

**The Parthenon Frieze:
Viewed as the Panathenaic Festival
Preceding the Battle of Marathon**

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The Parthenon frieze has been the subject of many debates and the interpretation of it leads to a number of problems: what was the subject of the frieze? What would the frieze have meant to the Athenian audience? The Parthenon scenes have been identified in many different ways: a representation of the Panathenaic festival, a mythical or historical event, or an assertion of Athenian ideology.

This paper will examine the Parthenon Frieze in relation to the metopes, pediments, and statues in order to prove the validity of the suggestion that it depicts the Panathenaic festival just preceding the battle of Marathon in 490 BC.

The main problems with this topic are that there are no primary sources that document what the Frieze was supposed to mean. The scenes are not specific to any one type of procession. The argument against a Panathenaic festival is that there are soldiers and chariots represented. Possibly that biggest problem with interpreting the Frieze is that part of it is missing and it could be that the piece that is missing ties everything together.

The Parthenon may have been the only ancient Greek temple with an exterior sculpture that depicts any kind of religious ritual or service. Because the theme of the frieze is unique we can not turn towards other relief sculpture to help us understand it. Nor can we look towards written confirmation because no ancient writer had anything to say about the about the frieze directly.¹

There are no records that exist that can tell us who carved the frieze or how it was finished, but it can be assumed that if the frieze was completed in

¹Nagy Blaise, "Athenian Officials on the Parthenon Frieze." *American Journal of Archaeology*. Vol. 96, No. 1 (Jan. 1992) pp. 55-69. pg 56

roughly five years and a single sculptor could carve up 3.5 meters per year, it would have taken at about nine sculptors to finish the frieze.²

The Parthenon stands on the Acropolis, replacing an older building that was destroyed by the Persians. The Parthenon that stands today was a Periclean project, it sits on the former temple base and was not as long from east to west but was longer and broader than its precursor. Pericles put his close friend Pheidias in charge of supervising. The architects were Kallikrates and Iktinos, Iktinos actually wrote a book about the Parthenon since it was his greatest achievement but this has since been lost.³

Plutarch who wrote six centuries later describes as well as anyone the impact and effect of these great buildings:

Perikles boldly laid before the proposals for immense public works and plans for buildings, which would involve many different arts and industries and require long periods to complete, his object being that those who stayed at home, no less than those serving in the fleet or the army, might have an excuse to share in the national wealth...So the buildings arose, as imposing in their sheer size as they were inimitable in the grace of their workmanship. And yet the most wonderful thing about them was the speed with which they were completed...it is this above all which makes Perikles' works an object of wonder to us...the fact that they were created in so short time and yet for all time.⁴

The Parthenon, the Erechtheion, the Athena Nike temple, and the Propylaea were all built when Athens was at the height of its power, both militarily and economically, at which point they were able to afford the best craftsmen,

² Neils *The Parthenon From Antiquity to the Present* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pg 218

³ R. J. Hopper, *The Acropolis* (London: London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 118-121.

⁴ John M. Camp, *The Archaeology of Athens* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Yale University Press, 2001), 73-74.

artists, and materials available, as anticipated by Plutarch, the temples of the Acropolis remain the most visible legacy of Classical Athens.⁵

The Periclean Acropolis is thoroughly integrated with older, pre-Periclean monuments (both statues and buildings). The Classical Parthenon was built mostly out of recycled archaic materials: marble blocks and column drums cut from the older Parthenon. Jenifer Neils argues that the Parthenon was built as a monument to Marathon, and also to all the victories won over the Persians in the years after they had sacked the Acropolis and destroyed the older Parthenon.⁶

The Parthenon is most likely the most celebrated of all Greek temples; it was provided more sculptures than any temple before or after. Though the Parthenon is Doric in style it also integrates many characteristics the Ionic architectural order and might introduce the Corinthian order as well.⁷

The metopes of the Parthenon are important in understanding the frieze, because the frieze is just one part of the temple and everything needs to be taken together as a whole. The Parthenon Metopes that were visible on the exterior of the temple were made in deep relief and surrounded the temple on all sides; the sculptors had to invent new examples in order to fill the unprecedented number of reliefs, with fourteen at each the west and east sides and thirty-two along the north and south. Many sculptors, with different specializations would have been needed to complete the ninety-two reliefs, but no names are preserved. The carving style differed in the preserved metopes, which suggests more than one sculptor and also that they had grown accustomed to the hard

⁵ Ibid 74

⁶ Neils, *The Parthenon From Antiquity to the Present* 26

⁷ Ibid pg 67

Pentelic marble. Each series had its own distinct mythological battle, but all four sides of the temple were united by the theme of an armed conflict.⁸ The theme of an armed conflict fits well with the procession being the one just preceding Marathon.

