

DIMITRIS DAMASKOS

Archaeology and National Identity in the Modern Greek Museum *

As was only to be expected, the founding of the Greek state in 1830 marked a confrontation with the past, both distant and not so distant. A past which differed in glory and splendour from the abject and utterly uncertain present nevertheless provided the necessary guarantees which ensured the newly formed state existence and a reason to be part of the European states being created in the nineteenth century.

Perhaps the most important identifying feature which shaped the character of the Greek state in the nineteenth century was the constant attempt to demonstrate continuity. The inhabitants of the new state needed to prove to themselves and to others what close ties they had with the ancient Greeks, ties which were pointed up through the language and the supposed common line of descent. This was reinforced by the ideological inclinations of the country's government under the Bavarian King Otto and his successors, who were, unsurprisingly, adherents of the classicizing movement then sweeping Europe. Thus, to give some examples, the structural development of Athens slavishly followed the Neo-Classical style in the construction of the great public and even private buildings. At the same time *katharevousa* was adopted as the official language of the state and a corresponding Hellenization of any place-names, which showed that in the past other peoples, in no way related to the ancient Greeks, had passed through the glorious land of Hellas, was gradually accomplished.

The myth of continuity was supported in academic terms by the supreme historian of the period, Konstandinos Paparrigopoulos. In his monumental work *Ιστορία του ελληνικού έθνους* [*History of the Greek People*] (published between 1860 and 1876), he sets out in great detail the principal argument of the day, emphasizing for the first time with such intensity in Greek historiography the role of Byzantium as the connecting link between antiquity and the present. He shows a Greek race which had survived through the centuries, maintaining an astounding cohesion and unchanging character, without rift or rupture throughout its age-old history. The citizens of the new state were all Greek by descent and

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Orthodox by religion, given that the new Hellenism was propped up by Ancient Greek civilization and the Byzantine tradition. Anything that disturbed that linear development was a foreign body, which Hellenism resisted, thus maintaining its cohesive structure. This applied to the periods when Greek territory was ruled by the Romans, the Franks and the Ottomans, periods known in Greek as the Romaiokratia (i.e. the period of Roman rule), the Frangokratia and Tourkokratia respectively. The importance that Byzantium acquired in its role of maintaining continuity was such that we should not be surprised by the fact that, though Byzantium was in effect the continuation of the Eastern Roman Empire, the centuries of its rule were never referred to as the "Vyzantinokratia". The Greek people thus emerged as somehow or other the only ones to keep alive the Byzantine heritage, that is the inheritance of a civilization which had stretched far beyond the narrow confines of the Greek state.

The idea of continuity, not just in the Greek example, is recognized nowadays by academics as a construct, on which the creation of national identities and a collective consciousness can be based. If we ask whether the collective subconscious of the Greek people entered into this knowingly, I think the answer is simple and spontaneous: this kind of attitude, which is inculcated in us as representing unshakeable values, is very difficult to rearticulate or resist. The fabrication of an eternally united people was the overarching political campaign espoused by the Greek state in the first decades of its existence, the consequences of which had a decisive effect on the way the Greek state looked at itself from then on and how it promoted and continues to promote itself to this day, not just on the European but on the international stage. The perception of the Greek race as an "undivided and unified" entity known as Hellenism, which has managed to be an outstanding success down the centuries, constituted and still to a large extent constitutes the great illusion on which generations of modern Greeks were raised. And it is not at all surprising that Paparrigopoulos's antiquated, multi-volume history is doing the rounds again today, supplemented with material about the intervening years, made available in serialized form in the magazines of Sunday newspapers or in independent editions, advertised as "our nation's precious heritage".

The question which arises is: to what extent has archaeology contributed to creating this perception of so-called national identity for Greeks today, and conversely to what extent

has the discipline of archaeology in Greece been influenced by the so-called continuity? In this paper I shall deal with some characteristic examples. My aim is to show the way in which the myth of continuity has become something which fundamentally influences the manner in which antiquity and its material remains has been presented in large Greek cultural institutions, whose policies in turn have determined the public's image of the past.

Archaeology and ethnography, especially in their early stages, were constructed to support the idea of continuity, of Hellenism. As a discipline, which is concerned with the material remains of past ages, archaeology was called upon to confirm the official position of the state. The excavations, with their impressive finds and the reconstructions of monuments, were a decisive factor in creating archaeological sites, albeit in primitive form, which would become visible evidence of Greek glory. Ethnography made a similar contribution by not just recording contemporary customs, but also tracing them back to corresponding ancient practices in confirmation of the much desired continuity.

