The New Acropolis Museum: Forging Identity through Archaeology, Architecture, and Preservation Efforts

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Nancy Miller

May 2010

Acknowledgment

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those people who played a role in the development of this paper. I am greatly indebted to the assistance of Professor Andrea Berlin, who offered me guidance and support while thinking of how to approach this topic, and always offered honest and objective advice. I would also like to thank my advisor Nancy Miller, who encouraged me throughout the writing process. I owe a great thanks to Professor Robert Mack, who always supported my research in areas where preservation and archaeology overlapped. I am also greatly indebted to my parents, Becky and Ahmed Elrasheedy, who were always encouraging, objective, and who constantly reminded me to turn my library books in. I would like to thank my friends, who have been incredibly patient with me, when the only thing I really had to talk about for an entire year was how my thesis was going. I would also like to give a heartfelt thanks to all those around the world who took an active interest in the issues raised by the construction of the New Acropolis Museum, and who took the time to make videos, blogs, and write letters in order to raise awareness regarding these issues. The campaign to save the apartment blocks at 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou street should always stand as a reminder that by working together, and voicing opinions, every person, no matter who or where they are, has the capacity to make a difference and help preserve our world heritage.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

In the summer of 2008, the New Acropolis Museum (NMA) opened its doors to Athenians and tourists alike. The museum had no objects on display, however during certain hours, guests were allowed to walk through the entry plaza of the museum, as well as go up to the first floor in order to see the new building. The museum, though not actually open, was already packed with people eager to get a first glimpse at the new space. To get to the museum, one entered the space just off of Dionysiou Areopagitou street, a pedestrian walkway passing by the front of the museum, and circling the base of the Acropolis rock. From the street, the museum appears out of place, and even awkward. It is an all glass structure made of jutting angles which often appear in discord with one another. A large, lustrous building surrounded by neoclassical and art deco structures, as well as nondescript concrete apartment blocks. Upon leaving the street to go to the museum, one approaches the entry plaza, which is essentially a large patio made of glass. Looking down, it is apparent why glass was used on the floor. Below the glass patio, a large expanse of remarkably well-preserved and articulated ruins face the down-turned gazes of the people above. Inside, sun pours into the museum, through blue tinted glass. Walking up to the first floor, people ascended a ramp, again made of glass, and again visibly affecting all who were on it. Cardboard cutouts had been placed in containers in the center of the ramp, or niches off to the side, to represent the objects that would soon be filling the museum. At the top of the stairs, at the end of the ramp, one could peer around barricades and see some of the gallery space not yet accessible to guests. Leaving the museum, many people stopped to use the museum's state-of-the-art

restrooms, or comment on the free filtered water dispensing machines in the air-conditioned lobby, before proceeding out and spending more time staring down at the archaeological site beneath their feet. In just seeing that limited preview of the museum, one thing was clear to most of the visitors: the New Acropolis Museum would be unlike any museum anyone had seen.

From Greece's inception as an independent nation in the 1830s to today, a museum specifically designed to house the finds from the Acropolis has been a necessity to the Greek government. The design and implementation of today's New Acropolis Museum serves the purpose of not only housing the finds from the Acropolis, but also portrays to the rest of the world the nature of Greece's national identity. As a nation that is defined by its long-distant past, Greece often struggles with the co-existence of both its modern identity as well as its ancient identity. In this paper, the development of today's New Acropolis Museum will be used as a microcosm, in order to understand how archaeological and architectural endeavors of the past and present shape the national identity of Greece, as understood by both the Greeks and the world at large.

The juxtaposition of the large, modern New Acropolis Museum nestled amongst apartment buildings from different eras, hovering above remains of Roman/Byzantine Athens, and resting at the foot of the Acropolis rock is initially jarring. It appears as though a modern building, one that would be at home in any urban space in America, was suddenly dropped from the sky and landed in the middle of Athens. However, as one navigates through the city of Athens, at almost every turn, a person encounters an intersection of time: A Byzantine church in the middle of a

large shopping district, an ancient kiln on display in a metro station, or a temple dedicated to Zeus adjacent to a busy street. Walking through the city of Athens, one finds herself walking through time. This phenomenon, the amalgamation of antiquity and modernity, is not unique to Athens. Most European cities with a long past, such as Rome, Paris, or London, also have areas such as those in Athens, where monuments from the past stand adjacent to modern buildings and streets. Unlike Athens, Rome, London and Paris have always been viewed by the rest of the world as posh and highly cultured cities, renowned for their food, fashion, and arts. On the contrary, throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the world felt Athens had little to offer, beyond its antiquity.

From the nineteenth through the twentieth centuries, American and European scholars flocked to Athens, eager to study the multitude of remains, on the Acropolis and in the surrounding area, such as the Agora, and at numerous other temples and sites throughout the city. The majority of these scholars came to study the Classical period of Athens, as this was seen as both the time and place in which civilized and intellectual Western culture was developed. Greece had begun to prepare for the influx of scholars coming to the country, and specifically to Athens. A large archaeological park surrounding the Acropolis was planned in the1830s. Around this same time, the Greeks also were involved with extensive excavation and preservation work on the Acropolis. In the Medieval period, the Acropolis became a heavily built-up space, replete with Frankish and Ottoman churches, mosques, fortifications and even domestic structures. In the 1830s the new Greek government made the decision to remove the Medieval structures that had become dominant on the Acropolis, in order

to showcase the monuments of the Classical period. While the Greek government worked to highlight the Classical past of Athens, this was not the only thing on the agenda. The government was also hard at work at extensive city planning, meant to modernize the city of Athens, in order to make it equal to the large urban centers of other European nations. This meant the development of public transportation, a public water system, and the installation of electric lighting.[1] Large Neo-Classical structures meant as administrative buildings and private mansions proliferated throughout the city, as Athens began to take shape as an urban metropolis with a heroic past.

It was during this period, in the 1860s, that the first Acropolis museum came into being, built on the Acropolis itself.[2] The museum was small, and housed some of the archaeological finds from the Acropolis. In 1885, a second museum was constructed, replaced by a third museum in 1965.[3] The reason for the construction of the new museums was largely in part due to continued finds made on the Acropolis in the course of restoration and excavation work, the need to house delicate architectural sculpture which could no longer survive the elements, as well as to accommodate the large number of tourists who began coming to Greece in the 1950s and 1960s. In the late 1970s, the government decided to build yet another Acropolis museum. This museum was to be much larger than the small museum on the Acropolis. It was to be built off-site, at the base of the Acropolis in the neighborhood known as Makriyianni.

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[1] Nasia Giakovaki. "Medieval and recent history: a new consciousness about the city of Athens at the end of the 19th century." *Archaeology of the City of Athens* (Digital Edition) http://www.eie.gr/archaeological/En/chapter_more_11.aspx

[2] Dimitrios Pandermalis "The museum and its contents" in ed. Bernard Tschumi Architects *The New Acropolis Museum*. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2009) 24.

[3] Pandermalis, 24.

In both 1976 and 1979, two local architectural competitions were held in the hopes of selecting the designer of the next new museum, however no winners were chosen either year.[4] In 1982, the desire to construct a New Acropolis Museum became a *cause célèbre*, thanks largely in part to Greece's outspoken and charismatic new Minister of Culture, former actress Melina Mercouri. As Minister of Culture, one of Mercouri's foremost goals was to see the Parthenon Marbles in the collection of the British Museum, returned to Greece; a goal that could only be accomplished by the development and construction of a modern museum to safely house the marbles. In 1989, Greece held its first international architectural competition to design the new museum, which was won by Italian architects Lucio Passarelli and Manfredi Nicoletti. However, their design was soon deemed unsuitable for the site in the Makriyianni neighborhood, which led to a second international competition in 2000. The second competition was won by Bernard Tschumi, a Swiss-American, and Michael Photiadis, a Greek. It is the building of Tschumi and Photiadis that currently resides in the Makriyianni neighborhood, beneath the shadow of the Acropolis.

"A Simple and Precise Museum:"[5] The Design, Materials and Location of the New Acropolis Museum

The New Acropolis Museum has come to represent many things in the minds of the people of Greece as well as people throughout the rest of the world. It is an

[4] Kalliopi Fouseki. "Conflicting discourses on the construction of the New Acropolis Museum: past and present." *European Review of History* vol. 13 no. 4, December 2006. 536.
[5] Bernard Tschumi, www.arcspace.com/architects/Tschumi.

emblem of progress in terms of how we think of museums, it is a symbol of Greece's modernity and capability, and to some it represents the best qualities of Athens and to some, the worst. One of the predominant ways the building has come to mean so much and impact so many people, is through the museum's design (fig one).

The design is relatively simple, composed of three main parts (fig two). The first part of the museum is a unique integration of archaeological site and building foundation. As mentioned earlier, the museum hovers above the well-preserved remains of a Roman and Byzantine area of Athens.[6] In between the walls of homes and bath complexes, are the large concrete columns reinforced with rebar that make up the base of the museum (fig three). Besides the columns, there is also the "Base Isolation System" which consists of elastomeric and sliding bearings made out of Teflon steel,[7] which allow the foundations to move in the event of seismic activity. According to Tschumi, incorporating this state of the art and ultra-modern technology into an active archaeological site was a challenge that required architects, engineers, construction workers and archaeologists to work closely with one another, to ensure the safety of both the modern building, as well as the ancient ones.[8] To Tschumi and others who worked on the design of the museum, the placement of the columns was meant to both "protect and consecrate" the archaeological site.[9] While it is unclear

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[6] The site is identified as dating from the Roman through the Byzantine periods, however it should be noted that finds dating as early as the Neolithic were made during excavations.
[7] Bernard Tschumi. "Conceptualizing Context." in *The New Acropolis Museum* ed. Bernard Tschumi Architects, 84.
[8] Tschumi, 84.
[9] Bernard Tschumi Architects. "New Acropolis Museum." http://www.arcspace.com/architects/Tschumi.

how exactly the columns consecrate the archaeological site, it is clear that the columns act as a way of visually connecting the modern space with the ancient ruins, as the New Acropolis Museum literally grows from within the walls of ancient Athenian architecture.

