

Knowledge Map: Myth and Religion: Religion in the City

In this topic, you are required to study the design, function and importance of temples in Greece and Rome. You will also have to examine the various religious officials that existed in the Greek and Roman world and their roles and responsibilities. Finally, we will examine the importance of animal sacrifices to those who conducted them. We will be looking at four case studies: the Parthenon and Temple of Zeus in Greece, and the Pantheon and Temple of Portunus in Rome.

Greece

The Temple of Zeus
(472BC-456BC)

The Parthenon (447BC-
432BC)

500BC 450BC 400BC 350BC 300BC 250BC 200BC 150BC 100BC 50BC 0 50AD 100AD 150AD 200AD

Rome

The Temple of Portunus
(120BC-80BC)

The Pantheon (125AD)

Greek Temples

1	The Sanctuary	This is a holy area in a city or town that contained a temple and an altar to a God. The sanctuary was usually separated from the rest of the city by a wall. Sometimes the sanctuary would have temples to more than one god, it did not have to be specific to one god or goddess.
2	The Function of a Greek Temple	A temple was a building dedicated to a god and was used to house the cult statue of that god. Essentially, the temple was the building that was the god's place on earth when they left Mount Olympus. Importantly, only priests were allowed in the temple - the majority of the population never set foot in the temple.
3	The Temple Building	Temples come in many shapes and sizes but all were rectangular in shape. The temple was usually orientated from east to west (to follow the sun). Most temples followed a similar design and included a plinth , steps, a colonnade , a cella , and an opisthodomos .
4	The Altar	This was the most important part of the sanctuary for the populace was the altar . The altar could exist in its own right and without a temple. The altar was where sacrifices and offerings to the gods took place.
5	Priests	The Greeks had two types of priest: Hierus (Priest) and a Hiereia (Priestess). Their name meant <i>one who sacrifices to a god</i> . Usually gods were attended by priests, goddesses by priestesses. Their main jobs were to make sure that the correct ritual was carried out at the correct time.
6	Sacrifice	In order to honour the gods, the Greeks would give them offerings. This could include gifts of money, dedications of song, or spoils of war. The main offering was a blood sacrifice that included several stages before it was correctly completed: the preparation, the kill, and sharing of the sacrifice.
7	Temple Decoration	Two main areas of the temple were decorated: the pediments and friezes . The design of the pediments and friezes were usually associated to the city it was in or the god the temple was dedicated to. The pediments were at the end of a temple, and the frieze was a continuous strip of sculptured stone or marble that ran around the whole temple.

Case Studies: Parthenon and Temple of Zeus

8	The Parthenon	The Parthenon is arguably the most famous temple in the world, certainly Greece. It sits on the Acropolis in Athens and was commissioned by Pericles and was built between 447-432BC. Its chief architect and designer was Phidias .
9		The temple was dedicated to the goddess Athena and was built to honour her. The sanctuary had several buildings and sculptures that focused on Athena and included a huge statue to Athena Promachos (' <i>Athena who goes into battle</i> ').
10		The Parthenon is huge in size, measuring 69.5 metres in length and 30.9 metres wide. It is orientated east to west like many temples, but it has a unique feature in that it has a double colonnade . Its pediments depict the stories of Athena's battle with Poseidon for Athens, and her birth.
11		Interestingly, it is not the main temple on the Acropolis to worship Athena. It became not just a monument to Athena but also to Athens itself. It would house the city's treasury.
12	The Temple of Zeus	The Temple of Zeus was located within the sanctuary at Olympia called the Altis. The temple was built around 472BC, but the Olympic Games had been held since 776BC at the site and there has been an altar to Zeus at the site since that time which shows the importance of the altar over the temple.
13		The Temple of Zeus was 64.1 metres in length and 27.7 metres wide. It was built in the traditional rectangular shape and was orientated east to west.
14		The eastern pediment shows the myth of Oinomaos and Pelops, and the western pediment depicts the mythical battle between the Centaurs and Lapiths called the Centauro-machy. This latter myth is supposed to represent the victory of civilisation over barbarism.

Roman Temples

15	The Sanctuary	The sanctuary was a holy area in a city or town that contained a temple and an altar to a god. Similarly to the Greeks, the sanctuary was usually separated from the rest of the city by a wall and could also have many temples in it dedicated to many different gods.
16	The Function of a Roman Temple	Similarly to the Greeks, the function of a temple was to provide a place for the god to be resident in when were on earth. Unlike the Greeks though, Roman priests were not appointed to a specific temple.
17	The Temple Building	Roman temples were based on a mix of Etruscan and Greek styling, and usually rectangular in design. However, there were major exceptions to this, most notably the Pantheon in Rome. Roman temples were built on a podium so you could only enter through the front of the temple.
18	The Altar	This was the most important part of the sanctuary for the populace was the altar . The altar could exist in its own right and without a temple. The altar was where sacrifices and offerings to the gods took place. The sacrifices was the most communal part of any worship and could involve the whole city.
19	Priests	Roman priests differed greatly from their Greek equivalents. The priest's role was to uphold the state religion by making sure all gods were at peace (' <i>Pax Deorum</i> '). There were three types of priests in Rome: the pontifices , the Augurs , and the Vestals .
20	The Vestal Virgins	The Vestal Virgins were a college of six priestesses who represented the only major female priesthood in Rome. As their name suggests they were priestesses of the goddess Vesta , the goddess of the hearth and home. The Vestal Virgins was an important and respected role, and they lived in the House of Vestals which was located in the Roman Forum, the centre of social and political activity in Rome.
21	Sacrifice	The Romans followed the same general procedures as Greek sacrifices , with blood sacrifices being the most common. The sacrifice had three stages: the preparation, the kill, and the sharing of the sacrifice. One difference though is that in Rome, a haruspex specialised in reading the entrails of the sacrificed animals.

Case Studies: Pantheon and Temple of Portunus

22	The Pantheon	The Pantheon is probably the most famous of all Roman temples. It stands in the ancient Roman Campus Martius (' <i>Field of Mars</i> '), and area where the army met before campaigns and where all elections took place.
23		It was commissioned by Emperor Hadrian in 125AD, and it is believed it was dedicated to all gods. It is built out of marble, brick and concrete.
24		It is significant as it is one of the best preserved ancient Roman buildings. It also has two unique features. Unlike other temples, it is a rotunda and at the top of the circular temple is an oculus . This is an opening at the top of the dome.
25		The internal decoration in the temple has been updated through time but the circular plan shows that there was room for several statues of gods to be placed in the cella.
26	The Temple of Portunus	This temple is dedicated to Portunus , the god of harbours. It was constructed during the Roman republic around 120BC and 80BC. Who commissioned it and who designed it are unknown.
27		It is regarded as one of the best existing examples of a Roman Temple and remains relatively intact. It is a mixture of Etruscan influence (podium and steps) and Greek influence (porch and colonnade).
28		The altar at the temple no longer exists. However, like Greek temples, it stood at the foot of the temple steps and all worship would have taken place at the altar.