From as early as the first years of King Otto's reign the Archaeological Service was a government agency created to protect, record and dig up ancient monuments. And it was quite soon clear that the numerous finds from the early excavations in Attica would have to be housed in a large museum. Temporary solutions were found in the first decades of the Modern Greek state, but it was 1866 before two wealthy Greeks offered a suitable site and the necessary funds for its construction. The museum was designed in a strictly Neoclassical style by the Bavarian Ludwig Lange and, though in the early years it was called "Central Museum", under Prime Minister Harilaos Trikoupis it was officially renamed by royal decree The National Archaeological Museum, the largest archaeological museum in Greece. At that time, i.e. in Paparrigopoulos's day, the connotations and goals of a national institution, such as an archaeological museum, were clear: it was meant to store and exhibit the material remains, which provided indisputable evidence of the continuity of Hellenism. Nowadays no one asks why the Athens Archaeological Museum is called the "National" Museum. It is because from the very start of the Greek state the archaeologist was principally charged with digging up and recording the past and at the same time with defending the nation's ideals. He was appointed as a sort of guardian of values, as someone with a profound understanding of history, fit to pronounce on matters which impinged on political issues, as we shall see in what follows, as well as on any kind

of subject related to antiquities. Gradually and systematically the protection of monuments came to be equated with the protection of the Greek nation.

There were two occasions in the course of the twentieth century when questions of national identity came strongly to the fore. These periods left a deep mark on Greek society as regards its relationship with antiquity and the past.

In the inter-war years Greece emerged traumatized from the defeat of its troops on the Turkish coast and the simultaneous withdrawal in 1922 of the ethnic Greeks living in the area and in the Turkish hinterland. This defeat ended once and for all any visions of extending the country's borders eastwards. Apart from the economic problems, the ensuing influx of refugees to the Greek state created serious social issues, which went on for many years before they were properly confronted. As a result of this debacle, the country turned in on itself and attempted to redirect the aspirations of Greek society.

These troubled times saw the emergence of a group of writers and artists in the 1930s, who made it their main concern to look for what they called Greekness in their works, in other words to pin down the features which define the Greek character of the works. Paparrigopoulos's threefold formula: Antiquity, Byzantium and Modern Greece, reappears with a vengeance, as does the preoccupation with ethnography. The two Nobel laureates, the poets George Seferis and Odysseas Elytis were members of this group, known as the "Generation of the Thirties", as were many other intellectuals, and they were viewed by subsequent generations as the most important group of artists in twentieth-century Greece.

Their attempt to define Greekness was a significant factor in this assessment, given that other tendencies had emerged in the same period, which were directly opposed to Hellenocentrism, being inspired by the European Modernist movement, and yet they were not taken up with the same enthusiasm. The identification of Greek society with the preoccupations of the Generation of the Thirties was such that, when the military dictatorship, declared in 1936 by Ioannis Metaxas, imposed their Greco-Christian cultural model, the representatives of this group completely identified with it and went along with the dictatorship, recognizing a common aim, regardless of ideological standpoint.

A second period in which archaeology was called upon to contribute to the defense of national interests comes towards the end of the twentieth century. Another exploration of what was meant by Greek identity was prompted by the emergence of the Macedonian

question. The break-up of Yugoslavia and its fragmentation into what were more or less nation states sparked off an introverted reaction in Greek society, which felt itself threatened by the avowed intent of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to present itself as an autonomous state with the name Macedonia. Reactions were not limited to the numerous demonstrations which took place in Greece and abroad to protest about the name (fig 1), or the skirmishes, mostly in the newspapers, between the opposing camps. Archaeology did its bit by organizing exhibitions on ancient Macedonia, which aimed to "sensitize" the public abroad to the Macedonian question by showing off the antiquities which had been excavated in Northern Greece, mostly in recent decades, and with other scholarly publications (fig. 2).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

In the light of all this, with regard to museum collections, the twenty-first century began in Greece with official opening ceremonies in two large museums which were re-displaying their old collections either in renovated or entirely new spaces. And one of them was the Benaki Museum.

In 1930 the Benaki Museum was the first private museum to be founded in Athens. Antonis Benakis, a wealthy Alexandrian Greek, had established himself in Athens a few years

earlier and turned his home into a museum to house his extensive collections (figs 3-4). Antonis Benakis's family home was in the centre of downtown Athens, next to the National Gardens and what was then the royal palace, and it had been an imposing private residence dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century. The collection was made up mostly of antiquities from Egypt from the Hellenistic and Roman periods and a large Islamic collection, as well as works of other periods from the Eastern Mediterranean. The exhibits gradually increased over the years, thanks above all to large donations but also to purchases which filled the gaps in the collections.

