

“The Heart of Ancient Athens: Acropolis and its surrounding Archaeological Sites”

Ministry of Culture and Sports
Ephorate of Antiquities of Athens



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“The Heart of Ancient Athens, Acropolis and its surrounding Archaeological Sites” is the place where the most basic aspects of the European identity have emerged:
Democracy, Philosophy, Science, Arts.

It has joined the list of European cultural heritage sites of the European Union for the catalytic role it played in the history and culture of Europe in 2014.



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“The Heart of Ancient Athens: Acropolis and its surrounding Archaeological Sites” is an extensive archaeological area that includes a significant complex of over a hundred monuments, which represent the core of Ancient Athens over a period of more than 3,000 years.

It includes the Acropolis Hill, its southern and northern slopes being the hub of Athenian cult and religion, the Ancient and Roman Agorae, Areopagus, Hadrian’s Library, the western hills of the Pnyx, Muses (Philopappos) and of the Nymphs (Observatory), where everyday life unfolded and, finally, Kerameikos, at the outskirts of the city, which was a burial ground and, moreover, housed the pottery workshops.

It is in this very area that democracy, philosophy, theatre and freedom of expression were born, spiritual elements that still provide the values and principles of the modern Western world.

Acropolis



The naturally fortified hill of the **Acropolis** of Athens has been inhabited since the Neolithic era; in the 13th century BC, during the Mycenaean period, it was fortified and became the seat of the local ruler. In the 6th century BC, as the most important sanctuary of the city dedicated primarily to goddess Athena, Acropolis was embellished with the first monumental temples and other buildings, while worshippers dedicated numerous votive offerings, such as marble statues of Korai, horsemen, as well as an abundance of clay and metal vases and figurines. The construction of buildings and the dedication of votive offerings continued until the Roman period.

The buildings that dominate today the Sacred Rock, the monumental Propylaea, the Parthenon, the Erechtheion and the Temple of Athena Nike, were erected in the 5th century BC on the initiative of Pericles, the inspired political leader who made Athens a hegemonic power among the Greeks. The monuments erected in the context of his building programme represent a perfect adaptation of architectural types in the natural environment and symbolise the political, economic and artistic apogee of Athenian democracy. The history of the Athenian Acropolis is not limited to antiquity; it was long-lasting and its monuments underwent many transformations upon the prevalence of Christianity and during the Frankish and Ottoman rule.

Southern and Northern Slope of the Acropolis



The **Southern Slope** of the Acropolis was unquestionably in antiquity the most important religious centre, second only to the Sacred Rock itself. It was also the cultural nucleus of the city. It was here that the great sanctuaries of Dionysus Eleuthereus and Asclepius were established and the Theatre of Dionysus was developed, the oldest of its kind in the Hellenic world, where ancient Greek drama flourished. Over the centuries several other buildings of importance for the social and cultural life of the Athenians were added, such as the Odeon of Pericles, the Stoa of Eumenes and, much later, in Roman times, the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, the famous Herodion.

The **Northern Slope** of the Acropolis was also a reference point for the religious life of the city. It was the place where the secondary hypostases of the Olympian gods were mainly worshipped, as indicated by the presence of the Sacred Caves (dedicated to Pan, Olympian Zeus and Apollo Hypoakraios) and the Sanctuary of Aphrodite and Eros. In this area there were also the Mycenaean Fountain and the Spring of Klepsydra, which were of vital importance to the Acropolis and the wider region.

Ancient Agora



The **Ancient Agora** of Athens was the focus centre of public life. The large open square attracted Athenians for a variety of purposes: trade, elections, consultations, trials but also theatrical events, ceremonies, military exercises or athletic competitions, everything could happen in the Agora. Administrative, judicial and commercial buildings 'Stoas' (collonates), altars, temples and shrines, fountains, the Odeon, the Library, the '*Bema*' (speakers platform), monuments and dedications of donors, areas of promenade and discussions flanked Dromos, the ancient road which led from Dipylon to the Acropolis where the grandiose Panathenaic procession used to take place.

The hill of the Agora, Agoraios Kolonos, is dominated by the Temple of Hephaestus, protector of bronze workers, and of Athena Ergane, protector of potters. It is the best preserved temple of the 5th century BC.

At the foot of the hill public buildings which housed the institutions of Athenian Democracy have been revealed (the Bouleuterion, where draft legislation was prepared, the Tholos, seat of executive power, the State Archives). Starting from the southwest of the square, the Athenians followed the road that led to the area of popular assemblies on the hill of Pnyx, passing through densely populated city districts. It is in the Ancient Agora and on Pnyx that have developed their activity all great politicians of the 5th and 4th century BC, great philosophers, including Socrates but mainly the anonymous today but omnipotent at that time Athenian citizen, who participated in the institutions of the direct Athenian Democracy.

In the south of the Agora stands the Areopagus Hill, the seat of the Supreme Court and sacred place of the mythical Erinyes (the Furies).

Roman Agora



The **Roman Agora**, or Agora of Caesar and Augustus, built in 10 BC in an area in the heart of the city, which already had a commercial character, was centre of organised commercial activity in Athens during Roman times.

