

Introduction: The ArtHumanities Parthenon Project

In the summer of 2003, a small team of educational technologists from the Visual Media Center (VMC) in the Department of Art History and Archaeology set out for the Acropolis in Athens to document with the newest technology some of the oldest monuments of Western culture. James Conlon, Jeremy Stynes, and Robert Carlucci of the VMC packed digital cameras, tripods, and laptop computers for their journey to the Acropolis, and on two very warm days in the Mediterranean sun, they shot several thousand minutely calibrated digital photos of the Parthenon, the Propylaea, and the Erectheion—the three most important surviving buildings of Athens from the time of Pericles. From this collection of digital images, they set about creating a suite of interactive Quick Time Virtual Reality (QTVR) panoramas to explore the Acropolis in a way unthinkable just a few short years ago. Quick Time panoramas offer a revolutionary and engaging system for teaching complex architectural and urban spaces by capturing the totality of a building in a way that moves far beyond old-fashioned slides. Teachers and students use a computer mouse to move effortlessly around or through a building in a manner that can only be superseded by an actual visit. Whether in the classroom or in the dorm room, students and teachers now have access to innovative digital teaching tools that are bringing Art Humanities at Columbia into the twenty-first century.

This project would have been unthinkable without the generous and unflagging assistance of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, and we owe a special debt of gratitude to Ms. Maria Pilali, administrator, and Dr. Stephen V. Tracy, director, who were instrumental in obtaining the permission and gracious assistance of the Greek cultural authorities. Partial funding was provided through the National Endowment for the Humanities as part of a three-year grant enabling the VMC to document important buildings for the digital teaching of architectural history with materials that will be freely available on the Web for nonprofit, educational use.