

Greek and Roman temples

[Premodern Digital Cultural Heritage Network](#)

Teacher's Guide

- Temples were built to house the statue of a pagan god; sacrifices were performed at an altar outside the temple.
- The earliest Greek temples were constructed of perishable materials such as wood, mud bricks and thatch. From the 8th century BCE onwards, more durable materials such as stone were used.
- The main room of the temple, housing the god's statue, is the **naos** or **cella**; it was completely walled in and built of uniform blocks.
- The side walls of the *naos* were usually elongated in the front, creating a porch (*pronaos*); they could also be extended in the rear creating a second porch (*opisthodomos*). The projecting walls of the porches are called *antae*.
- **Columns** could be placed in front and back, or for more prestigious temples all around the *naos* (*peripteral* temple).
- There are **three main Greek orders** of architecture: **Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian**. The three orders are recognizable based on their different types of capitals.
- The **Doric order** (established in the 6th century BCE) translates the form of earlier wooden temples into stone. The **Doric capital** consists of two undecorated elements: a curved *echinus* and a square block on top (*abacus*). On top of the columns rests the *entablature*, consisting of an *architrave* and a *frieze*. The **Doric frieze** consists of **triglyphs** and **metopes**. The *metopes* are square zones, which can be plain, painted or feature sculpture. Doric columns do not have a base.
- The **Ionic order** evolved around the same time as the Doric but developed for a longer period of time and is influenced by Near Eastern architecture. The main differences from the Doric order lie in the columns and the entablature. The **Ionic column** has a **base** and a **capital** consisting of **two volutes** and an ornamented necking. The frieze is often decorated by continuous sculptural reliefs.
- The **Corinthian order** (4th century BCE) features more richly decorated **capitals**, consisting of one or two rows of **acanthus leaves**, from which the volutes grow.
- All three orders are used in Roman architecture.

Bibliography

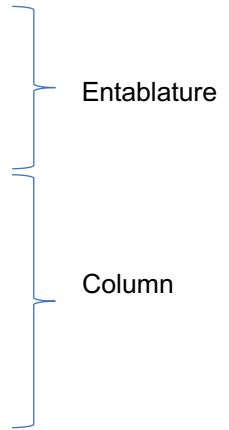
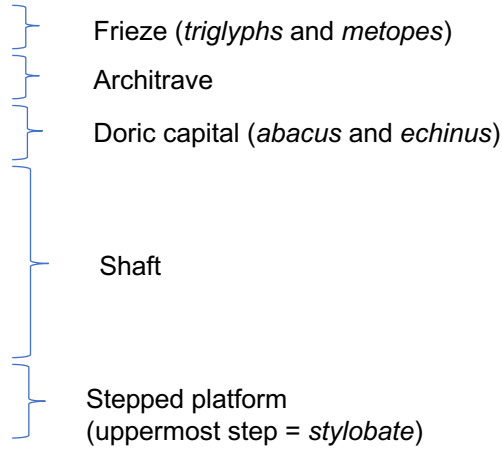
Richter, Gisela M.A. *A Handbook of Greek Art*. 9th ed. Oxford: Phaidon, 1987

[Roberts, John. "Orders." In *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*, edited by John Roberts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007](#)

[Roberts, John. "Temple." In *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*, edited by John Roberts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007](#)

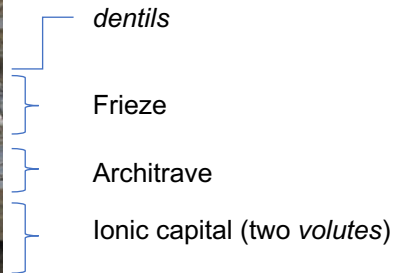
Materials suitable for: Classical Studies (Senior Cycle) – Art and Architecture in Greek Society; Roman Art and Architecture.