Ancient sources do not mention the metopes, but it is possible to recognize the four themes through comparisons with related architectural sculptures and Attic vase paintings. The east/main entrance to the temple shows the Olympian gods fighting the earthborn giants for supremacy of Mount Olympus. The south depicts a fight that explodes between the Lapiths and centaurs at a wedding feast. The west shows Amazons on horses and on foot, fighting Greek soldiers. The north metopes show the fourth and final battle, which illustrates the Sack of Troy. All of the battles took place in different areas of Greece, either in cities with a prominent acropolis or in mountainous locations, but more importantly these scenes represent stages in the fighting where the outcome is undecided which subtly alludes to the Persian wars earlier in the century. The metopes unlike the frieze are all about war and the divine. The Parthenon metopes have more than one possible meaning that may not just be about foreign enemies from the recent past, but when taken into consideration with the rest of the Parthenon, it seems to be the most realistic explanation.⁹

The Parthenon frieze runs around the upper edge of the temple wall of the Parthenon. On the north, west, and south the frieze portrays a procession of horsemen, musicians, and sacrificial animals. On the east side there is a scene

⁸ Ibid 159-164

⁹ Ibid 165-168

centered on a child handing a folded cloth to an older man. On one side of them gods and goddess are sitting and on the other, two girls are carrying some object. What the frieze means has long been a subject of debate but as of late it has been most commonly thought to be a Panathenaic procession.

The Parthenon frieze is the best preserved out of all the other sculptures in the Parthenon, because on the building it was the least conspicuous, this caused it be the most protected, and because the Parthenon was converted to a church later on. The position of the frieze can also mean that it was the least important on the Parthenon, along with the fact that no ancient author mentions it. This could be because the frieze itself was not that important, but that is doubtful due to the size of the frieze, the detail, and the amount of time it would have taken to carve such an extensive piece of art. The fact that no ancient author mentions the Frieze does not mean that it was not important either, when dealing with ancient history there is often a lack of sources to study, and the sheer size of the frieze suggests its importance, the frieze itself is huge; it is 160 meters long and has over 360 animal and human figures. Taking all these facts into account the frieze must have been an important and integral part of the Parthenon.¹⁰

Boardman argues for a type of Panathenaic festival in an article published in 1984 called "The Parthenon Frieze". Boardman states that the majority of the debate has been over the type of Panathenaic festival, whether it represents a

¹⁰ John Boardman. "The Parthenon Frieze". Parthenon-KongreB Basel, pp. 210-215. 1984 pg 210-211

mythical, historical, or symbolic festival, and also over the identification of individual figures and groups of figures.¹¹

Robin Osborne writes that the frieze represents the official view of the Athenian polis, because the qualities of the citizen body on the Frieze match closely with those advertised in the fullest contemporary statement of the ideology of democracy that is possessed, the Funeral Oration. In a traditional funeral oration the citizens are represented as soldiers and the soldiers are young men.¹²

Tom Stevenson argues in his article “The Parthenon Frieze in Recent Scholarship: Problems and Interpretations” that the frieze represents and idealized, contemporary celebration of the Great Panathenaia, not just the procession but the entire festival of as a whole. This is very close to most conventional interpretations of the frieze, which have been disputed over the recent years.¹³

J.J. Pollitt writes in “The meaning of the Parthenon Frieze” that most interpretations of the Frieze are that the Parthenon Frieze must to represent some mythical or at least mythologized history, because that is what is so often shown in Greek architectural sculptures.¹⁴ Pollitt claims that the frieze that the frieze has little or nothing to do with a Panathenaic procession, he admits the

¹¹ Ibid pg 211

¹² Robin Osborne, “The Viewing and Obscuring of the Parthenon Frieze.” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 107. pp 98-105, 1987. pg 103

¹³ Tom Stevenson, “The Parthenon Frieze in Recent Scholarship: Problems and Interpretations” pg 42

¹⁴ J.J. Pollitt, “The meaning of the Parthenon Frieze” *“Studies in the History of Art”*, 49. 51-65, 1972. Pg. 63

possibility that it might be connected in a general and loose way with a Panathenaic festival.¹⁵

