

# Greek Temples

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

Greek temples have some very specific architectural characteristics. Throughout this lesson you will learn about Greek temples and the building materials and proportions that were used to create them. Specifically, you will learn about:



### BIG IDEA

Greek temples evolved from simple altars with shelters to large, monumental forms of religious architecture.

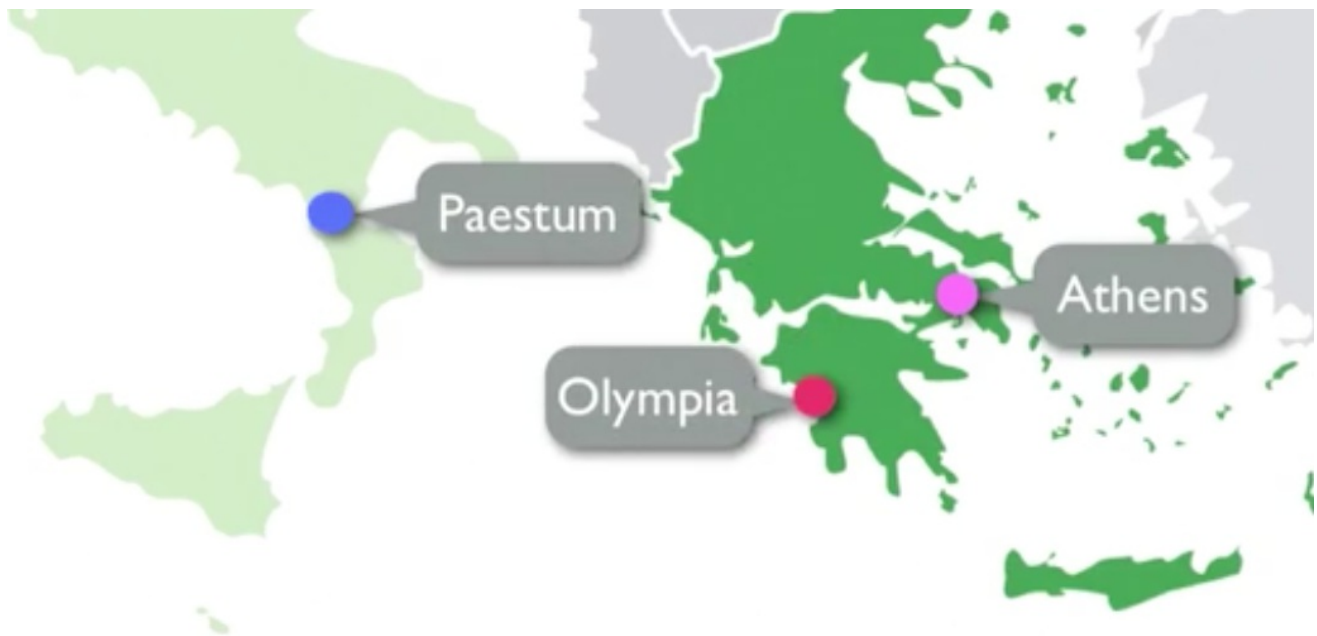
## 1. Period and Location: Greek Temples

The Greek temples you will learn about in this lesson were constructed between 550 BC and 450 BC. We'll explore Paestum on the Italian peninsula, as well as Athens and a temple in the city of Olympia, Greece.

The timeline below highlights the period this lesson covers.



This map shows the geographical area covered in this lesson:

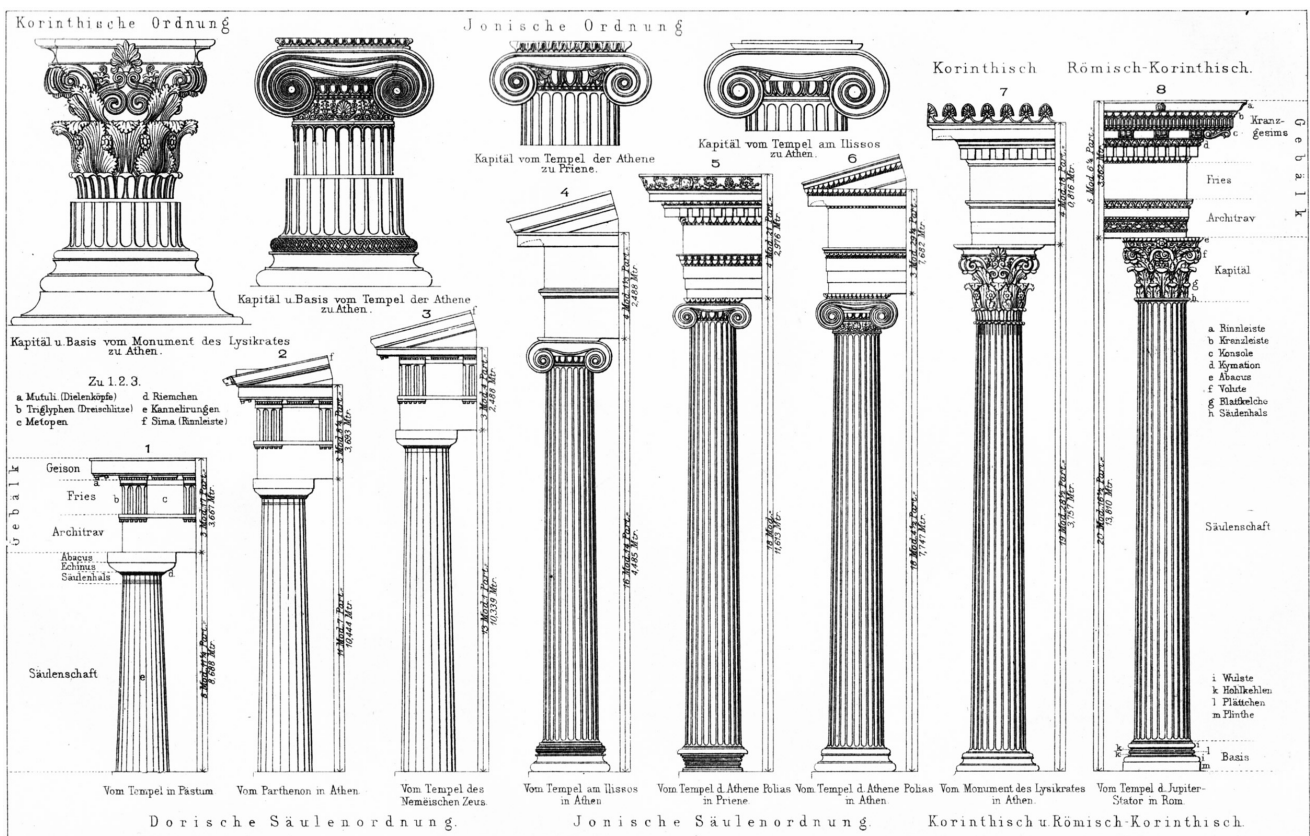


---

## 2. Architectural Orders

In ancient Greek architecture, there are three architectural orders, or design frameworks. While these orders are more than just the column, the column is one of the central characteristics.

- The **Doric order** is highlighted by the Doric column, which is a large column typically about six times as tall as it is wide. A Doric column is capped by an unornamented **capital**—the top piece of the column. It's generally considered a more masculine order compared with the other two.
- The Ionic order is highlighted by the Ionic column, which is typically a slenderer column than the Doric. An Ionic column is usually about seven or eight times as high as it is wide, and it's capped by a scroll-like capital.
- The Corinthian order is highlighted by the Corinthian column. Typically the most slender and feminine of the orders, it's generally used indoors and topped by an acanthus-leaved capital.



The above illustration shows all three orders of columns. You can see how they develop over time with the shorter columns on the left, and then get progressively longer, thinner, and more refined as you move toward the right.

- The first three columns on the left-hand side are all examples of the Doric order, where the capitals are undecorated.
- The three columns in the middle are Ionic order, where they have volutes, or the spiral elements, on the capitals on either side.
- The last two columns are Corinthian order, where they use acanthus leaves on the capitals. These were used a great deal in ancient Rome.



Being able to recognize different orders of columns is important because that can help you figure out what date the temple was constructed and even where it was constructed. You can tell the difference between a Greek temple and a Roman temple, for instance.

In ancient Greece, the **shaft**, which is the main body of a column, was usually fluted or marked with vertical ridges. The **entablature** is the upper section of a classical Greek temple that rests on the columns. Another feature is the **entasis**, which is a slight bulging, most commonly associated with the Parthenon, that is meant to offset the optical illusion of sagging of perfectly straight lines, particularly along the entablature.



### Doric Order

The simplest and oldest style of Greek column, marked by an undecorated capital

### Capital

The top of a column

### Shaft

The main body of a column; in ancient Greece, it was usually fluted, or marked with vertical ridges.

#### **Entablature**

The upper section of a classical Greek temple that rests on the columns

#### **Entasis**

A slight bulging, most commonly associated with the Parthenon, that is meant to offset the optical illusion of sagging of perfectly straight lines, particularly along the entablature

---

## **3. Temples of Hera**

While located in Italy, Paestum was originally a settlement of Hellenistic Greek people and early Greek temples. These early Greek temples were nothing more than mud-and-wood shelters to protect an altar or offering area. Over time, temples evolved into forms of monumental architecture. Typically built of limestone and marble, these temples began using the Greek idea of *symmetria*, where the proportions of the building are harmoniously related to each other, much like the proportions of the body are harmoniously balanced.

