



MONUMENTAL ADVENTURES

at the greek unesco monuments

THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO EPICURIUS AT BASSAE



1

► credits

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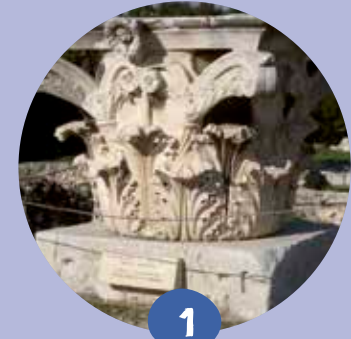


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The Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae

Ten steps to...



The oldest known Corinthian-style capital was found there.



It is built at a high altitude (1131 m).

On Mount Kotilion, which in antiquity belonged to the prefecture of Arcadia but now it belongs to the current prefecture of Ilia.

... the temple of Apollo Epicurius



3

Mount Lycaion lies within close distance. It is said that Zeus was born and raised there by Neda the Nymph¹.

The river Neda, that originates from mount Lycaion, was named after the Nymph.



5

The traveler geographer Pausanias considers it to be the second most beautiful temple in the Peloponnes, after the temple of Athena Alea in Tegea.



7

Pausanias again! He mentions that the temple is the work of the great architect Ictinus.

The architects Ictinus and Callicrates built the Parthenon. That is why some call the temple the "Parthenon of the Peloponnese."



9

Its frieze, depicting the Battle of the Amazons and the Battle of the Centaurs is in the British Museum.



4

It is the first Greek entry in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

It was registered in 1986, a year before the Acropolis of Athens and Delphi.



6

It combines the three architectural styles of antiquity.

The Doric and Ionic style and for the first time the Corinthian style.



8

It is covered by a canopy, to be protected from harsh weather conditions.



10

It was built in honour of the god Apollo, who helped the inhabitants to be saved from an epidemic. After all, this is what its name means!

Apollo "Epicurius", i.e. the helper and protector!

The temple of Apollo Epicurius

God
help us



WHAT?

- Ancient outdoor sanctuary dedicated to Apollo “Epicurius”.

WHERE?

- Π.Ε. Regional District of Ilia, Prefecture of Western Greece.

WHEN?

- 7th–5th c. BC: Worship of Apollo. Construction of the first temples.
- 420–400 BC: Construction of the temple by Ictinus

what do the numbers say:

1,131m
ALTITUDE



120 
WORKERS
in the 1812
excavation.

23 RELIEF
PLAQUES
on the frieze of the temple

14.48x38.24 m
DIMENSIONS
of the stylobate

... in the UNESCO List!

The monument was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List based on the following criteria:

 CLASSICAL PERIOD
YEAR OF REGISTRATION:
1986



6x15
COLUMNS

1. View of the archaeological site from above.

critterion i

Monument of unique artistic and architectural value. It combines traditional elements with bold innovations.

critterion ii

The Corinthian style capital appears here for the first time, and since then it becomes a model for the monuments of that style.

critterion iii

It is a special example of a mountain sanctuary.

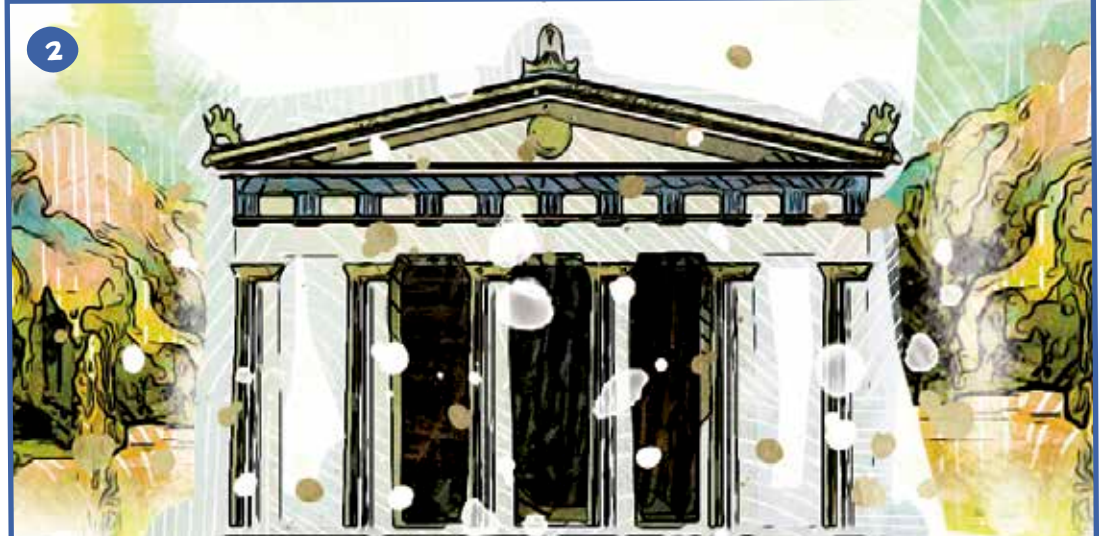
Walking around the Temple of Apollo...