Boardman argues for a type of Panathenaic festival in an article published in 1984 called "The Parthenon Frieze". More specifically Boardman claims that The Parthenon Frieze represents the Panathenaic festival preceding the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC, with emphasis on the 192 Athenians that would lose their lives. The Frieze is just one piece of the interpretation; one must also look at the metopes, pediments and statues. Boardman states that the majority of the debate has been over the type of Panathenaic festival, whether it represents a mythical, historical, or symbolic festival, and also over the identification of individual figures and groups of figures.¹⁶ To fully understand why the Frieze is interpreted this way the Cavalry and the Peplos scenes are the most important parts to the interpretation. The lack of any specific account of the festival is the reason why the frieze is still debated.¹⁷

The first recorded response to the Parthenon Frieze was made by a fifteenth-century traveler Cyriac of Ancona, who evaluated it represent Athenian victories during the Periclean period. But since the eighteenth century there has been a general agreement that it represents the procession held every four years at the Great Panathenaia, to celebrate Athena's birthday.¹⁸

The frieze represents a Panathenaic procession, which could be a contemporary occasion, maybe a fifth-century festival, the date is and type of

¹⁵ Ibid pg 51-52

¹⁶ Boardman, "The Parthenon Frieze" pg 211

¹⁷ Stevenson pg 48

¹⁸ Ibid pg 45

procession is unknown. It has been described as the inaugural procession of the festival, and taking place in mythical history, but it is difficult to identify individuals and to recognize when they appear twice. Boardman argued for the unity of time and place in the frieze and claims that;

The festival was that which just preceded Marathon, and that the procession was dominated by those who were to fight and fall at Marathon, their heroic status indicated by their activity, with horses and chariots, and by their reception by the Eponymous Heroes and Twelve Gods, given the close associations demonstrable between Marathon, the Panathenaea, and the building of the Parthenon.¹⁹

The view that the frieze represents some Panathenaic procession is accepted, but different theories are based on different things. Some theories use an overall view of the frieze and certain individual figures and groups in the frieze. There are others that just look at the figures and do not take the whole frieze into account.²⁰ There is also the possibility that it does not represent a single Panathenaic procession but is the combination of many to show a general picture of what a Panathenaic procession was like.

The most noticeable part missing from the frieze is that there are no hoplite soldiers; the citizen army of Athens, any frieze that has to do with the military strength of Athens should have the representation of the hoplites, especially if it represents Marathon because the hoplites were the ones who were killed. There was a lot of room on the frieze for the hoplites to be represented and this also makes this frieze very different from any other ordinary

¹⁹ Boardman pg 211

²⁰ Ibid pg 211-212

Panathenaic procession. The horsemen and chariots can not be viewed as a conventional accompaniment to the procession.

This would seem like a flaw in argument of the Frieze being a procession just preceding the battle of Marathon, but Boardman offers the explanation that the choice of the horsemen and chariots was deliberate and were chosen in order to give the soldiers a higher honor because horsemen and chariots held a higher rank in Athens, and were singled out to show the heroic character of the participants. There can be no explanation or interpretation of the frieze that leaves them out.²¹

In order to understand the frieze one must first get a definition of what a Panathenaic procession was. The Panathenaia was the birthday festival of the city of Athens, and celebrated the birthday of Athena. The Panathenaia was separate from other festivals by the lack of nocturnal, disturbing, and ludicrous aspects, what's left shows the sheer magnificence of the classical period in Greece. Since 566 BC the Great Panathenaia was celebrated every four years, but the essential parts of the festival, such as the sacrificial procession, were also found at the smaller annual Panathenaia.

As an introduction to the celebration there is a nocturnal festival called the *pannychis*. At dawn there is a new fire fetched, and it is carried in a torch race from the grove of Akademos outside the city through the Agora and up to the altar of Athena on the Acropolis. By the Dipylon Gate where the Sacred Way from Eleusis enters the city, is where the Great Panathenaic Procession is formed, which is preserved on the Parthenon Frieze, all members of the

²¹ Ibid 211

Panathenaia have their place, from the young horsemen and the venerable elders to the young girls with the accessories for the sacrifice; baskets, jugs, and of course there are the victims for the sacrifice, more than one hundred cows and sheep are slaughtered at the Great Alter. The most important part of the festival preceding the sacrifice is the presentation of the *peplos*, the annual gift for Athena, intended for the life-size statue of Athena. For months the women of Athens would have been working on the *peplos*.²²

