

The Athenian Parthenon: reception and display

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Abstract: In this article the *Parthenon* is considered in the context of the multiple meanings that the west has ascribed to it as well as its alterations and damages through time. Fateful events in the course of a turbulent history in the land of Greece not only affected the state of the Parthenon but added to a debate that focused on this monument as the most important classical building leading to the creation of an outstanding museum in Athens.

Keywords: Parthenon; Ancient History; Heritage; Museum.

The Athenian Parthenon has been admired and glorified as no other western monument has. Through time it has been ascribed meaning and ideologies in striking contrast to the sparse references we have about it from antiquity. It has been called the most perfect Greek temple that marks the culmination of the Doric order, the most important building in the history of western culture, the symbol of democracy, and the symbol of modern Greek national identity. Consideration of the Parthenon in the context of the multiple layers of contrived symbolism has featured in several recent discussions. The reception of the Parthenon and the temple's transformations through the ages is one of the most captivating topics surrounding this iconic building. The Parthenon has come to symbolize so much, to provoke diverse interpretations and dominate discourse on classical architecture that references to it as a "tyrant of a monument" (Papalexandrou 2009) or as a "utopian building" (Ferrari 2006) should not surprise us.

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The debate concerning the proper display of its sculptural decorations has involved a number of complex issues some of which are yet to be resolved but has also led to the creation of one of the most remarkable museums in the world that does justice to the monument. Yet, the reason that issues pertaining to this museum have been so much in the spot light is partly relevant to the meaning that Europe has assigned to the Parthenon within the last three hundred years. This paper which is based on a public lecture I delivered during my visit at the University of Sao Paulo in May 2014 will provide a brief summary of the history of the Parthenon, its reception through the ages and the issues that led to the creation of the new Acropolis museum¹.

The story of human activity on the Athenian Acropolis began in the prehistoric era when its slopes were inhabited in the Neolithic

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period. The rock, although not the highest in the Athenian area, must have been chosen in antiquity for being naturally defensible with access to water sources. Having served as an administrative center during the Mycenaean period and having survived the devastations that brought the Bronze Age of Greece to an end, the Acropolis assumed a different role and experienced a growing significance in the historical period as a religious center. The Athenians honored their patron deity Athena with a sanctuary on the Acropolis rock, her first temple having been built in the 8th c BCE at the site where the Erechtheion was later constructed.

For centuries goddess Athena was worshipped there. In the Archaic period the sanctuary witnessed momentous growth: new temples were constructed including earlier versions of the Parthenon and the temple of Athena Polias, Athena in her role as protector of the city. The sanctuary's premises were enhanced by the display of numerous offerings made of a variety of materials, the most well-known being the korai.

These Archaic buildings and dedications suffered destruction when the Persians reached the Acropolis in 480 BCE. Eventually at the time of Athenian supremacy, Pericles decided to undertake an ambitious building project on the Acropolis. The Parthenon, dedicated to Athena Parthenos, "Athena the Virgin", is the most well-known monument of that building project. Nevertheless we are struck by the reference to the Parthenon in one of the major ancient sources, Pausanias (1918 1.24.5):

As you enter the temple that they name the Parthenon all the sculptures you see on what is called the pediment refer to the birth of Athena, those on the rear pediment represent the contest for the land between Athena and Poseidon.

He devotes only this sentence to the entire Parthenon and seems to be more interested in the colossal chryselephantine cult statue of Athena which he describes in more detail. One would expect to find in Pausanias' writings confirmation of more recent notions

of the Parthenon's immense significance, its celebration as a symbol of democracy and identification as the most important classical temple.

Thucydides, (The Peloponnesian War 1.10.2) in referring to Sparta's lack of impressive temples and monuments that could speak of her power in posterity, contrasts her unimposing appearance to that of Athens, stating that generations to come would perceive her power twice as great as it is, should the city cease to exist. Thucydides makes no explicit reference to the Parthenon and no connection between the Athenian temples and the democratic ideals of the time. The issue is Athenian power and that is the case also in what Plutarch (1916) writes centuries later (Life of Pericles 12.1). He refers to the wonderful beautification of Athens by Pericles with public and sacred buildings:

But that which brought most delightful adornment to Athens, and the greatest amazement to the rest of mankind; that which alone now testifies for Hellas that her ancient power and splendor, of which so much is told, was no idle fiction, – I mean his construction of sacred edifices...