1

HELLO STRANGER! HOW COME YOU ARE HERE, ON OUR ROUGH MOUNTAIN? I AM FROM NEIGHBORING PHIGALEA AND I GRAZE MY FLOCK ON THE SLOPES: MY NAME IS LYCAON².

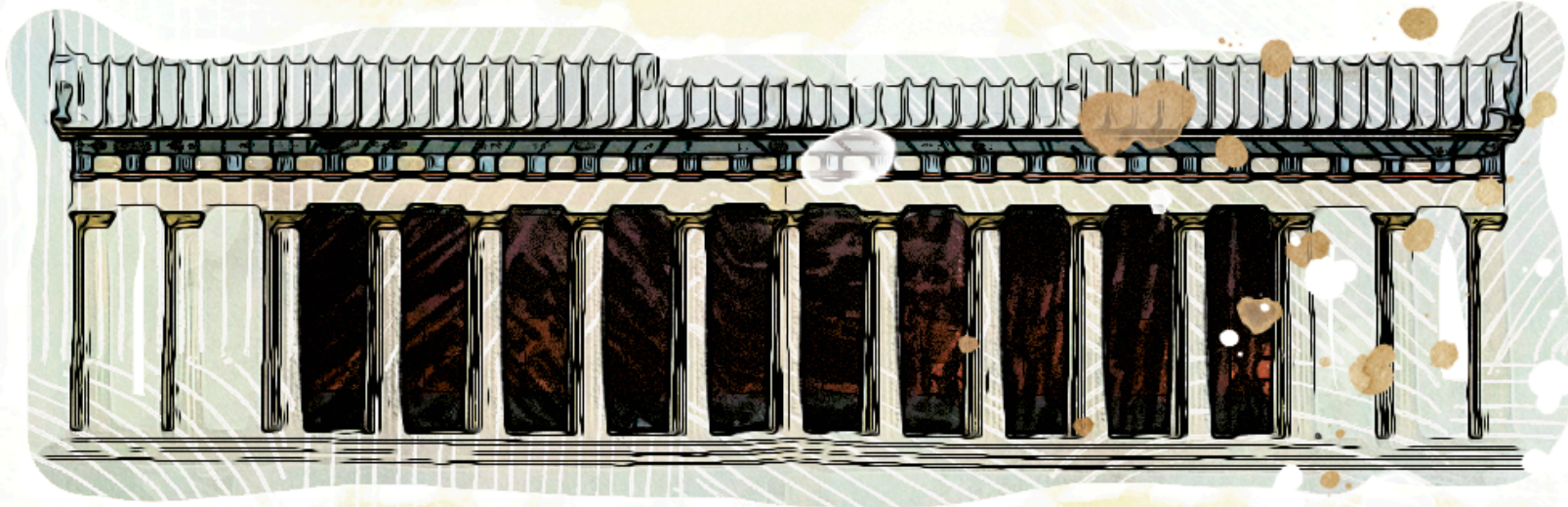


2



COME AND SEE THE WONDERFUL **TEMPLE** WE DEDICATED TO THE GOD APOLLO, WHO HEARD OUR PLEA AND SAVED US FROM THE EPIDEMIC: THEREFORE, WE HONOR HIM AS EPICURIUS!

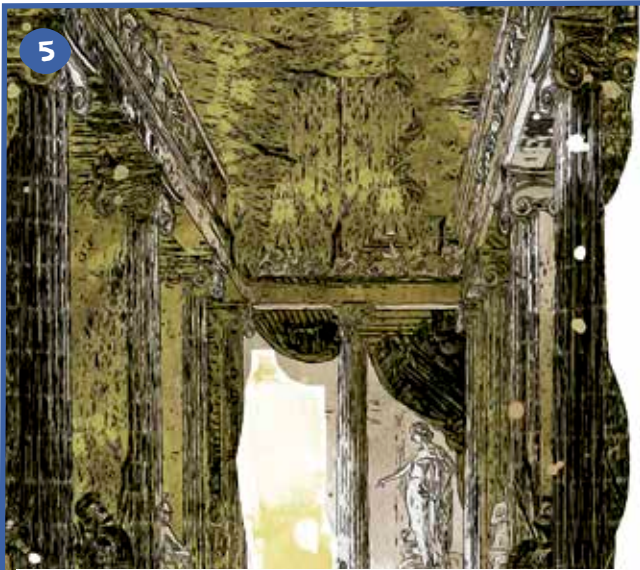
3



LET'S GO INSIDE: DO YOU NOTICE THAT THE **ENTRANCE** IS ON THE NORTH SIDE? THIS IS A TRADITION IN ARCADIA! SEE HOW HARMONIOUSLY THE ELEMENTS FROM THE DORIC AND IONIC STYLES ARE COMBINED! THE ARCHITECT MUST HAVE BEEN GREAT!