Above the archaeological site, the second part of the museum consists of the entry plaza, and the two levels above the entry plaza that are the home to two of the three permanent collections in the gallery. This portion of the building consists of a multi-leveled space in the form of an uneven quadrilateral (fig four). The form of the quadrilateral, while reflecting a modern aesthetic for asymmetrical shapes, was defined primarily by the shape of the excavation area below the museum. The building materials in this section of the museum are the same as throughout the whole of the building: glass, concrete, marble, and in a more abstract use of the term "material:" light.[10] This section of the museum has natural light streaming in through both the windows in the walls, as well as from above. The interior walls of the museum are constructed of concrete, which was treated with a sandblasting technique meant to absorb the light (fig five). This softens the effect of the bright Attic sun, preventing the antiquities from suffering damage due to solar exposure. The concrete also prevents the walls from reflecting the light in ways that would appear odd or aesthetically unpleasant on the statues throughout the gallery.[11]

The floor in this section is made of both glass, as well as marble. Glass is used on an incline ramp leading from the first floor of the museum to the second, a space

[10] ibid, 84.
[11] ibid 85.

that houses the statuary found during excavations on the slope of the Acropolis (fig six). Marble is used on the floor of the majority of the other galleries within this section. It is a pale marble, quarried locally. The marble of the floor matches the marble used for the display bases on which the statues stand.[12] The statues themselves are not encased, and are spread throughout the space, never abutting a wall or a column, making a 360 degree view possible of every object on display. The statues would blend into the gallery, were it not for their aged golden hue. The use of so many neutral colors and few materials gives this section of the museum a minimalist, and almost industrial aesthetic. However, the glass windows prevent this portion of the museum from feeling like a warehouse where sculptures are stored, rather than displayed. The windows go from floor to ceiling, yet are not entirely transparent. They are translucent so faint outlines of the buildings outside of the museum can be seen, while allowing filtered light to fill the gallery, providing a sense of warmth.

The effect, however, is rather stark, and the ability of a visitor to walk around each item is unique. Both elements which can be initially jarring to those used to traditional museums such as the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. The National Archaeological Museum displays the majority of its statues in such a way that they are placed against walls of a room, evenly spaced from one another, and with one or two pieces on display in the center of the space (fig seven). Guests are invited to gaze upon the objects in a way that has been pre-determined for them. At the New Acropolis Museum, however, a guest is allowed to gaze upon and interact with the objects in a personalized way. The statues and the visitor occupy the same space,

[12]ibid, 85.

which creates a more intimate interaction for the visitor, rather than merely gazing reverently at an object from a polite distance.

Leaving this second section, a visitor proceeds up stairs, elevator or escalator to the third section of the museum, the Parthenon Gallery. Below this section, the form of the museum was the shape of an unequal quadrilateral. The Parthenon Gallery is a rectangle, which is set on top of the unequal quadrilateral of the rest of the building in such a way that portions of three out of the four corners of the rectangle project beyond the base (fig eight). This effect is accomplished by employing a cantilever construction. Being cantilevered, the rectangle has no external supports or braces that balance it on top of the unequal quadrilateral forming the rest of the building. This allows the rectangle to appear to be at odds with the rest of the building, balancing precariously at an awkward angle, which does not match the base below. The purpose of this design is two-fold. At a very basic level, the disjunction between the top of the building and the bottom of the building creates visual interest, as the building appears to have a slightly different form from all angles that it is viewed. The second purpose is that the rectangle on top of the museum has the exact same dimensions, and is aligned in such a way as to exactly mimic the alignment of the Parthenon. The rectangle that makes up the Parthenon Gallery is also composed entirely out of glass, allowing visitors to the gallery an unobstructed view of the Parthenon, the Acropolis, as well as the modern city of Athens (fig nine). The glass is also meant to allow natural sunlight into the gallery in order to illuminate the architectural sculpture on display, as well as to filter down to light the galleries below the Parthenon exhibit.

The use of light is integral in the design of the new museum. Tschumi himself has stated that light is the fourth main building material used in the project. The Athenian sun, or "Attic Light" which is so central to the design of the museum, is also a key issue in the quest to have the British Museum repatriate the portions of the Parthenon frieze and Pediment sculptures currently on display in London. Co-designer of the museum, Michael Photiadis states that the works on display in the Parthenon gallery, "were made to be in the Attic light, and in the new museum they will continue to be in the Attic light."[13] Tschumi, too, states that the light in Athens "differs from light in London, Berlin or New York."[14] The importance of "Attic light" has been picked up on and used by many different news sources and writers, due largely in part to the poetics of the concept. The Parthenon sculptures can only truly be seen in the light of Athens, rather than the light of any other city. Poetics and politics aside, the importance of the use of natural sunlight in the Parthenon gallery should not be overlooked. The sculpture on display in this gallery, as architectural sculpture, was meant to be viewed outside, in the sun. As the gallery's intention is to enable the viewer to get the truest sense of how these objects would have looked had they still remained in tact on the Parthenon, the use of natural light, as opposed to interior lighting, is one of the best ways to convey that sense.

In order to allow the Attic light inside the museum, much work and research had to be put in to finding the correct type of glass with which to make the Parthenon

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[13] The Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles. "Light on the New Acropolis Museum." Sept. 13th, 2001. http://www.parthenonuk.com/DynaLink/ID/8/newsdetail.php

[14] Bernard Tschumi Architects. "New Acropolis Museum." http://www.arcspace.com/architects/Tschumi.

gallery, as well as the other myriad windows throughout the museum. At Tschumi's insistence, engineers were required to use a nearly transparent glass with minimal reflections.[15] The reason for this was that in order to create the effect that a visitor was viewing the sculpture in the original exterior setting, the glass must be unobtrusive. Besides the issue of appearance, there was also the issue of climate control, and how to best manage the temperature of a building filled with sunlight.[16] By way of much experimentation, it was decided to use a double-glazed glass silk-screened with a gradient of black dots, which controls heat and glare (fig ten).[17] Few metal fixings and joins were used in the glass, in order to minimize the effect of shadows in the gallery, as well as create the effect of a wall providing an unobstructed view to the vista beyond.[18] Though the time and money put into finding suitable materials to mimic an outside setting was great, the truest and most accurate way of exhibiting these exterior sculptures was of utmost importance in the design of the museum.

The way in which the sculptures are displayed in the Parthenon gallery (fig 11) also aids the viewer in understanding how the objects would have been displayed on the Parthenon. The metopes are displayed in pairs around the center rectangle of the Parthenon gallery. Between each pair of metopes is a large steel column, meant to mimic the Doric columns of the Parthenon. Beneath the metopes, the frieze is displayed continuously around the rectangle. It encased in gray concrete walls,

[15] Joel Rutton in *New Acropolis Museum*. 140.
[16] Rutton 140.
[17] ibid 140.
[18] ibid 140.

recessed from the display of the metopes. The frieze consists of both the original frieze sculptures, as well as, for the first time on display, casts of the pieces in the British museum. The pediment sculptures are displayed at the East and West ends of the central rectangle, finishing off the creation of a type of abstract and modern Parthenon temple.

While the Parthenon Gallery displays the architectural sculpture in the most current, accurate way, certain liberties have been taken with the arrangement of the pieces, in order to enhance the viewer's experience, particularly with the frieze. The frieze in the museum is only 1.5 meters off the ground, much lower than its original place, in antiquity. Originally (fig 12), the frieze was placed at the top of the cela of the Parthenon, and would have been extremely difficult, if not nearly impossible to see in detail, placed in shadows and obscured by columns. The issue of the obscured frieze is solved at the New Acropolis Museum however, as the frieze is well-lit, and placed at an appropriate height for viewing. Likewise, the pediment sculptures are not laid out in a way that mimics their original placement on the Parthenon, except for the fact that they are on the East and West ends of the rectangle. The pediment sculptures are displayed on podiums set on the ground, and like the other sculpture in the museum, are not set against a wall of any sort, allowing visitors a 360 degree view of the objects. Pandermalis explains that the decision to display the pediment sculptures in this way was reached after extensive experimentation with their placement, and that finally, "it was concluded that the pediment sculptures, as three-dimensional objects,

should be freestanding so that the well-sculpted backs are displayed for all to see."[19] In looking at the way in which the Parthenon Gallery was designed, what becomes apparent is the fact that for Tschumi, Photiadis, Pandermalis et al., a key concept was the way in which the viewer can relate to, and interact with the Parthenon sculptures in a modern setting. At any point in the Parthenon gallery, a visitor can look from a piece of the Parthenon sculpture, out to the city of Athens, or up to the Parthenon itself. This allows a visitor to have a sense of how history fits into modernity, and allows her to experience antiquity in a new way, offering visitors, in the words of Tschumi, "an unprecedented context for understanding the accomplishments of the Acropolis complex."[20]

While the design of the New Acropolis Museum is central to the visitor's experience, a critical element that played a role in the design of the museum was its site. In 1974, the decision was made to replace the existing Acropolis Museum, which was on the rock of the Acropolis, set behind the Parthenon. The selection of the Makriyianni location is something of a modern legend. It is said that Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis, after ascending the Acropolis, looked out from the rock and pointed to the Makriyianni area and said "There" in response to the question of where the next Acropolis Museum should be built.[21] Although the idea of the first Prime Minister of Greece following the military takeover by the Junta selecting the site of the new museum while gazing across Athens from the Acropolis has a poetic beauty to

[19] Pandermalis in *New Acropolis Museum*, 38.
[20] Bernard Tschumi Architects, http://www.arcspace.com/architects/Tschumi.
[21] Helena Smith. "Acropolis Row." *The Guardian*. (March 27th, 2002.) World News.

it, there are more logical reasons to choose the Makriyianni neighborhood as the site for the museum.

The old Acropolis Museum (fig 13), on the rock of the Acropolis, was far too small to house the extensive collection of sculpture, and too small to accommodate the rising number of tourists visiting Athens. Expanding the existing museum was not a practical solution to solve the issue of tourists and display of artifacts. The amount of space on the Acropolis is limited, and construction on the Acropolis would hinder the tourist experience. As such, a larger museum would need to be built off-site. The Makriyianni neighborhood, at the bottom of the Acropolis, and next to the pedestrian walkway of Dionysiou Areopagitou was a good selection (fig 14). The Makryianni neighborhood, as well as most of the way along Dionysiou Areopagitou, is an affluent area, where many mansions were erected in the twentieth century. Being close to the Acropolis, in a well-trafficked, safe area, surrounded by beautiful examples of mid twentieth century architecture, Makryianni was a sensible choice for the site of the new museum. As such, in 1989, when the first international design contest was held, the Makryianni neighborhood was chosen as the site of the New Acropolis Museum.

