

Hellas: Then and Now

Classics 3700: Experiential Reflections, Summer 2019

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In May of 2019 a group of mostly Classics students visited many sites of ancient and contemporary Greece. During those travels, this (mature) student, previously trained and seasoned in architecture, was most affected by three distinctly different phenomena: the meaning implicit in the architecture of the Acropolis; the shocking number of abandoned villas spotted roadside during our bus-based travels through Athens, the islands, and the Peloponnese; and, the built metaphors crying out for interpretation within the New Acropolis Museum.

While all of these phenomena, and more, have been addressed within, there is no consequent claim that their treatment is exhaustive or definitive, only honest, cleanly argued, and heartfelt.

As an organizing hypothesis, to carry the threads of exploration forward, the contention is that the symmetry of the Parthenon and the asymmetry of the Erechtheion, with the meanings implicit in both of those types of organization, will serve to illuminate the problem of the villas as well as the metaphors of the New Acropolis Museum. The Parthenon will be juxtaposed with the Spartan code and the Erechtheion with Pericles' Funeral Oration.

In a less contextually apt series of juxtapositions, the problem of the villas will be tested against social theories of Jane Jacobs and Niall Ferguson in an attempt to understand how Japan and Israel prospered, after disastrous WWII experiences, while Greece faltered.

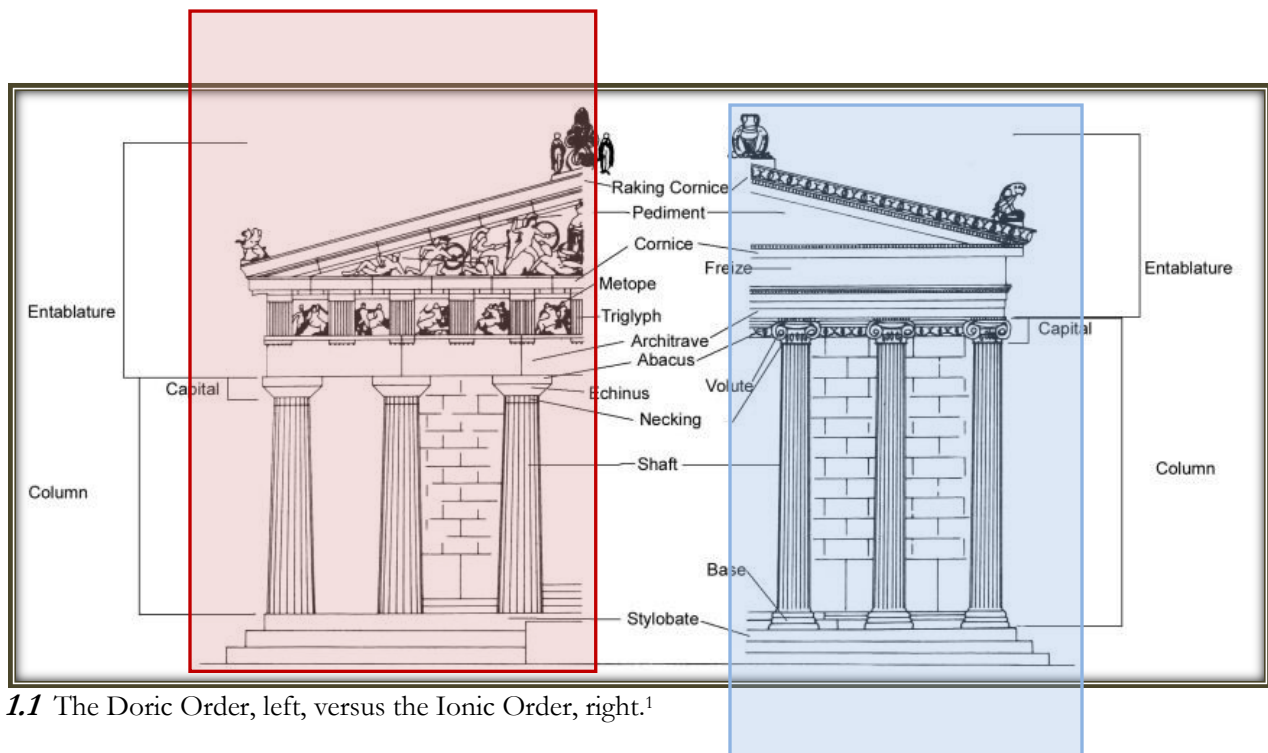
Finally, the loads borne by the columns at the New Acropolis Museum will be analyzed to test their purpose and meaning as parts of a much greater whole. In parallel, the concept of the screen will be examined to see just how tangible and impactful the historical fabric of ancient Greece is within the culture of its contemporary descendants.