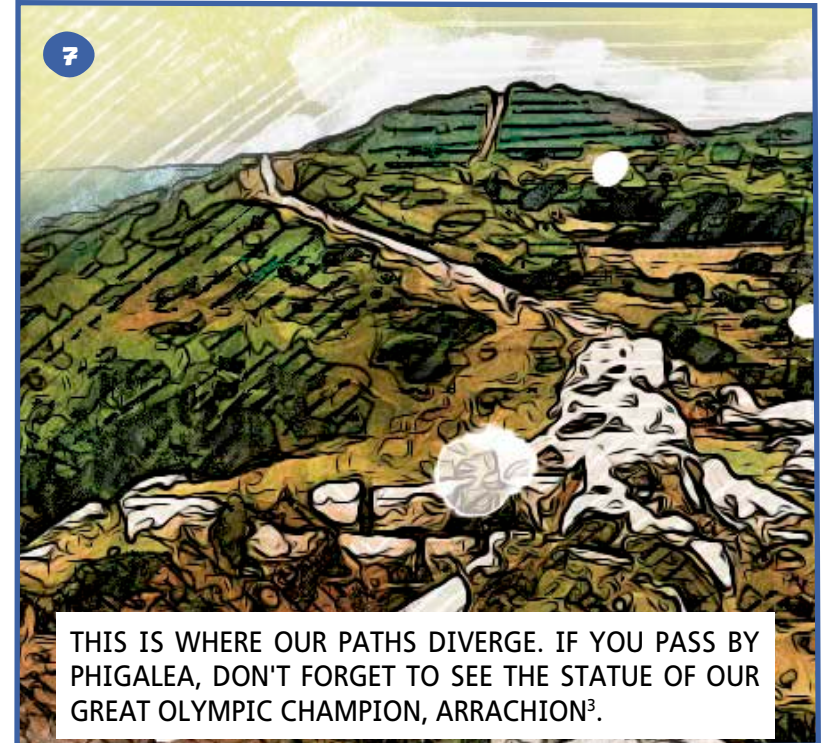
... Epicurius with the shepherd Lycaon

4 WHILE GRAZING MY GOATS, I GO INSIDE TO PROTECT MYSELF FROM THE COLD AND I ADMIRE THE **FRIEZE** FOR HOURS: HERE IS HERACLES WEARING THE LION SKIN FIGHTING AGAINST THE AMAZONS. AND ON THE OTHER SIDE, THE LAPITHS FIGHT AGAINST THE CENTAURS. I IMAGINE MYSELF AT THE WEDDING OF KING PEIRITHOUS, FIGHTING TO SAVE THE BRIDE, THE BEAUTIFUL HIPPODAMIA!



5 LOOK UNDER THE FRIEZE! OUR TEMPLE HAS NO COLUMNS, BUT **WALLS** WITH AN IONIC STYLE CAPITAL! SEE THE COLUMN IN THE BACKGROUND? BEHIND THAT IS THE ADYTON, THE INNER SANCTUM!

6 HAVE YOU EVER SEEN SUCH A DECORATED **CAPITAL**? IT'S ONE OF A KIND! IT REMINDS ME OF A BASKET DECORATED WITH ACANTHUS LEAVES!



7 THIS IS WHERE OUR PATHS DIVERGE. IF YOU PASS BY PHIGALEA, DON'T FORGET TO SEE THE STATUE OF OUR GREAT OLYMPIC CHAMPION, ARRACHION³.

The environment...

“And suddenly, in a turn of the mountain, the famous temple of Apollo Epicurius rises unexpectedly in front of it. Directly facing the cliff, shaped as it is with the same stones of the mountain, you feel the deep impact of the landscape and the temple. Like a piece of the mountain, stone by stone, the temple seems inseparably wedged among the rocks, being a rock in itself, though a rock touched by spirit”

Nikos Kazantzakis, *Traveling—The Morea*, 1965.

The wider area of Mount Lycaion, the sacred peak of the Arkadians, is associated with ancient myths and important sanctuaries. The temple is located 14 km south of the historic settlement of Andritsaina. It is built in the area of Bassae, which was subject to the important ancient Arcadian city of Phigalea, on the western slope of Mount Kotilion. Bassae owe their name to the structure of the terrain, i.e. the several small valleys (*βάσσαι* or *bassae*), which extend among the rocks.



2. The temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae, 19th c. E. Dodwell, *Views in Greece*, London 1821, 115.



3. View of the sanctuary and the temple with the modern canopy.

... and the landscape

- The temple of Apollo was built in a harsh environment, isolated from other constructions, on the west slope of the mount Kotilion. The connection of the temple with Phigalea was made through the “Iera Odos”, i.e. the Sacred Way.
- The temple of the 5th c. BC blends harmoniously with the rocky, mountainous landscape. One of the reasons is that the walls, bases and columns are of local gray limestone, while the capitals, frieze and ceiling tiles are of local Arcadian marble⁴.

