

Pheidias

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Pheidias

Often credited as being the “greatest” of all Ancient Greek sculptors, Pheidias, was a man gifted with both talent and turmoil. No one specific piece can definitely be attributed to the artist, but historical record suggests that he was the supervisor and main sculptor for works such as the Athena Parthenos and the [Zeus](#) for the temple at Olympia. Because many sculptures often attributed to him were designed with large quantities of gold and ivory, he is believed to have been extremely proficient with fine materials. He was Athenian; this scholars do not debate. His master is said to have been Agelades of Argos, though there is no proof to substantiate the claim#. Many believe that the majority of his pieces were commissioned by the city of Athens and, in turn, attribute many large public monumental sculptures to Pheidias, even though the dates do not always support this. Through my research, I agree with R.G. Haggard, that his career was launched when he was commissioned to sculpt an Athenian monument to Marathon. Scholars argue whether or not the funds for this project came from the spoils of the war, or the Athenian government. In several ancient texts the name Pheidias appears and seems to always be followed by a positive statement about his sculpture.

Plotinus (third century AD) writes of the giant [statue](#) of Zeus at Olympia and praises Pheidias for his skill, but the only proof that scholars and art historians have that the statue even existed is a [coin](#) that depicts an image similar to the way the statue is described#. R.G. Haggard contends that “the Parthenon statues remain the greatest monument to his genius” (Haggard 22), but does not believe he sculpted the majority of the images himself. Haggard believes that his role as “supervisor” over the massive commission was crucial to the presentation of the famed Athenian battles. Less than a year after the completion of the Athena Parthenos, Pheidias was brought to trial: the charge, embezzlement. A.W. Lawrence, who does not give specific sources, believes that he was exonerated from the embezzlement charges because all of the precious metal from the statue could be weighed. After the charge failed, he was again charged, publicly, this time with both misappropriating public funds and sacrilege. The latter charge existed because he had depicted himself and Perikles on the shield held by Athena.

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