Reflection 1: Within the Ancient Roots: The Parthenon, Erechtheion; Xenophon & Pericles

This student's first acquaintance with the Parthenon, and indeed the Athenian Acropolis, occurred in Ellis Hall, Queen's University, four decades ago this autumn. The impact of a first art history course combined with Kingston's architecture and some personal factors, led to one of the most significant changes in this student's life: in what seemed a single term, I was transformed from one wanting to study and teach the Western Canon to an aspiring architect.

Although Modernism in 1979 had biased students against reverence for such things as the Ionic or Doric orders, Fig. 1.1 below, they still impressed as the textbook of the time made clear:

What do we mean by 'architectural order'? By common agreement, the term is used for Greek architecture only (and its descendants); and rightly so, for none of the other architectural systems known to us produced anything like it. Perhaps the simplest way to make clear the unique character of the Greek orders is this: there is no such thing as 'the Egyptian temple' or 'the Gothic church'...



1.1 The Doric Order, left, versus the Ionic Order, right.¹

¹ Artistic Adventures of Mankind, at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=doric+and+ionic+orders+differences&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewi2gLs7LfjAhXJMd8KHUFZCxiQ_AUIECgB&biw=1600&bih=757#imgrc=QxiJXKfCP9i5M:

In the next decade of this student's life, architecture was transformed from an academic discipline written in words, drawings, and ancient sites to a plastic medium of firmness, commodity, and delight.² And in the attempt to marshal the creation of delight, thousands of precedent buildings were analyzed discussed and, where possible, visited.

If I could keep only one of those books of canonic architecture, it would be Clark & Pause's *Precedents in Architecture*. The book has no pictures of finished buildings nor vistas of the buildings in context. It is an architect's book consisting of a set of design questions graphically applied to 64 precedent-setting buildings from around the world, though most of them are distinctly Western.

What does it mean for a building to be distinctly Western? That is the question at the heart of this paper, the distinctness of the West as manifested in perhaps *the* two seminal buildings at the base of our architectural DNA: the Parthenon and the Erechtheion.

Following such a build up, one would expect *Precedents in Architecture* to contain significant study of both buildings yet neither appears even once. Yet, it is equally accurate to say that either the Parthenon or the Erechtheion is present in each of the 64 buildings studied as every Western building built since the advent of these two order-based fabrications voluntarily (architecture) or involuntarily (construction) acknowledges their lineage.

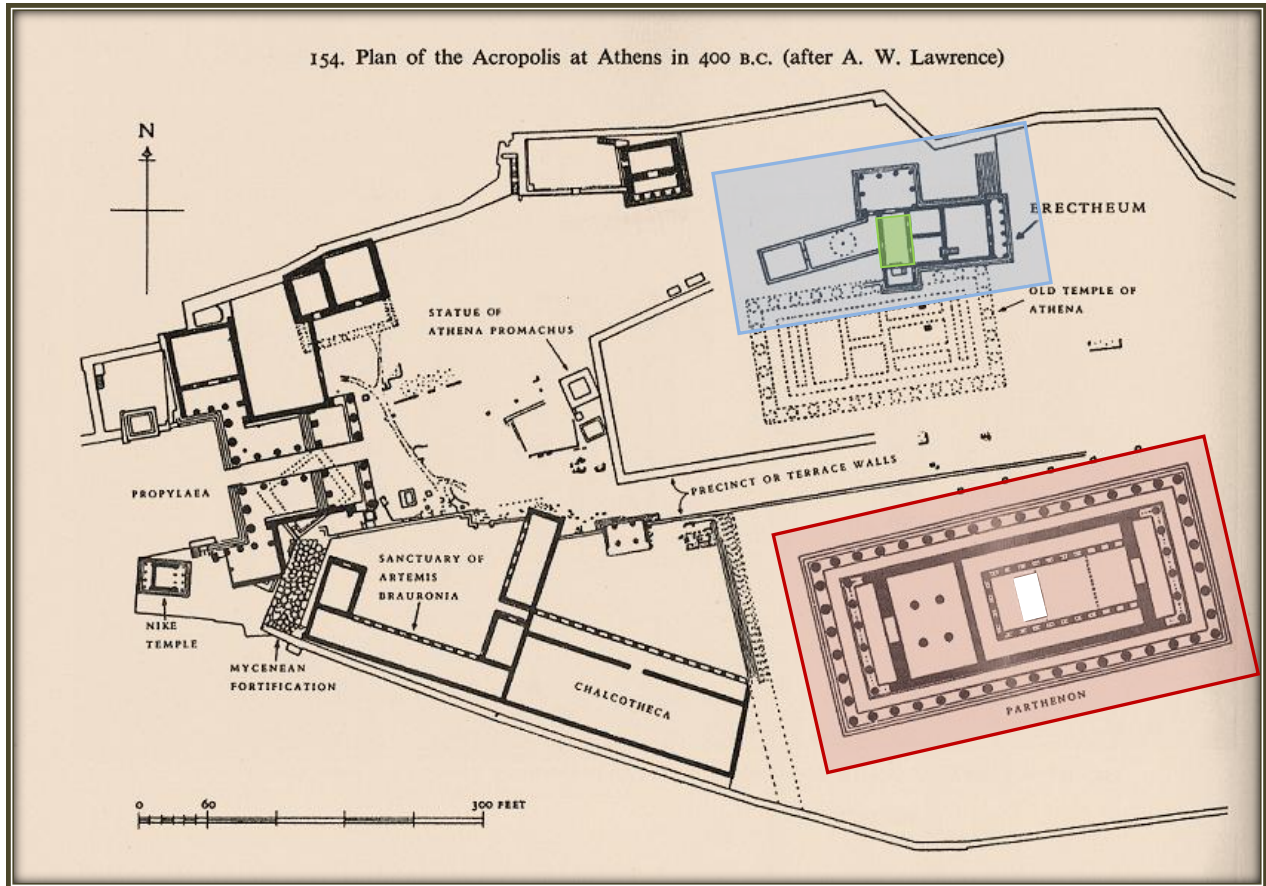
As the site plan in Figure 1.2, below, illustrates, the Parthenon is a significantly larger building than the Erechtheion. The Parthenon (447-436 BCE) also preceded the Erechtheion (c. 406-402 BCE)³ and presumably, as the Parthenon faces the business end of the lower city, was the ancient billboard of primary intent: this is contemporary Hellas from 436 BCE forward.

