

What Factors Were Particularly Important In Affecting The Layout Of Greek Sanctuaries?

A Greek Sanctuary is any place consisting of a temple, an altar, and a wall (or something similar) that surrounds the area and designates it as holy ground. They were places where offerings to the gods were made and housed. Usually, they were built on hills, as this was the easiest place to defend in the case of attack, and they were often used as strongholds throughout Greek history.

There were hundreds of sanctuaries all over Greece, but most were small and only housed one or two small temples - for instance, the temple of Aphaia on Aigina. A few of the sanctuaries were of national importance to a group of people, for instance the Athenian Acropolis, where there were many temples and holy sites, including the ancient Acropolis buildings. Athenians travelled from all over to visit the Acropolis, but it was of little importance to other Greeks. Olympia and Delphoi were also Sanctuaries. They were pan-Hellenic, and of importance to all the city-states of Greece. They were far bigger and had stadiums, treasuries and theatres as well as the temples. Some sanctuaries had an inner and outer space. The outer area would house the altar and temples, and sometimes the buildings that housed offerings, whilst the inner area would have theatres and would hold shows and contests. This is particularly evident at the sanctuary of Herakles on Thasos, where the steps built as part of the entranceway to the inner sanctuary were used as seating so that spectators could watch the entertainments on the outside. Many sanctuaries had a route to take to the propylaea. As at Delphoi, the paths could be themselves a factor in the development of a sanctuary. Over time the Sacred Way became adorned with treasuries. Similarly, the "processional way" (used in rituals) was built-around in some places such as Olympia. There is no "standard" sanctuary, just as there is no "standard" temple - they are all different in size and shape, they all worship different deities, and they were all built and developed in different ages.

The most important factor that affected a sanctuary's size, layout and development was its geography. Sanctuaries in small, unimportant city-states would have been unimpressive in comparison to others. The deity worshipped there was likely to have been a local deity, only special to that city-state, whilst the larger and more powerful city-states worshipped many important gods and the sanctuaries were duly larger and more impressive. Another geographical problem was the exact location of the sanctuaries. To have a sanctuary on a hill and to have a water supply was the ideal. However, this caused problems, as often the hill itself could be a problem when development was concerned, and growth was often restricted. Similarly, those sanctuaries placed near rivers or on a ledge would have limited space in which to expand. The temple of Apollo at Delphoi is also disadvantaged by its terrain - the hillside happens to be in such a way as to prevent a preferable three-quarter view of the temple. It is also built on many separate levels, which breaks up the sanctuary.

As expected, cost was normally a limiting factor in the building of sanctuaries. Most sanctuaries had trouble raising the money to fund their growth, and the temples were built out of cheaper materials or were on a smaller scale. It is clear that the Athenian Acropolis boasts grander buildings than the sanctuaries of Olympia and Delphoi, even though at the height of their prevalence they were far more important and visited far more often than the Acropolis was. This was because after the Persians

had been defeated and driven out of Greece, the Athenians were made the protectors of the other city-states. The city-states under protection had to pay a fee to Athens. After much debate, it was decided that the fee could pay for the reconstruction of the temples on the Athenian Acropolis. It was this that allowed the Athenians to build the Parthenon. The average yearly total income for Athens at the time of planning for the Parthenon was 1000 talents, and the Parthenon was expected to cost 496 talents. This was a huge amount of money, and the building of the Parthenon would not have been possible without the money from the other states, despite the protest at not using the money to advance the army.

War was an important factor. Many holy building projects were brought to a stand still by war. For instance, the Parthenon (which be the second Parthenon on the site, but it is improvable, and there are many arguments for and against the Mycenaean Parthenon) was never finished. In fact, only a few column drums and the foundations of limestone had been built before the Persian invasion in 480BC.

Another important factor in the development of a sanctuary (especially in the development of the Acropolis) that applied mainly to later buildings was whether the site had already had a temple on it. If the land was originally given to the gods as holy ground, it remained that way whether or not the temple stood standing, and nothing more could be built on it. For instance, after the Persians burnt and knocked down the old Acropolis temples, the Athenians swore an oath not to rebuild or re-grow the ground- the piles of ashes and ruined remains were a reminder of the brutality of the Persians. Interestingly, the Parthenon was able to be rebuilt - because it was never finished, it was never consecrated and the cult statue never inaugurated, so it could officially be built on. This oath of not rebuilding temples created many difficulties in working around the old temple sites, or those already standing, and often the sanctuary was built in a more unusual or less ideal way. One example would be the Temple of Zeus at Olympia- the altar was built for the temple of Hera, a much earlier temple, so the temple of Zeus, although the far grander of the two, was not built in the ideal position compared to the altar.

Large gifts to the gods would also affect sanctuaries, especially large statues, such as the bronze statue of Athene at the Acropolis. The statue was nine metres high in total, one and a half metres of which was just the base. It was built with the spoils of war to commemorate victory, to thank Athene for her protection, and to encourage her to help them again. The bronze was the first thing noticeable as you entered the Acropolis through the Propylaea, and demanded full attention. In a less obvious way, smaller offerings also changed the face of a sanctuary by requiring small storerooms to house them in.