Below is Hera I. It is one of two **peripteral temples** identified as a Temple of Hera. Constructed between 550 and 540 BC, Hera I was designed in the Doric manner. It's difficult to see all the elements that comprise the Doric order in this picture below, but the use of the Doric column is the dead giveaway.



### Temple of Hera I

550-540 BC

Paestum



#### DID YOU KNOW

The Greek goddess Hera was the Greek god Zeus's wife. This temple is aptly named Hera the First to distinguish it from the other Temple of Hera, named Hera the Second, shown below.





Temple of Hera II

470-460 BC

Paestum, Italy

Hera II is a much clearer example of the Doric order and its parts. Notice the Doric column. It is topped by the entablature, the solid piece of masonry you see right above the columns. On top of the entablature is the Doric frieze, which is a band of sculpture or relief that runs horizontally around the building.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Peripteral Temple

A type of ancient Greek or Roman temple surrounded by a row of columns

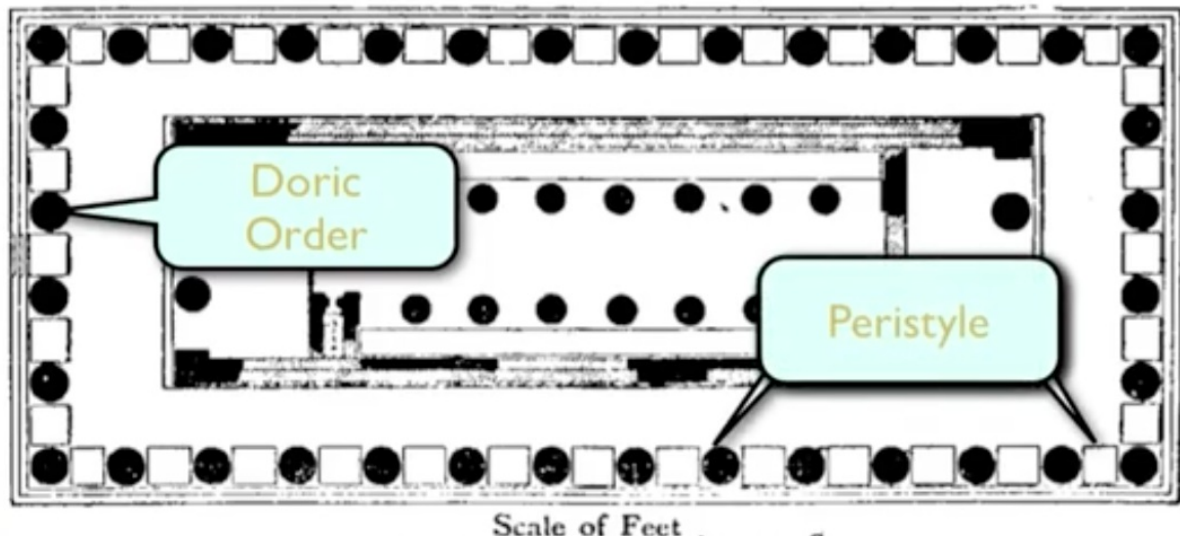
---

## 4. Architecture Elements

As opposed to the continuous frieze of the Ionic order, the Doric frieze is broken up into alternative or alternating parts—the triglyph, which are these three lines, and the metope, which is the squarish area here—which would have been ornamented in some way with sculpture and/or relief. On top of this is a triangular pediment. The Doric order columns were assembled in a very specific way. A metal central rod ran up and down, and on top of that the drums were stacked.

Take a look at the diagram below of the Temple of Hera. Temples all vary in one way or another, but this example shows the typical **peristyle** outer colonnade. Highlighted is an example of the Doric style. Notice the solid walled center portion that houses smaller rooms, such as the treasury and sanctuary.

# DIAGRAM OF THE TEMPLE OF HERA II



## TERM TO KNOW

### Peristyle

An architectural space, such as a court, that is surrounded by columns

## 5. Symbolism and Sculptures

The outer and inner ornamentation of the temples weren't simply decorative elements. The temples were symbolic pieces of architecture, and the friezes of pediments, or triangular areas in the front and back of the temple, were places to tell stories related to the temple.

The pediments were important areas of the sculptural program in part due to their being some of the largest and most visible areas of the temple. Their shape, however, created some design challenges.

Below is a large sculpture called "The Dying Warrior". It was taken from one of the pediments from the Temple of Aphaia on the tiny island of Aegina near mainland Greece.