But, despite having the prime location, greater size and renown, the Parthenon, architecturally, appears to this student a lesser work of architecture. Some of the reasons for the superiority of the Erechtheion can most clearly be seen in the floor plans shown on the site plan,

² Vitruvius's tripartite description of the requirements of architecture.

³ Both sets of dates from Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*, pp. 112-117.

Figure 1.2 and floor plans, Figure 1.3. For example, the perimeter of the Parthenon is a single rectangle; the perimeter of the Erechtheion is formed by the entirely artful combination of at least four rectangles one of which (lime green hatching, centre of plan) unites all the other plan elements.



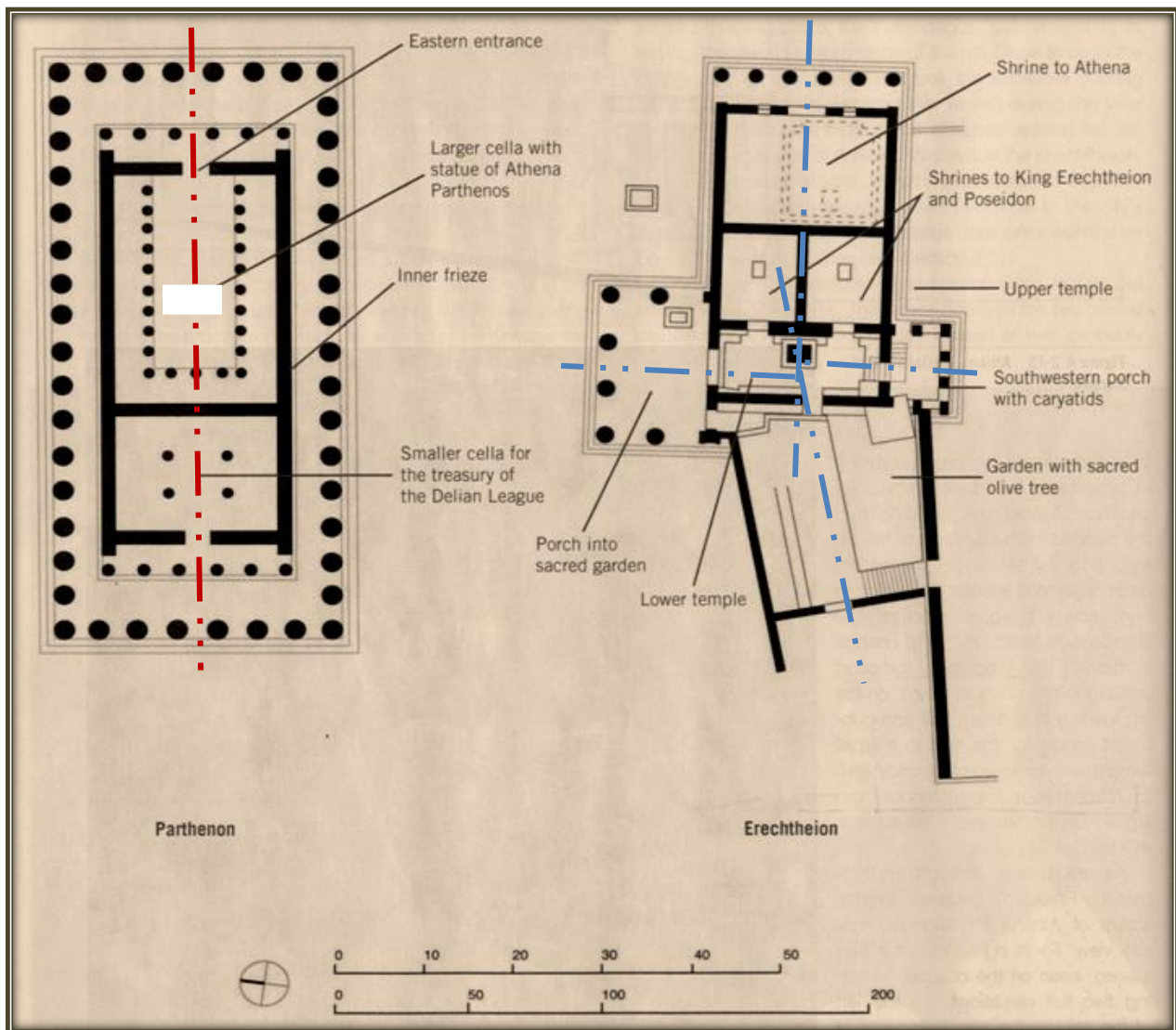
1.2 Site Plan, Acropolis of Athens, Greece, c. 400 BCE with the Erechtheion in blue, Parthenon in red.⁴