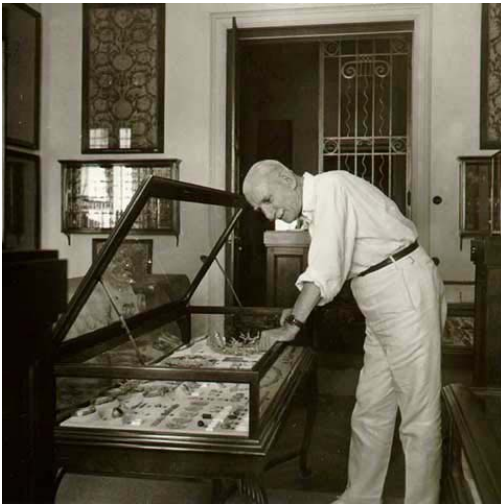


Fig 3.



Fig. 4.

The constraints on space in the original building led to the museum being closed between 1993 and 2000 in order to refurbish it structurally and museologically. The grand opening in June 2000 signaled a new period in the museum's development. The main feature of the new display is the spreading of the exhibits and the archival collections over several buildings. The main building housed the main body of the collection. As for the large Islamic collection, this was displayed four years later in two Neoclassical buildings as an Annex to the Museum. A new Annex is to be opened next year, housing a reconstruction of the atelier and a large number of paintings by an important painter of the thirties, Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika. The new Annex will function simultaneously as a tribute to the so called Generation of the Thirties. Alongside Ghika's paintings will be displayed works by other artists of the period and later. This new project will complete the Museum's display of Greek twentieth-century culture.

The interesting point as regards the argument I am developing in this paper is that, due to lack of space in the main building, the Islamic objects had to be separated from the main building and displayed in an independent museum. In this way the main body of the collection remains intact. In every promotional pamphlet, in the museum guide and on its website the goal of the institution is emphasized: "This group of collections comprises many distinct categories totalling more than 40,000 items, illustrating the character of the Greek world through a spectacular historical panorama: from antiquity and the age of Roman domination to the medieval Byzantine period; from the fall of Constantinople (1453) and the centuries of Frankish and Ottoman occupation to the outbreak of the struggle for independence in 1821; and from the formation of the modern state of Greece (1830) down to 1922, the year in which the Asia Minor disaster took place" (fig. 5).



Fig. 5

The Museum depicts in an entirely clear way, and perhaps uniquely in the Greek museum world, the development of Hellenism, in the form in which it became entrenched as ideology from the nineteenth century onwards. Some historical oversimplifications, such as including the Neolithic and Cycladic exhibits in the broad sweep of Hellenism, or the acceptance of the Greekness of all the exhibits, above all the automatic categorization of Byzantine and more modern works as artifacts of Greek origin, are understandable when the absolutely fundamental influence of the Paparrigopoulos view of history on Greek society is acknowledged. One can also understand the museum's status in the cultural and

social life of Athens (and to a lesser extent in the rest of Greece) from its foundation up to the present day. As powerful members of Athens' haute bourgeoisie, the Benaki family became leading lights in Athenian society. Up to the death of its founder the museum was a model for the way in which the cosmopolitan spirit of a family from Alexandria could shape a serious museological and collecting policy in a country, which at that time was facing serious identity problems (figs 6-7).



Fig. 6

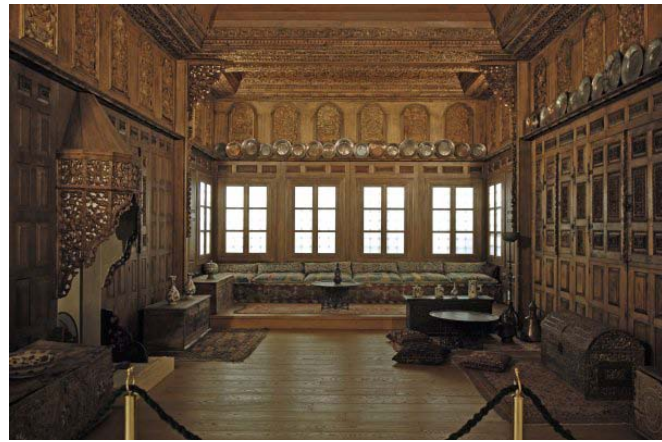


Fig. 7

The recent re-display of the greater part of the collections has moved towards developing a broad survey of Hellenism, while keeping the display plan suited to a big house which opens its rooms to visitors to exhibit its wide-ranging collections. And it is precisely this old bourgeois mentality which has ensured the continuation of the dominant establishment ideology in twentieth-century Greece. It would be rather odd to expect a radical approach to museology and display in a museum which, before being converted to a museum, was the private residence of one of the most powerful bourgeois families in Athens, whose family members played a key role in shaping the Greek ideological and political establishment in the early decades of the twentieth century. Thus, as the broad sweep of Hellenism unfolds, it reflects the ideological stance of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, which was from the very beginning the pre-eminent supporter of the myth of continuity, even in the case of collections of works from antiquity, Byzantium and the so-called folk

culture of the post-Byzantine period. The Benaki is a "bourgeois" museum, which uses its exhibits to project the image it has of itself to the visitor.

