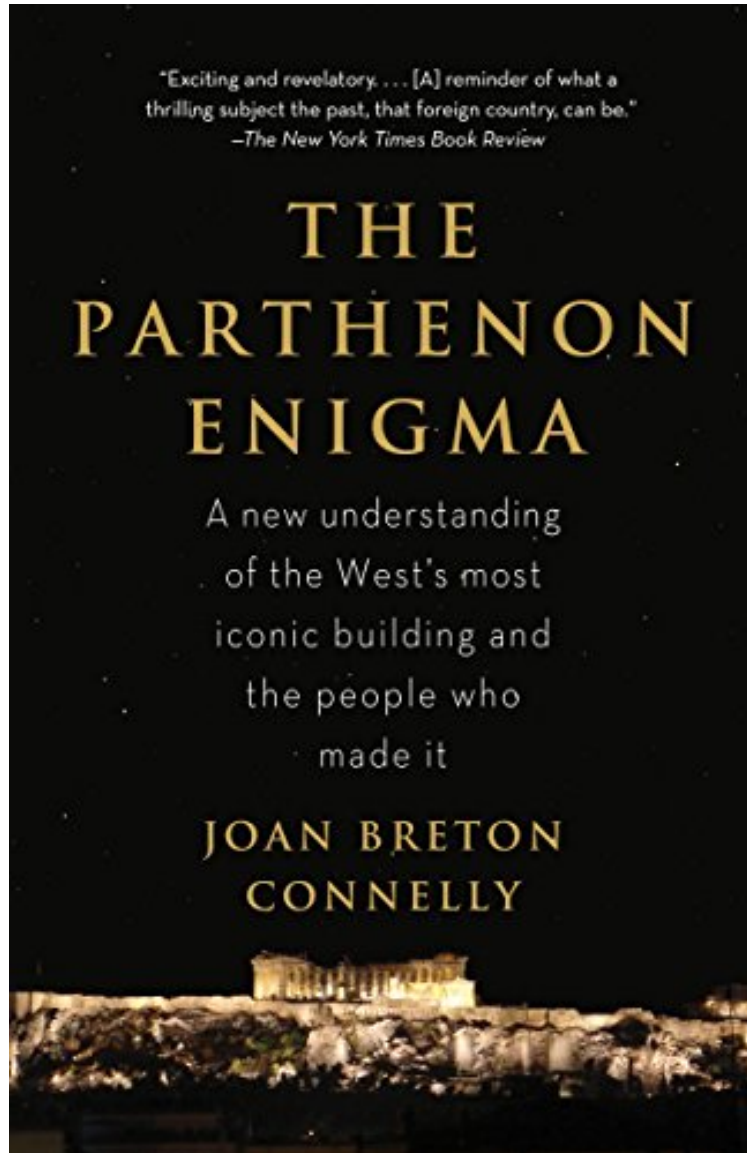


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The Parthenon Enigma

Joan Breton Connelly

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Joan Breton Connelly : The Parthenon Enigma before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Parthenon Enigma:

18 of 18 people found the following review helpful. Great read for anyone immersed in ancient AthensBy Patrick GarnerA breakthrough book by one of the finest authors working today in the archeology field. Connelly is also author of "Portrait of a Priestess"--if you don't already have it, find a copy, as it similarly reevaluates an area of ancient studies that was in need of a thoroughly unique analysis. Connelly, in both of these texts, reinterprets long-standing beliefs about Athenian thought. In addition to the "Parthenon Enigma" being an engrossing read, it becomes a

sweeping look at the ancient Mediterranean world. I read it front to back in about 10 days, finishing it would a small "Wow." I'm currently rereading the book. Highly recommended. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An academic argument, a popularization, and a stunning narrative of discovery