In the frieze on the east side there is what can be recognized as the ten Eponymous Heroes, so the frieze can be interpreted as an event in the recent past because the ten-tribe structure was a recent, democratic creation and would be out of place in a scene dealing with the mythical or the ancient historical past. This would also remove other mythical or ancient figures in the procession, because the Eponymous Heroes would seem inappropriate in a scene showing mythical/historical past.²³

Since 1906 these ten figures have been thought to represent the Eponymous heroes of the ten Athenian tribes. Their closeness to the gods shows that their status is one between the gods and the mortals. These men could not have represented magistrates because they would have been a part of the procession not standing and awaiting the arrival of the procession. The reason that the Eponymous Heroes were shown was that their statues stood in

²² Walter Burkert, Greek Religion (Cambridge , Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 231-233.

²³ Boardman pg 211

the Agora, along the Panathenaic way, the location that is argued to be depicted on the east frieze.²⁴

The east frieze that shows the peplos scene in the center shows one of the final rites of the Panathenaic procession. This scene however is isolated and distinctly different from the rest of the Parthenon Frieze. The figures are not part of the procession; the Gods shown in the scene also have their backs turned from it as to show that they are not interested because there is something more important going on. It seems to be more of a symbol than anything else.²⁵

The East Frieze figures have become essential to many of the interpretations of the Frieze. The condition of the stone causes some problems as its surface has been battered. The East Slab was most likely displaced from the building when it was converted to a church, and remained on the Acropolis until it was removed by Lord Elgin.²⁶

The Peplos Ceremony is essential to the interpretation of the entire frieze; it is the focal point of the semicircle of gods. These standing figures are set off from the gods by the amount of space that surrounds them. Two adults are interacting with two smaller attendants, while the fifth figure is further to the left, whose main purpose seems to have been to attract the attention of the viewer.²⁷

The first two figures are carrying stools for sitting on; the outline of the object is clear at the right where a bent lion leg can be seen. The young women's forearm supported it, with her fingers curled around it. The first two

²⁴ Blaise, pg 59

²⁵ Pollitt pg 61

²⁶ John Boardman, "The Parthenon Frieze, a Closer Look" pg 307

²⁷ Jenifer Neils, "The Parthenon Frieze" (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 166-167

figures are also carrying footstools on their heads. Apart from what the first two figures are carrying, there is also debate over their age and identity. They are dressed as adults and they must be considered young adults, because of their being dressed as adults. The two are slightly different heights, but the heads of the five figures make an arc, which causes there to be a more distinct break with the figures of the gods behind them. The most common belief is that they are the attendants to the two senior figures who are the priestess of Athena and the Archon Basileus (priest); it is agreed by most scholars due to their appearance and context.²⁸

The question that is raised by the attendants is who are the stools for? Are the stools for the children of the gods (Hebe and Eros), for the priestess of Athena and the Archon Basileus, or for the *peplos*, and if so, why only two? Because of the separation from this scene and the rest of the frieze, the best guess would be that the stools are for the priestess and priest. It is unlikely that the young girls are the metic girls that carried stools for the nobles. It is more likely that they are important figures that were essential part in the cult of Athena, which would make them the *arrephoroi* (ten-year-old girls who served the goddess for one year) they lived on the Acropolis for their time of service, under the guidance of the priestess.²⁹

On the right side of the scene is a girl handing a cloth to a man, the man is lifting it away from her which shows that he is receiving it. The bearded man that is receiving the cloth must be seen as a priest indicated by his cloths, a short-

²⁸ John Boardman, "The Parthenon Frieze, a Closer Look" pg 308-313

²⁹ Jenifer Neils, "The Parthenon Frieze" pg 168

sleeved ankle length chiton. The Venus rings on her neck shows that it is a girl and not a boy. The dress that is worn is that of an ordinary *peplos* with an open side, this is a normal classical dress for a girl.³⁰

These figures can all be connected to a Panathenaic festival, even if the girl is not a girl such as Jenifer Neils suggests then the boys function would have been to assist the priest with the animal sacrifice. Young assistants were important in cult because of their purity, and only a very pure child could handle the very important gifts for the goddess.³¹

