

Phidias and the Temple of Zeus

Study*ladder*



Phidias, his early life

Phidias, or Pheidias was the most famous sculptor of the ancient era. He was born in Athens around 490 BCE. During his childhood, Greece was at war with the Persians.

When news of the advancing Persian armies reached Athens in 480 BCE, the people were evacuated to other cities.

Upon their return, they found their city burned to the ground, including the temples on the acropolis.

The people vowed to rebuild their city and make it more glorious than before. Pericles, who later led the city, proposed a great rebuilding program in 449 BCE.



Phidias, in Athens

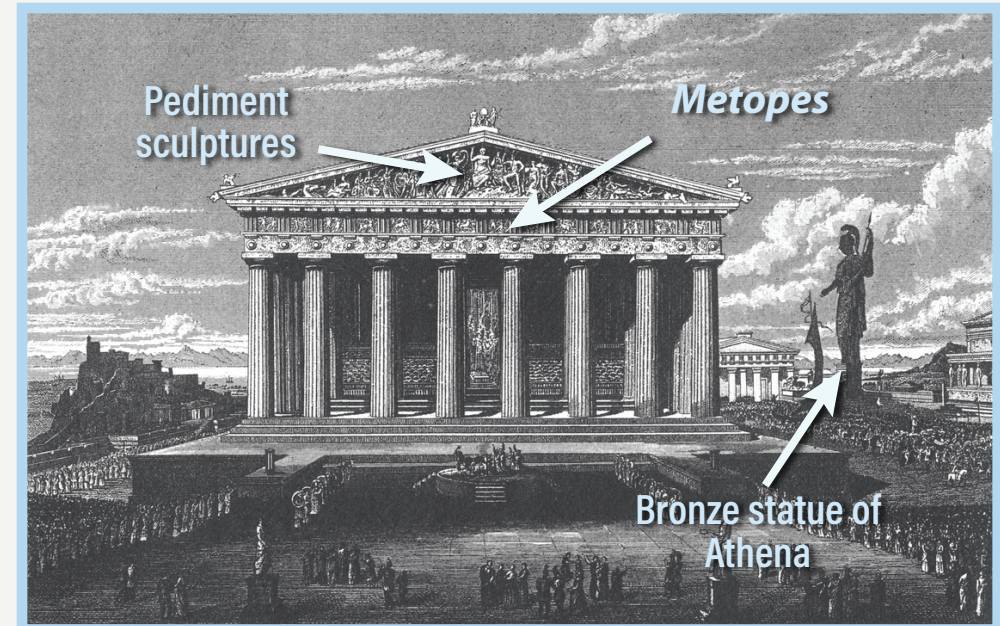
Pericles appointed his friend, Phidias, as artistic director of the great rebuilding program of Athen's acropolis in 447 BCE.

He was responsible for the design and construction of the decorative features of the Parthenon. Sculptured panels called metopes on the exterior, the sculptures that decorated the two pediments, and the highly decorated frieze that ran around the top of the temple. He sculpted the imposing statue of Athena, which was placed inside the Parthenon in 438 BCE.

He sculpted many statues for the project, including a giant bronze statue of Athena that stood watching over the city.



Phidias' gold and ivory plated statue of Athena was placed inside the Parthenon in 438 BCE.