By Robert J. Crawford

In perhaps one of every 20 academic books I read, I find a very very good crossover that will also appeal to a popular audience. Prof. Connelly not only offers a new interpretation of the Parthenon, but she explains Athenian culture and politics with an extraordinary and exciting lucidity. I felt like I was re-discovering Periklean Athens all over again: it was fresh, brilliant, and original. The object in question is the Parthenon, which is supposed to represent the birth of the West and the concept of democracy, according to its Enlightenment interpreters. It combines form with sculptural representation, though no one really knows what exactly most of the sculptures are supposed to portray or even what the true purpose was. Many have assumed that the statues depicted recent events. Connelly begins with the assertion that - unlike monotheistic cultures that have a single, sacred text as an irrefutable canonic reference - the Classical Athenians turned to local ritual and architecture to embody the essence of the city state's culture, ideology, and narrative. As such, the Athenians (and the others of classical Graeco-Roman world) lived in a more ambiguous world, where collective interpretations left much implied but unsaid, in part secret, in part assumed in conventions that remain mysterious to us. What Connelly does in this masterful book is offer an interpretation of this gestalt, as expressed in the Parthenon. (Keep in mind that Athens, and possibly Sparta, is only one of exemplar of a vast culture that was spread through the entire Mediterranean. It's enough to leave one awestruck - it's why I majored in classical civilization in college, so this book is a return to my youthful inspiration.)

According to Connelly, the sculptures begin by depicting King Erechtheus and Queen Praxithea, whose sacrifice of their daughters helped to found Athens as legitimate in the eyes of the Olympian Gods, a unique entity that sprung from the soil in mythic time. Also portrayed, Athena and Poseidon competed for the patronage of Athens, which the former won, creating a jealous enemy in Poseidon. They also sprung from the seed of Hephaestus, as scraped off of Athena's thoroughly uninterested thigh. Unique by this mandate, the Athenians went on to do great things: they believed in themselves, in their unique origin as spawn from the earth around Athens. Connelly develops this narrative into an interpretation of the experience of Athenians, who reinforced their sense of solidarity through rituals and celebratory festivals connected to the Parthenon. In her scheme, religion was inseparable from the politics and ideology of Athens, a sense of superiority that enabled them to dominate their allies in the Delian League and finance colossal expenditures on their behalf to beautify Athens, i.e. a repressive democracy based on unique privilege and naked self interest. If this sounds contradictory, it indicates how completely different the conception of democracy and citizenship was then: it was less about individual rights than contributing to the well being of an elite city that was destined to dominate its brothers in the Greek diaspora. Democracy was a duty to serve the community, which excluded outsiders by its very nature and sense of uniqueness. A narrative thread through the book is the steps of discovery that Connelly took, including a manuscript fragment by Euripedes to very technical archaeological excavations that demonstrated the use of paint on the statues. You get the story of the Elgin marbles, complete with the current controversy regarding their return to Greece. I found it a dazzling example of how classicists reason. Nonetheless, I have some caveats to add. First, like all classicists who focus exclusively on the West, Connelly takes for granted that it was superior. I would have like more context and comparisons with the other great empires, e.g. Persia and Egypt, whose architecture the Parthenon has been accused of copying. Second, many of her colleagues have criticized her new interpretation; perhaps it is too early, but I would like to hear her rebuttals. Recommended with the greatest enthusiasm. The text is pretty much at the undergraduate level. 11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Phenomenal Book; Brilliant Scholarship

By Linda Johnsen

A total eye-opener, this book brings ancient Athenian spirituality back to life in a way I haven't experienced since Roger Lipsey's "Have You Been to Delphi?" Connelly writes so lucidly, you can vividly feel yourself strolling through the Parthenon 2500 years ago. (Such skill in taking readers on a journey into the past is regrettably rare in archeological writing!) Connelly's insights into the foundation myth of Athens are amazing and thoroughly convincing. Fascinating, readable, revelatory.