While there is a sequential hierarchy of spaces leading to the statue of Athena in the Parthenon (white rectangle in Figs. 1.2, above, 1.3, below), there must also have been a sense of inescapable unity within the Parthenon (Fig. 1.10, below) as its hyper-columnar structure is reminiscent of uniformly and symmetrically arrayed soldiers surrounding the treasure within.

The Erechtheion was composed of more humanly scaled, asymmetrically composite spaces (Cf. Figs. 1.6 and 1.7, below) with the significant advantage of multiple, fractionally scaled elevations allowing wonderfully varied angles of approach and much less militarily daunting facades (Figs. 1.6-

⁴ Janson, *History of Art*, p. 120.

1.9, below). Finally, as figures 1.5 and 1.10 illustrate, the floor plate of the Parthenon is essentially a stepped singular plane while the floor plate of the Erechtheion occurs on three distinctly different levels making the sectional qualities of the Erechtheion much more complex, intriguing, and aesthetically satisfying.



1.3 Floor plans with axial relationships illustrated in the Parthenon, left, and Erechtheion, right.⁵

⁵Richard Chenoweth Architect at: <http://www.chenarch.com/Lecture-10-H1.html> with drawings credited to Ingersoll.

Ictinus & Callicrates are known to have been the architects of the Parthenon though the division of work between the two is unknown.⁶ Regarding the Erechtheion, Fletcher wrote the following:

The resulting building is unusual and irregular in plan, but shows the same principles as those employed in the layout of the Propylaea [Fig. 1.4, below] **namely the gathering together of several elements into a complex but unified arrangement.** It is more likely that this was done deliberately, on the inspiration of the Propylaea, rather than that an original plan, similar to the 'old' temple [Cf. Figure 1.2, above specifically the dashed drawing immediately below the Erechtheion], was gradually modified. The original architect is not known...and if he were not Mnesicles himself, he certainly had learned from Mnesicles." [Bold face added.]⁷