In 1989, the Italian team of Passarelli and Nicoletti won the international design competition. Their design was for a large, wedge shaped museum meant to look like a geological formation (fig 15), because to Passarelli "it would be unthinkable to build something under the Acropolis that did not integrate with the earth around it."[22] Passarelli and Nicoletti's design was for a relatively short building,

[22] Ed Vulliamy "Rome's modernist empire prepares to conquer the Acropolis." *The Guardian* (Aug 5th, 1991). Digital Version.

utilizing much underground space. In 1997, when the extensive Roman and Byzantine remains were discovered on the site chosen for the new museum, Passarelli and Nicoletti's design had to be scrapped, as it was fundamentally unsuitable for a space rich in extant remains. As a result, in the second international design competition, all of the designs needed to take into account the fact that they would be built on a rich and important archaeological site that needed to be preserved. In 2001, Tschumi's design was chosen as appropriate for the site of Makryianni, as the it was sensitive to the archaeological site both by showcasing and conserving it beneath the entry plaza, as well as allowing the remains to dictate the shape of the building.

The location of the museum played a critical role in the its design which, in turn, played a role in the materials used. All of these aspects are central to how a visitor moves through and experiences the museum, its collections, and the city outside. The basic elements of design, materials and location, though used to maximize visitor experience, are also elements at the heart of the plethora of lawsuits, objections, and outrage that accompanied the construction of the new museum. The next section of this paper will present an in-depth look at the problems of constructing the new museum.

"There's Nothing Between…We're Going Straight From Antiquity to Now:"[23] Objections to the New Acropolis Museum.

[23] Elly Kouremenos in "Acropolis view divides ministers, Vangelis, 85 year old Elly." by Maria Petrakis. *Bloomberg.com* www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid-20670001

Bernard Tschumi begins his book on the New Acropolis Museum with an acknowledgment:

> An architectural project always represents the confluence of many minds. In the case of the New Acropolis Museum, the people of Athens, through discussion, argumentation and consequent consensus are the true authors of this project. Their inspired dialogue, developed over nearly four decades and four architectural competitions, resulted in a building that reflects its mission, site and unique heritage. It is a building that, quite literally could not have been constructed anywhere else in the world.[24]

If one had no prior background knowledge to the issues surrounding the construction of the New Acropolis Museum, and had merely picked up Tschumi's book and began to read, Tschumi's attribution of the design of the museum to the Athenians would seem to be a polite acknowledgement of the role the people of the city played in the project. However, Tschumi's polite acknowledgment takes on a slight tongue-in-cheek tone when one considers that the Athenian's "discussion and argumentation" includes numerous lawsuits against the Greek government due to damage to the archaeological site caused by construction, numerous international internet campaigns to prevent the government from tearing down buildings in Makriyianni to build the museum, and the involvement of international archaeologists, preservationists, professional organizations and Athenians to halt construction of the museum altogether. Although the museum was eventually finished, the people behind the lawsuits and objections were ultimately a part of the reason the completion of the museum was delayed almost five years. The objections against the construction of the new museum were not minor,

[24] Tschumi, 6.

nor was the movement to halt construction and protect the Makriyianni movement a small one.

The Athenian's objections to the museum were not just reserved for Tschumi's design. As early as 1991, there were feelings of anger regarding Passarelli and Nicoletti's design. The Greek Association of Architects was particularly vocal towards the design of Passarelli and Nicoletti, calling it "vast and characterless," and accusing the Italians of "thinking like tourists…it [the museum] will be so large the world's most important sculptures will be lost in it."[25] Aside from being considered aesthetically unpleasant, the museum was viewed as being inappropriate both for the Makryianni neighborhood, as well as for the collection it was meant to house. Residents of the neighborhood were also displeased with a new museum whose construction called for their homes to be expropriated.[26] In an attempt to halt construction of the museum, in 2003 residents of Makriyianni alleged that the site was being excavated improperly, and that construction of the museum would damage the archaeological site. The International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), an advisory body working with UNESCO, got involved in the situation and along with the residents of the neighborhood, filed a lawsuit to prevent the continued construction of the museum. While the lawsuit delayed construction of the museum, it was eventually overturned, and in a somewhat ironic twist, it was decided to expropriate and demolish additional buildings surrounding the museum land, in order to reveal additional archaeological remains.

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[25] Helena Smith. "Greek chorus of outrage over home for the marbles." *The Guardian* (April 22, 1991). Digital Edition.
[26] Smith 1991.

The issue of the government's expropriation of privately owned structures was a major point of contention throughout most of the construction of the new museum. For those living around the Acropolis, not just in the neighborhood of Makryianni, expropriation is a familiar issue. Since the early nineteenth century, when Greece became a newly established country, there was a strong desire to build an archaeological park around the Acropolis, especially in the area of the Agora. In the 1920s, the Greek government was able to begin work on extensive excavation around the Acropolis, thanks to its partnership with the American School of Classical Studies in Athens (ASCSA). The partnership between the government and the ASCSA was beneficial in that the Greek government would be able to finance an archaeological park showcasing Athens' archaeological remains, and the ASCSA would be able to excavate and research a site of great importance to the field of Classical archaeology. The work being done in the Agora would also bring in more tourists and scholars, which would be beneficial to local business owners. The agreement, however, was not beneficial to the people living in the proposed excavation area. In order to commence work on the excavations and proposed park space, many buildings needed to be expropriated and removed. This created an atmosphere of uncertainty for many Athenians, who were unable to make major or minor repairs or changes to their buildings. The reason for this ban on upgrading buildings was due o fear that changes and repairs would drive up the property value of a structure, causing it to be more expensive when and if the building was to be expropriated.[27]

[27] ibid 115.

Similar building restrictions are currently in place in a neighborhood of Athens called Anafiotika. Anafiotika is a small neighborhood, built at the base of and, in some places, into the rock of the Acropolis (fig16). Anafiotika was created by immigrants to Athens from the island of Anafi in the 1860s.[28] Not soon after its development, the neighborhood was deemed illegal by the Greek government, for encroaching on the rock of the Acropolis.[29] As such, the neighborhood was expropriated, with several buildings demolished in the 1930s, as well as in 1977.[30] Tourism has played a major role in stopping the destruction of the buildings, as Anafiotika became a tourist hotspot in the 1990s, due to its unique island architecture and unusual location. While total removal of the neighborhood is not occurring, residents are required to receive permission from the government in order to repair or change their homes.[31]Residents of the Makriyianni neighborhood found themselves in a similar situation, once the Makriyianni was chosen as the site for the new museum. While the expropriation and demolition of some of the structures in the area of the new museum received little to no press coverage, the threat in 2007 to two buildings—17 Dionysiou Areopagitou and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou—caused an international uproar.

In 2003, 15 Dionysiou Areopagitou was expropriated and demolished in order to facilitate construction of the new museum. The demolition of number 15 was the inspiration for a newspaper article in Athens' daily newspaper, the Kathimerini. The

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[28] Roxane Caftanzoglou "The shadow of the sacred rock: contrasting discourses of place under the Acropolis." ed. Barbara Bender and Margot Winer. *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place.* (Berg: Oxford, 2001) 23.
[29] Caftanzoglou 24.
[30] ibid 22.
[31] ibid 29.

focus of the article was not so much the loss of number 15, as it was the increasing interest in Athenian architecture from the 1930s through the 1970s. The article cites nostalgia as a driving force behind concern over the city's recent architecture, stating that for "the children who grew up in those apartments…what was just one more nondescript building, is now a tender, sentimental symbol with personal connotations and even an aesthetic dimension."[32] The article also states that two recent trends—Greeks taking more of an interest in their country's modern history, and European Preservationists and Architects taking an interest in recent architecture from the past 50 or 40 years—play roles in the new way Athenians view the apartment blocks they once considered aesthetically unpleasant. The nostalgia for and interest in modern Athenian architecture and urban traditions that struck the public in 2003, was the background for the international public campaign to save 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou (fig 17).

As discussed earlier, part of the goal of the new museum is to provide visitors with an unobstructed view of the Parthenon and the Acropolis, in order to provide a context for the collection. 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou, however, were blocking the view to the Acropolis from the museum's café terrace. Without the removal of 17 and 19, those on the café terrace would only have a view of the rear of the apartment buildings. The idea of visitors staring at the rear façade of two apartment buildings was deemed unacceptable, and efforts were made to demolish 17 and 19. The problem with this decision was that both 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou were protected

[32] Nikos Vatopoulous. "Nostalgia for the old apartment blocks." *Kathimerini.* Aug 5, 2003. www.ekathimerini.com Digital Edition.

buildings since 1978 and eventually deemed "Works of Art" by culture minister Melina Mercouri in 1988.[33] A building listed as a protected Work of Art in Greece is similar to a building listed on our own National Register of Historic Places. Listing as a Work of Art is official recognition of the importance of a structure, due in part to its historic value, as well as its aesthetic value. Number 17 was listed as a Work of Art as an outstanding example of Art Deco architecture built by noted Greek architect Vassilis Kouremenos, while number 19 was listed as an outstanding example of Neoclassical Athenian architecture and is owned by famed composer Vangelis Papathanassiou, most well-known for his work on Chariots of Fire. A Work of Art is meant to be protected by the government against all threats of demolition. As such, when the government decided in September 2007 to strip 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou of their protected status in order to demolish the buildings, the reaction of the public was largely unfavorable.

A number of factors played a role in the public reaction to the government's decision to strip 17 and 19 of their protected status. The main factor was a sense of betrayal that Athenians felt by the decision. The government had pledged to protect these buildings, and in turn protect the modern heritage of the city. When the government made the decision that the Art Deco and Neoclassical buildings could be sacrificed to make way for the new museum, it was as though the government was issuing a statement that Athens' modern architecture and urbanity were not as important as its past, or its future. Elly Kouremenos, wife of the architect of 17

[33] Nicholas Paphitis. "Greece opens the way for landmark's razing to allow Parthenon view." *Associated Press Worldstream*. Sept 13, 2007. Digital Edition.