Built in the fifth century b.c., the Parthenon has been venerated for more than two millennia as the West's ultimate paragon of beauty and proportion. Since the Enlightenment, it has also come to represent our political ideals, the lavish temple to the goddess Athena serving as the model for our most hallowed civic architecture. But how much do the values of those who built the Parthenon truly correspond with our own? And apart from the significance with which we have invested it, what exactly did this marvel of human hands mean to those who made it? In this revolutionary book, Joan Breton Connelly challenges our most basic assumptions about the Parthenon and the ancient Athenians. Beginning with the natural environment and its rich mythic associations, she re-creates the development of the Acropolis; the Sacred Rock at the heart of the city-state; from its prehistoric origins to its Periklean glory days as a constellation of temples among which the Parthenon stood supreme. In particular, she probes the Parthenon's legendary frieze: the 525-foot-long relief sculpture that originally encircled the upper reaches before it was partially destroyed by Venetian cannon fire (in the seventeenth century) and most of what remained was shipped off to Britain (in the nineteenth century) among the Elgin marbles. The frieze's vast enigmatic

procession—a dazzling pageant of cavalymen and elders, musicians and maidens—has for more than two hundred years been thought to represent a scene of annual civic celebration in the birthplace of democracy. But thanks to a once-lost play by Euripides (the discovery of which, in the wrappings of a Hellenistic Egyptian mummy, is only one of this book's intriguing adventures), Connelly has uncovered a long-buried meaning, a story of human sacrifice set during the city's mythic founding. In a society startlingly preoccupied with cult ritual, this story was at the core of what it meant to be Athenian. Connelly reveals a world that beggars our popular notions of Athens as a city of staid philosophers, rationalists, and rhetoricians, a world in which our modern secular conception of democracy would have been simply incomprehensible. The Parthenon's full significance has been obscured until now owing in no small part, Connelly argues, to the frieze's dismemberment. And so her investigation concludes with a call to reunite the pieces, in order that what is perhaps the greatest single work of art surviving from antiquity may be viewed more nearly as its makers intended. Marshalling a breathtaking range of textual and visual evidence, full of fresh insights woven into a thrilling narrative that brings the distant past to life, *The Parthenon Enigma* is sure to become a landmark in our understanding of the civilization from which we claim cultural descent.

From Booklist *Starred* Universally recognized as a symbol of Western democracy, the Parthenon emerges in Connelly's bold new analysis as a shrine memorializing myths radically alien to modern politics. Newly recovered classical literary texts and surprising archaeological finds compel readers to acknowledge the implausibility of the usual interpretation of the Parthenon's frieze sculptures as a depiction of fifth-century Athenians celebrating their Panathenaic Festival. To buttress a quite different interpretation, Connelly cites lines from a long-lost Euripides play, so investing the Parthenon statues with mythical—not historical—significance, enshrining the legendary King Erechtheus and Queen Praxithea and the three daughters they heroically sacrifice to save their threatened city. The discovery that Athenians believed their political order originated with virgin sacrifice may shock readers, despite the ubiquity of human sacrifice in the world's prehistory and the centrality of blood sacrifice in Christianity. Yet in Athens's violent founding myth, Connelly sees a reminder of how completely Athenians put community welfare above self-interest. Newly aware of the potent message embedded in the Parthenon frieze as a whole, many readers will endorse Connelly's concluding appeal to British authorities, asking them to return to Greece the priceless pieces of the frieze that have long been held in London. An explosive reinterpretation of a classical icon. —Bryce Christensen
A highly detailed, often technical history . . . these pages spring to life with Breton Connelly's excitement . . . The sources are treated with considerable even-handedness, with the result that the interpretation is quite compelling . . . [The frieze's] procession is not political, or even contemporaneous with Pericles's Athens, she suggests, but religious and mythological.
—Daisy Dunn, *Literary (UK)*
A valuable argument about the purpose of the temple as a visual memento of the invisible past . . .
Connelly's theory is attractive and plausible, and is backed by a considerable breadth and depth of scholarship —archaeological, visual, and textual.—A. E. Stallings, *The Weekly Standard*
Learned, ambitious, generously illustrated and pugnacious . . . up to date with the excellent theoretical work of recent decades . . . [Connelly] aims to address both specialist and general audiences simultaneously . . . The stakes are therefore higher than in most disagreements in classical archaeology . . . What we know of the operation of the institutions of the democracy . . . works strongly in favour of Connelly's argument . . . Even those who have doubts must surely now recognize that Joan Breton Connelly's ideas deserve to be taken into the mainstream . . . Personally I am convinced that, in her main claim, Connelly is right. She has not solved the "enigma"; but dissolved it . . . It is time to change the textbooks and the museum