Some of you, or probably most of you, may have already visited the Museum and you may be wondering about the photos I just showed you. And you're right. These pictures are not from the Benaki Museum, nor even from a Greek Museum. Housed in an old nineteenth-century military academy, these exhibits is part of the collections in the Museum of Bitola in FYROM. Bitola, formerly called Monastir, used to be a wealthy Ottoman town until the early twentieth century, as can still be seen from the extant urban architecture of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Under the suburbs of the modern city excavations have revealed the ancient city of Heraklea Lynkestis, founded in the mid-fourth century BC by Philip II. Part of the ancient city has been heavily restored in the last few decades and the ancestral line between Philip of Macedon and Bitola's modern-day inhabitants is very well demonstrated, mainly in recent monuments erected in the center of the modern city (fig. 8).



Fig. 8

The partially refurbished Museum of Bitola in many ways demonstrates the deep-rooted perception of a line of continuity between Antiquity and modern times, in which there is a striking resemblance to the way the history of Hellenism is displayed at the Benaki Museum. Bitola's history covers a time span which includes prehistory, the Hellenistic,

Roman and Byzantine periods, right up to the struggle for liberation of the region from the Ottoman Empire and the political struggles of the first half of the twentieth century.

The former military academy where the museum is now housed offers no particularly interesting architectural solutions for the museums' exhibits. There is a huge rectangular room which has been divided lengthwise into two uneven parts. The visitor comes into the room at the point where the prehistoric collection is displayed. Unfortunately for the supporters of the notion of an uninterrupted Macedonian bloodline between distant past and modern times, there are no significant Hellenistic finds from the time of Philip and Alexander, but the visitor finds himself confronting the cast of a miniature Roman copy of the classical Athena Parthenos by Pheidias in the middle of the archaeological collection (the original Roman copy itself is displayed in the small collection on the archaeological site). At the end of this huge room there is a folk art collection of garments and weapons from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The visitor has to turn right and then back towards the entrance behind the dividing wall to find the rest of the collection: Byzantine icons, the reconstruction of a living room from one of the city's nineteenth-century bourgeois town-houses as well as documents from the so-called Macedonian liberation movement from the early decades of the twentieth century. The collection ends with post-war paintings by local painters (figs 9-13).



Fig. 9



Fig 10



Fig. 11

The museological display stresses the desired linear continuity, which – due to the constraints of the museum premises – is underlined by the awkward placement of the exhibits along the long walls. The similarities between Bitola and the Benaki Museum, as I have already stressed, are striking when it comes to the way they each demonstrate the Grand Narrative of their national heritage. Both museums subscribe to the ideological concept of an unbreakable line which unites the distant past with more recent times. But above all, the concept behind both institutions is the product of a nineteenth-century ideology. This is easily explained if one looks at the formation of both states, based on the axiom of the nation-state.



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

The Greek state was the consequence of nineteenth-century European classicism, which favored the construction of a state based on the glorious past of fictive ancestors who had lived on the same soil. The continuity had to be invented, in order to maintain the existence of the state. The Republic of Macedonia, founded by General Tito after the Second World War as part of Yugoslavia, owes its existence to the Yugoslav leader's determination to stop any splinter movements among the Bulgarian and Albanian minorities living in the

area. But most of all, as I have already said, the break-up of Yugoslavia in the nineties led to the forging of the "Macedonian" national identity and subsequent unsubstantiated historical claims, such as the declaration that the inhabitants of the state were directly descended from Alexander.

In both cases a nation-state had to prove a long past in order to affirm its substance. But there is a major difference between the two, in relation to the subject of this lecture: the state ideology of Hellenism as displayed in the Benaki Museum presents a standpoint which has remained completely unchanged for decades. In Bitola, on the other hand, the same narrative is presented from their point of view, as the history of the Macedonian people. But the political situation in the Balkans in the last couple of decades has encouraged a resurgence of nationalism, and it is now presented as part of a current ideological debate, which, for all that it may sometimes become overheated, must be confronted. The quite different political situation of earlier years, in which Yugoslavia found itself isolated for a large part of the twentieth century, did not allow ethnic issues to come to the surface. Generally speaking matters of nationhood seem to continue to cause heated debate in states that have been segregated within larger multinational or multilingual political entities.