Green details

Acanthus (*acanthus spinosus*): native plant of the Greek flora, with broad, toothed leaves. It is a basic decorative element in the Corinthian style capitals. It is said that the great sculptor Callimachus drew his inspiration for this special decoration with the shaped acanthus leaves, when, once in Corinth, he saw a basket on a girl's grave, covered with a square slab, around which acanthus had grown⁵.

Apollo Epicurius through time



429 BC

Epidemic in the wider area of Phigalea. The inhabitants request the assistance of Apollo to deal with the epidemic.



659 BC

Second Messenian War: The Phigalians, helped by the neighboring Oresthasians, liberate the city from the Spartans.



end of the 7th c. BC.

Construction of the first temple of Apollo. Other phases followed, around 600 BC and around 500 BC respectively.



420–400 BC

Construction of the existing temple.



Hellenistic–Roman period

The temple remains in use.



Byzantine period

Total abandonment of the site.



c. 174 AD

The traveler and geographer Pausanias visits the temple and Phigalea.



1765

The French architect J. Bocher discovers the ruins of the temple.



1812

First excavations from a group of European antiquarians.



1815

The sculptural decoration and other finds are transferred to the British Museum.



1902

Excavation and restoration works by great Greek archaeologists.



1975

Establishment of the *Committee for the Conservation of the Temple of Apollo Epicurius.*



1986

Inclusion of the monument in the UNESCO World Heritage List.



1987

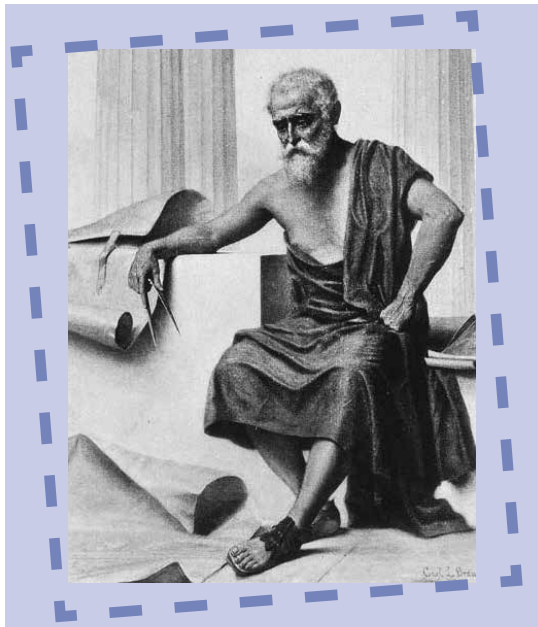
Covering the temple with a protective canopy.

Historical figures through the ages

Worshippers and pilgrims regularly flocked to the imposing temple to offer votives and perform sacrifices in honour of Apollo.



CREATE



Ictinus
(5th c. BC)

is mentioned as the architect of the temple.

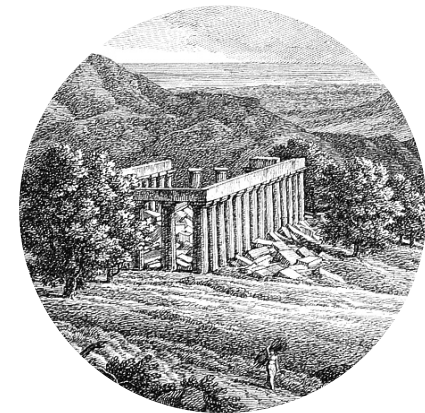
ADMIRE



The Greek traveller
and geographer **Pausanias**
(2nd c. AD)

records the only description
of the temple in antiquity.

DISCOVER



The French architect
Joackim Bocher

identifies the ruins with the
temple of Apollo in 1765⁶.



PLUNDER



The architects
Charles Robert Cockerell
and **Karl Haller von Hallerstein**

organise in the beginning of the 19th c.
the first excavation, study
but also looting of the monument.



Veli Pasha
of the Peloponnese

son of Ali Pasha of Ioannina, granted the
antiquities hunters permission to search
the area, in exchange for half of the finds.
However, when he saw them he was
disappointed and asked for a monetary reward.

STUDY



The archaeologists
Konstantinos Kourouniotis,
Konstantinos Romaios and
Panagis Kavvadias

are the first systematic excavators of the temple at
Bassae, at the beginning of the 20th c.⁷.

A monument is born

AN "EXCAVATOR" FOX!

Far from the human settlement and interference, the temple remained forgotten for centuries, until it was discovered in 1765.



4. Drawings from the frieze of the temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae. A. Schweiger Lerchenfeld, *Griechenland in Wort und Bild*, Leipzig 1887.

A few decades later, it attracted the interest of antiquities hunters, who, under the guise of studying antiquities, looted it and sold their finds abroad.