Dionysiou Areopagitou (and current resident) told Bloomberg news that the decision made by the government is an attempt at making "us vanish. It's as though there's nothing in between. No Neoclassicism, No Art Nouveau. We're going straight from antiquity to now."[34] Kouremenos' statement illustrates how her identity as an Athenian is defined by historical continuity, rather than specific points in time. As such, 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou are as much a part of the identity of Kouremenos, and Athens, as the Acropolis and its antiquities, and the new museum.

Besides illustrating historical continuity or standing as examples *par excellence* of specific architectural styles, 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou have come to play important roles in the daily lives of Greeks and tourists alike. 17 and 19 are both landmarks on the Dionysiou Areopagitou promenade (fig 18). Their distinctive looks, vicinity to the Acropolis Metro station and the old center of Athens called the *Plaka* are all elements that make the buildings popular meeting places for tourists and Athenians. At any given time throughout the day, large numbers of people can be found sitting near 17 and 19, checking maps, buying jewelry and postcards, playing soccer, or leisurely walking past, enjoying the promenade. Since the promenade was officially "opened" prior to the 2004 Olympics, the walkway has been and continues to be popular with Greeks and tourists. The personal connection people feel with the Dionysiou Areopagitou promenade and its buildings is so strong that the threat of destruction of the buildings was likewise a threat on people's memory of the place.

[34] Petrarkis 2007.

The strong connection people felt with the promenade and numbers 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou was ultimately the major factor in the popularity of the people's campaign to save the two structures. The public campaign was spearheaded by residents in the Makryianni neighborhood, and began with architect Nikos Rousseas posting signs and handing out brochures regarding the planned demolition of the buildings. Soon, a number of blogs were created both in English and in Greek to raise awareness of the issue of demolition, such as Dionysiou Areopagitou 17 and Monumenta. In addition, Elginism.com, an existing blog dedicated to the issues of heritage preservation, began to cover the stories. Shortly after the blogs were posted, came various online petitions, Facebook groups, and sites urging people from around the world to email the Ministry of Culture in order to reverse the decision to de-list the buildings and demolish them. In the span of a few weeks time, thanks to the Internet, a story which may have at one time only been local news became a global story, covered by news agencies worldwide. "We have supporters from all over the world who have learnt about this through our blog,"[35] stated Rousseas, who spoke to numerous news sources of the great success of the Internet campaign.

The extensive Internet campaign played a major role in arousing interest from international news agencies. In 2007, the leading story in Greece was hardly the issue of saving 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou, due to the fact that 2007 was the year most of Greece caught fire. The devastating fires were the top news story during the summer of 2007 both locally and internationally. It was during this time, when

[35] Helena Smith. "Greeks row over Art Deco demolition." *The Observer*. July 29 2007. Foreign Pages, 31.

attention was turned to the national disaster in Greece, that the Ministry of Culture agreed to remove 17 and 19 from the protected Work of Art list. While this may or may not have been intentional, it raised just enough suspicion on the parts of bloggers that, online, the timing of the decision to de-list the buildings began to be seen as somewhat of a conspiracy, making the story that much more interesting to reporters. In this 2007 report from the Associated Press, it is stated:

> Architect Nikos Rousseas, whose office is in the four-story building, said he was "amazed" at Voulgarakis' decision, which he said came "very unexpectedly," at a time when public attention was focused on the devastating forest fires that ravaged southern Greece and killed more than 65 people.[36]

Further adding interest to the story was an incident in 2008, when Christos Zachopoulos, Chief of Staff at the Greek Ministry of Culture, attempted to commit suicide by jumping from the fourth floor of his apartment. The suicide attempt was due largely in part to a sex scandal with one of Zachopoulos' employees, but also brought to light corruption on Zachopoulos' part in terms of the mishandling of archaeological sites and protected buildings. It was, in fact, Zachopoulos who cast the deciding vote in the even split of 12–12 in the decision to de-list and demolish 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou.[37] In a January 2008 interview with BBC correspondent Malcolm Brabant, Rousseas stated that he and the other residents of 17 Dionysiou Areopagitou felt the government's decision was "not clean" and needed to be investigated.[38] While it is not the intention of this paper to delve deeply into the

[36] Paphitis 2007.
[37] Anthee Carassava "Scandal steals spotlight in Greek culture ministry." *The New York Times*. January 19 2008, Section B Column 0 Arts and Cultural Desk.
[38] Malcolm Brabant (correspondent). (January 2008). *BBC News* [Television Broadcast]. Athens, Greece: British Broadcasting Network.

scandals surrounding the official decisions made regarding 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou, the scandals are noteworthy in that they created a strong amount of interest from international news stations, and helped to bring the issue of the demolition of 17 and 19 to the public.

Aside from the drama and scandal surrounding the decisions made regarding 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou, much of the public interest in the matter was invested in the seemingly large sacrifice of these monuments for a rather trivial issue, the view from the terrace café of the new museum. From within the museum, unobstructed views to the Parthenon were necessary in a theoretical and contextual sense, however on a dining terrace, the issue of the view seemed to be a matter of pure aesthetics. The Kouremenos family was especially vocal about the loss of a work of art to enhance the view from the dining terrace.

> We're not the only ones who spoil the view. Wherever you turn in this museum, which is all glass, you see Athens: balconies, antennas, washing hanging out to dry.[39]

This quote is made by Marina Kouremenos, daughter of Vasilios Kouremenos. In Kouremenos' quote, she illustrates one of the fundamental problems people had with the destruction of 17 and 19. The museum is meant to give the viewer a sense of context of what they are seeing, both in terms of the ancient city of Athens, by offering views of the Acropolis, as well as the modern city of Athens, which is on display outside of each window. Tschumi explains that by means of certain glazes on windows, specifically in the Archaic gallery, it would be impossible to see "people

[39] Petrarkis 2007.

putting out their washing and broken refrigerators left on the balcony"[40] and would only see faint outlines of the "ghosts of Athens."[41] Despite the fact that understanding the context of the art in regards to the modern city would require providing an unrestricted and unedited view of Athens, aesthetics won out over authenticity.

The final argument made by those in favor of preserving 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou was one regarding the buildings' right to exist in modern Athens. This argument is one based almost entirely on aesthetics, and is fueled by a dislike for the ultramodern appearance of the new museum, and a feeling that the museum is an offense to the neighborhood and Acropolis. Rousseas explains that the issue of tearing down the Art Deco and Neoclassical buildings in order to provide an obscured view to the acropolis from the terrace is ironic, as

> The Art Deco building was designed with tiny balconies that could not be used for dining because its architect believed it would be a sin to chew in front of a monument as sacred as the Acropolis.[42]

Although Rousseas does not explicitly say the new museum does not belong in the neighborhood in this quote, he does make it clear through implication that the museum was not designed with the same sensitivity to its locale as 17 Dionysiou Areopagitou. Vangelis Papathanassiou, owner of 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou has also spoken out against the museum, calling it

> A monstrosity that arrogantly overshadows the whole area, thus offending the Parthenon itself, our history, the Athenians and Greeks in general. It is attempting to devour what is left of this historic area. [43]

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[40] Maria Petrarkis. "A room with a view awaits the marbles." *Kathimerini*. May 05, 2009. http://www.ekathimerini.com Digital Edition.
[41] Petrarkis 2009.
[42] Smith 2007.

Papathanassiou, like Rousseas, believes that the new museum's design makes it inherently unfit for the Makriyianni neighborhood. Rousseas and others feel the museum's size, design and materials make it an offense to the neighborhood, and to the Acropolis. This viewpoint is shared by many Athenians, who describe the building as "an aesthetic disgrace, all pomp and no substance, an eyesore, the crime of the century, and a disgusting blot on the landscape."[44] In these instances, the substitution for an aesthetically unpleasant building for two aesthetically pleasing and historic buildings is seen as something akin to a criminal offense.

With so many taking issue to the very design of the building, Tschumi was called on by multiple people and media outlets to engage in a dialogue with the residents in order to work out an agreement that would allow for 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou to remain standing. Tschumi himself remained notably silent regarding this issue, commenting multiple times that the decision regarding the building was not his, but was the Athenians. What one must keep in mind, is that while Tschumi never spoke out as a proponent for tearing down 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou, in interviews and quotes, such as the one above, Tschumi was vocal about the need to blur and shade the uglier elements of the city that were visible from the museum. Since the problem of visitors staring at the backs of buildings rather than the

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[43] Matthew Campbell. "Vangelis Papathanassiou fights the Greek gods of demolition." *Times Online* November 18, 2007. http://www.timesonline.co.uk.tol/news/world/europe

[44] Harry van Versendaal. "New museum stirs fierce passion both ways." *Kathimerini*. Dec 12, 2007. http:www.ekathimerini.com Digital Edition.

Parthenon is not one that is solved by the application of window glaze, it is not out of the question to assume Tschumi was in favor of removing the buildings.

Proponents of saving 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou attempted to offer solutions to beautify the rear facades of the building, thus making them aesthetically pleasing to view from the café terrace. Planting large trees and flowering vines was suggested, which would offer the terrace visitors a lush garden-type atmosphere. Painting the back of the building was another suggestion, as was a video wall projecting real-time images of Dionysiou Areopagitou onto the rear facades of 17 and 19, essentially erasing them from view.[45] These suggestions came from an online magazine, *Greek Architects*, which held a contest in order to creatively propose to solve the problem of viewing the rears of 17 and 19. The idea was to show that through creativity, a compromise could be reached.[46] In the end, it was through legal means that 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou were saved. In July 2009, the decision to de-list the buildings and tear them down was overturned by Greece's Supreme Court, the Council of State.[47] The ruling was a result of numerous petitions, calls, letters, and news stories all alleging the demolition of the buildings was not legal.