I will close this examination study with a reference to the supreme ideological symbol of Modern Greece, the Parthenon and the other monuments on the Acropolis. The building projects on the Acropolis reflect the views of the Greek state as regards the way in which it has looked at the country's glorious past from the nineteenth century onwards. From the very first years of King Otto's reign reconstruction projects and small-scale excavations were carried out on this emblematic Greek monument. These projects intensified in subsequent years and continue unabated to this day, mostly as regards the restoration of the monuments. Over and above developments in the restorations from age to age, which kept pace with scholarly progress, their main feature was the dismantling and "purging" of all the buildings testifying to the presence of the Franks and the Ottomans. As the Bavarian architect Leo von Klenze characteristically remarked, the later buildings were "relics of barbarism" which had to be got rid of. The "relics of the glorious past", on the other hand, were to be regarded "as a firm basis for a glorious present and future."

In this historical context the rock of the Acropolis acquired an epithet in modern times: it is called the Sacred Rock, as if the sanctity of the rock in antiquity had automatically been transferred to a later age. And that is its official appellation nowadays, though this epithet has also imprinted itself on the consciousness of Greek society. And this same obsession with "cleansing" the Acropolis of anything which does not recall the Ancient Greek past still provokes discussions about issues related to the monuments of the Acropolis, and matters connected with them, as we shall see.

Immediately after the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974, at the instigation of the then prime minister, Constantine Karamanlis, who in the 1950s had played a leading role in reconstructing the Herod Atticus theatre for performances in the summer Athens Festival, a committee was formed to restore the monuments of the Acropolis. From the inter-war period onwards the reconstruction acquired yet another purpose, that of displaying the monuments to the ever increasing influx of visitors, foreigners and otherwise, who wanted to admire the buildings on the Acropolis (Fig. 14). The restoration works on the rock in the post-dictatorship period were also part of the attempts being made by the politically and morally damaged Greek state to take its place among the other European states after the seven years of the junta, which had proved to be a very great constraint on the development of Greek society.



Fig. 14

The 1980s were a turning point as regards issues relating to the Acropolis, when the then Minister for Culture, the celebrated actress Melina Merkouri, strenuously reiterated the demand for the return of the Parthenon Marbles from the British Museum. Ever since this application has been supported by the whole of Greek society with emotional outpourings about "ownership" of the antiquities and returning them to the place where democracy was born and the foundations of Western civilization were laid. Once again almost the whole of the Greek community, backed by the majority of Greek archaeologists, who have come to see themselves as the guardians of the ideals of Greek society, is showing signs of behavior which goes back to the fundamental policies and ideologies of the nineteenth century.

The demand for the return of the marbles was combined with demands for the construction of a new museum, which would fulfill a dual purpose: in addition to housing the finds from excavations in a large, new museum, it could respond to the critics who claimed the Greeks were unable to provide adequate care for the antiquities they already had in their museums. Even before the necessary preparatory studies were begun and architectural plans chosen, the new museum had become a propaganda issue under the guise of a "national struggle" for the return of the antiquities.

The choice of the site and of an architect was subject of lengthy disagreements. In the interim extensive excavations were carried out on the construction site on the south side of the Acropolis, in order to uncover the antiquities it concealed. However, the building of the museum also caused a series of intense debates and disagreements over another issue of special interest. In order to build it, neighboring blocks of flats, and even some on one of the most beautiful and architecturally interesting streets in Athens, *odos Dionysiou Areopagitou* (which runs directly underneath the Acropolis), had to be compulsorily purchased. Two of them, situated next to the proposed entrance to the museum, were emblematic buildings of the inter-war period in the art deco style and listed buildings, protected by government decree (figs 15-16). And yet it was the Greek government itself which decided they should be demolished, though this was finally averted after interventions by many individuals and by the Supreme Court. Supporters of the plans for demolition tried to undermine the value of these buildings, stressing the national interest. Moreover the fact was stressed that in the initial architectural concept for the museum an

important element was the visual connection between the Parthenon sculpture and the Parthenon itself, seen through the glass-fronted building (figs 17-18).



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

Brushing aside the various pretexts put forward for the Greek government's desire to demolish the two listed monuments, one realizes that behind it all is the same old ideological stance relating to the past and its management. Even if we accept the argument about the visual connection between the sculptures in the museum and the monument on the rock, a visit to the site quickly undermines the argument, given that the Parthenon is clearly visible from all parts of that side of the building facing the rock. This is not the

issue. It is rather that – just as in the nineteenth century all the Frankish and Ottoman structures were gradually cleared away – nowadays the recent past gets in the way of the direct connection between the classical past and the present. In the nineteenth century the Ottoman buildings on the Acropolis were an unwelcome reminder of a past, which had to be erased so that the newly formed Greek state could be shown to be a worthy successor to the Ancient Greek heritage. The attempt to wipe out any evidence which could stand in the way of the Greek state's need for confirmation of its independent existence in those early years can be explained in the light of the ideological and political climate of the time.