The scene that flanks the center of the east frieze is collectively taken as the Olympian gods, there are twelve of them all seated, if they stood up they would be over a third taller than the rest of the figures on the frieze. The gods are seated in two groups of six, with a smaller younger attendant in each group; all sit on four legged stools except for Zeus, who sits on a throne. All of the gods are facing the procession and one goddess commonly recognized as Aphrodite is actually pointing at the procession. The males are recognized by their dress, either nude from the waist up or only partially draped. The best clues to the identities of these figures are the carved attributes such as;

The petasos (travelers' cap), the boots of Hermes, the torch of Demeter, the throne of Zeus, the snaky aegis lying on the lap of Athena, and the crutch tucked under the smith god Hephaistos, a discreet allusion to his lameness. Drill holes around his head indicate that the youthful god was wearing a headband, and so he is certainly Apollo with his characteristic laurel wreath. Gestures, such as the brooding pose of Demeter mourning for her daughter Persephone, the anakalypsis, or the unveiling of the perpetual bride Hera, or the restless knee-grabbing pose of Ares are also

³⁰ Boardman, "The Parthenon Frieze, a Closer Look" pg 316-318

³¹ Neils, "The Parthenon Frieze" pg 170-71

*employed to characterize the individual deities. Even more subtle is the gesture of Apollo, who has hooked his right thumb inside his cloak, an incipient act of revealing himself.*³²

Just as important are the relationships shown by the gods towards each other. The twelve gods are configured into pairs. For example Hera is seated besides her husband Zeus and turns her upper body towards him. Hephaistos turns and looks at Athena, who raised the child on the Acropolis. The winged boy Eros lays in his mothers (Aphrodite) lap and tucks his right hand into her outer garment. The youthful two sitting next to each other are the siblings Apollo and Artemis.³³

If the Gods are interested in the procession then why do we have the peplos scene? The peplos scene is in the middle of the east façade, which is in front of the main entrance to the cult chamber. The peplos that is being brought in (or taken away) has no object in the frieze. The main ceremony seems to be aborted, but when the eyes of the viewer lower they see a statue of Athena, the frieze seems to have established a new procession for Athena.³⁴

The southernmost third of the west frieze depicts six unmounted horses, at least one horse is too young and his mane is uncropped, and another is so wild that two men cannot control him. The first figure like other corner figures is a marshal but instead of directing the procession, he is still dressing. The second is also still getting ready, while the third figure is waiting and bridling a standing horse with another waiting behind which differs from the next two horses that are rearing back to back. The next figure is reining his mount and at the same time

³² Ibid pg 160-162

³³ Ibid pg 164

³⁴ Osborne pg 149

has placed his right foot on the far side of the horses' right forehoof, attempting to make the horse lean forward with a stretched out appearance.³⁵

The last block in the west section opens with a figure that is looking down and making a specific gesture, his right index finger pointing towards the horse in front of him, which is another very specific action. If a tablet was present at one point as Jenifer Neils suggests then the scene would most likely resemble a cavalry inspection, though no tablet is visible but it could have very easily been painted in. This would make sense in that the *Constitution of the Athenians* (49.1) states that, "The council holds scrutiny of the cavalry's horses...Horses which are unable to keep up, or are unwilling to stay in line and are unmanageable, are branded on the jaw with the sign of a wheel, and any horse which has been branded is rejected."³⁶ Since two horses are depicted as being out of control and unable to stay in line this theory would make sense.

The third figure on this block is a stable boy holding a lead to the horse; the boy has a cloak over his left shoulder like the other attendant figures on the frieze. The horse lacks any drill holes on his head, so either the reigns were painted in or the horse was unbridled, the horse is running his muzzle against his front leg, which could be a sign that the horse was rejected. Pollitt explains that the west frieze shows groups of cavalry members getting ready for the procession, some mounted and some still dressing, and he claims it is supposed

³⁵ Jenifer Neils, "The Parthenon Frieze" pg 126

³⁶ Ibid pg 128

to represent the time immediately preceding the cavalcade, that is fully launched on the north and south sides.³⁷

Almost all modern writers on the Parthenon frieze have accepted that the horsemen were included in the procession. They usually have accepted the two speeches from Demosthenes as evidence in this case. The first appears in *Against Meidias*, where Demosthenes condemns *Meidias* for being in such a terrible physical condition that he could not remain on his horse during the processions. This shows that the horsemen were allowed in the processions and the cavalry procession did take place in Athens. The second takes place in the *First Philippic* where Demosthenes castigates the Athenians for allowing military commanders stay and help plan processions instead of sending them to fight the Macedonians.³⁸

