[redacted]

Works Cited

Martin-Mcauliffe, S., & Papadopoulos, J. (2012). Framing Victory: Salamis, the Athenian Acropolis, and the Agora. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 71*(3), 332-361. doi:10.1525/jsah.2012.71.3.332

The Athenian Acropolis: Placement and alignment of Ancient Architecture

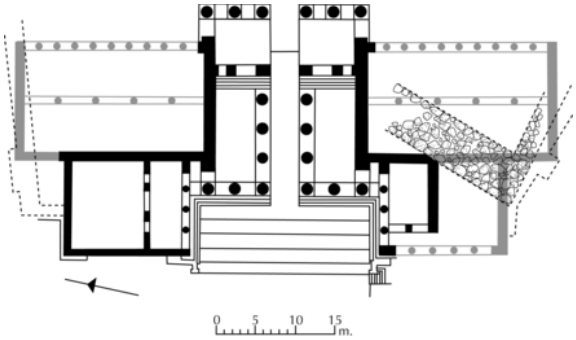
There is no doubt that ancient Athenian architects were very concerned with small details within their monuments, but is it possible they were also concerned with large scale planning and alignment in ways we have never considered? For my research paper I read and assessed the scholarly article: *Framing Victory: Salamis, the Athenian Acropolis, and the Agora* from the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, where authors Martin-Mcauliffe and Papadopoulos present a new idea that the location and alignment of many monuments were not merely an anomaly, but were meticulously placed and aligned to showcase Athenian heroism and triumph.

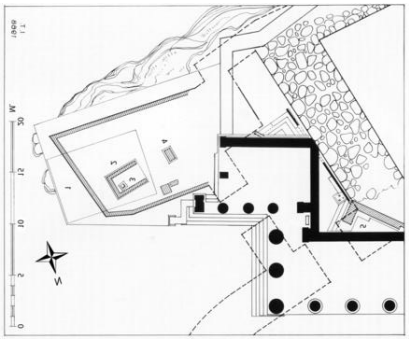
Summary

The beginning of the article goes into great detail concerning how observations of the Parthenon and acropolis taken when photography was a new technology have skewed western understandings of these works. Martin-Mcauliffe and Papadopoulos note that the first photographs of the Parthenon were taken at an angle as though viewing the ancient building as a citizen would have after passing through the Mnesiklean Propylaia. Any cursory search of the web confirms this to be true. The authors argue that this limited viewpoint of these works have prevented citizens and researchers alike from realizing a greater understanding of the placement and the planning of these buildings. They also note how although older historians who visited the site were awestruck and more impressed with the Propylaia than the Parthenon, the interest in the Propylaia has been significantly been reduced in modern times. Arguments are made that previous historians who make claims that the acropolis and its monuments were placed in a haphazard and rather unplanned fashion failed to see a larger and more careful design that glorified Athenian victory.

One of the first examples of a larger plan for the Acropolis is made in Martin-Mcauliffe and Papadopoulos research and observation of the Mycenaean wall. Other historians believe the Propylaia was never completed due to religious conservatism and the costs of waging the Peloponnesian war. However, based on the authors' observations, they believe this analysis is not completely accurate. Others have made recreations of the Propylaia that they believe to be the original plans: These plans show a more symmetrical gateway design, but they believe these are not accurate, as it would have required tearing down some of the legendary Mycenaean wall. The authors point out they believe the asymmetry, especially on the southern side, was intentionally done to preserve the wall as a war memorial. They claim the beveled edges of the gateway that snuggly fit against the wall is strong evidence to support the idea that the architect had never planned to demolish the wall to build the Propylaia, but rather keep it as a type of

Athenian memorial. (Below are the hypothetical designs(left) vs how the gate looks against wall (Right))





The authors go on to make observations about the Propylaia and its orientation in relation to other major events in Greek history. They point out that as you “exit” the Propylaia, it was oriented perfectly so you would look out to see Salamis, where the great Greek victory against the Persians took place. They theorize that you would also have been able to see the Bronze temple of Athena in the distance, another memorial to Athenian victory.