In the years during which the fate of 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou was uncertain, many issues regarding the new museum were raised: its aesthetic appeal, its appropriateness, its legality, and its impact on the Athenian landscape, environment and identity. While ultimately the museum was constructed, and 17 and 19 were

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[45] Rene Maltezou. "Video wall may save historic Athens buildings." *Reuters*. Jun 16th, 2009. http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE55F4E520090616
[46] Maltezou 2009.
[47] Athens News Agency "Court blocks demolition of buildings." *Athens News Agency*. July 12, 2009. Digital Edition.

saved, many people still remain displeased with the outcome of events. To many, the New Acropolis Museum still represents a state sanctioned entity meant to erase aspects of modern Athenian history, in order to privilege certain times, rather than celebrate the continuous history of the city. While this is a viewpoint shared by many, it is not a viewpoint shared by all. In the next section of this paper, public support for the museum will be discussed.

"We Can Leave an Imprint of Our Era on this City…This Museum Reminds Us that We Always Need to Have a Vision:"[48] In Support of the New Acropolis Museum

When Bernard Tschumi began his design of the New Acropolis Museum, he faced three unique challenges, which he stated:

> How does one design a building located only 300 meters away from the most influential building in Western civilization? Additionally, how does one design a building when its site is an extraordinary archaeological graveyard containing the remains of many centuries of civic life in Athens? Equally insistent was the third query, how to design a structure whose unstated mandate is to facilitate the reunification of the Parthenon frieze?[49]

In response to Tschumi's first issue, in the discussion of the museum design, it was shown that the museum is meant to make reference to the Parthenon, and in doing so creates a type of abstract and modern Parthenon in which to view the sculptures. As to Tschumi's second issue, the way in which the archaeological site dictated the building's shape, the placement of the columns, as well as the development of the

[48] Nikos Xydakis. "The need for a vision." *Kathimerini*. Jun 02, 2009. http://www.ekathimerini.com. Digital Edition.
[49] Tschumi 82.

seismic bearings was a response to the challenge of building atop the archaeologically rich site. Tschumi's third challenge, to design a building that would play a role in the reunification of the Parthenon marbles, was and continues to be one of the most important points in support of the construction and design of the New Acropolis Museum.

In 1981, the issue of repatriating the Parthenon marbles currently held in the British Museum's Duveen Gallery (fig 19) became something of an international *cause célèbre.* The reason for this was an off-hand comment made by Greece's new Minister of Culture, former actress Melina Mercouri, during a phone interview with the BBC.[50] Following that initial comment in 1981, in a speech to UNESCO, Mercouri said the Greek government was prepared to formally ask England for the return of the Parthenon marbles.[51] Prior to Mercouri's comments, Greece had long sought the repatriation of England's portion of the Parthenon Marbles. However, Mercouri's outspoken nature, and willingness to give the press sound bites, helped the issue find new life on an international stage. Besides creating international attention, Mercouri and her staff worked hard within Greece itself, to help turn the need for the Parthenon sculptures into a national issue of importance to the people of Greece. "Before, the government put culture out of the grasp of the people. We want to change that and show the continuity from ancient times to the present."[52] In this brief quote,

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[50] Kathimerini. "Battle for Mercouri's dream still going strong." *Kathimerini* January 24, 2004.
[51] Mercouri, Melina. "Address to the World Conference on Cultural Policies." UNESCO. Mexico City, Mexico. July 1982.
[52] Swartz. Quote from Michael Koutosis, adviser to Melina Mercouri.

Mercouri's philosophy is that Greek culture throughout the ages belongs to and should be accessible to all people of Greece.

In response to Mercouri's zealous public campaigns, the British Museum had to restate publicly its reasons for not returning the Parthenon marbles. One of the primary reasons England felt it should not need to return the marbles was that, unlike the Greeks, they believed the agreement that Lord Elgin had made in 1812 to remove the marbles was legitimate. The arrangement was made between Elgin and the Ottomans who, at the time, were the ruling party in Greece. Second, the British Museum's stance on the issue has also included the point that Athens had no space in which to properly and safely house the Parthenon marbles.[53] The third major point was that the marbles were not just a part of Greek history, but were a part of world history, and their placement in the British Museum—a museum dedicated to the global history of art and artifacts—allowed them to be understood in a global context, and thus reach the maximum amount of people. Of these three primary arguments presented by the British Museum and English government, it was decided that the second point, Greece's inability to house the marbles, should be addressed, and hence the need for "the best, the most beautiful museum in the world"[54] was born.

For those seeking the reunification of the Parthenon marbles, Tschumi's design of the museum was the design best suited to accomplish this goal. In an oft-quoted New York Times Article, Architectural writer Nicolai Ouroussoff states:

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[53] T Wilson. "Mercouri moves on Parthenon sculptures." *Herald*. April 29, 1988. Digital Edition.
[54] Quote by Melina Mercouri. James Larnder. "The Missions of Melina Mercouri" *The Washington Post.* Apr 21 1983. Digital Edition.

> By fusing sculpture, architecture and the ancient landscape into a forceful visual narrative, the New Acropolis Museum delivers a revelation that trumps the tired arguments and incessant flag waving by both sides. It's impossible to stand in the top-floor galleries, in full view of the Parthenon's ravaged, sun-bleached frame, without craving the marbles' return.[55]

In Ouroussoff's quote, Tschumi's design is what creates the strongest argument for the return of the marbles. It is the experience of moving through the museum, and interacting with the space and the objects that creates a desire in the viewer to see the Parthenon objects reunited in a single space. This sentiment is echoed by many visitors to the museum, who find the design of the museum and the Parthenon gallery incomplete without the marbles, or who see the gallery as a response to the charge that Greece cannot care for the marbles.[56]

The museum also addresses the issue of providing an adequate space to house the sculptures by addressing simple issues the old museum could not get past, such as being unable to show the majority of the Acropolis finds, or dealing adequately with the amount of tourists coming to the museum each year. The new museum displays ten times more artifacts than the old Acropolis museum, and was designed to accommodate the large amount of visitors that are expected annually. By being able to display more objects, and allow for more visitors, Greece was able to show that they are capable of safely housing the Parthenon sculptures all while making them accessible to a large amount of visitors.

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[55] Ouroussoff Nicolai. "Where Gods yearn for long-lost treasures." (October 28, 2007). *The New York Times*. [electronic version]
[56] Athens News Agency. "A day at Athens' New Acropolis Museum" (July 21, 2009). *Kathimerini.* Digital Edition.

In 2008, fragments of the Parthenon frieze in possession of Italy (fig 20) as well as the Vatican were returned to Greece. Likewise, Sweden and Germany returned fragments of the Parthenon to Greece as well, in time for the opening of the new museum. However, not all the returned items were not given back permanently, as many were simply on loan. The Italian piece for example, was returned to the museum in Palermo from whence it came, after the expiration of a one-year loan agreement. Despite not giving the objects to Greece, Minister of Culture Michalis Liapis stated that the act "sets an example for others to follow and eventually restore the unity of the Parthenon Marbles."[57] While these are small steps towards reunification of the entire Parthenon sculptural program, they are steps that may not have been taken, were it not for the opening of the new museum. As such, although the Parthenon marbles have not been reunited in their entirety, the new museum was still a success in moving forward towards achieving Greece's goal of reunification.

While the reunification of the marbles was a major point to supporters of the new museum, it was not the only reason the museum gained public support. The form and design of the new museum was a major factor in the support of those championing the project. Until the beginning of construction of the new museum, architecture in Athens had been relatively stagnant, in terms of innovation, with the exception of a few new buildings designed for the 2004 Olympics. Much of the urban fabric of Athens consisted of concrete apartment blocks in varying condition. The Kathimerini

[57] Athens News Agency. "Vatican returns Parthenon fragment to Athens." (2008). *Hellenic Republic Embassy of Greece Press Office.* http://www.greekembassy.org/Embassy/content/en/Article.aspx?office=3&folder=218&article=24470

at one point described Athens as a "concrete archipelago spread out around the Acropolis…it's a mess."[58] While the city at one time had boasted many buildings with interesting architectural details done in variations of the Neoclassical style, many of those buildings were torn down, or had gone to ruin for varying reasons. Prior to the construction of the new museum, the 2004 Olympics were the impetus for many beautification programs in the city of Athens. Structures such as the Panathenaic Stadium were restored, while new stadiums for the Olympic events were completed. The Metro system in Athens was finally completed, with stations serving as miniature museums. The city's main squares, such as Syntagma, were heavily restored and the pedestrian walkway of Dionysiou Areopagitou was opened. Following the Olympics, while the major changes in Athens continued to enhance the city, buildings were still falling into disrepair, and the city continued to be identified as a sea of concrete apartment blocks. "Greece in 2009 is a far cry from Greece of 2004. It has lost so much of its vitality, its unity and hope. There is little to celebrate in the summer of 2009."[59] This quote, from a Kathimerini article published in 2009, illustrates the condition of Athens in the year the New Acropolis Museum opened. The atmosphere of Athens as a whole was somber and downtrodden. For proponents of the New Acropolis Museum, the opening of the museum was what the city needed in order to turn itself around:

> The New Acropolis Museum shows us that we can leave an imprint of our era on this city, even when it stands beside one of its greatest landmarks. And this imprint helps to showcase the city, the ancient

[58] van Versendaal 2007.
[59] Xydakis 2009.

> living side-by-side with the modern; it enriches the city's history and boosts our self esteem.[60]

In this quote, journalist Nikos Xydakis explains how the new museum should be viewed as a catalyst to Athens, meant to inspire Athenians to not only embrace their modern identity, but to leave their mark in the city, thus maintaining the historic continuity in which Athenians have so much pride. In this respect, the ultramodern design of the museum was meant to stand as a monument to modern Athens.

> The opening of the New Acropolis Museum was one of the most emotional experiences of my life. It is more than a museum, it is a symbol of national pride and hope for the future[61]

In this quote from an Athenian hotelier, the museum can be seen as a symbol of the way in which Modern Athens is connected to and safeguards its ancient past, all while maintaining a modern identity meant to extend into the future.

The idea of the museum acting as a catalyst to the city is not merely a romantic notion inspired by poetic quotes regarding the symbolic importance of the museum. In 2005, Greece launched what was described as a "modernization program" which included building new and upgrading existing museums.[62] Amongst those, was the new archaeological museum of Patras, located just outside of Athens, and designed by architect Theofanis Bobotis. From the exterior, the museum appears to be an amalgamation of prismatic shapes, cylindrical columns, and a large aluminum globular shape (fig 21). The museum design is unlike any other museum in Greece.