Demosthenes refers to the horsemen in both cases in a very general way, but this does show that the horsemen were allowed to be in the processions and that it might not have been that irregular. Xenophon, in the third chapter of *Hipparchikos*, talks about the role of the cavalry in the Athenian ceremonial life, there is no mention of the Panathenaia.³⁹ This shows that there on occasion was cavalry in the processions but this does not prove to have anything to do with the Parthenon frieze except that it was possible for the cavalry to be involved. It could be that like in the *First Philippic* the cavalry planned the procession so included themselves in the procession, but this does not explain the fact that the horsemen take up almost half of the frieze.

³⁷ Pollitt, 55

³⁸ Ibid 52

³⁹ Ibid 53

The problem is that there is no source that confirms or denies the horsemen's participation in the Panathenaic procession, but as the horsemen take up almost half of this scene it can be assumed that they had something to do with the procession. It does not seem that they were just there to act as a bodyguard either. The Athenian cavalry was relatively new at fifth century, because they had relied on the cavalry of their allies, but after a betrayal they began their own. Athenian cavalry was divided into ten squadrons based upon the ten tribes. It is possible that the procession was a celebration for the formation of an Athenian cavalry.⁴⁰

There is still no reason to believe that the cavalymen actually took part in the procession, it could be that they were there to remind people the equestrian contests at the Panathenaic festival. Xenophon describes it as, mock battle where two rival units drawn from the ten squadrons of the Athenian cavalry and then charged each other and rode through each other's ranks. Xenophon does not describe a particular festival though, and the evidence that remains is a list of the winners from 280 BC. Another festival at Olympia, held for Zeus, also held the mock battle so the frieze might be a general description of the ceremonial and festival life and not the Panathenaia alone.⁴¹

After the cavalry comes the procession of the chariots on the North and South sides of the frieze. It is the believed by most that this section shows the *apobatai*, who were armed men who would jump from a moving chariot and then be in a footrace. It is thought that the *apobatai*, their chariots, and, the chariot

⁴⁰ Pollitt pg 55

⁴¹ Ibid 57-58

drivers were a part of the Panathenaic procession but there is no evidence apart from the frieze itself. There is evidence the *apobatai* were a part of the Panathenaic games.⁴²

With the addition of the chariots to the cavalry almost seventy percent of the frieze has been occupied. This shows that by far these are the two most important parts of the frieze. The problem is that there is no certain connection between these two and the Panathenaic procession except a few pieces that describe the festivals in general. This makes it very hard to know for certain what the frieze is describing except that the cavalry and the chariots were a very important part of it.

The figures in the procession that are on foot, which follows the chariots on the north and south sides and finishes in the south, offers much more in the way of connecting the frieze to the Panathenaic procession.

The frieze that shows two groups of men who stand between the cavalcade and the officials of the sacrificial procession is very poorly preserved. On the south, there is the lower part of perhaps fourteen. On the north there were sixteen of which there are six complete with heads. These men are intended to represent the mature citizens, most likely state officials. They are sometimes identified as the *thallophoroi*, who are the beautiful old men that carried the branches in the Panathenaic procession, but there is no trace of the branches, and on some figures it would have been impossible for them to be painted in, along with the fact that the old men are not particularly beautiful.⁴³

⁴²Ibid 58

⁴³ Boardman, "The Parthenon Frieze, a Closer Look" pg 322

Harrison believes that these men represented three generations:

The representation of a conspicuously old man together with a beardless youth and a mature bearded man is a sign that three generations are being shown. This is appropriate to the heroes; we can feel sure that the very old man is Kekrops, the most ancient of the Eponymoi. The pair next to him should be those nearest to him in time: the fatherly man Erechtheus, the youth on whose shoulder he leans Pandion.⁴⁴

The above statement follows the belief that the Parthenon frieze is a combination of the past and present showing mythical figures. Harrison also mentions Aigeus, the father of Theseus. Harrison suggests that the frieze is of a general procession showing Athenian rituals not one specific procession.