Yet in the recent case this move betrays an obsession with superannuated ideological models. One can perceive a desire to create an archaeological site purged of later interventions, where the visitor can enter and converse directly with an idealized, even imaginary antiquity, which s/he approaches reverently, placing it on the highest level of a notional scale of cultural values. And to an even greater extent, the wiping out of the material remains of the intervening periods, even of the very recent past, continues to be a desideratum for the Greek public, whenever it is necessary to make some sort of connection between the Greek state and Classical antiquity. In this case the dogma of continuity is being by-passed, as the purpose is different. It is not exactly the continuity which is being stressed but the direct relationship with Classical antiquity, because in that way ownership of the works currently outside Greece is demonstrated. The Greek DNA, which is "evident in the Parthenon sculptures", as a foreign journalist wrote in connection with the recent opening of the new museum, must be made clear in every possible way. According to the architects Bernard Tschumi and Michalis Fotiadis, the sculptures converse with the ancient building, by-passing anything more modern which intervenes between the museum and the rock. Thus a space is created in which an attempt is made to create an intuitive appreciation of antiquity. The visitor enters this space, which must be absolutely devoid of representations of other periods, so that the experience can be correspondingly "pure".

The same point of view represents the stance of some archaeologists, architects, heritage management experts and other groups involved in Acropolis issues concerning the old museum on the rock. The nineteenth century building is now standing empty, with all its famous former exhibits in the new building. The real debate which has not yet been launched is about the future of this building. Should it be demolished in order to clear the

rock of all non-classical remains and maybe to continue any excavations on the site which could be useful to a better understanding of the ancient topography? Or should it remain as historical evidence of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century archaeologists' work and serve as a small museum displaying the history of the excavations? As you may guess, the subject is likely to provoke an exchange of arguments on both sides, which is no bad thing, especially for the historians of the future.

In June 2009 the new Acropolis Museum was opened with all due ceremony. Every publication, report or declaration from the government trumpeted the largely propagandistic aim of the museum: i.e. to be a museum worthy of its exhibits, fit to accommodate the sculptures currently in the British Museum in perpetuity. The visitor, whether an expert or not, can see at close quarters a large part of the most important works of Ancient Greek sculpture, something which was quite often impossible on account of the confined space in the little museum formerly situated on the Acropolis itself. On the grand staircase leading from the ground to the first floor the finds from the temples on the slopes of the Acropolis are displayed. The first floor houses the finds from the Archaic period up to the Late Antique. The second floor is entirely devoted to the sculptural decoration of the Parthenon, with the display space having the same dimensions and the same orientation as the monument itself (fig. 19).



Fig. 19

The last room on the first floor makes an impression: it is virtually empty and presents an exceptionally fragmentary picture. Whereas the exhibits from the Archaic and Classical

periods are numerous, giving the visitor a very good picture of which finds came from which excavations on the Acropolis, the period from Alexander the Great until the end of Antiquity (represented by the last Attic portraits of the fifth century AD) i.e. a period of some 800 years, is represented by just six portrait busts and three or four other sculptures. Given that a host of sculptures have been found in excavations, this is striking. The extant Hellenistic and Roman portrait sculptures alone, which were published as a corpus a few years ago, amount to about 120 pieces. In any event there is no way that lack of display space can be blamed.

The explanation seems to lie elsewhere and is connected with the view modern-day Greece has of certain periods of Greek history, as I have already mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The whole presentation of the museum's display, both before and after the official opening ceremonies, emphasized the progression of Athenian civilization up to the high Classical period, i.e. the age of the Parthenon. Just as the Museum is in part a propaganda tool to back up the claim for the return of the Parthenon marbles, so too the exhibits themselves assist in this goal. Anything later than the Parthenon and above all from Alexander onwards is downplayed to an outrageous degree. As is well known, Alexander the Great may have helped to spread Greek civilization to the farthest parts of the Orient, but the urban centers of the Hellenistic world were subsequently removed from Greek dominion. And it was all the more galling that later on it was the Romans who were ruling over Greek territory, taking away the autonomy of the Greek cities.

The exhibition of the new Acropolis Museum obsessively repeats the fossilized tactics and ideés fixes of earlier periods. The highpoint of Greek civilization is still deemed to be the height of Athenian Classical civilization and anything thereafter cannot be as worthy. It seems likely that Winckelmann's views on assessing the developmental phases of Ancient Greek art, which date back to the eighteenth century, are still valid for a large part of the archaeological community.

Looking at all the instances I have described shows, albeit in somewhat summary fashion, the deeply rooted conviction in the Greek collective consciousness and above all in the dominant ideology, as expressed in state and individual cultural policy, as to the continuity of Hellenism. The progression from antiquity to the present day has no rifts or ruptures, only continuity, because the development of history and of cultures is a closed system of

enduring values, unadulterated by any otherness. In this progression from the most distant past to the present, antiquity continues to represent the highpoint of the journey. And as for the Greeks, we learnt at school that we are their only descendants, the ones who are really entitled to manage their material remains. This explains why the slogan which dominated the numerous demonstrations in the 90s about the Macedonian question was the introverted and one-sided "Η Μακεδονία είναι ελληνική" (Macedonia is Greek) and why the Parthenon marbles must be returned to the place where they were created.