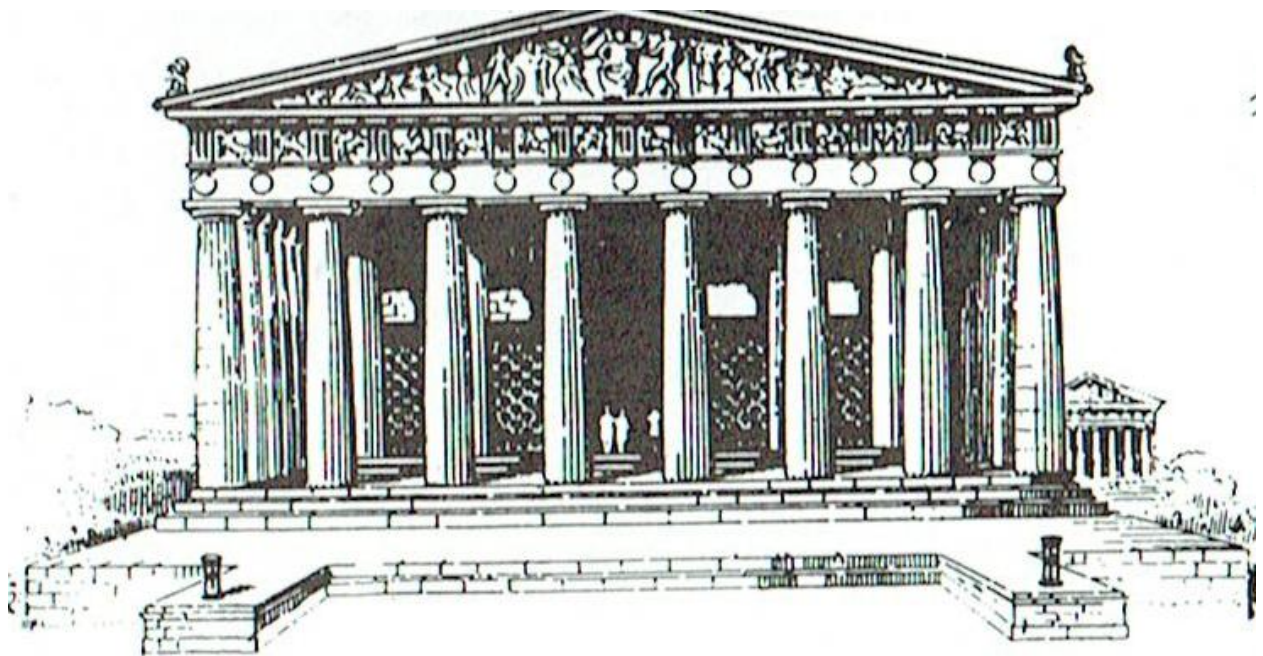
Fletcher's description of the design of the Erechtheion serves the thesis of this discussion well: where the Parthenon is a more/less monolithic, symmetrical, uni-axial creation, the Erechtheion is a quadra-axial, polylythic, asymmetrical creation "gathering...several elements into a complex but unified arrangement." Moreover, the unity achieved by the Erechtheion is almost endlessly changing as one experiences the building from different internal, external, and conceptual perspectives.



1.4 Perspective view from the northwest, the Propylaea, Acropolis, Athens, Greece, May 2019.

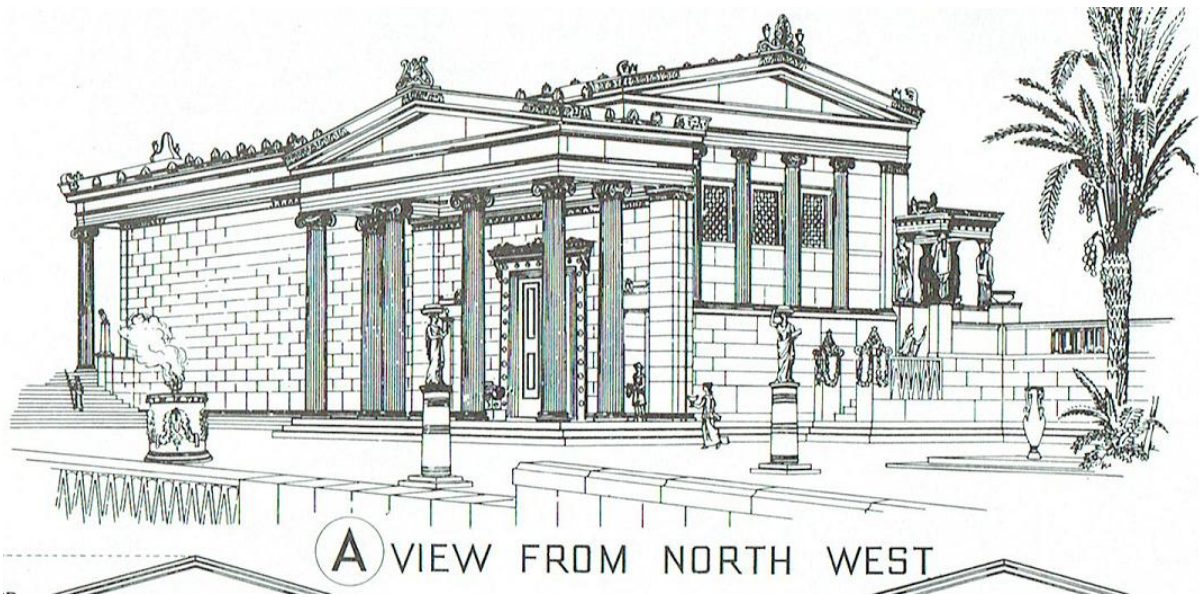
⁶ Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*, p. 112.

⁷ Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*, p. 116.