Yet, he states that these accomplishments were the most heavily criticized ones by Pericles' enemies for having spent the allies' money to adorn Athens:

And surely Hellas is insulted with a dire insult and manifestly subjected to tyranny when she sees that, with her own enforced contributions for the war, we are gilding and bedizenning our city, which, for all the world like a wanton woman, adds to her wardrobe precious stones and costly statues and temples worth their millions. (Plutarch 12.2)

Similar to Pausanias, Pliny in his *Natural History* focuses on the statue of Athena Parthenos.

There is a striking discrepancy between modern interpretations and what the

ancients have actually left in writing about the Parthenon. Could it be that the meager number of sources has nothing to do with how much was originally written but with how much has survived (Beard 2002)? Even so, modern interpretations clearly have not been based on ancient testimony. The exact purpose and original significance of the Parthenon has often been discussed in recent times. As was the rule for ancient Greek temples, the Parthenon housed the statue of a deity, the colossal gold and ivory statue of Athena Parthenos, Athena the Virgin, the work of Phidias who was the overall director of the sculptural decorations of the building. Normally, the orientation of Greek temples was East-West and this was the case with the Parthenon. The important feature where rituals were enacted was the altar located in front of the entrance but there is no evidence that the Parthenon had an altar. It has been written that “without an altar, a temple is simply not a temple at all.” (Ferrari 2006: 7). Ferrari actually suggests that the building could have functioned as a *thesauros*, a treasury. Others propose the Erechtheion as the most significant religious building on the Acropolis given its location, the incorporation of several cults in a structure of unusual plan and housing of the old, most revered statue of Athena Polias.

The distance between our perception of the Parthenon and its original context is further accentuated by the disappearance of the original, dazzling colors in its entablature. The notion that Greek temples were completely white is totally false and has shaped several wrong assumptions about Greek religious architecture.

In discussing the Parthenon, twentieth century scholars would exalt the building as signifying the peak in the development of Greek religious architecture. Changed current perspectives even question the exclusive role of Pericles in this project. The interpretation of the interior decorated Ionic frieze of the Parthenon as the Panathenaic procession has provoked much debate because such a theme contradicts long established rules in Greek architecture. Sculptural decorations of Greek temples were not to represent contemporary scenes but

only mythical ones and the violation of this condition constituted sacrilege. Furthermore, there are a number of inconsistencies between what the frieze depicts and what actually took place in a Panathenaic procession. Many believe that understanding the frieze subject could be crucial in perceiving the meaning of the Parthenon in antiquity. Alternative interpretations include those proposed by John Boardman and Joan Connelly. Boardman makes a connection between the number of males in the cavalcade represented in the frieze (excluding the charioteers) to the number of Athenians who died in the battle at Marathon and states that “the connection with Marathon is everywhere” (Boardman & Finn 1985: 250). For Boardman the message of the Parthenon to contemporary Athenians was clear and continued to be important while the Persian issue was current (Boardman & Finn 1985: 251). In modern literature, the reference to the Persian wars has also been made in relation to the metopes which represent mythological subjects of strife.

Joan Connelly in her work entitled *The Parthenon enigma* (2014) discusses the meaning of the Parthenon having pointed out how that meaning has been distorted by varied responses to the monument through the centuries. For some time Connelly had focused on the interpretation of the frieze in the context of two hundred and fifty lines surviving from the lost play by Euripides called *Erechtheus*. She gives a new meaning to the much discussed scene of the handing of the peplos which she sees as a depiction relating to the sacrifice of one of Erechtheus’ daughters to save the city of Athens when threatened by Eumolpus. For Connelly, this slab does not refer to the Panathenaic events but to a heroic act, “the ultimate sacrifice” (Connelly 2014: 165) for the continuity and well-being of Athens.