Nowadays one can understand why the newly formed Greek government needed to impose the myth of continuity in order to shore up its independence. These kinds of "invented traditions" are well known in cases of states which have gained their independence after being a satellite of some larger power or which are going through the process of decolonization (fig. 20). The issue which remains for Greek society and more especially for archaeology today is that of actually facing up to the myth for what it is and accepting the effect it has had on the collective subconscious. Despite the fact that it is difficult, not just for the academic community but for Greek society, to renegotiate the notion of continuity, given the power it has developed over all these years, a reappraisal could free the Greek society from an ideological straitjacket.

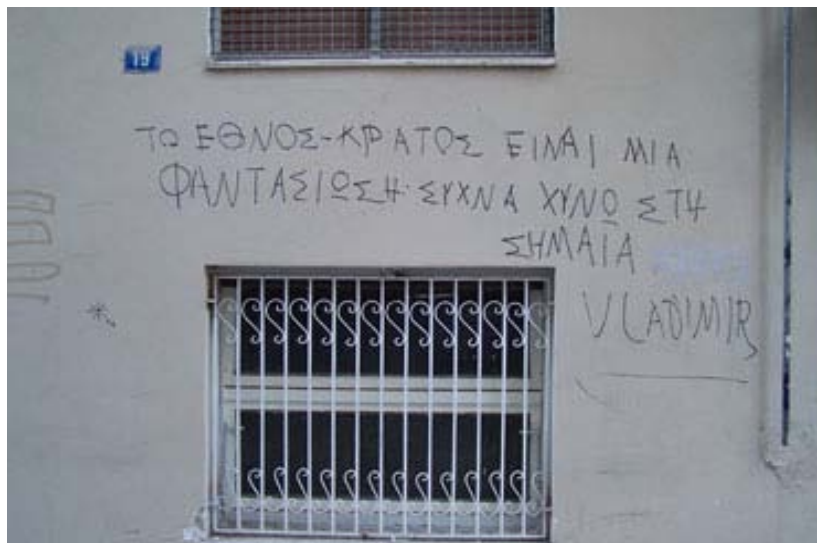


Fig. 20

This straitjacket represents the way antiquity is viewed. To give one small, but typical example: a few days after the official opening of the Acropolis Museum the archaeologists

banned photography inside the building for no obvious reason. This policy is directly opposed to the opening up of the new museum to the "community", which the President of the Organization for the Construction of the New Acropolis Museum, an archaeologist himself, had proclaimed. It also flies in the face of the insistently declared policy of demanding the "return of the marbles". With actions like this Greek archaeologists are declaring what they stand for directly and indirectly: that is that they, through the appropriate government bodies, are the only ones who have the right to handle the material remains of antiquity as they like. The entrenched perception of the archaeologist as the connoisseur and guardian of the nation's historical treasures makes the Greek public surround them with an aura of reverence and respect. This combination sometimes still allows the appropriation of antiquities for the benefit of specific professional groups, which, to quote Michel Foucault, have the knowledge and hence the power.

Let us take another, recent example. In the celebrations of last year's National Day in Greece a small boy of African origin was photographed in traditional Greek costume and holding a small, plastic Greek flag in his hand (fig. 21). This photograph was described in a nationalist blog as "a disgrace". The photograph was at the time very topical for another reason, given that the present government had announced its intention of granting Greek nationality to immigrants who were born in Greece of parents living legally in the country. While in many European countries this step is automatic, the majority of the Greek community finds it hard to accept because, among other things, it touches on issues of national identity. How can the homogeneity of nation states, which the Greek citizen has been taught to believe in, be overturned?



Fig. 21

Can the myth of continuity still be a fundamental axiom in Greek society, above all at an institutional level? I insist on the word 'institutional', as any changes which might potentially emerge from the re-shaping and re-orientation of the collective subconscious of a society, need the necessary support from those who shape the dominant ideological tendency. The problem which arises in countries based on the ideology of the nation state is that it is difficult to query the existing status quo. Yet given the rapid developments on the international, socio-political stage, one wonders what would have to change in the Greek reality and how, so that Greek society could find a way forward to a reality, which no longer corresponds to the circumstances of earlier periods. The constantly changing demographic landscape, with people moving from countries with weak economies to those with greater possibilities of absorbing their labor, shapes the profile of Greek society, which is becoming ever more multicultural, as well as that of classical archaeology.