Trade of oil took also place inside the Roman Agora, as testified by an inscription of Hadrian's era, preserved in situ. Much later, during the Ottoman period, the Roman Agora is known to be called '*Staropazaro*', being a wheat marketing space.

The archaeological site includes also, among other monuments dating to the 1st c. AD (*Agoranomeion, Vespasianae*), to the 7th and to the 17th century (Early Byzantine basilica and *Fethiye* mosque adequately), the Horologion of Andronikos of Kyrrhos (end of 2nd century BC),

an impressive architectural creation of the late Hellenistic period, known also as the Tower of the Winds or '*Aerides*' (the blowing winds), which has 'housed' some of the most important achievements of astronomy, physics and engineering of the time, in particular a unique mechanism of 'timepiece' or 'planetarium', of a manufacturing philosophy comparable to that of the famous Antikythera mechanism.

Hadrian's Library



Hadrian's Library, an important part of the extensive building programme of the philhellene emperor Hadrian, was built in 132 AD, in order to accommodate the city's largest library and, probably, the State Archives; but also the worship of the emperor. A building of roman inspiration and luxurious construction, with colourful marbles in both its facade and interior, it was the largest spiritual and cultural centre of the city during imperial times. In the late 3rd century AD, its external enclosure was incorporated in the fortifications built for the future protection of the city from barbaric invasions. In the early 5th century AD, a building was constructed in the inner courtyard, the so-called *Tetraconch*. Possibly it is the first church built within the ancient city walls, replaced in the same position by two Byzantine churches dating to the 7th and 11th century.

During the Ottoman period, Hadrian's Library and its surrounding area constitutes the administrative and commercial heart of the city, and houses it's bazaar and the Governor's official offices and residence ('*Voevodaliki*'). After the liberation of the city, the building was converted into infantry and cavalry barracks (1835), which were gradually demolished over the last century, in order to unearth the magnificent Roman building.

Western Hills



The area of the Western Hills that comprises the hills of the **Muses (Philopappos)**, of **Pnyx** and of the **Nymphs**, was first inhabited in the 6th century BC, with the establishment of the Assembly of citizens (*Ekklesia*) on the hill of Pnyx and the launching of the Koile road, which led from Athens to Piraeus crossing the urban fabric of the area. Being integrated into the Themistoclean precinct, they became one of the most densely built sections of ancient Athens, extending to two known ancient municipalities (*demoi*), Melite and Koile.

The monumental complex of Pnyx, used for the meetings of the Assembly of the Athenians from the 6th until the late 4th century BC, is connected with the heyday of the Athenian democracy, since it was the superior centre of power and control throughout the course of its operation.

Among the successive phases of the monument's use, the one preserved today is that dating from the time of Lycurgus (330-326 BC). It is a universal monument-symbol of citizens' freedom of expression and the incarnation of democracy, a place where the basic principles of *isopoliteia* (equal citizenship rights), *isegoria* (equality in freedom of speech) and *isonomia* (equality of political rights) were first formulated as the supreme good of Democracy, principles that have diachronically inspired democracies throughout the western world.

The monumental complex of the Assembly of the Athenians, the Koile road, preserved to a length of about 500 meters, the monument of Philopappos and the important sanctuaries of Musaeus and Nymphs, of Pan and Zeus, the *Diateichisma* (fortification wall) and the dense remains of the urban fabric of ancient municipalities (*demoi*), the more recent monuments of Pikionis and the Observatory, along with their unique natural environment and the panoramic view of Attica basin, determine the archaeological, architectural and environmental importance of the Western hills.

Kerameikos



Kerameikos lies on the north-western outskirts of Athens. It stands out as the ancient city's most prominent cemetery, in use from the Prehistoric Period down to Late Antiquity and, at the same time, as one of the major centres of pottery production and vase painting in the ancient world.

The site hosts one of the best preserved segments of the ancient fortification wall of Athens, in the course of which two of the most monumental gates had been constructed, the *Dipylon* - the largest gate in the ancient Greek world - and the Sacred Gate; they were crossed by equally nodal arteries, the *Dromos* and the Sacred Way.

Here the Athenian state honoured its Gods with ceremonial processions such as the Panathenaic *Pompe* or the *Iacchus* procession of the Eleusinian Mysteries, as well as the dead of wars, who were buried at public expense in the Public Cemetery, known as *Demosion Sema*. Those were commemorated through funerary games and orations, such as the *Epitaphios* delivered by Pericles.

The spirit and ideals of ancient Athens and ancient Greece are concentrated in Kerameikos.



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European Heritage Label



The European Heritage Label (EHL) is a new European Union initiative, which builds on a 2006 intergovernmental initiative. It was established by Decision 1194/2011/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The general objectives of the European Heritage Label are to strengthen European citizens' sense of belonging to the European Union, in particular that of young people, which is based on shared values and elements of European history and cultural heritage, as well as on respect of national and regional diversity, and on strengthening of intercultural dialogue. For this purpose, the Label emphasises the symbolic value and highlights the profile of sites that have played a significant role in the history and culture of Europe and/or the establishment of the European Union.

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