As the political dominance of Athens declined and momentous developments changed the Greek and Eastern Mediterranean lands, the Parthenon’s original significance for the people of Athens faded away. The cult statue of Athena Parthenos had to be repaired in the 2nd century BCE due to damages it

suffered in a fire. Among the devastations caused by the invasion of Athens by the Heruli, a Germanic tribe in 267 CE, was a tremendous conflagration of the Parthenon which deprived the building of a roof for many years. It was repaired in the 4th century but using terracotta roof tiles, the original ones having been of Pentelic marble as had been the case for the entire building. This roof was smaller than the original and did not extend all the way to the outer colonnade but only to the cella walls. Blocks from other ancient buildings including columns from a stoa were incorporated into the cella (Korres 1994b: 48).

The Acropolis and especially the Parthenon underwent transformation during the Early Christian times as a number of Classical buildings were eradicated while the Parthenon and the Erechtheion were converted into Christian churches, a common practice at the time. When exactly the Parthenon became a Christian church cannot be accurately ascertained but in the age of Justinian it seems that it functioned as such. It may have been dedicated to the Holy Wisdom (Aghiastou Theou Sophias) at first and eventually, to Theotokos (Mother of God) – Atheniotissa (of Athens) or the Virgin obviously a continuation of the cult of Athena Parthenos. The necessary adjustments had to be made in the building so it could function as a Christian place of worship including changing its orientation from E-W to W-E, opening new doors, adding windows and creating murals and mosaics with Christian themes. Despite the damages that these alterations caused in addition to deliberate mutilation of some sculptural decorations, the conversion into a church contributed to the preservation of the building as it continued to be used and maintained. The Christians preserved much of the building and its decorations intact.

In his book *The Christian Parthenon: classicism and pilgrimage in Byzantine Athens*, Antony Kaldellis (2009) claims that the Parthenon played a much more significant role as a Christian church than it had as an ancient temple. Instead of sinking into oblivion as is commonly claimed, Athens became

an important pilgrimage destination in the Byzantine period. It was also in the Byzantine period that the Parthenon provoked antiquarian interest. According to Kaldellis (2009: 4), it was during the period of the Enlightenment that the Byzantines were classified as “oriental” and, “un-Hellenic” and thus the importance of the monument as a Christian church was ignored. Classicism endowed the Parthenon with ideologies that do not correspond to ancient Greek ideas about the monument.

From the 13th to the 15th century Athens fell under Latin domination. A bell tower was added in one of the Parthenon’s western corners and the building was now a Catholic church dedicated again to the worship of Saint Mary of Athens. Eventually, the Acropolis became a fort that housed the Catalan guard.

Athens fell to the Ottomans in 1456 and subsequently the Acropolis continued to be the place where the garrison was stationed while the Parthenon was still a place of worship but now in the form of a mosque with the Christian bell tower modified into a minaret. This mosque was deeply admired by those who travelled to Athens – including the Turkish 17th century traveler Evliya Çelebi – and praised as the most excellent mosque in the world. The Erechtheion housed the harem of the leader of the Turkish garrison. However, these changes did not cause the most severe damages on the Parthenon as the most devastating ones were yet to occur and would be caused by westerners. The first dramatic incident occurred in the context of the Venetian attack under Morosini 1687 (described in Hadziaslani (1987)). In order to face the threat, the Turks undertook a number of defensive works along the western side of the Acropolis for which they used the blocks of the temple of Athena Nike as building material after dismantling this small amphiprostyle temple. A large quantity of gun powder had been deposited inside the Parthenon. The building was bombarded and a mortar bomb found its target as it entered the temple through the roof. The ensuing explosion was cataclysmic. The cella walls, columns, decorations and roof were severely affected, hundreds of people who were inside the temple were killed and the Acropolis

burnt for days. This event left the Parthenon in a ruinous state. Morosini's destructive actions on the Acropolis further included attempts to remove sculptures from the west pediment of the Parthenon but he was not able to accomplish this "mission" as they fell to the ground and shattered. Fortunately a number of drawings of the architectural sculptures had been made ahead of the explosion, possibly by Jacques Carrey, the French Ambassador's painter in 1674 (although the identity of the artist has been recently reconsidered).

The Venetians did not hold on to their conquest of Athens and the Ottomans gained control again in 1688. The garrison was stationed on the Acropolis on which a number of houses were built. A small mosque was constructed among the ruins in the Parthenon, a mosque that could not compare in size and splendor to the one that had been so admired by travelers. Several of the travelers who visited the Acropolis removed small pieces that they found on the ground.

