian citizenship was granted to a man with at least one Athenian parent. This law was meant to deter Athenian citizens from marrying non-Athenian women and strengthen the kinship bonds that tied families with the city-state, Athens. In actuality, this law led to more stringent policing of Athenian women's behavior. Women were watched more closely, and their behavior was more restricted. At the time that the Parthenon was being built, adultery became a public offense.

Any questions before we move on? **(Allow for response.)** Let's head to the Treasury.

In the Treasury, at the West Pediment maquette

Here we have the miniature version of the West Pediment. We see two gods in the center—who are these two? **(Allow for response.)** Yes, Athena on the left with her sword and helmet, and Poseidon on the right with a long pole that used to be a trident before it was broken about 50 years ago. This is the story of how Athens got its name—a contest between Athena and Poseidon. Anyone know the story? **(Allow for response.)** Yes, Poseidon gifted a salt water stream, which represented control of the seas. Athena gifted the first olive tree- judged to be

the better gift and thus naming her the patron deity of Athens. That's normally where we end the story—but there's more.

The votes for Athena and Poseidon were nearly split, with Athenian men voting for Poseidon and Athenian women voting for Athena. However, there were more women than men, so Athena won. Poseidon was furious and flooded the city, demanding retribution. So Athenian men appeased him by punishing women—who lost the right to vote and cementing their secondary status compared to Athenian men. The vote was nearly split with men voting for Poseidon and women voting for Athena.

Thousands of years ago, Athenian women voted, but then lost the right to vote. Today, we're in a different time and place. Women in America gained the right to vote in 1920, only 100 years ago. You know the contest between Athena and Poseidon, and you know what gifts they gave to influence the vote. I'm curious what the result would be today—Athena or Poseidon? Play along with me here, and close your eyes for a quick anonymous vote. In a second, I'll ask you to raise your hand (**model raising hand**) and vote for Athena or Poseidon. Ready? Who votes Athena gave the better gift? (**Allow for response. Count raised hands, and estimate whether more men or women voted for Athena.**) Who votes Poseidon gave the better gift? (**Allow for response. Count raised hands, and estimate whether more men or women voted for Athena. Announce the winner, and gender division in terms of voting**) Interesting! **Athena/Poseidon** won today—and most **men/women** voted for **Athena/Poseidon**! So today we voted the **same/different** than Athenians did, but luckily today no one lost their right to vote.

Conclusion:

Thank you so much for coming to the museum today, and joining me to find depictions of Others and Otherness on the Parthenon. If you would like to learn more about Otherness in ancient Greece, I recommend a book by David Castriota's called "Barbarian and Female: The Other on the West Front of the Parthenon." If you would like to learn more about the mythology we talked about today, the ancient authors Hesiod's *Theogony* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* are great places to start for more on Otherness.

Assessment:

- N/A

Following Up:

- Self-assessment: What went well? What is one thing that didn't go well? What is one thing you will try next time?
- Record number of visitors on the program clipboard. Return cart and materials; report any items that need repair or replacement.

Resources:

- Primary
 - The *Oresteia* by Aeschylus
 - The *Theogony* by Hesiod
- Secondary
 - "Barbarian and Female: The Other on the West Front of the Parthenon" by David Castriota

- "Athena and Athens in the East Pediment of the Parthenon" by Evelyn B. Harrison (pg 225 – The Parthenon edited by Vincent Bruno)
- "Marriage and the Maiden: Narratives on the Parthenon" by Sue Blundell
- "Women in Ancient Greece" by Sue Blundell
- "Introduction: Woman as Other" by Simone deBeauvoir
- "The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece" by Sue Blundell and Margaret Williamson
- "Early Greece: The Origins of the Western Attitude toward Women" by Marilyn B. Arthur
- "The Children of Athena" by Nicole Loraux, translated by Caroline Levine

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APPENDIX A:

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Instructions