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Hair in the Classical World Caryatid Wall Text

Bellarmino Museum of Art

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CARYATID HAIRSTYLES

These two views of Caryatids (the columnar statues supporting the south porch of the Erechtheion on the Athenian Acropolis), show the results of recent laser cleaning (left) and the appearance of two of the sculptures *in situ* prior to 1907 (right). The five Caryatids in Athens were installed in the new Acropolis Museum in 2009, making it possible for visitors to approach them from behind for the first time. (The sixth Caryatid was removed in the early 19th century by Lord Elgin and is now in the British Museum.) A project to clean the Athens Caryatids using a double wave-length of ultraviolet and infrared concluded in 2014. It successfully removed the grime caused by air pollution while revealing the elaborate fishtail braids falling down the figures' backs.

In ancient accounts of the Erechtheion, these maidens are referred to as *korai*. (Modern scholarship designates them *Kore* A-F.) They were carved about 430 BCE. Their later name, Caryatids, is due to a story related by the Roman writer Vitruvius in the 1st century BCE. Such was their renown that the Roman Emperors Augustus and Hadrian ordered replicas made.

The recently discovered, anonymous, early 20th-century photograph at right records the elaborate carving and distinctive hair texture of both maidens. Dr. Natalia Vogeikoff-Brogan, the Doreen Canaday Spitzer Archivist at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, found it in the archives of William B. Dinsmoor (1886-1973), the renowned archaeologist and professor of architecture at Columbia University. The crack visible in *Kore* B's head was repaired in 1907, so the photograph must have been taken shortly before.

The Caryatids have been carefully studied for their pose and clothing, but their unique hairstyles had until recently been overlooked. In 2009, a project directed by Dr. Katherine Schwab, Professor of Art History at Fairfield University, led to the discovery that their elaborately plaited coiffures could be replicated. The Caryatids' elegant and complex hairstyles, with their voluminous fishtail braids, were central to these maidens' identity and status in Athenian society. In our day, with hair trends changing by the moment, it is fascinating to realize that the popular fishtail braid forms a bridge to the distant past—a time when hair revealed significant details about an individual. The expressive power and authority of hair in antiquity was lost over the centuries, but the importance accorded it in contemporary society, and the resources lavished on hairstyling and hair products today, suggest that this ancient idea may have come full circle.