Another fateful event that had critical consequences for the Parthenon concerned Thomas Bruce, known as Lord Elgin, British Ambassador at the Sublime Porte in Istanbul. In 1801-1804 Elgin removed many sculptures which belonged to the pediments, metopes and the frieze. He also removed one of the Caryatids and one Ionic column from the Erechtheion, as well as blocks from the Propylaea and the Temple of Athena Nike. Elgin appointed Giovanni Battista as overseer of this entire venture. Battista was an artist but of a much lesser caliber than Turner whom Elgin preferred but had not chosen because of the steep compensation he had asked for. A key personality involved in the entire undertaking and one who played a decisive role was Reverend Philip Hunt. Not all the pieces of this affair can be put together with certainty but one critical factor that played a role in the support Elgin received from the Sublime Porte was related to political affairs of the time. The French navy had been defeated by Lord Nelson in 1798 and the Sultan saw great benefit in allying with the British in order to safeguard the Ottoman Empire from French hostility.

Central in the controversy surrounding this entire matter is the question of what exactly the authorities specified that Elgin could take. This is directly linked to a letter of permission, a *firman* that he was granted by the Ottoman authorities in Istanbul. The original *firman* no longer exists; there is only an Italian translation of it. Initially, the local authorities in Athens presented obstacles to Elgin's team as they required a fee each time the members wished to enter the Acropolis and allowed them only to make drawings (Rothenberg 1974: 131) Elgin turned to the authorities in Istanbul and received a *firman* which secured his team entrance to the Acropolis without interference and disruption allowing them to make drawings, casts and to conduct excavations. More importantly, it gave them permission to remove any (some?) pieces of stone with inscriptions or figures (Chamberlin 1983: 16; Rothenberg 1974: 134). Questions arise from this statement because of its ambiguity. Did the authorities actually grant Elgin permission to extricate blocks from the buildings themselves or just take what had already fallen off? A further issue often discussed, relates to which extent Elgin might have exploited his diplomatic status in making this agreement with the Sublime Porte. Did he take advantage of it or act as a private citizen? Elgin claimed that the ancient monuments suffered greatly by travelers as well as the Turks who occasionally would crush statues in order to make mortar (Hitchens 1988: 79). Therefore the argument that ensued was that this was a mission to save the antiquities from further destruction.

The realization of this project meant that the building would suffer extensively including the cella walls. Destructive means such as saws were used in order to remove stone mass from the back surfaces of the frieze slabs for the purpose of lightening their weight. Inevitably, as blocks were being extracted, portions of the entablature crumpled. Elgin used his own ship "Mentor" to transport some of the works to England, and as the ship sank off the island of Kythera he even covered the cost for the retrieval of the cargo that had sunk. The extracted ancient works reached England

where in 1816 they were bought by the British Museum at a much lower price (35,000 pounds) than the one expected by Elgin. Before the purchase was decided, the Select Committee debated on the usefulness of this transaction and skepticism was expressed as to whether these works were worth buying or not.

The possession of the marbles by the British Museum has created a huge controversy in recent years. Elgin's arguments focused on the issue of protection from future damage as he claimed with certainty that if the works had been left on site they would be doomed to destruction. In fact some damage which cannot be repaired was inflicted on the Parthenon marbles by conservators in the British Museum many decades ago when they used metallic brushes to scrape their surfaces in the context of the wide spread misconception that classical sculptures were originally completely white in the color of the marble.

Over a number of decades the issue of the Parthenon Marbles' return to Greece has been intensely debated and many claims have been presented by each side: The argument put forth by the British Museum Trustees focuses on the immense value for the public when viewing the marbles in the context of its universal collection. "The British Museum tells the story of cultural achievement throughout the world, from the dawn of human history over two million years ago, until the present day. The Parthenon Sculptures are a significant part of that story" (The Parthenon Sculptures [20-]). According to this line of argument the displays in the British Museum transcend the narrow confines of British history and focus on the ecumenical. Various discussions on cultural heritage include the contention that artifacts which have been displayed in a particular museum for a long time have become an integral part of this nation's tradition.