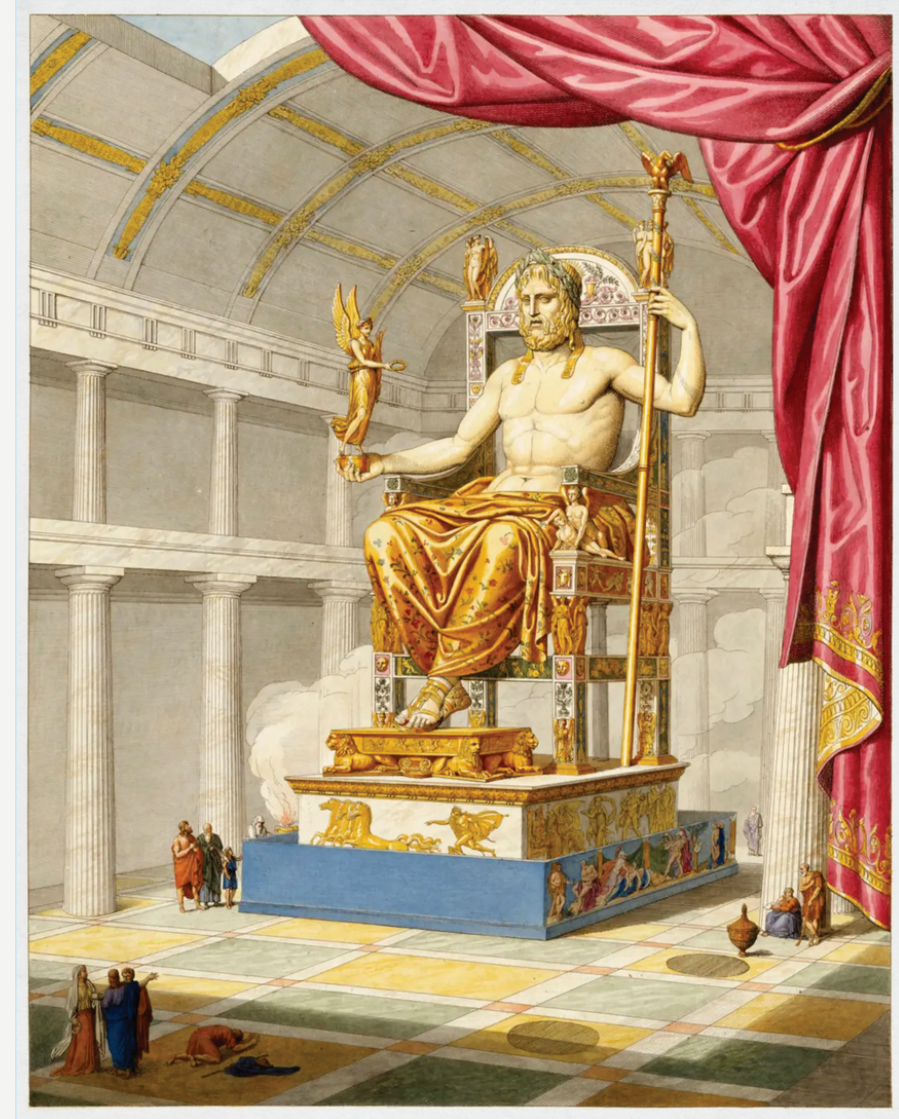


Phidias, in Olympia

When Phidias went to Olympia, he was welcomed by the Eleans, who controlled the sanctuary. They wanted him to design a great statue for their new temple, the Temple of Zeus.

In about 430 BCE, Phidias began building a colossal statue of Zeus. It was at least 12 m (40 ft) tall and was plated with ivory and gold. He made it in pieces in his workshop near the temple.

Zeus held a statue of Nike, the Goddess of Victory in his left hand. In his right, he held a sceptre topped with an eagle.



7 Wonders of the Ancient World

Antipater of Sidon, the poet of the 2nd century BCE, described the Statue of Zeus as one of the seven most magnificent wonders (sights) he had seen.

Antipater's list became known as a list of places to visit and witness the magnificent structures for yourself. (An early sightseer's bucket list!)

The Statue of Zeus appeared on various Greek and Roman coins from the 4th century BCE until the 2nd century CE.



THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD



What happened to Thidias' statue?

The Roman Emperor Theodosius I ruled that all pagan practices, including the Olympic Games, should be stopped. After the last games were held in 393 CE, the temples were closed, and the buildings in the sanctuary fell into disrepair.

Finally, Emperor Theodosius II (r. 408-450 CE) ordered that all pagan temples be destroyed. Some texts say that Thidias' great statue was destroyed by fire, along with the temple in 426 CE.

However, some texts say that the statue was moved to the Palace of Lausus in Constantinople (Istanbul in Turkey), where it was later lost in a fire in 475 CE.

Unfortunately, what happened to the statue is a mystery!

**It's a
mystery!**

