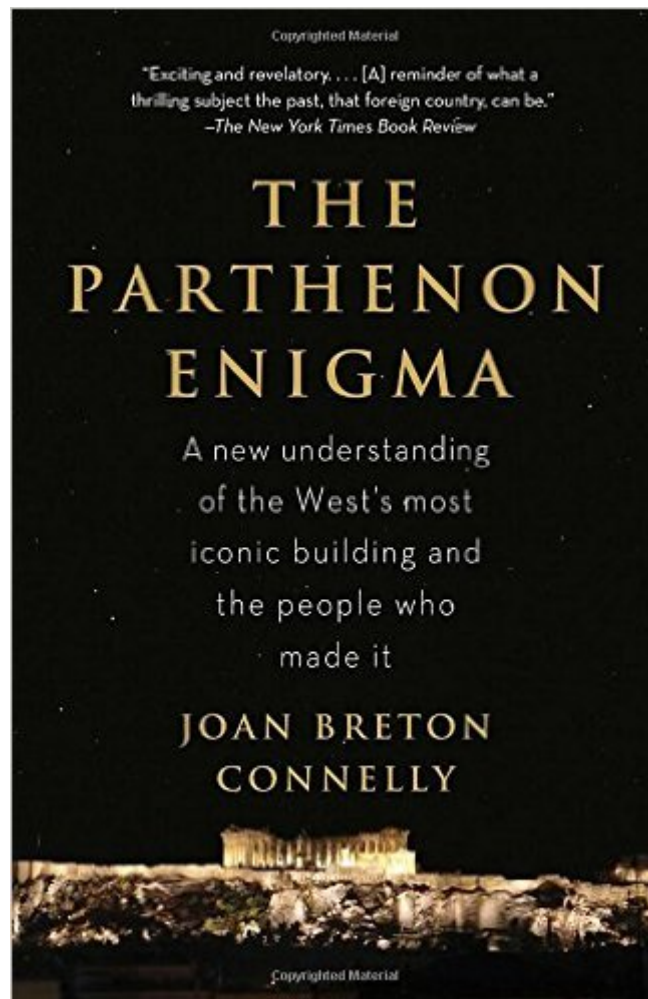


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The Parthenon Enigma: A New Understanding Of The West's Most Iconic Building And The People Who Made It.



Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book and one of The Daily Beast's Best Books of the Year Winner of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Award Since the Enlightenment, the Parthenon "the greatest example of Athenian architecture" has been venerated as the definitive symbol of Western democratic values. Here, Joan Breton Connelly challenges this conventional wisdom, drawing on previously undiscovered sources to present a revolutionary new view of this peerless building. Reaching back across time to trace the Parthenon's story from the laying of its foundation, Connelly finds its true meaning not in the rationalist ideals we typically associate with Athens but in a vast web of ceaseless cultic observances and a unique mythic identity, in which democracy in our sense of the word would have been inconceivable. Marshalling a breathtaking range of textual and visual evidence, and full of fresh insights woven into a thrilling narrative that brings the distant past to life, The Parthenon Enigma sheds a stunning new light on the ancient Athenians from whom we claim cultural descent "and on Western civilization itself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This was an amazingly good book. I am a fan of Classical Greek culture with some background, having taught an interdisciplinary course on The Classical Age 9 times over a period of 20 years at Virginia Tech. I know a good deal about Classical sculpture and architecture, and was pleased to find that I haven't been misleading my students about anything, except...the Parthenon frieze. While this book is incredibly wide-ranging, its real contribution to scholarship is a reinterpretation of the frieze. It is traditionally thought to represent the Panathenaic Procession, an annual event (though

more significant every 4 years) staged for several centuries from the 5th Century BCE until a Roman emperor outlawed pagan celebrations in the 4th Century CE. The author does a very respectable job of questioning and marshaling evidence for interpretations. Her theory is that the frieze represents the sacrifice of the daughter of Erechtheus, required by the Oracle at Delphi for an Athenian victory pitting Athena and her allies against Poseidon and his allies (who had wanted to be the local god). This general conflict between Athena and Poseidon is known from the West Pediment. The story of the family of Erechtheus and his daughters is only known from a fragmentary play by Euripides named "Erechtheus." She apparently first put forward this hypothesis over 20 years ago, and has been building her case ever since. That mythical event was apparently the origin of the Panathenaic Procession, so the traditional interpretation is not wildly off. But she argues, for instance, that the Procession was a contemporary event, and no other art on the Parthenon (or really anywhere on temples) depicted contemporary events.

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