In many discussions Elgin has been absolved from the accusation of abusing authority in his capacity as ambassador of Britain and has been presented as having acted as a private citizen. It is maintained that he operated within the confines of the law having obtained permission from the authorities at the

time. Other arguments used against the idea of the return include the issue of precedent: more countries will reclaim antiquities that were removed by westerners in the past. Furthermore, the presence of the marbles in the British Museum has supposedly played a major role in the rise of philhellenism and influenced many cultures for which consequently the Parthenon is part of their cultural heritage as well. Arguments of this type have made the issue of ownership more complicated and one that cannot be claimed exclusively by the Greek State.

The Parthenon as a symbol of Greece's national identity is central to the arguments for the return of the marbles and a distinctive point in the continued emphasis on these antiquities versus so many others removed in the past which Greece could reclaim. The idea of the monument's integrity is also stressed, denouncing the deplorable extraction of its decorations as an act of violence against a building for which architecture and decoration were conceived as one. The lack of a proper museum to house these antiquities for a very long time placed the Greek side at a disadvantage in claiming the restitution of the Parthenon works. Now Greece has one of the most impressive museums in the world which could display the Parthenon marbles in close proximity and direct dialogue to the temple itself. This is the best that can be done given the fact that they could never be placed on the monument itself due to the damaging effect of the atmospheric pollution. All remaining decorations from the Acropolis buildings were removed in order to be protected inside the museum a long time ago. The new museum enables the visitor to imagine and understand the original setting and physical environment of the works.

Beyond the legal issues, ethical issues concerning the removal of antiquities in the age of colonialism directly relate to the debate about the return of the marbles. How should Britain view this today versus its actions as an Empire in the past? Despite the various suggestions to reach a solution that would be acceptable to both sides, the arguments remain complex, multifaceted and unresolved.

Clearly the intense focus on the return of the Parthenon marbles versus the return of other very significant ancient Greek antiquities is closely connected to the endorsement of the Parthenon as the symbol of the Modern Greek state. For a long time in the past the field of ancient Greek art history had been dominated by the emphasis on the High Classical period which was viewed as a phase during which Greek art reached its “peak”. Following the 1821 war of independence against the Ottomans the European states played an important role in promoting the link between the newly formed Modern Greek state and the glorious ancient past, the Parthenon being the most suitable symbol for conveying this idea of continuity. As expected, Otto of Bavaria, the designated first king of Greece (1832-62), as well as the architects Karl Friedrich Schinkel and Leo von Klenze featured prominently in the implementation of this ideology. Fortunately, Schinkel’s extravagant plans for building a palace for King Otto on the Acropolis did not materialize. Before that, and for a period of two years during the war (1824-1826), the Parthenon had functioned as a school for girls. Now, it functioned as a space for the display of royal pomp and dissemination of propaganda, promoting the connection with the Athenian golden age: in 1834 in imitation of the Panathenaic procession Otto, having approached the Acropolis on horseback and accompanied by various groups e.g. select citizens, soldiers etc., entered the Parthenon and sat on a throne – this event is described in Connelly (2014: xi). Intended to alleviate the image of Greece as an impoverished, desolate country, the Bavarian monarchy helped to construct this connection, advancing the idea that the king was ruling a nation that had an illustrious past.

As a major proponent of this idea, Leo von Klenze wished for the Acropolis to contain purely the ancient buildings. Expressing contempt for the historical phases that post classical structures represented, he was therefore instrumental in initiating the process of removing any later additions including the mosque and other Ottoman structures. This

approach has been a point of some contention as it resulted in erasing the traces of the medieval past which according to a number of scholars was a significant chapter in the history of Greece. The Acropolis seized to be the post of the garrison. Excavations and restoration projects commenced according to 19th century amateur methods and limited means which often proved to be problematic (Von Klenze’s role and the phases of subsequent work on the Acropolis are discussed by Mallouchou-Tufano (1994)). Haphazard incorporation of scattered ancient blocks and eventually bricks into the buildings made these projects even more the problematic. The material of the temple of Athena Nike was recovered but the first restoration was faulty and had to be followed by another one later on. In 1874 the first museum was built on the Acropolis rock materializing Von Klenze’s idea. The museum was small and unobtrusive but built at an inappropriate spot within the sanctuary and over the remains of ancient structures. It was to be extended later on.