(B) E. FACADE (RESTORED)

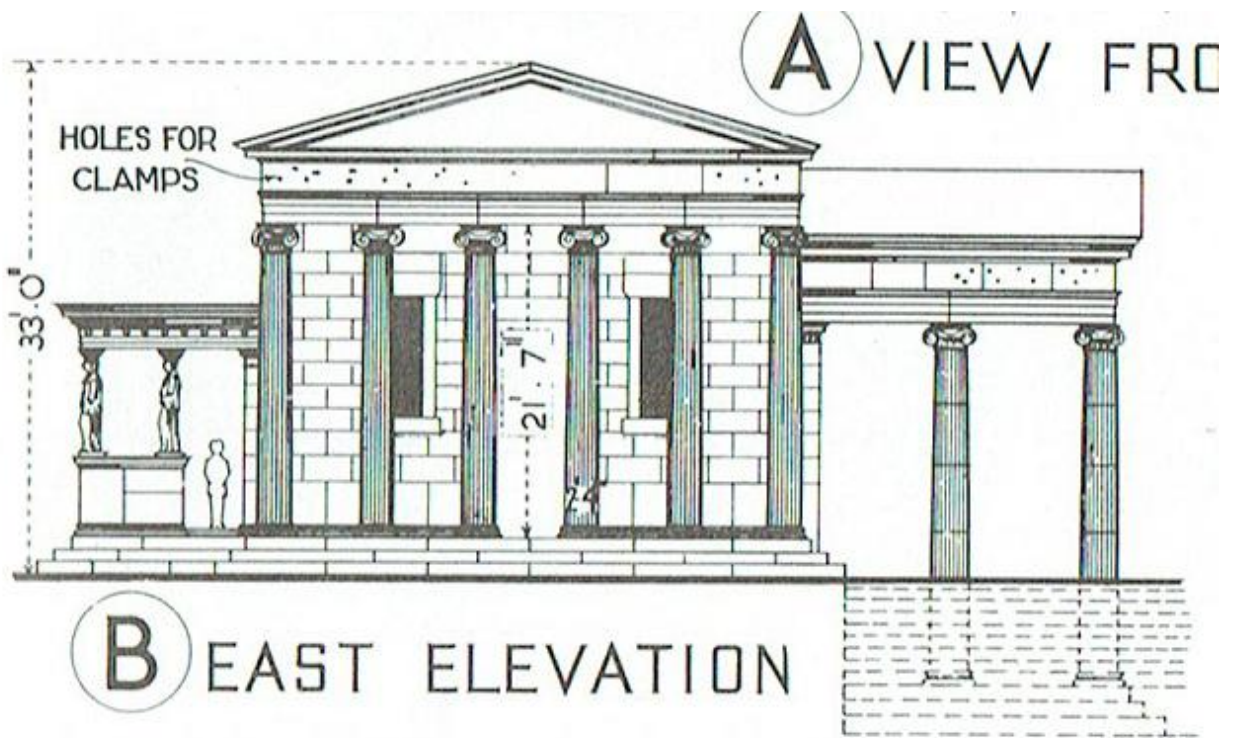
1.5 East Elevation (Front) of Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens, Greece.⁸