Do you look on the cultural goods of past centuries as something which you have to protect because you consider them "your own" cultural heritage, or do cultural goods transcend the current borders which have been created in recent centuries? The question: "Who owns antiquity?" is once again a matter of intense debate in the international academic community, a question which is also being asked in Greece, whether on account of the Parthenon Marbles or other antiquities which are the subject of claims by countries from which they were exported illegally. The myth of continuity "exacerbates" the arguments, which, in Greece at least, revolve entirely around questions of ownership, without facing up to the fact that the parameters which created the ideological debates of the nineteenth century need renegotiating. To give a very simple, even oversimplified, but characteristic example: on Facebook there is a Greece-based group called "Hands on: archaeologists in action", which is very informative about various current archaeological matters worldwide. Whenever there is a post about looted antiquities, then most comments say something along the lines of what a pity that these artefacts are no longer in their place of origin, i.e. Greece. Even the famous Venus de Milo in the Louvre was once the subject of bitter remarks, declaring that this statue should be back where it belonged.

Summing up the volume "*A Singular Antiquity. Archaeology and Hellenic Identity in twentieth-century Greece*" two years ago, I concluded as follows:

“If one considers that the Greek state was never in reality made up of just Greeks, then the inflexibilities of archaeology in Greece can gradually be done away with. Thus the discipline will accept that its foremost duty is to give equal protection, care and due eminence to all the cultural goods found on Greek soil, regardless of their identity and not to draw up a national ideological program on the basis of the antiquities. Only then will the antiquities cease to be "our" national heritage in the collective subconscious and become something that belongs to everyone, transcending the often suffocating embrace of nationalism”.

In the foregoing I have described a condition in the archaeological matters in Greece that seems not to be flawless by this suffocating embrace of nationalism. But is it the case for archaeology in Greece as a whole? I will end this lecture with a very personal remark. In recent years I have been working regularly in the Museum of Kavala, on the shores of Eastern Macedonia, preparing to publish the sculptures in the museum. The building itself is from the sixties, and has never attracted masses of visitors. A new wing was built in recent years to house the reconstructed columns of the Parthenos temple of the early fifth century BC. The Parthenos was venerated in the region as another aspect of the hunter goddess Artemis. The temple is located on the hill above the modern city, where in antiquity there was a city called Neapolis. Only a few remains from the temple survive nowadays, mostly capitals, but they are extremely important for Late Archaic/Early Classical Ionian architecture. The display with the reconstruction of the columns is really impressive, as you can see from the photos I took this summer when I visited the Museum and saw the new wing for the first time. The visitor, after admiring the architectonic remains turns to the right, where there is a small corridor-like room with the history of the city of Neapolis. At the end of the room I was struck by the display of three gravestones. The archaeologists had had the idea of putting some relatively modern funerary monuments found in the city of Kavala which reveal its recent past next to the Roman ones and the late antique finds from the site. Looking closer one sees an Ottoman gravestone from the eighteenth century, a Greek one from the nineteenth and finally a Jewish one from the early twentieth century (fig. 22). The display makes clear Kavalas' multicultural past, something which was the norm for most Greek cities until the first half of the twentieth century, and especially in Macedonia. The Museum finishes its exhibition with these three pieces that

show an alternative, really simple but effective way of showing a different past and not just the sterile fixation on the continuity of the nation.



Fig. 22

In his article in “*A Singular Antiquity. Archaeology and Hellenic Identity in twentieth-century-Greece*” and in his book “*The Nation and its Ruins*” Yannis Hamilakis has posed the rhetorical question as to whether the traces of the non-Greek civilizations will find a place in the display of the history of the rock at some time in the future in the New Acropolis Museum. He has also pointed out a stone block from the Erechtheion which has an Ottoman inscription on it and was lying somewhere near the Classical building. It was, of course, wishful thinking on his part to suppose that this might be of interest, since there was never any intention on the part of the powers that be to bring up such matters; quite the contrary. The implications of the New Museum's demand for the return of the Parthenon Marbles suggest there would definitely not be any space left for the display of any alternative choices.

Kavala is quite a different case. It's a small museum, there is no Great Idea behind the display concept, one cannot even draw a line between early and late antiquity, due to the

chronological scattering of the material. The city's local history still plays an important part in the collective consciousness of the inhabitants and subsequently of the archaeologists who come from the region.

Once more it seems that the contradiction that emerged in the debate about Modernism vs. Postmodernism, i.e. between *Grande Histoire* and "small-scale" history, is present in the way the past is displayed and presented. And somehow it seems that narrating small histories may be some times more effective in giving us a deeper understanding of our distant and not so distant past than trying to show the big picture. Time will show if in the new century a new way of confronting the past will emerge. But this is certainly a topic for the archaeologies and the archaeologists of the future.