From 1885 on restorations were taken over by Nikolaos Balanos who despite his energy and commitment used highly inappropriate methods ignoring emerging new approaches for restoration in Europe. He caused extensive damage that had to be repaired by later restorers. An example of his inadequate and destructive methods relates to the inclusion of iron clamps to hold blocks together. Greek temples were constructed of masonry without any bonding material. Metal clamps, which were of lead, were used to hold the blocks together but Balanos used iron clamps without coating them in lead. As iron oxidizes it expands and cracks the marble. This is was one of his most serious mistakes that had to be addressed subsequently.

Due to the German respect for the Classical past the Parthenon survived the Second World War unharmed. But the greatest danger in the 20th century came from the atmospheric pollution which proved to be extremely destructive for the monuments. As the industrial sector grew and vehicles increased significantly, acid rain that contained pollutants caused irreversible damage to the monuments

turning portions of the marble into gypsum. This made the need for a major conservation project urgent, something that started in 1977 with the establishment of the Committee for the Conservation of the Monuments of the Acropolis. This committee worked on a strategy based on the expertise of many specialists besides archaeologists and the implementation of highly sophisticated technology. The project has yielded outstanding results. However, the damages caused by the atmospheric pollution remains an acute problem that cannot be solved despite the efforts to find a solution (farfetched ideas in the past included the construction of a transparent dome over the Acropolis). The restoration project has a number of facets ranging from amending earlier restoration mistakes to identifying ancient blocks and placing them correctly on the buildings to making new discoveries in the process such as fragments of a frieze, pediments, evidence concerning acroteria or an old shrine being located in the north peristyle of the Parthenon. Particularly interesting is the reference to the columns of the back room as possibly being Corinthian and the existence of two large windows in the pronaos for providing natural light for the cult statue (Korres 1994a: 176). Insertion of modern materials is made only when absolutely necessary. A material which has significant advantages in these restorations is titanium. The approach is systematic, scientific and based on the most up to date methods.

The threat that the atmospheric pollution posed for the continued future existence of the monuments made the transfer of the sculptural decorations inside the museum an absolute necessity some time ago. The originals were replaced by copies on the buildings themselves. This transfer added to the debate concerning the suitability of the old museum. Not only was its location not appropriate but its size necessitated a very crowded display in improper conditions.

Discussions about the creation of a new museum at a location below the Acropolis called Makrygianni, started and the first architectural competition took place in 1976. None of the proposals could be given first or

second award. Challenges included the shape of the plot and the existence of buildings in the vicinity that could not be demolished due to the important architectural styles they represented. These interfered either with the view to the Acropolis or with the overall aesthetics of the museum premises (the story of the competitions for the museum are described in detail in Philippopoulou (2011)). It took many decades for the project to materialize.

In 1979 a second competition was announced which gave rise to many objections and debates that delayed the submission of proposals. The dispute primarily concerned issues that this particular location posed. The existence of antiquities in the area added to the reservations about the suitability of this lot. Again, the committee did not award a first prize. There was a temporary decision to upgrade the existing museum and not to proceed with the construction of the new one.

The 1982 Unesco World Summit on Cultural Policy in Mexico marked a turning point in the deliberations on the most suitable Acropolis museum. A Recommendation was voted for the return Elgin Marbles to Greece following M. Mercuri's official declaration in her capacity as Minister of Culture, that Greece will claim the return of the Parthenon marbles.

Melina protested against the reference to the Parthenon works in the possession of the British museum as "Elgin marbles". The more suitable and correct title "Parthenon marbles" is currently being used. The need for a new museum was now more urgent but the process would be long and cumbersome. The British Museum argued that Greece did not have a suitable museum to house the Parthenon works. The old museum could not properly accommodate the enormous crowds of visitors that it received annually. There were many other issues that pertained to the storage areas and the displays themselves. It was an overcrowded building in many senses. Lengthy debates ensued and the problems seemed insurmountable. Three locations were suggested: Makrygianni, Dionysos and Koile. Melina had even discussed the issue with I.M. Pei but this collaboration did not

work out. The Greek State decided to hold yet another competition in 1989 which was opened to international architectural firms. The competition was completed in 1990 and the first award was given to Italian architects. Reaction was mixed. In addition to strong or angry statements all kinds of obstacles appeared, including the commencement of the metro project. All these delayed the process and eventually led to the cancellation of the competition.