It is even said that a fox, that jumped out of her nest scared by them, pointed out the place where the frieze of the temple had fallen!

"THE FRANKS TAKE OUR ORNAMENTS AWAY..."

In August 1811 a group of European antiquities hunters, led by the English architect C.R. Cockerell, began the excavation and built an entire village, called *Frangopolis*, to house their numerous personnel.



5. Excavation of 1812 at Bassae. Engraving by O. M. von Stackelberg.

The sculptures of the temple, as well as other finds, were transferred to England, where they were sold at an auction in 1814, to end up in the British Museum a year later.

The vandalism was considered analogous to the looting of the Acropolis of Athens by Lord Elgin.

The provosts and residents of the area reacted to the theft and are said to have sent a letter of protest to Kolokotronis.

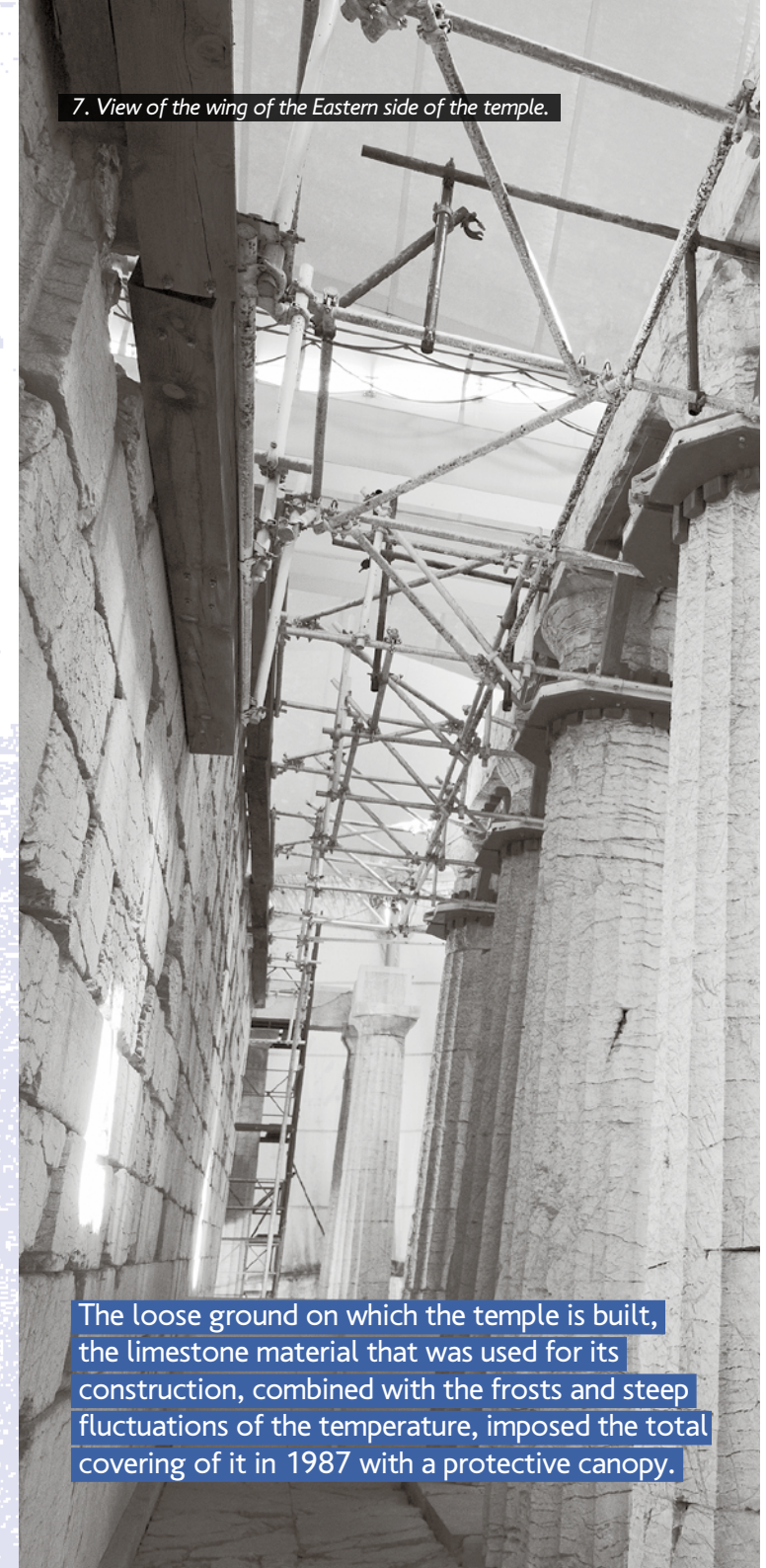
RESEARCH AND RESTORATION

The first excavations took place at the beginning of the 20th c. under the direction of the Archaeological Society at Athens and were continued by Greek and foreign archaeologists who conducted new excavations.



