



The Acropolis & the Parthenon

The Parthenon -pediments and metopes

NARRATOR:

There is little to see of the pediments and metopes on the Parthenon itself now. Replicas of individual sculptures have been put in place to give a sense of what the building once looked like; but the originals have been removed to museums. Some of them are in the Acropolis museum in Athens, but many others are now scattered across the world, with a large number in the British Museum in London.

Both pediments have largely been destroyed, and most of what is left is kept in the British Museum. The display tries to bring out the unity between the figures, but in fact the gaps between the surviving statues would have been larger than the display suggests.

The subject matter of both pediments is Athena, with the east presenting the story of Athena's birth, and the west the story of the contest with Poseidon to become the patron deity of Athens.

The carving of the pediment figures is of very high quality, with even the back of some of the statues finished despite the fact they would not have been visible. It is also impressive how the drapery appears to be pressed against the body of the goddess Iris as she flies through the air. And how the exhaustion is shown in the face of the horse of the moon as he comes to the end of his night-time journey across the sky.

Today it is the Parthenon's frieze which tends to command the most attention, both because of the questions over its theme and because it is almost complete.

To any ancient viewer, though, the pediments and perhaps the statue of Athena Parthenos would have been at least as impressive.

The Parthenon's metopes, too, are amongst the finest examples of sculpture to survive from the ancient world. Even though they are relief work, many of them have an almost fully three-dimensional feel.

The dramatic poses neatly fill the square slabs and many display great skill in the carving of musculature and drapery. Some of the metopes are particularly impressive when viewed from below – as they originally would have been in their position high up on the temple.