Melina's legacy following her passing in 1994 was continued by her husband Jules Dassin through the establishment of the Melina Mercouri Foundation (MMF). The mission of the Foundation focuses on the return of the Parthenon marbles but the MMF also played an important role in the construction of the new Acropolis museum.

Problems and complications were not avoided in the process of planning for the new museum but finally the fourth competition was announced in 2001 and the first award was given to Bernard Tschumi who collaborated with the Greek architect Michael Photiades.

The old museum closed on 2 July 2007. The process of removing original decorations from the Parthenon for the sake of preservation was completed. The challenging task of transferring the contents of the museum to the new museum was brilliantly addressed by placing the works in specially prepared crates and lowering them to the new location with three cranes, a process that lasted for over three months.

The Museum is exceptionally welcoming to the visitor starting with the curiosity it instills as one approaches the entrance where antiquities discovered during construction are displayed *in situ* below a transparent glass surface. The same is true for the lobby where a glass floor permits a view of the architectural remains preserved below. The display enables the visitor to perceive the various phases that have been documented on the Acropolis through the study of the monuments and a number of archeological discoveries. This starts with one's ascent through the ground floor where finds from the Acropolis slopes

are displayed, proceeding further up to works of the Archaic period which include remains of temple decorations and dedications to the sanctuary most prominently the korai as well as Early Classical works of the Severe style, all presented in such an innovative way that makes this a genuinely engaging experience. From here the visitor may continue to the top floor where the Parthenon works are displayed and then return to the first floor to view works relating to the temple of Athena Nike, the Propylaia, the Erechtheion with a dazzling presentation of the Caryatids on a balcony and conclude the tour with a range of works from the 5th c BCE to the 5th CE ranging from the Classical to the Hellenistic through the Roman periods.

As the atmospheric pollution has made the removal of the sculptural decorations from the Acropolis buildings absolutely necessary, the proximity of the Parthenon display to the Acropolis rock and the relationship that could be established between the two spaces was crucial. This was addressed in an ingenious way by the architects. The museum top floor in the form of a glass shell is slightly tilted in relation to the floors below, the objective being for this space to have the same orientation as the temple itself. The room is drenched in natural light which creates an experience as close as possible to seeing the works in the open on the Acropolis. Sophisticated technology has been deployed in order to achieve the best results in relation to how light is diffused.

E. Philippopoulou in her book on the Acropolis Museum states that the museum is characterized by extroversion as opposed to the norm which is introversion – museums do not communicate with the outside world in order for the visitor's interest to be channeled toward what is displayed (Philippopoulou 2011: 375). The original frieze slabs along with copies of the missing ones have been placed at a low level on a wall in the middle of the room and the visitor is invited to walk along the four sides which have the same dimensions as the Parthenon cella walls. The metopes are displayed in front of the frieze and in between metallic columns imitating the Parthenon columns. The view of the Acropolis

is glorious and thus a close visual connection is established between this room and the Parthenon which offers a truly unforgettable experience to the visitor.

The review of the Parthenon's reception through the ages is a most revealing endeavor that adds to the fascination that this monument can exert on the viewer. The Parthenon's rich legacy for humanity

interwoven with all the assumptions and meanings that the West has assigned to it emphasizes now more than ever the unquestionable importance of its correct conservation. Today one can feel reassured that the Parthenon, the other Acropolis buildings and their sculptural decorations are being cared for in the most appropriate and responsible way so they can be enjoyed by generations to come.

THOMAS, K. O Partenon ateniense: recepção e exposição. R. *Museu Arq. Etn.*, 28: 31-41, 2017.

Resumo: Nesse artigo, o Partenon é considerado a partir do contexto de múltiplos significados a ele atribuídos pelo Ocidente. Alterações e danos sofridos ao longo do tempo são igualmente incluídos na análise. Eventos fatídicos dentro da turbulenta história da Grécia afetaram tanto o estado de conservação do Partenon como também acrescentaram a um debate que focou esse monumento como a mais importante construção clássica. Foco esse que levou à construção de um fantástico museu em Atenas.

Palavras-chave: Partenon; História Antiga; Patrimônio; Museu.

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