After the devastating earthquake of 1965, extensive restoration work began, while since 1975 the Temple Conservation Committee (Ε.Π.Ν.Ε.Α.) has undertaken the difficult task of preserving the monument. The restoration work of the temple continues to this day. In 2009, the restoration of its northern face was completed.

7. View of the wing of the Eastern side of the temple.

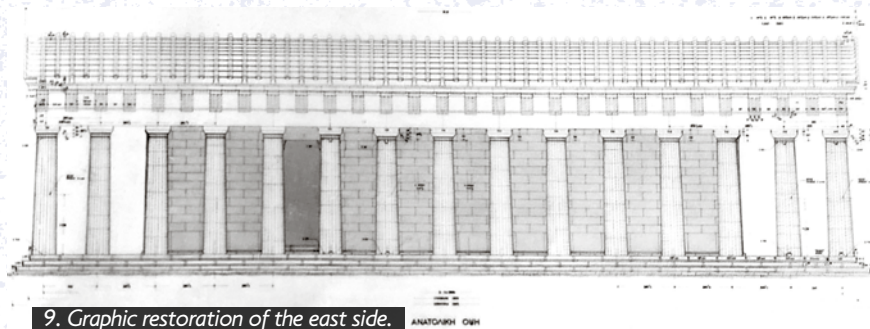
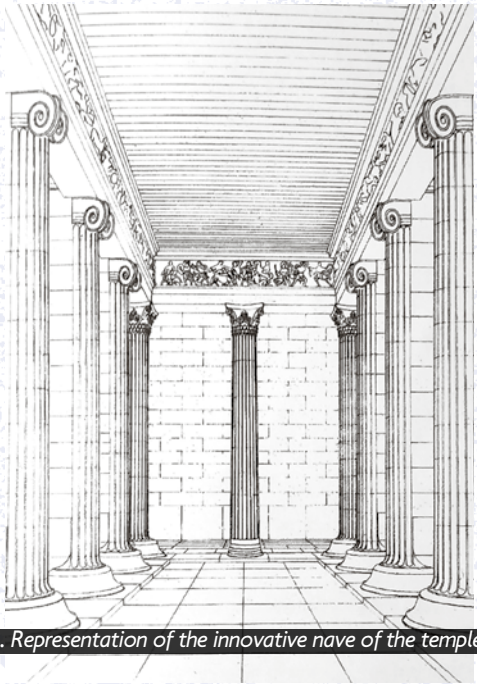


The loose ground on which the temple is built, the limestone material that was used for its construction, combined with the frosts and steep fluctuations of the temperature, imposed the total covering of it in 1987 with a protective canopy.

A unique monument...

A genius architect!

The temple of Apollo Epicurius with its unique design combines, in a special way, elements of the traditional architecture of the 6th century BC with bold innovations of the genius architect.



The particular N–S orientation is connected to the Arcadian religious tradition, as attested in the neighboring temple of Artemis Orthasia at Bassae, 100 m higher than Epicurius, or in the temple of Athena in Alifeira of Ancient Arcadia.

“The architect of the temple in Phigalea was Ictinus, a contemporary of Pericles, who also built the so-called Parthenon in Athens”
Pausanias, *Arcadika*, 41:9.



A style is born

The “Parthenon of the Peloponnese”

Researchers cannot say with certainty whether Ictinus was actually the architect of the temple. However, they identify obvious architectural similarities with the Parthenon, such as the internal Π-shaped colonnade, the use of the Ionic style in the interior of the temple and the use of the iconographic theme of the Battle of Centaurs.

The temple is the first in which all three architectural styles of antiquity are combined:
The outer colonnade is Doric.
The semi-columns of the nave are Ionic.
...but the most impressive thing is that the capital at the entrance of the adyton (sanctum) is the first known Corinthian capital.

... with timeless radiance ★ 1

“The magic of light and of the alternating colors, which is more intense at the time of sunset, gives such fascinating grace to the landscape, you think that it has real independence of life and soul”

Otto Magnus von Stackelberg,
Der Apollotempel zu Bassae in Arcadien, Rome 1826.



Visitors are even today enchanted by the stunning view from the temple of Apollo Epicurius.

Building with light

The novelties of the temple influenced important monuments, such as the temple of Athena Alea at Tegea, the temple of Zeus in Nemea and the Tholos (circular building) at Delphi and at Epidaurus, which also combined the three architectural styles.



10. The temple of Apollo Epicurius before 1987.

Natural lighting combined with the orientation of the temple were used effectively as a structural element: the entrance to the sanctuary from the east would highlight the interior of the temple and the Corinthian column during sunrise.