Doric order



Cyrene (Libya) - Temple of Zeus - looking northeast. Ross Burns/Manar al-Athar [ID 42219]

Ionic order



For further elaboration, figures and different temple ground plans, see:

Becker, Jeffrey A. ["Introduction to ancient Greek architecture."](#) in *Smarthistory*, August 8, 2015

Garni (Armenia) - Temple of Mihr. Miranda Williams/Manar al-Athar [ID 59442]

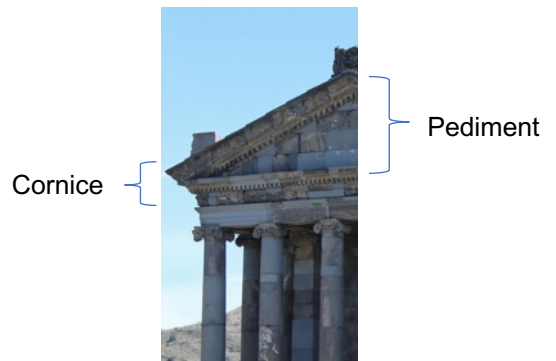
Corinthian capital



Acanthus leaves

Alexandria (Egypt) - Corinthian capital (Anfoushy grounds). Judith McKenzie/Manar al-Athar [91334]

The roof



Garni - Temple of Mihr. Emilio Bonfiglio/Manar al-Athar [ID 59435]

Cyrene (Libya) – Temple of Zeus



Cyrene - Temple of Zeus - looking northeast. Ross Burns/Manar al-Athar [ID 42219]



Cyrene - Temple of Zeus - looking southwest. Ross Burns/Manar al-Athar [ID 42195]

- A well-preserved example of a **Doric temple**.
- Visible **fluted columns**, architrave, fragments of the frieze with **triglyphs and metopes**, *naos*.
- Built 540-430 BCE.
- Reconstructed in the 1st century CE.
- Damaged by an earthquake in 365 CE as well as Christian destructions.

More images

[Cyrene – Temple of Zeus](#)

Cyrene (Libya) – Temple of Apollo



Cyrene - Temple of Apollo - Lower Terrace. Mohamed Kenawi/Manar al-Athar [ID 42149]

- Another example of a Doric temple.
- **Peripteral temple** – *naos* surrounded by columns on all four sides.

More images

[Cyrene – Temple of Apollo](#)

Garni (Armenia) – Temple of Mihr



Garni -Temple of Mihr. Miranda Williams/Manar al-Athar [ID 59431]



Garni (Armenia) -Temple of Mihr. Emilio Bonfiglio/Manar al-Athar [ID 59435]



Garni -Temple of Mihr. Miranda Williams/Manar al-Athar [ID 59442]

- Founded 1st century CE or in the time of Trajan (98-117) when Armenia was a Roman province for a short time.
- Rebuilt in 1978.
- Popularly thought to be dedicated to Mitra (Mithras), an Indo-Iranian Sun god and one of the main pagan gods in ancient Armenia (venerated also in the Roman Empire).
- **Peripteral temple** on a high podium with 24 **Ionic columns**.
- Entablature (architrave and frieze) decorated with acanthus leaves, rosettes and other Roman motifs executed by local workmen.
- Made of **basalt**, a hard dark stone (in contrast, other Greek and Roman temples were usually made of marble).

- An example of Graeco-Roman architecture **at the borders of the Roman Empire**.
- The temple is situated on the edge of a triangular cliff over the river Azat in the village of Garni, 30 km east of Yerevan, capital of Armenia.

More images

[Garni – Temple of Mihr](#)

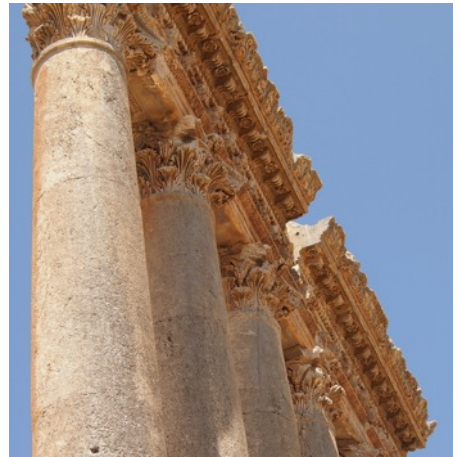
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[Rogers, J.M. "Garni." In *Grove Art Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003](#)

Baalbek (Lebanon) – Temple of Jupiter



Baalbek - Temple of Jupiter - monumental entrance (propylaea). Ross Burns/Manar al-Athar [ID 90863]



Baalbek - Temple of Jupiter - south colonnade. Andres Reyes/Manar al-Athar [ID 90993]



Baalbek - Temple of Jupiter - south side - from Temple of Bacchus. Judith McKenzie/Manar al-Athar [ID 90980]

- Comprises a monumental entrance (*propylaeum*) with a colonnade of 12 granite columns, a hexagonal forecourt, and a rectangular court; temple is at the western end.
- Remarkable for its **ca. 20 m-high columns**, the highest in any classical temple, and for its sophisticated planning and design.
- On a high podium (13.5 m) accessible via steps.
- 10 **Corinthian columns** in the front, 19 along the sides, on pedestals, with shafts

- Principle temple in Baalbek (ancient Heliopolis).
- The temple was a prominent pilgrimage site.
- Founded by 60 CE, enlarged up to the 3rd century.