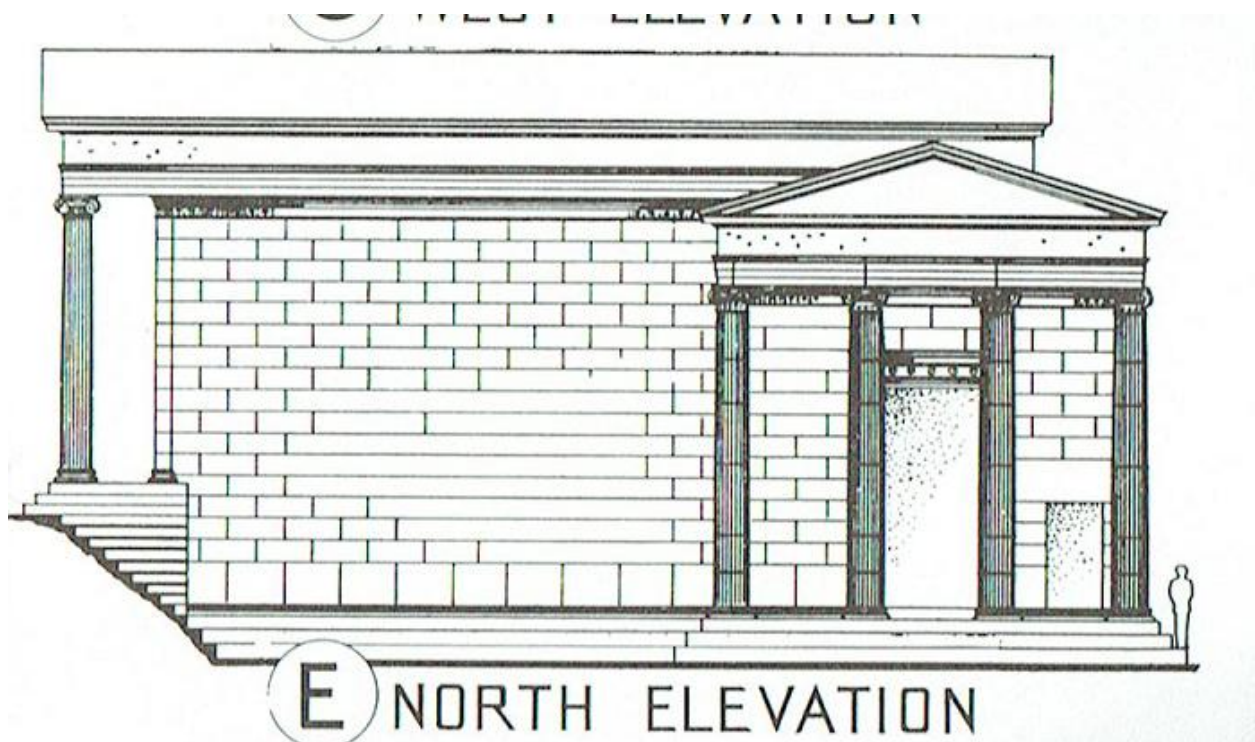
(A) VIEW FROM NORTH WEST

1.6 Perspective view, Erechtheion, Acropolis, Athens, Greece.

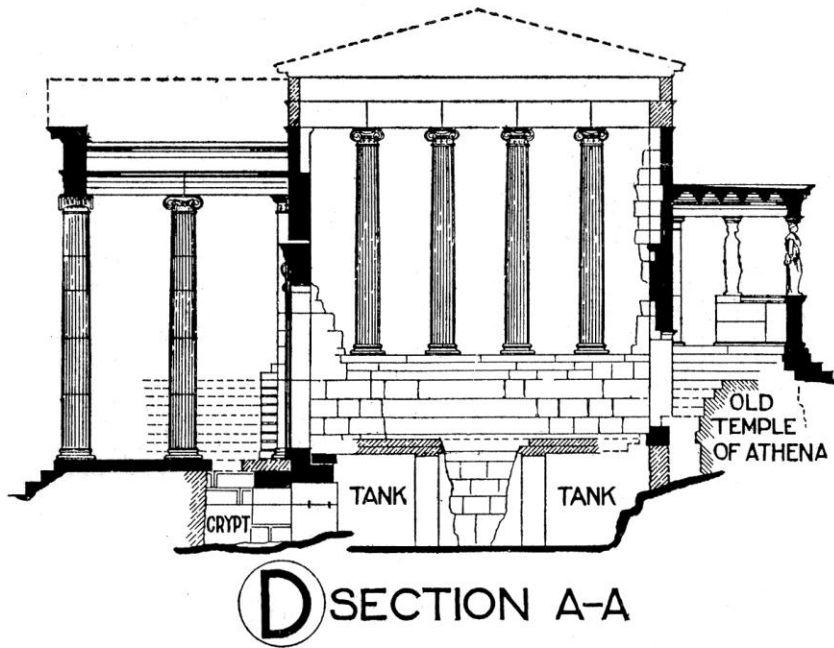
⁸ Drawings in Figures 1.5-1.10 from Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*, pp. 114, 117.



1.7 East Elevation, Erechtheion, Acropolis, Athens, Greece.

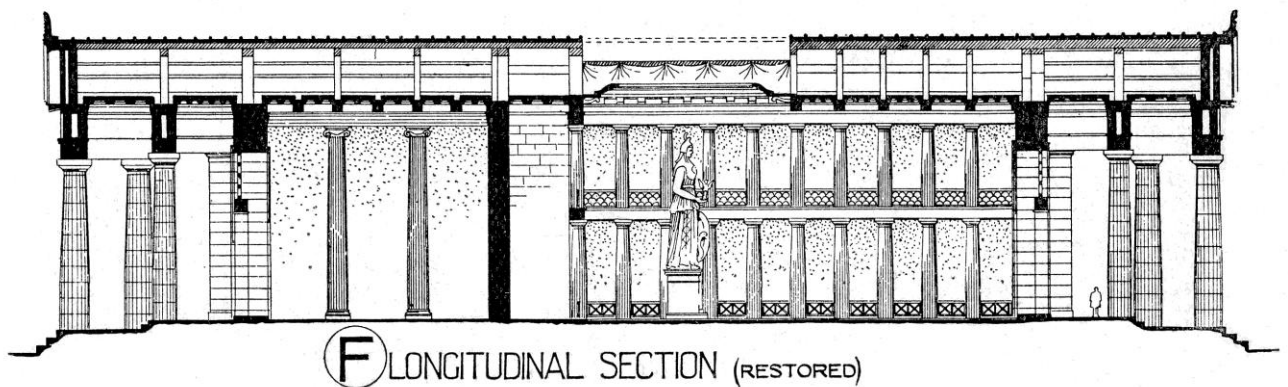


1.8 North Elevation, Erechtheion, Acropolis, Athens, Greece.



1.9 North-South (Longitudinal) Building Section, Erechtheion, Acropolis, Athens, Greece.

Of all the drawings illustrating the differentia between these buildings, none speak as eloquently as these two: Figure 1.9 conveys an enormously sophisticated sense of proportional balance enabling the much smaller Caryatid porch (mass, far right) to counterbalance its axial opposite (mass, far left). The tension created by this magnificently proportioned volumetric equation easily elevates this drawing into the realm of the spiritual: for this architect that drawing has the same hypnotic effect as the nave of a Gothic cathedral. One suspects the lived experience of the interior of the Parthenon would also be powerful but, as compositions, the Erechtheion is alive, the Parthenon, flat.



