

Rebuilding the Ancient Colossus of Rhodes

The Colossus of Rhodes was an architectural marvel of ancient Greece considered one of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World. This ancient spectacle was a colossal statue of the Greek sun-God Helios, sculpted by Chares of Lindos, who hailed from a neighboring city nearby the ancient city of Rhodes. The exciting news for contemporary art and antiquity scholars is that plans have been made to rebuild the ancient Colossus of Rhodes! A European contingent of engineers have proposed the construction of a building replicating the exterior of the ancient statue, with a museum inside displaying Greek treasures.

The original Colossus of Rhodes took 12 years to sculpt and construct, and was finished in 280 BCE after 12 years. While no one knows for sure what the small details of the statue looked like, many historical representations of it depict Helios partially cloaked, with one hand shielding his eyes from the sun. The statue stood 105 feet tall and consisted of a white marble pedestal securing the statue's body on top. The body had a bronze outer shell but was supported within by internal rods and weighted stones. This message was inscribed at the base of the statue, praising Helios and the people of Rhodes:

“To you, Helios, yes to you the people of Dorian Rhodes raised this colossus high up to the heavens, after they had calmed the bronze wave of war, and crowned their country with spoils won from the enemy. Not only over the sea but also on land they set up the bright light of unfettered freedom.”

The specific location of the Colossus in Rhodes has been disputed throughout history. According to ancient accounts, it was originally believed that the statue straddled the Mandraki harbor entrance in Rhodes, with one leg on either side. However, this belief ultimately proved a myth as it would have been structurally impossible for the statue to straddle the harbor in that manner. Though the exact location is still unknown, most historians of antiquity agree that the Colossus was somewhere near the Mandraki harbor.

The sculptor, Chares of Lindos, created the Colossus of Rhodes as an offering to the God Helios, so that Helios would stand guard over the harbor given that Rhodes was one of the most important trading ports in the ancient Mediterranean. Helios was particularly worshiped in Rhodes, an ancient city in the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea. He was the most important deity of the ancient city, and was honored at many festivals and events such as the Halieia festival and Panhellenic games, an ancient Greek version of our Olympic games. The sculptor, in choosing a grand, standing position for his Colossus, wanted to create a more statuesque representation of Helios, who was normally envisioned as a chariot driver with the sun dragging behind him. There is an interesting linguistics link between the words Rhodes

and Helios. The word Rhodes derives from the nymph Rhodos who bore seven sons to Helios. The sons are known as the Heliabai.

Sadly, this amazing statue did not stand for long. The Colossus was toppled by an earthquake sometime between 228-226 BCE. The statue snapped at the knees, and the broken pieces cluttered the docks of Rhodes for nearly a thousand years before being melted down and reused as metal in the mid-7th century CE. The remains were untouched for so long because locals believed the oracle of Delphi's prediction that moving the sculpture would bring misfortune to the city.

While the plans for reconstructing the Colossus is still in early stages, we hope that we will be able to see this replica of one of the 7 ancient world wonders in the coming years.