More images

[Baalbek - Temple of Jupiter](#)

[Baalbek - Temple of Jupiter - monumental entrance \(propylaea\)](#)

[Baalbek - Temple of Jupiter Great Court](#)

[Baalbek - Temple of Jupiter Hexagonal Court](#)

[Baalbek - Temple of Jupiter monumental altars](#)

Bibliography

[Lyttleton, Margaret. "Baalbek." In *Grove Art Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003](#)

[UNESCO World Heritage Centre. "Baalbek."](#)

Baalbek (Lebanon) – Temple of Bacchus



Baalbek - Temple of Bacchus - interior - looking east. Ross Burns/Manar al-Athar [90605]



Baalbek - Temple of Bacchus - front - looking west. Judith McKenzie/Manar al-Athar [ID 90595]



Baalbek - Temple of Bacchus - back and north side. Andres Reyes/Manar al-Athar [ID 90592]

- An exceptionally well-preserved temple.
- Founded in the 2nd century CE.
- Size 66 x 35 m (comparable to the Parthenon).
- On a high podium.
- **Peripteral, Corinthian order**, 8 columns at the front and back, 15 at the sides; columns made of local limestone with **unfluted shafts**.
- **Peristyle** with a coffered ceiling, decorated with personifications of neighbouring cities (e.g. Antioch).
- Architrave of the doorway decorated with carved vine scrolls and putti.

More images

[Baalbek - Temple of Bacchus](#)

Djemila (Algeria) - Severan Temple



Djemila (Cuicul) - Severan Temple. Miranda Williams/Manar al-Athar [ID 76169]



Djemila (Cuicul) - Severan Temple. Miranda Williams/Manar al-Athar [ID 76183]

- Djémila (ancient Cuicul) is a late 1st-century CE Roman colony in North Africa.
- Founded as a colony for army veterans, it expanded in the early 3rd century CE.
- **Corinthian temple**, dedicated to the Severan family, built in 229 CE.
- Emperor Septimius Severus, founder of the Severan dynasty, reigned from 193 to 211 CE. He was born in Leptis Magna (in modern-day Libya, North Africa)

- The Severan temple is one of the most prominent buildings in Djémila.
- Well-preserved *cella* and two rows of Corinthian columns in front of the façade (*prostyle* temple).
- The temple stands on a man-made terrace surrounded by a colonnade, accessible via a large stairway.

More images

[Djemila \(Cuicul\) - Severan Temple](#)

Bibliography

Potter, T. W. "Djemila." In *Grove Art Online*. Oxford University Press, 2003

[UNESCO World Heritage Centre. "Djémila."](#)

Class Exercises

Questions for discussion

Show or print the class presentation. Ask your students to describe one of the pictured temples. The following questions can guide them:

- What kind of structure is this (theatre, temple, bath etc.)?
- What architectural elements can you recognise (*naos*, fluted columns, *triglyphs* etc.)?
- What is the order of the temple (Doric, Ionic, Corinthian)?
- What materials is the temple built with?
- How would you describe the temple's ground plan (*peripteral*, *prostyle*)?
- When was the temple built? How would you date it?
- Where is this temple?
- Ancient people lived simply, without TV, WiFi or social media, and many never left their hometowns. How did these people feel when looking at these temples? What effects did the temples have on them?

This exercise is also suitable as a group activity.

Correct the mistakes (p. 9)

Print the exercise on p. 9. The elements of these temple have been mislabelled. Ask your students to correct them.

The activity is suitable as individual or group work in class or as homework.

Crossword (p.10)

Print the exercise on p. 10. Ask your students to fill in the crossword.

The activity is suitable as individual work in class or as homework.