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[60] ibid.
[61] Teresa Levonian Cole. "New salvo in the war for the marbles: will the New Acropolis Museum lead Britain to return the Elgin Marbles?" (July 1 2009). *The Daily Telegraph (London)*. Features p. 25
[62] Dimitris Rigopoulous. "New architectural idiom for new museums." (August 23, 2005). *Kathimerini*. Digital Edition.

Bobotis' design, like Tschumi's, is a decidedly modern house for antique objects. Bobotis' museum design, as reported by the Kathimerini, was a surprising choice for the Patras museum. When this choice is viewed in the context of the completion of the New Acropolis Museum, the choice to award the Patras project to Bobotis can be seen as a growing trend in Greece: showcasing antiquity by means of modernity. Yet another similarity between the Bobotis and Tschumi designs is the idea that the museum should not be seen as merely a building to show an exhibit, but should actually be designed around the collection. "Museums used to be…neutral receptacles for exhibits, but these days museums are designed around the exhibits," states Bobotis. This is similar to the way in which Tschumi has described his own design:

> In my view there are two kinds of museums: museums that don't have a collection and have to do something to attract the public's attention, and museums that have collections and whose only task is simply to increase the level of interest. The New Acropolis Museum will have a one [a collection]. And what a collection! I know in every detail what will be in the museum.[63]

To both architects, the contents of the museum are a major factor that dictates the form of a modern museum. While the form of Bobotis' museum is not influenced by Tschumi's design, nor are Bobotis' theories on architecture, Tschumi's design can be seen as leading the way for the selection of Bobotis' design, as well as future modernist museums.

Besides being the impetus for a modernization movement for museums, many of the new museum's supporters had hopes that the museum would begin a movement of urban renewal within Athens itself. Following the opening of the New Acropolis

[63] Dimitris Rigopoulos. "Acropolis museum to be anti-Bilbao." (February 26, 2002). *Kathimerini*. Digital Edition.

Museum, Athens opened a new National Contemporary Art museum which, along with the Acropolis Museum, was meant to create "a cultural axis with two poles of attraction, of international standards, that link antiquity with contemporary artistic creation."[64] The "cultural axis" created by the New Acropolis Museum and the Contemporary Art Museum is a part of the new Athenian urban renewal, which focuses heavily on the idea of modern architecture housing traditional cultural elements. In a September 2009 article in the Kathimerini, numerous cultural centers were listed as planning new construction projects throughout the city of Athens.[65] The goal of these new construction projects was not only to provide modern homes for these foundations, museums and government buildings, but was also to set about transforming Athens into an architecturally modern city.

Many Athenians hoped the urban renewal to be sparked by the opening of the New Acropolis museum would not be limited to just an architectural renewal, but also would include a public policy renewal. In an editorial piece in the Kathimerini, entitled "Decline and Decay," the author (who is unnamed) suggests that the opening of the New Acropolis Museum must be the impetus for the government to clean up Athens, and make it a safer city. The editorial is primarily about the dangers to those in the center of Athens, an area known as Omonia, which is roughly 15 minutes away from the area of the Acropolis, and houses a large majority of tourists coming to

[64] Dimitris Rigopoulos. "Opening in two years." (May 29, 2007). *Kathimerini*. Digital Edition.
[65] Dimitris Rigopoulous. "Buildings that renew the city's image." (September 25 2009). *Kathimerini*. Digital Edition.

Athens. The area of Omonia is dangerous, asserts the article, due to the number of drug dealers and users, criminals, and prostitutes.

> The problems that plague Athens today have to be dealt with in a way that does not contradict the message of the bright new museum at the other end of the city's center…The quality of our democracy in the streets is just as important as the legacy we house in our splendid museums…When visitors come to Athens they visit us, not our ancestors. They will judge us, not our ancestors.[66]

While the editorial stresses that dangers to tourists need to be addressed, its main point is that the way in which the dangers are addressed need to be in line with "message" of the New Acropolis Museum, meaning in a way that is both modern, sensitive, and civilized. While the author's metaphor of dealing with crime and the construction of the new museum is certainly unique and colorful, one critical point can be taken away from reading this essay. His point is that the New Acropolis Museum is not just a museum, but a symbol of progress for the city.

To its supporters, the New Acropolis Museum had many roles to fill: it needed to be the strongest point in the argument for the reunification of the Parthenon Marbles; it needed to motivate Athenians and Greeks to think of their modern role in the history of their city and country; and it needed to be the impetus for an urban renewal, both architecturally and socially. While Tschumi outlined three of his daunting challenges in the creation of his design, what he could not have foreseen were the challenges facing the museum after its completion: the roles the museum would need to fill, and the symbols which the museum would need to become.

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[66] Anonymous. "Decline and Decay" (August 7, 2009). *Kathimerini*. Digital Edition.

Even those who objected to the construction of the museum would be hard-pressed to say that nothing positive has come of its construction. A newfound global interest in the modern architectural heritage of Athens was formed when, through technology, Athenians were able to raise awareness and gain support in the quest to save 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou. An important lesson was learned in the fight for 17 and 19, which is that people can make a difference. As clichéd as that seems, it is something many people often forget. We live in a world so replete with petitions and protests that fail to resolve anything, that people forget ocassionaly, a goal that is fought for can be achieved. The struggle for 17 and 19 also successfully conveyed to the Greek government that the people of Athens consider the continuous history of the city to make up their identity, not just the glory periods of antiquity, and the "now" in which they currently live. Thus, even when the New Acropolis Museum represented a threat to the history and identity of Athens in the minds of some people, in the end, the museum came to be an entity through which people could unite behind a single common goal.

While this paper has dealt primarily with concrete issues regarding the New Acropolis Museum: its location, materials, design, form, as well as the reasons for objecting to or being in support of the museum, in the final sections of this paper, issues based more in the abstract realm will be discussed. The last sections will focus on the New Acropolis Museum's effect on the identity of Modern Greeks, as well as the museum's transformative effects on visitors.

"I Woke With This Marble Head in My Hands; It Exhausts My Elbow and I Don't Know Where to Put it Down:"[67] The Burden of History to Modern Greece

The title of this section is taken from the opening lines of a poem written by Greek author George Seferis in 1967. The poem is perhaps most well-known to people who are not Greek, from the Opening Ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games. The poem was read during a section of the Opening in which a large head of a Cycladic figurine—representing prehistoric Greece-- rose from a pool of water, broke apart and formed a kouros figurine—from Archaic Greece—which then morphed into a Classical era sculpture, finally turning into a modern man. This section of the ceremony was meant to highlight and glorify the continuous history of Greece. It was an interesting choice then, to read Seferis' poem, which is about the burden placed on Modern Greeks by their past. The dual relationship illustrated in the Opening Ceremonies is one felt by many Greeks, who are simultaneously proud of their history, yet at the same time often find themselves judged or inconvenienced by it.

One such site that exemplifies the way in which history has become a sort of burden to Modern Greece, is the site of the Acropolis itself. The Acropolis is a burden to Modern Greeks because it has the unique position of being a "free floating signifier."[68] This idea of the Acropolis as a free floating signifier means that the Acropolis and its monuments are not important because they are tied to a specific location, but they have become symbols for a greater universal concept. While the Acropolis is a national symbol to the people of Greece, and holds a special

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[67] George Seferis, *Mythistorima* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1967).

[68] Caftanzoglou 24.

significance to Greeks, it is also a global symbol of the development of cultured civilization. The monuments represent the epitome of a civilized community that valued art, science, math, democracy, and philosophy. Classical Athens serves to be both the foundation for and pinnacle of Western civilization and intelligent thought. As such, the Acropolis has taken on a universal importance. As a universal symbol, the manner in which the Acropolis and its monuments are cared for and preserved are of concern not just to the people of Greece, but to people around the globe. Greece, however, bears the responsibility of housing the Acropolis and its monuments, and as such, caring for the site and its monuments has become the responsibility of the Greek nation and its people.

The New Acropolis Museum can be viewed as a way to relieve the "burden" put on Modern Greeks by their history. The museum is not a traditional museum meant to fit into the Neoclassical neighborhood in which it is located, nor is it meant to mimic the Parthenon, whose sculptural program is its crown jewel. The museum is a modern structure that pays homage to the Parthenon in a thoroughly modern way. To describe the New Acropolis Museum, one would say that the design is heavily reliant on precise mathematic principles, uses of state-of-the-art engineering ensuring longevity of the building, employs a simultaneously simple yet lavish design to create an innovative and eye-catching building that affects everyone who sees it and moves through it. These are all descriptions that could likewise be applied to the Parthenon itself.

> Today we do not build Parthenons—we already have perfection in our midst—but at last we have a great public building which shows that we

> can see the Acropolis in all its glory, and that we too, are capable of building for the future.[69]

What is described in this quote is an idea that Modern Greece does not have to attempt to replicate Ancient Greece. This also illustrates the idea that Modern Greeks are more than just the caretakers of an illustrious past. While Greeks do care for, and often define themselves by the lengthy history of the land in which they live, they also have a sense of a modern identity, and know that this modern identity is just as valuable as the ancient identity. The preservation of 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou can also be seen as contributing to the new modern identity of the Greeks. While the buildings were initially going to be torn down both to excavate beneath, in hopes of finding more antiquities, as well as to enhance the view of the New Acropolis Museum, ultimately the historic value of these buildings was recognized and they were saved.

Greece has a long history of privileging the past at the expense of the present, not just in Athens, but throughout the whole of the country. It has been discussed how at one time the people living in the area around the Agora, and presently those living in the neighborhood of Anafiotika live in a state of limbo, uncertain of what they can or cannot do to their homes, or even if they may lose their homes, in order to provide more land for excavation, or to simply cleanse an ancient site of modern intrusions. In archaeologist Jack Davis' report of his Pylos Regional Archeological Project (PRAP), he discusses some of the issues archaeologists faced when dealing with local residents. While PRAP was an uninvasive project, meaning only surface surveys and architectural surveys were done, people were skeptical to speak with and help Davis

[69] Nikos Konstandaras. "Building for the future." (June 22, 2009). *Kathimerini*. Digital Edition.

and his team of archaeologists. "Archaeology can strike terror into the hearts of Mediterranean landowners,"[70] Davis states. The reason for this is that in an archeologically rich country such as Greece, where it is joked one can dig anywhere and find antiquity, landowners become nervous that the government will limit what they can do on their property, or expropriate their land.