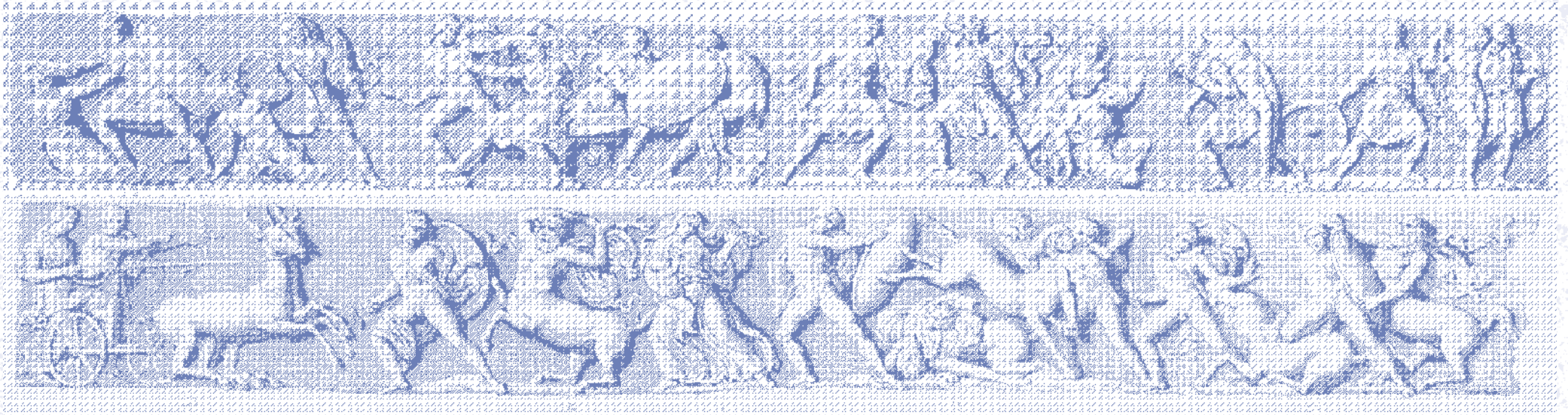
A unique monument...

Tough battles...

The 31 m long marble frieze, with scenes from the Battle of the Amazons and the Battle of the Centaurs, introduces another novelty, since it is the first example of a frieze that develops in the interior of the temple, in the nave.

“of all the temples in the Peloponnese, after that of Tegea, this one could take first place, for the beauty of the stone and the harmonious ensemble”

Pausanias, *Arcadika*, 41:8.



11–12. *Lapiths vs Centaurs on the west long side of the nave.*

The battle scenes are full of vibrancy and passion, while the clothes swirl to accentuate the dramatic movement.



... and feisty women

The women also repel the Centaurs! A Lapithian mother protects her child.

... with timeless radiance ★ 2

The innovative artist Paeonius of Mende⁸ is mentioned among the possible sculptors of the temple.



13. Nike by Paeonius. 421 BC. Archaeological Museum of Olympia. The winged goddess lands with momentum and fluttering garments.

Four different sculpting workshops appear to have cooperated to create the many interwoven figures and dramatic scenes of the frieze.



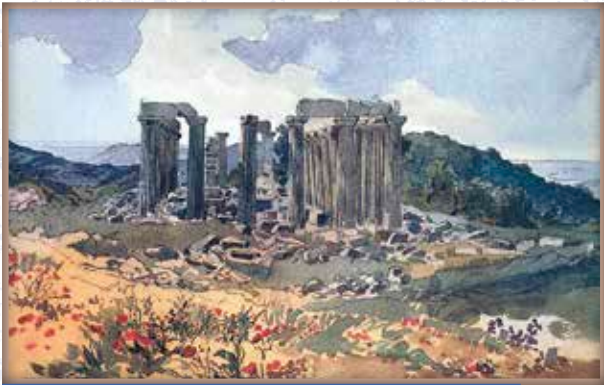
14–15. The Battle of the Greeks against the Amazons is depicted as a tough battle between equal opponents. The Amazons fight with passion and grace and evoke sympathy, even though they have lost the battle.



A unique monument...

Unearthly beauty

The harmonious coexistence of the temple with the nature around it has been an inspiration to artists since the 18th century.



Karl Bryullov, *The Temple of Apollo at Phigalea*, 1835. Pushkin Museum.



Edward Lear, *Temple of Apollo at Bassae*, 19th c. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Otto Magnus von Stackelberg depicts, rather idealized, the interior of the temple after the first excavations in 1826.

Nostalgic photo with shepherdess who passes her flock through the temple. Probably from the 50s or 60s.