Behind the men there is the rapid forward movement of the chariot *apobatai*, in front of them the operational part of the sacrificial procession begins with the musicians, this causes the old men to create a transition, just as the Eponymous Heroes do on the east frieze between the mortals and the divine. Because of their proximity to the gods these men are either important officials of the state or heroes. It can be said that they are also taller than the mortals on the frieze because they are leaning on their sticks and their heads still reach the top of the slab. It has been argued that they are most likely not heroes but magistrates of the Athenian *polis*. These men were chosen by lot or by the raising of hands and there were ten of them for each of the ten tribes.⁴⁵

One clue that is given to us for the identification of these men is that if they are magistrates is the fact that thirty was the minimum age for a magistrate in Athens, and four of these men are beardless which leads one to believe that in

⁴⁴ Harrison pg 202

⁴⁵ Neils, "The Parthenon Frieze" pg 159-160

all likelihood they are not over thirty years old. The four heads on the north side are very individualized, almost like that of a portrait. The designer clearly wanted to set these men apart as they carving is more three dimensional. If these men were officials then they would have been depicted in their duties to show their status with the festival. With these reasons it seems like these men were meant to be seen apart from the other figures, somewhere between mortals and gods.⁴⁶

The next scene on the north side, these figures appear in order, kitharists and flautists, youths bearing pitchers of water, tray bearers, and sacrificial victims, cows and sheep. The sacrificial procession on the south side was very badly damaged and has gaps that are very hard to reconstruct. There are figures carrying what could be writing tablets, musical instruments, there is one fragment that preserved a tray bearer. There are again sacrificial animals and their attendants but there is only cows shown here.⁴⁷

The Kitharists and flautists competed in the Panathenaic games, but it is not known whether or not the contestants marched in the procession. It is known that musicians did participate in sacrificial rituals. It has also been noted that the water bearers should be women not men as they are in this frieze, but has it has been suggested that the figures could be could be the winners of the torch race and there could have been water bearers in ruined section in the south frieze. There is also the difference in the two sacrificial scenes. Why are there sheep and cows in one and just cows in another? It could be that there were two

⁴⁶ Ibid161

⁴⁷ Pollitt pg 59

different sacrifices. Also sheep were offered, according to the ancient custom, to Pandrossos

in the old temple, while cows were offered to Athena. It is possible that they are both put here to show the sacrificial rituals of all Athenian festivals.⁴⁸

If the Parthenon frieze does not represent the Panathenaic procession and instead shows a general picture of the classical Athens, the general portrayal of a procession, does it have a message? There must be a message otherwise why put the time, effort, and money into creating a work of art.

It is not impossible that the design of the frieze was to single out one idea, but it is more likely that it was designed to emphasize and celebrate the cultural identities of Athens. This would make the Parthenon Frieze not a documentation of a single event that took place but the interpretation and the idea behind all the ceremonies, contests, and forms of training that constructed the cultural and religious life in Athens.

There are many authors that believe that the Parthenon has to represent some mythical or at least mythologized history, because that is what is so often shown in Greek architectural sculptures, but this does not have to be true. It could be that this does show the procession or could represent the Athenians of the time that the Parthenon was built. The frieze does not even have to represent the same time frame, the same procession.

The only problem with this is that the cavalcade on three sides of the frieze represents the men of Athens who gave their lives at Marathon, being lead in the framework of a Panathenaic procession into the presence of all the gods to

⁴⁸Pollitt pg 61

confirm their heroic status that they had won by their sacrifice, and acknowledging the debt that all of Greece own Athens. The setting is that of the Agora, where the *peplos* was picked up, the twelve gods and the Eponymous Heroes are represented. In the Parthenon there are many things that help remember Marathon, in the iconography of the sculptures.⁴⁹

It is important to note that originally there were 192 male figures in the cavalcade on the frieze, apart from the charioteers, which is the exact same number of Athenians that are said to have died at the battle of Marathon. It is easy to see understand Boardman when he says that these 192 figures are the supposed to represent the warriors celebrating their last Panathenaia, before their heroic deaths on the battlefield.⁵⁰

Whatever view is taken it is important to remember that it is all speculation and without any written documentation of the meaning of the frieze it may never fully be under stood, Pollitt says it best:

*The Parthenon Frieze is a unique monument. In size and complexity it has no parallel in Archaic or Classical Greek relief sculpture. It was also created in one of the most original and expansive periods in European art. Does it make sense that its designers were incapable of representing something that had never been represented before? The frieze was a product of its time, and it explores the issues of that time with mixture of idealism and originality.*⁵¹

⁴⁹ Boardman, "The Parthenon Frieze, a Closer Look" pg 325-326

⁵⁰ Nagy, pg 56

⁵¹ Pollitt pg 63

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