This is not to say that Greeks are afraid of archaeology, nor always find it to be troublesome. For many Greek towns, the best time of year is when they are inundated with archaeologists from abroad, and suddenly restaurants are filled, shops are frequented, and beer can hardly be kept in stock. Older townspeople regale archaeologists with stories of ruins found in fields, or artifacts found in caves, and are eager to share with visiting scholars the history of the area. Even in Athens, the summertime flood of archaeologists brings about an economic upswing. For the most part, the issues Greeks have with archaeology and the role it plays in their lives, is the way in which their government often handles situations. Expropriated lands, building restrictions, indefinite pauses for new construction projects are all problems Greeks face when an archaeological discovery is made on their property. The massive global campaign to save 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou served to show the government that Greece is not just defined by its archaeological remains, and one era's work of art should not be sacrificed to reveal another era. The preservation of 17 and 19 Dionysiou Areopagitou brought together Greeks and non-Greeks, archaeologists, preservationists, and architects to ultimately force the Greek government to reevaluate

[70] Jack Davis. "From Pausanius to the Present" in Jack Davis ed. *Sandy Pylos: From Nestor to Navarino*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998.). 291.

the way in which certain time periods were privileged over others. With the global acceptance of Greece's newfound modern identity, which is shaped by all eras of Greece's history, perhaps areas such as Anafiotika, once seen as a sacrilegious blight on the Acropolis, will be viewed as a unique architectural area that should be studied and protected, rather than expropriated and left to vanish.

While it certainly was not only the New Acropolis Museum or the issues that accompanied its construction that created interest in modern heritage, or a modern identity for Greeks, the museum was the most widely publicized element in this modern revitalization. The success of Greece's modernization by means of the New Acropolis Museum would not have been possible had it not been for the successful way in which the museum changed how people thought about and experienced antiquity through modernity. In this final section of the paper, the new museum experience afforded visitors to the New Acropolis Museum will be discussed.

"Thanks to all who worked a miracle for Greece and Athens and our Culture:"[71] A Visitor's Experience and Transformation

The success of the New Acropolis Museum hinges on one single fundamental principle, that of the visitor "getting it." For a person passing by the museum, or seeing it in pictures in books or online, the museum appears wildly out of place. "The New Acropolis Museum is like a meteorite falling into Greece's swamp…the waves

[71] Karolos Papoulias, in Helbi. "President Papoulias' first visit to the New Acropolis Museum." (January 12, 2008). *Kathimerini*. Digital Edition.

churn up our daily routine."[72] As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, the modern structure appears as though it just landed, like a meteorite, in the words of Nikos Konstandaras. There was no precedent for the museum's design in Athens, it was not as though the Makryianni neighborhood was a center for modernist architecture, and the museum design grew organically with its surroundings. As such, to a passerby or a person not spending their time analyzing the architecture of the museum in the context of modern Athens, the museum does not actually make much sense. The museum is large and imposing in a neighborhood of understated and elegant mansions. The building is oddly shaped, with the top portion seemingly at odds with the bottom portion, which at first glance has little to do with the perfection of the Parthenon, or even the logically square apartment blocks and mansions in Makriyianni.

In the years prior to the opening of the museum, the construction site was fenced off, and much of it was blocked from view with large signs telling visitors that the new museum was coming soon, in between images of sculptures from the Acropolis as well as plans of the new museum. Once construction of the building reached a point where the building was taller than the fenced off area, people could begin to get a sense of what the museum would look like. Rebar, concrete, large iron frames and huge panes of glass were visible in various states of construction. I had the opportunity to see the evolution of the New Acropolis Museum across four summers. Every time I walked by the museum, the people I was with along with myself would stop, stare at the museum, and conversation would eventually turn to "I don't get what that's going to look like. Is it going to look like an office building?" The building,

[72] Konstandaras 2009.

when viewed in various stages of construction, did not make much sense. Finally in the summer of 2008, the museum building was complete, and open to the public as artifacts were being moved in. I was eager to see the new building, even if it was not displaying its exhibits. The idea of finally being able to see this structure that I had watched slowly progress for four years was beyond enticing. Before going into the museum, I had seen it from the Acropolis, which I had visited a few weeks prior to the museum being opened. Seeing the large glass structure from above (fig 21), even in its completion, I still did not really get it.

It was not until going into the museum and moving through the space that I understood the design that had been puzzling me for so long. As soon as I stepped onto the glass entry plaza, I knew I was in for an experience I had never had at a museum. I had never walked onto a museum's grounds and felt a momentary sense of panic. The panic was due largely in part to the fact that I was standing on glass (fig 25) which—to someone afraid of heights—appeared to be towering above the archaeological site below. Like me, everyone who stepped onto the entry plaza was visibly moved, although most people did not appear to be moments away from a panic attack. For the most part, people's reactions ranged from surprise at what they were walking on, and what was visible below, to continuously expressing amazement at the extensive and well-preserved archaeological site that they seemed to be floating above.

The site, indeed, was well preserved and extensive. A problem with the site, however, was that nothing was labeled. As such, it was difficult for people to figure out what they were looking at. This, however, was not a problem for most people, who

simply pondered “what’s that?” snapped a picture, and moved on. For myself and my companion, the unlabeled site provided the opportunity to try to guess what we were looking at, a game that occupied at least 40 minutes of our time. The general reaction to the unlabeled site was far different than most reactions at poorly labeled sites throughout Athens, where people get frustrated not knowing what they’re looking at, or why they spent 5 euros to look at it. This could have been due largely in part to the fact that everyone’s foray into the museum that day had been free, but it is likely, too, that the architecture played a large role. Viewing an archaeological site while walking above it was a unique experience. No other site in Athens allows a visitor to feel as though they were hovering through the site. The interest created by viewing and interacting with the site in a new and unique way, far outweighed the problem of not quite knowing what we were seeing.

From the entry plaza, I entered the lobby of the museum and proceeded up the ramp leading to the first gallery. The ramp, like the entry plaza, was made of glass, some of which was transparent, allowing further dizzying views to the site below. We walked by cardboard replicas of the artifacts, which would be placed in the ramp once the museum was opened officially. The cardboard cutouts, while being slightly humorous to many, gave visitors an indication of what ascending the ramp with antiquities in it would be like. The ramp offered visitors an opportunity to see an archaeological site, from a modern building, which also housed finds made at sites such as the one below our feet. Although the archaeological site at which we were looking was not the one from which the objects in the ramp came from, it still afforded those unfamiliar with archaeology a context for the finds.

At the end of the ramp, one ascended a short stairway to the first gallery. Since the museum was not officially open, the top of the stairs was as far as we could go on that day. At the top of the stairs was a triangular shape, meant to mimic a pediment. In the triangle were images of the sculptures from Archaic Hecatompedon, which predated the Parthenon on the Acropolis. Light flooded the plateau at the top of the stairs, from walls of windows that filled the closed off space that would become the Archaic gallery (fig 24). Peering around barricades, I could see many familiar Archaic objects from the old museum. Many were still wrapped with protective covering, while some were in the open. I had seen most of these pieces before, in the old Acropolis museum. However, in the light-flooded gallery of the new museum, the objects looked very different than I remembered them. It was then, seeing the archaic statues in the sunlight that I turned to my companion and said "this is going to be amazing when it's done." As I left the museum, I heard many visitors echo my same sentiment.

The amazement I felt as I left the museum was a complete turnaround from the dubiousness I felt towards the structure on the day I went in. Even though from the outside, I did not fully understand the museum, I was compelled to go inside of it, to see if entering the building could clarify the use of materials and odd form of the museum. It was only once I stepped into the museum space, and moved through the museum that I left feeling like I understood. I wasn't sure if it was the entry plaza's new way of viewing a site that had changed my mind, or if it was walking up the ramp which juxtaposed ancient with modern in a way I had not seen before, or if it was seeing the ancient sculptures in the sun, with the city and sky behind them that made

me understand the organization and meaning of the museum. The museum was a building that made the visitor see these pieces from antiquity in the context of the modern city of Athens. The museum did not display the antiquities in way that compelled the visitor to look at them in a referential way. The museum was displaying the antiquities in a way that asked the viewer to consider their context: to see an archaic sculpture in the sunlight, with the modern city as its backdrop, and think about not only the Acropolis of the past, but the Acropolis today.

Once the museum was opened officially, the issue of context was emphasized by the way the works in the museum were displayed. "The museum…is now being populated by those sculptures,"[73] stated Tschumi once the sculptures were moved into the new museum. The idea of the museum being "populated" is central to the way in which the objects are displayed. The objects are not just placed in a space, they are meant to inhabit a space. As such, no object is placed against a wall. The galleries, with the exception of the Parthenon gallery, are literally filled with sculptures placed at or slightly above eye level. A visitor gets the sense that they are sharing a space with the sculptures. As a result of their placement, visitors can see every angle of every piece, which is not possible in most museums. This allows viewers to understand not just that the pieces are aesthetically pleasing, but also to understand the way the objects were made, how they may have been damaged, and even see if pieces had been cut away and reused in another context. Visitors can also get quite close to the objects, which they frequently do, and notice minute details they otherwise may

[73] Tschumi in Nicholas Paphitis. "1st of Acropolis sculptures successfully transferred by crane to new museum at foot of ancient Greek citadel." (October 14 2007). *The Associated Press*. Digital Edition.

have missed. While visitors can get close to pieces at other museums, there is often an awkward sense of getting too close, breaking an unwritten rule, the same rule which calls for whispers and hushed voices inside a museum. This is not so at the New Acropolis Museum, where the objects are arranged to encourage individuals to come closer, and view from all angles. The inviting nature of the objects, and their placement against a backdrop of modern architecture in a modern city, makes the visitor realize the New Acropolis Museum is different than most museums they have been to before. Regardless of how one feels about the aesthetics, location, design or arrangement of the museum, it is clear that the New Acropolis Museum represents a new way to think about a museum and its purpose. The museum does not dictate a right way or correct angle to view an object, leaving that to the viewer. The museum only seeks to make a visitor think about the objects' relationship to the ancient and modern city and, in turn, the visitor's own place in history.