labels.
—William St. Clair, *Times Literary Supplement*
Exciting and revelatory; the subject of this matchless narrative is a matter of extraordinary significance for understanding the ancient people we so admire; The Parthenon Enigma serves as a bracing reminder that first-rate scholarship not only takes no visible fact for granted, but also digs deep into the unknown unknown; Her book is that rare thing: the exposition of a truly great idea, and a reminder of what a thrilling subject the past, that foreign country, can be.
—Caroline Alexander, *The New York Times Book Review*
A careful, learned account and a good read; There is plenty of learned and intricate argument here.
—Mary Beard, *The New York Times*
The thrilling notion that a great monument has been decoded, that centuries of misunderstanding have been put to flight, will captivate many readers; one of the most original theses of modern classical scholarship.
—James Romm, *The Wall Street Journal*
A detailed portrait of the Parthenon as seen through what Connelly calls "ancient eyes."
—Eric Wills, *The Washington Post*
Engaging and intensely interesting . . . [makes] a thoughtful, stimulating, and unquestionably valuable contribution to our understanding.
—J. J. Pollitt, *The New Criterion*
Usually recognized as a symbol of Western democracy, the Parthenon emerges in Connelly's bold new analysis as a shrine memorializing myths radically alien to modern politics; An explosive reinterpretation of a classical

icon." "This detailed, smart, and tantalizing study offers much to savor while immersing readers in a 'spirit-saturated, anxious world' at the mercy of mercurial gods." "Joan Connelly's groundbreaking work will forever change our conception of the most important building in the history of western civilization. By cracking the hidden code of the Parthenon, she reveals the classical world in a radical new light that will reorient how we all view its legacy for the 21st century." "Tom Reiss, author of *The Black Count*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize "Joan Connelly's learned and elegant study makes a powerful case for a new understanding of the Parthenon, its original meaning as a religious object and for the fullest possible restoration of its many parts still scattered far and wide." Donald Kagan, Sterling Professor Emeritus of Classics and History, Yale University, and author of *The Peloponnesian War* "I so admire the historical approach of this luminous book: courageously and intelligently starting from scratch, Joan Connelly reconstructs the meaning of the Parthenon from the perspective of Perikles and his contemporaries in Classical Athens. The unfamiliar picture that emerges gives us all a sharper vision of what this timeless monument can still mean to our own troubled world." Gregory Nagy, Francis Jones Professor of Classical Greek Literature and Professor of Comparative Literature, Director of the Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University "Readers born before 1960 may be reluctant to break with some long established truths about the meaning of the Parthenon frieze but Joan Connelly's book is one for the 21st century, full of new finds and fresh insights." Angelos Chaniotis, Professor of Ancient History and Classics, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton "We are a species of storytellers whose tales have shaped our reality since ancient times. Joan Connelly's brilliant study of the Parthenon shows how a myth can reveal as many secrets as a rock or a ruin, and how rethinking what we know about antiquity can help us better understand ourselves today." George Lucas, creator of the Star Wars saga About the Author JOAN BRETON CONNELLY is a classical archaeologist and the author of two previous books, *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* and *Votive Sculpture of Hellenistic Cyprus*. She received her A.B. in classics from Princeton University and Ph.D. in classical and Near Eastern archaeology from Bryn Mawr College, where she now serves on the board of trustees. In 1996, Professor Connelly was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. She received the Archaeological Institute of America's Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award in 2007 and held NYU's Lillian Vernon Chair for Teaching Excellence in 2002-2004. She has held visiting fellowships at All Souls College, Magdalen College, New College, and Corpus Christi College at Oxford University, and at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, and has been a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Professor Connelly has excavated throughout Greece, Kuwait, and Cyprus where she has directed the Yeronisos Island Excavations since 1990. She is currently a professor of classics and art history at New York University.