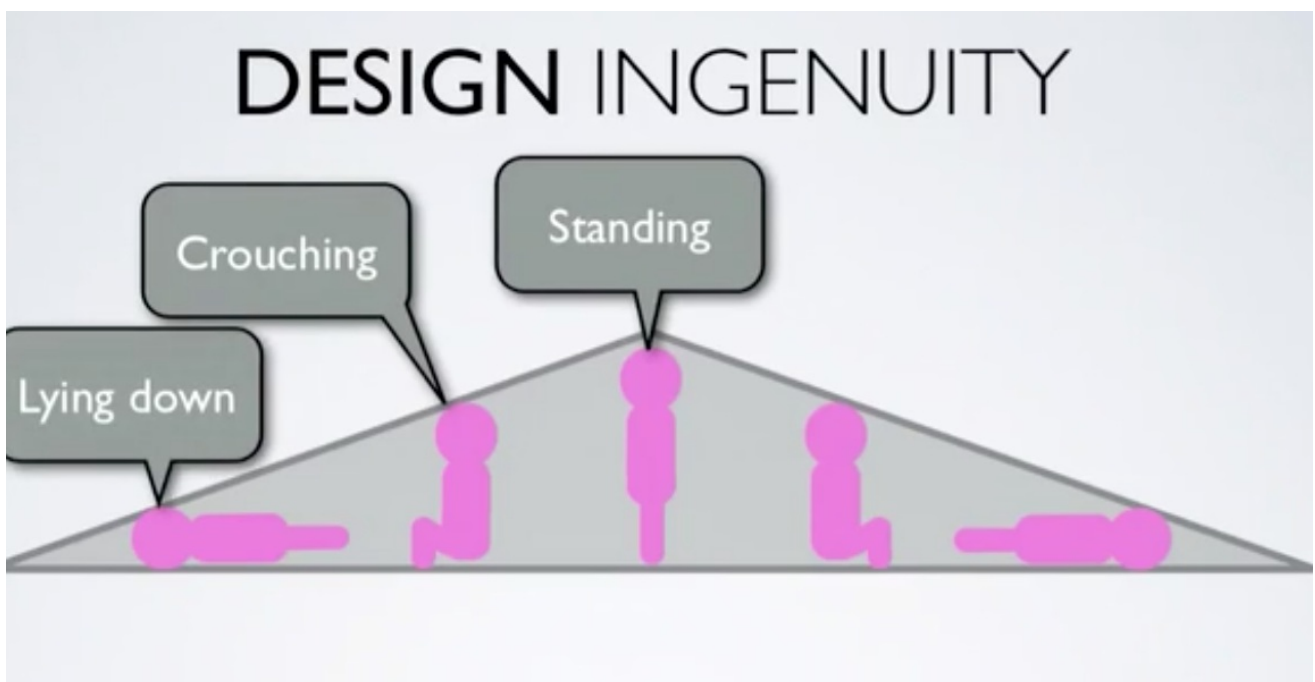
The Dying Warrior (from west pediment of Temple of Aphaia)

500-490 BC

Marble

To make the best use of space while conforming to the restrictions of the space, artists sculpted figures, especially human figures, in multiple positions.

Take a look at the diagram below. Our “Dying Warrior” would have fit nicely in the corner of the triangle, while crouching figures would fit within the intermediate space and standing figures would be placed within the very middle.



This final drawing of the Temple of Zeus from Olympia provides a good example of this technique:





Temple of Zeus

470-456 BC

Olympia, Greece

Notice the figures placed within the above drawing. This is a very clear example of the elements comprising the Doric order. In fact, the Temple of Zeus from Olympia was thought to be the epitome of Doric design in its time. In the above image, notice:

- The Doric column
- Triglyphs
- Metopes
- The pediment



## SUMMARY

The architectural characteristics of Greek temples are unique and the building materials and proportions that were used to create them can help identify the particular orders. In this lesson, you learned about the **period and location of Greek temples**.

You learned about the three **architectural orders**: Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian. As examples of the Doric order, you explored the two **temples of Hera**.

Finally, **architecture elements** of Greek temples were covered. The Doric frieze, pediments, and

columns were explored. **Symbolism and sculptures** were important to this architecture. Sometimes parts of the temples tell stories related to the temple. To make the best use of space, artists sculpted figures in multiple positions.

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY IAN MCCONNELL FOR SOPHIA LEARNING. Please see our [Terms of Use](#).



## ATTRIBUTIONS

- [Illustration of Doric \(first three\), Ionic \(next three\) and Corinthian \(final two\) columns](#) | Author: Unknown | License: Public Domain



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Capital

The top of a column.

### Doric Order

The simplest and oldest style of Greek column, marked by an undecorated capital.

### Entablature

The upper section of a classical Greek temple that rests on the columns.

### Entasis

A slight bulging, most commonly associated with the Parthenon, that is meant to offset the optical illusion of sagging of perfectly straight lines, particularly along the entablature.

### Peripteral Temple

A type of ancient Greek or Roman temple surrounded by a row of columns.

### Peristyle

An architectural space, such as a court, that is surrounded by columns.

### Shaft

The main body of a column, in ancient Greece, it was usually fluted, or marked with vertical ridges.