From the ground up, the New Acropolis Museum is a modern structure with roots in antiquity. The foundations of the building are sunk amongst the foundations of Ancient Athenian walls from thousands of years ago. The building soars in the air, offering viewers a light-filled space to view the treasures of the Acropolis. Finally, the building is capped by an homage to the Parthenon, a universal symbol of the achievements of civilization. The museum construction was only possible with architects, engineers, archaeologists, politicians, and public citizens from Athens and around the world working together, and engaging in dialogue and debate. The New Acropolis Museum represents the way—through new architectural constructions, heritage preservation, and archaeological endeavors—a modern identity can be

created. Through the New Acropolis Museum, the people of Greece make a statement to the world, which is that they are not defined purely by their antiquity. Instead, they are modern people, who aim to preserve and share all aspects of their history with the world, now and into the future.

Figures

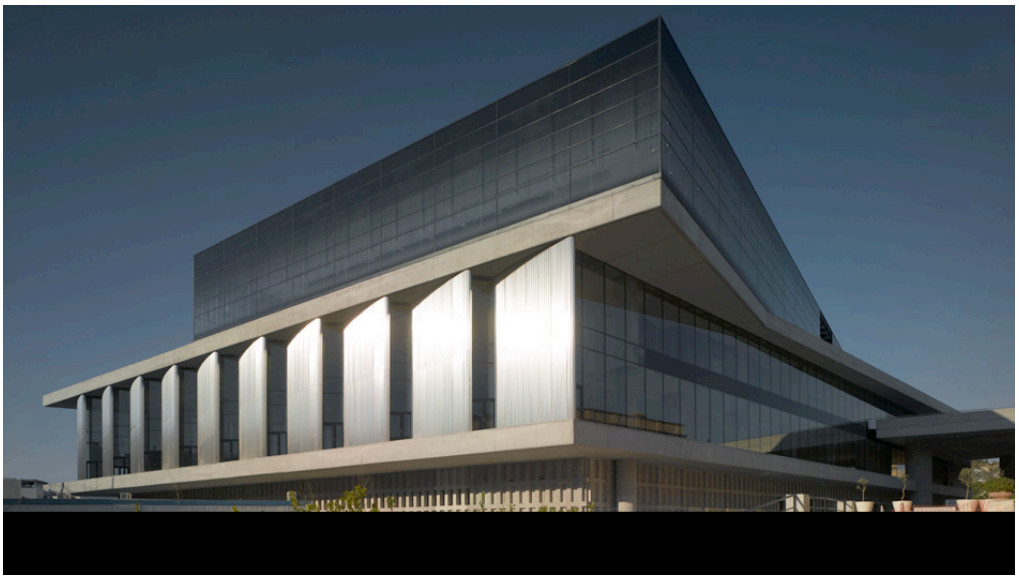

Figure One: The New Acropolis Museum

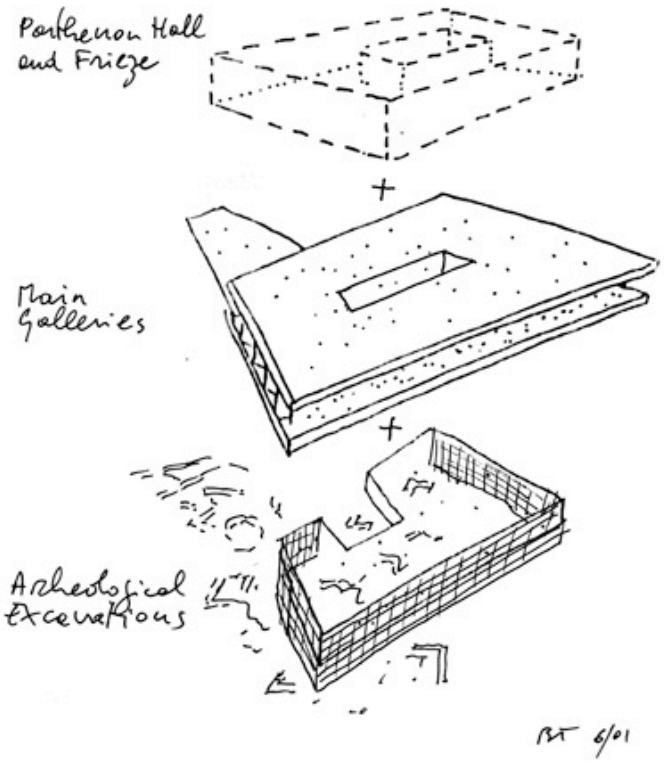

Figure Two: The Three Part Plan

Figure Three: The Columns and the Site

Figure Four: Form

Figure Five: The Archaic Gallery

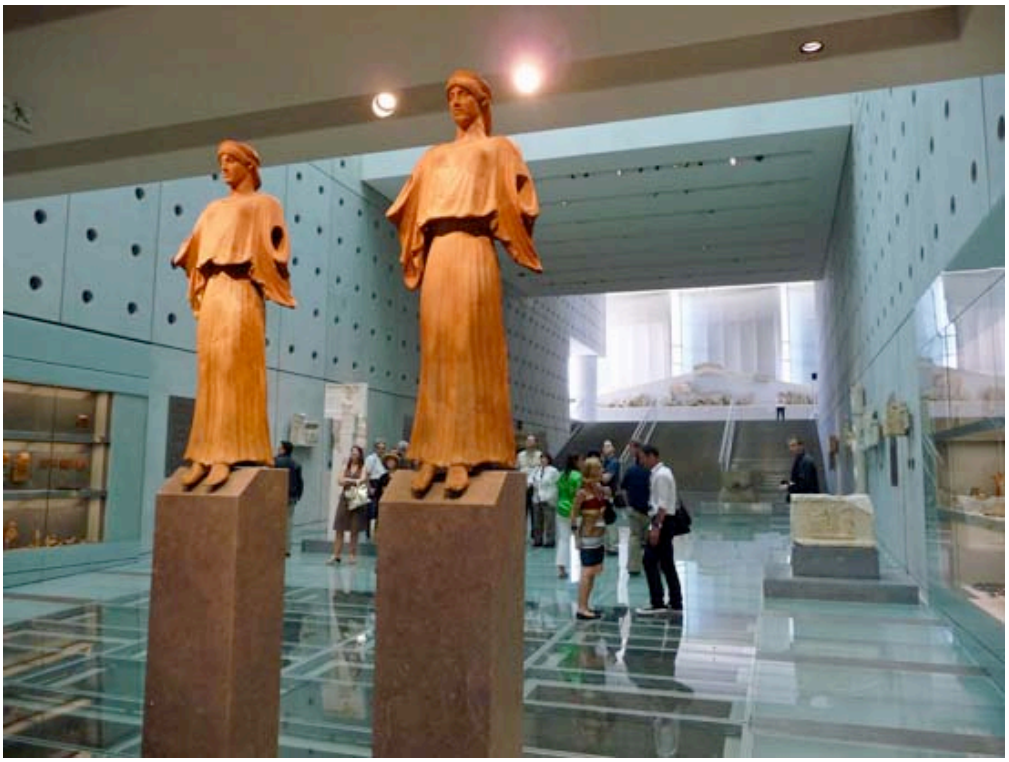

Figure Six: The Ramp

Figure Seven: National Archaeological Museum

Figure Eight: Parthenon Gallery

Figure Nine: Parthenon Gallery Windows

Figure Ten: Close-up of Glass in Parthenon Gallery

Figure 11: Parthenon Gallery Display

Figure 12: The Parthenon

Figure 13: The old Acropolis Museum

Figure 14: Aerial View of New Acropolis Museum

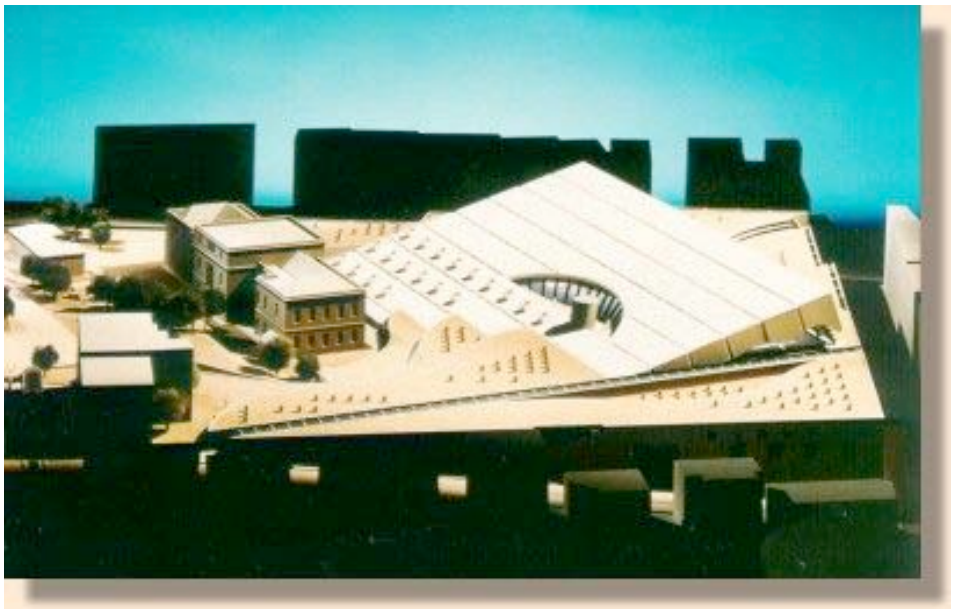

Figure 15: The Italian Design of the New Acropolis Museum

Figure 16: Anafiotika

Figure 17: 17 Dionysiou Areopagitou

Figure 18: Dionysiou Areopagitou Walkway

Figure 19: The Parthenon Marbles in the Duveen Gallery at the British Museum

Figure 20: President Napolitano Returning Italy's Parthenon Fragment

Figure 21: Patras Museum

Figure 22: Excavations Under Glass

Figure 23: The Archaic Pediment

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