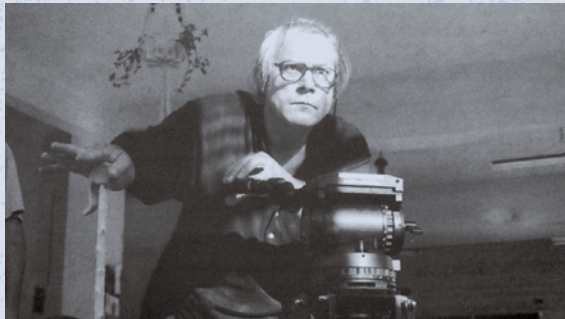
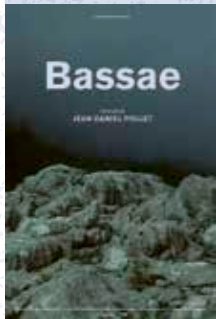
“...And then, one last turn,
until we find the shining
pillars of Bassae
to be preserved now under canvas.
We have missed their classic order
and sensation,
But the gravel that squeaked
under the canopy
validated our presence,
just like a cuckoo
That kept telling the time
as I sat there
Staring at butterflies
in the pre-naturalistic flora.”
Seamus Heaney, “Bassae”, 2000? ”

... with timeless radiance ★ 3

“This is where you should be...”¹⁰

The French director Jean-Daniel Pollet was impressed by the charm of the archaeological site of Bassae and rendered it poetically in the film “Bassae” (1964).

“Ever since I returned from my trip to the Mediterranean, Bassae is the place I've been obsessed with. When I discovered it, I said to myself "this is where you should be". So, we went there... We wanted to capture on camera this object that had lost its meaning, but which was fantastically mysterious”



In the early 60s the temple of Epicurius Apollo was widely presented to the international audience through cinematography and photo tributes.



The monument through the photographic lens of Patricia Lawrence, but also as a cover to the known LIFE magazine (May 2, 1962).

Monumental dialogues



GREECE



Heraion of Samos

The largest, according to Herodotus, temple of Greece.



GREECE

Temple of Athena Alea

This temple in Tegea is the second largest temple in the Peloponnese after the temple of Zeus in Olympia, and the only one that Pausanias considers more beautiful than Apollo Epicurius.



FRANCE



Mont-Saint-Michel

The small island on the edge of the Normandy coast hosts a famous medieval abbey at its hill, dedicated to the Archangel Michael, which combines a multitude of architectural styles.

ETHIOPIA



Lalibela

A small city, built in high altitude, which is famous for its monolithic churches which are carved into the great solid rocks of the area.

A message today...

A mountain sanctuary

The construction site of the temple at an inaccessible deserted landscape, far from any other human facilities, played an important role in its preservation, as much of its material was not reused or destroyed in later periods.

At the same time, however, the complete abandonment of the building to the mercy of the natural phenomena caused significant damage over time. Due to the gradient of the ground, the foundations of the temple suffered subsidence, while the limestone, the main building material of the temple eroded by the frequent frosts that trap water in its pores. Severe weather phenomena are exacerbated by climate change, which is why the maintenance and restoration work of the monument is particularly demanding.



16. The surrounding area of the temple.

... for a better tomorrow!

Goals 2030 >



13 ΔΡΑΣΗ ΓΙΑ
ΤΟ ΚΛΙΜΑ >

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

1. The traveller Pausanias hands down the Arcadian myth that Zeus was born in the Critea area of the Mount Lykaion and not on the island of Crete. The goddess Rhea, in order to protect the infant Zeus from Saturn who swallowed his children, gave him to be raised by the nymphs Theisoa, Neda and Agno.
2. Lycaon: the shepherd's name is inspired by the first mythical king of Arcadia, Lycaon.
3. Arrachion of Phigalea was a famous athlete in the pankration, winner in three Olympiads. The last time, in 564 BC, he died during the fight, but because his opponent had already conceded defeat, Arrachion was declared the posthumous winner. His statue is in Olympia, in the Museum of the History of the Olympic Games.
4. Northwest of Doliana, in the province of North Kynouria, Arcadia, ancient quarries were found that produce the characteristic whitish marble that was used extensively at the great temples of Peloponnese.
5. The story of the creation of the Corinthian style capital is handed down by the Roman architect and engineer Vitruvius in the 1st century BC in his treatise "On Architecture" (*De architectura*).
6. The temple is then visited by many travellers and researchers, such as L.F.S. Fauvel (1787), F.C.H.L. Pouqueville (1800), R. Smirke (1803), W. Gell (1804), W.M. Leake (1805), E. Dodwell (1806) etc.
7. The Archaeological Society at Athens, under the direction of K. Kourouniotis and with the participation of P. Kavvadias and K. Romaios, undertook in the years 1902–1908 an ambitious excavation and restoration program, largely giving the temple the form it has today.
8. The sculptor Paeonius of Mende in Chalkidiki lived in the second half of the 5th century BC. He also worked on the pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia. The statue of the winged Nike (Victory) that he created in Olympia is considered to be a milestone in the evolution of ancient Greek sculpture.
9. Excerpt from the poem "Bassae" by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney (1939–2013), see Stratis Haviaras (ed.), *The alphabets of Seamus Heaney*, Athens 2000 (translated by George and Manolis Savvidis). Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995 "for his works of lyrical beauty and moral depth".
10. Director Jean–Daniel Pollet (1936–2004) visited the temple of Apollo several times. The short documentary "Bassae" (1964) captures the mysterious beauty of the monument and was awarded in Paris Biennale 1965.

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