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### The Temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens

In the city of Athens, there is so much architecture that everywhere you walk you can see a new building. Not only is the architecture ancient, but also modern. For example, look at the Zappeion or the Parliament building, both modern buildings influenced by ancient architecture. Or look at the new National Library of Greece, modern architecture not influenced by the past. When thinking of Ancient architecture in Athens that exists, one thinks of the Acropolis which holds the most famous pieces of architecture: the Parthenon, the Erechtheion, and the Propylaia. But there is so much more than the Acropolis in Athens. Another temple, close the College Year in Athens academic center, is the Temple of Olympian Zeus. Although visiting the temple of Zeus may not feel as exciting since only fifteen columns are still standing, its architecture and history are as interesting and rich as the history of the Parthenon.

The construction of the temple of Zeus began in the 6th century BC by the Athenian tyrant Peisistratos, but stopped either because of the overthrow of Hippias or lack of funds. Through the Classical period, the Athenians never built on the temple because they wanted the temple to symbolize the failure of the tyrants who believed they were bigger than the gods. For the next seven hundred years, many others continued building the temple of Zeus until Emperor Hadrian in 131 AD completed the temple. Originally the Peisistratos family had begun the temple of Zeus to be in the Doric order, the earliest of the column orders. But the Roman

architecture Cossutius altered the design to the Corinthian order.<sup>1</sup> To correctly understand the temple analyses of the architecture is important.

Analyzing the architecture of the temple displays much about the history of the temple. The temple of Zeus is of the Corinthian order, this conclusion came from looking at the capital. The decor is foliage and stems, the leaves in the capital are papyrus leaves, from the Egyptian influence (figure 2). The Corinthian order is popular in the Roman period, explaining why Cossutius changed the order of the temple. Cossutius was ordered to design the temple to be the largest temple in the Mediterranean world.<sup>2</sup> Meaning, after the completion of the temple in 131 AD the temple was an octastyle temple. There would be eight columns in the peristyle and seventeen columns in the penpteral. The completed temple would have had one hundred and four columns altogether. Inside the cella, which one can see still standing, there was a statue of Zeus made of ivory and gold made as a replica of the statue of Zeus in the temple of Zeus in Olympia (image 1). Alongside the statue of Zeus was a statue of Hadrian, reminding the people of Athens who completed this massive temple.<sup>3</sup> But today the temple looks very different.

The architectural ruins still standing today only show a fraction of what the temple would have looked like in 131 AD. From the seven columns still standing, starting from the bottom, the crepidoma is still present which is the three steps. The euthynteria is also present on the bottom of the crepidoma. The upper stair, the stylobate is also present. Because this temple is Corinthian, the base is present on the bottom of the shaft of the column. The torus, scotia, and filet, parts of the base, are very clear. The shaft is still in good shape, with the fluting and arris visible. Even the capital is in good condition with the foliage and stems of the Corinthian capitals clear. The

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<sup>1</sup>Tony Spawforth, "The Complete Greek Temples," London: Thames & Hudson, 2006, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 40-41.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 41.

last part that still exists are in parts of the ceiling beams. Six of the columns are on the outside, while seven of the columns would be part of the cella where the statues of Zeus and Hadrian would have stood, imitating the statue of Zeus in the temple of Zeus in Olympia (image 1). But do not underestimate the remains of this temple, it is as impressive as other temples in the ancient world.

The first time I saw the columns of the temple was when I was walking to class by Zappeion Hall. After seeing these large columns I decided to visit the temple of Zeus. After walking into the site, I was shocked by how tall the columns were, much larger than most temple columns. The columns felt taller than the columns of the Parthenon and more decorated because of the Corinthian capitals. The beautiful Corinthian capitals were another shock, they were in amazing condition. I have traveled to many different temples which only have the foundation giving only a small hint of their original size, but this temple holds a feeling of mystery by the size of the seven columns still standing and my imagination ran wild thinking of the original size of the temple. This created a more fantasized image of Ancient Greece as the Acropolis standing magnificently behind the temple. These elements are what establishes the site of the temple of Zeus, a special site that is sorely underestimated.

Many architectural and archaeological sites in Athens are missed since the Acropolis is famous throughout the world. Tourists come to Athens to see the Acropolis and the Parthenon yet miss so many other amazing places in Athens. One of these places is the temple of Olympia Zeus. Although today the temple only has seven of its one hundred and four columns standing, the site still holds much mystery. Originally the temple began in the Archaic period by Peisistratos as part of the Doric order but was not finished. The temple was not completed until

Emperor Hadrian, being finished as part of the Corinthian order and is ordered to be the biggest temple in the ancient world. Since the temple was not finished until the Roman Empire and the order was changed from Doric to the popular Roman order, the Corinthian order, the temple is more Roman than Greek. Yet, the temple of Zeus is still important to the history of Ancient Athens.

Word Count: 1,090

## Appendix



Figure 1.  
Temple of Olympian Zeus, Athens. Completed 131 CE.  
George Rex.  
Published 19 July 2015.  
Ancient History Encyclopedia.



Figure 2.  
Corinthian Capital from the Temple of Olympian Zeus, Athens. Completed 131 CE.  
Mark Cartwright.  
Published 19 July 2015.  
Ancient History Encyclopedia.

Works cited

Ancient History Encyclopedia. "Illustration." Accessed March 1, 2019.

Spawforth, Tony. "The Complete Greek Temples." London: Thames & Hudson, 2006.