(Direct line of sight from the Propylaia to Salamis)

Within the acropolis itself the authors note how certain ruins and temples were placed very meticulously as a memorial to major events in Athenian history. They point out two archaic buildings that were carefully built into the acropolis’s northern wall. These buildings were placed immediately west of the Erechtheion to correspond to the location of this temple. Additionally, to the east, are the unfinished column drums neatly stacked from the Pre-Parthenon that was destroyed when the Persians sacked the acropolis in 480 BCE. They believe this carefully constructed "commemorative wall” was not randomly built like this, but rather placed there to be a clearly seen by all Greeks. These were just other examples of more extensive

Athenian planning and building placement than has yet to be realized.

Finally, the paper dives into analyzing the classical agora that had been constructed when it became clear that the over cluttered, archaic agora was no longer of sufficient size to match Athens needs. Several pages are spent analyzing each of the stoas in the new agora. One of the first things they point out is how the new location has seen nearly non-existent research into how this new location reinforced the idea of Athenians using ritualistic topography within the city to highlight their glory and victory. By individually analyzing the lines of sight and vantage points from the many stoas in the new agora, the authors point out how each was positioned in a certain way as to offer a unique vantage point to certain monuments or memorials on the acropolis. For example, they point out the Stoa Poikile was located in a unique way as to allow those near its colonnade to view the war memorial of Spolia in the north wall of the acropolis from the best possible vantage point. As the Stoa Poikile was, first and foremost, a victory memorial to many of Athenians greatest victories, they contend that it would make sense that this particular stoa would be oriented toward the Spolia on the acropolis.

In closing, the authors point out how the Athenians spent great sums of wealth trying to create works of architecture that would commemorate their victories and glory for eternity. By using the landscape of their city, and carefully planned viewing points from some of their greatest works they had hoped to achieve this.

Analysis

In choosing to look at a very heavily researched and analyzed location in Athenian history from a different approach, Martin-Mcauliffe and Papadopoulos may have uncovered a larger architectural plan for the acropolis and the city of Athens as a whole that has otherwise been missed by other researchers. It is not clear from the article, but I believe the author discovered these things simply by “taking a step back” and looking at the larger picture of Athenian architecture. Additionally, one of their friends and close colleagues is to Tasos Tanoulas, who has spent years restoring the Great Propylaia. This may have led them to their first clues to the larger plans within Athens.

Overall, I believe this was a very good article and is based on very good evidence and sound conjecture. Although it is difficult to know with certainty what ancient architects planned and the reasons they built certain structures in the manner they did, the evidence the authors presented here makes a strong case for the possibility that Athenian architects had small details in mind. Such as the amazing artwork that details buildings such as the Parthenon, as well as large details, like the precise orientation of the Propylaia to commemorate one of the Athenians greatest victories. While none of the evidence presented in the article is sound fact or provable through laboratory testing, it is a good theory based on on-the-ground observations and facts we do know about the Athenians.

From class we know the Athenians were very detailed oriented. While this may be more focused on their small details of the temples, this would support the idea that the Athenians would also be very careful about the direction their structures faced to reinforce the glory and victory that each of these temples stood for. Furthermore, their use of harmony and balance within their designs would go hand in hand with the idea of linking many of their distant works. Additionally, if further research supports their theory, it could also explain where some Roman architects got ideas for placement of some of their greatest works within the city of Rome. Although I don't see much of a direct link between this research and modern architecture, some limited examples can be found. The most notable in America could be the placement of the Lincoln memorial facing out toward the National World War II Memorial and the Washington Monument. This sort of alignment is very similar to the idea the authors are proposing, however, there is no direct evidence that there is any link between the Athenians use of it and our own.

So, in closing, while it may be true that ancient Greek cities were not as symmetrical or even as we are used to in today's Western world, the article I read makes a strong case for more planning in the Acropolis, and the city as a whole, than most historians or architects give them credit for.