Crossword (answers)

1. Doric; 2. Corinthian; 3. peripteral; 4. Ionic; 5. naos ; 6. frieze ; 7. prostyle; 8. Mitra; 9. basalt

For further images of all temples and sites, please visit [Manar al-Athar](#)

Exercises

Correct the mistakes

Can you spot the mistakes? What are the correct names for these elements?
To which order of architecture do these temples belong: Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian?
(Optional) In which modern countries are these temples?

_____ temple



- Acanthus leaves
- Frieze
- Architrave
- Ionic capital
- entablature

Cyrene - Temple of Zeus - looking northeast. Ross Burns/Manar al-Athar [ID 42219]

_____ temple

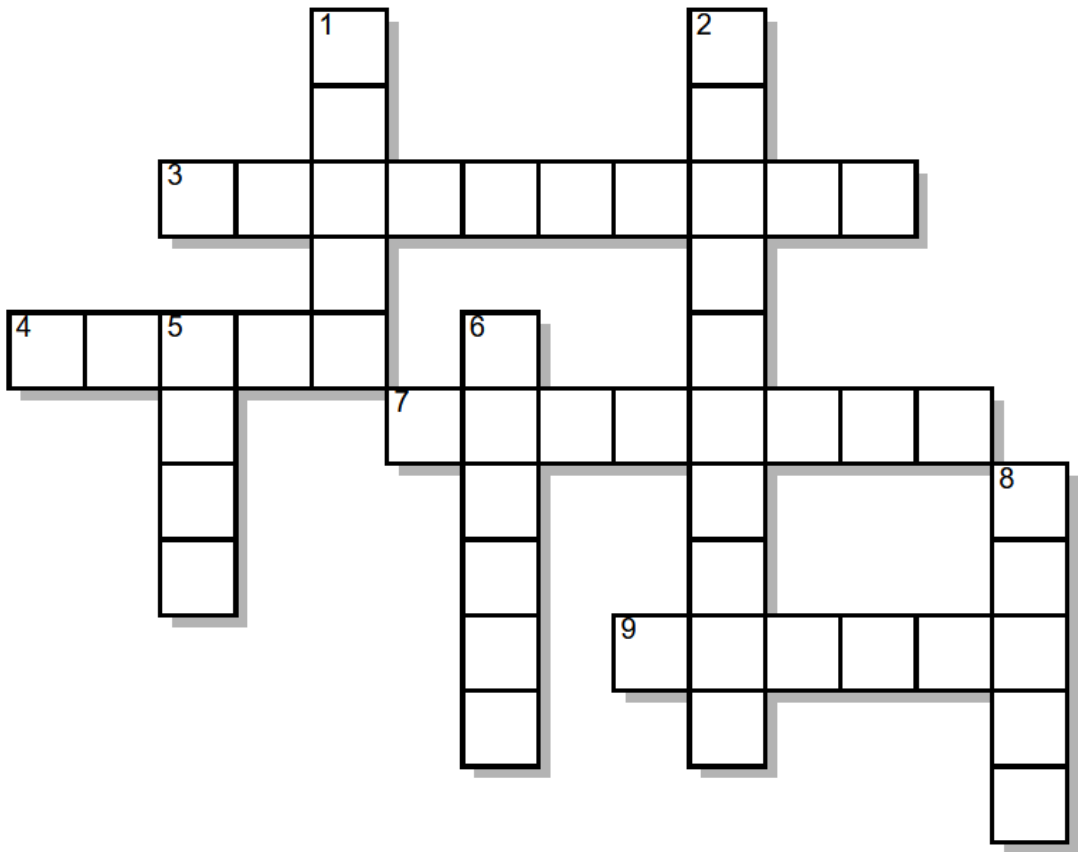


- triglyphs
- Corinthian capital
- Fluted columns

Garni - Temple of Mihr. Miranda Williams/Manar al-Athar [ID 59442]

Exercises

Crossword



ACROSS

- 3 A type of temple surrounded by columns on all sides
- 4 A capital with two volutes
- 7 A type of temple with columns only in front of the façade
- 9 Material used for the Temple at Garni

DOWN

- 1 Frieze with triglyphs and metopes
- 2 A capital with acanthus leaves
- 5 The main room of the temple, housing the cult statue
- 6 Part of a temple decorated with relief sculpture
- 8 An Indo-Iranian Sun god