1.10 North-South (Longitudinal) Building Section, Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens, Greece.

Moving from architecture to zeitgeist, Xenophon's admiration and description of Lycurgus' Spartan Code is jarring when juxtaposed with Pericles' *Funeral Oration* as the cultural spirit and teleological ends of Sparta and Athens are nearly diametrically opposed. Where the freedom of Spartan citizens was curtailed to the point of planned human breeding in aid of strong soldiers,⁹ Athenians chose their valedictorians based on individual intellectual gifts and reputation.¹⁰ Where the Athenians celebrated their dead because those dead had bequeathed them a free country¹¹ in which individual merit was celebrated,¹² the Spartans wished to be judged on the degree to which Spartans were "...obedient, respectful, and self-controlled..."¹³ in a culture that could not have been less conducive to the fostering of a distinctive self.

Where Athens celebrated the diversity of ideas, citizens, and products fostered by open minds and markets,¹⁴ Sparta promoted a "uniform standard of living"¹⁵ whereby a noble death was preferred to living in dishonour¹⁶ with the unchallenged but broad understanding that dishonour was defined by the state and accepted (voluntarily or otherwise) by all.

In short, the Spartans lived to excel at war; the Athenians to excel at democratic, meritorious life. The monolithic essence of the Spartans is much more easily recognized in the symmetrical Parthenon while the polythetic essence of the Athenians (or any heterodoxy) is more easily recognized in the several gathered elements of the complex but unified Erechtheion; the former speaks to unity and control, the latter to the complex beauty of human freedom.

⁹ Xenophon's *Politeia of the Spartans*, paragraphs I:3-9.

¹⁰ Pericles' *Funeral Oration*, paragraph 34.

¹¹ Pericles' *Funeral Oration*, paragraph 36.

¹² Pericles' *Funeral Oration*, paragraph 37.

¹³ Xenophon's *Politeia of the Spartans*, paragraph II:14.

¹⁴ Pericles' *Funeral Oration*, paragraphs 38-40.

¹⁵ Xenophon's *Politeia of the Spartans*, paragraph VI:3.

¹⁶ Xenophon's *Politeia of the Spartans*, paragraph IX:1.

Reflection 2: Why the Abandoned Villas?

It was during the second bus trip, on the morning of our first full day in Greece, enroute to Lake Marathon, that the abandoned villas began appearing. Mostly they were variations of the villa shown in Fig. 2.1, below: two-storey, cast-in-place, reinforced concrete structures with the rebar, for another set of columns, protruding from the third floor level. It was evident from the adjacent vegetation and patination that these concrete frames had been abandoned for years, not months. Subsequent research has not only verified that the abandoned villas presaged a deeper, darker problem, but revealed that the number of these buildings is in the 500,000 range.¹⁷



2.1 Typical abandoned villa in the greater area of Athens, Greece.

In order to understand the problem of the abandoned villas, a half-dozen texts were consulted as well as colleagues of Greek origin or experience, and contemporary journalism. However, the deeper the digging, the deeper the roots travelled. As time moved forward, the hope of definitive understanding mellowed into a more impressionistic sense of causal factors.

¹⁷ Roussanoglou, "Thousands of Empty Properties...", *Business*, p. 1.

My favourite commentator was James Angelos, an American with Greek roots who grew up in both countries: "A Greek hotel owner once summarized the country's predicament to me like this: 'First, Greece has the problem of itself. Second, Greece has the problem of the Troika.'"¹⁸ The view of the hotelier is useful for dividing the problem into historical and contemporary issues.

The Troika consists of the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Central Bank,¹⁹ all of which have taken it upon themselves, with Greece's debt-fueled consent, to hold Greece to account. The difficulty the Troika faces is manifold. First, if Greece fails, Italy and Spain will not be far behind. Second, if Greece fails, the seat of democracy, not to mention the European Union, will be seen as glaring failures. Thirdly, and this is based on years of reading financial news, if Italy, Spain, and Greece fail, the run on banks that was stemmed in 2008 would become a contagion throughout Europe revealing our fiat currencies for what they are: backed only by predicted international GDPs and promissory notes.

Of equal concern, in a contemporary context, is the oft-cited corruption rampant throughout Greece (Spain, and Italy). And it is corruption that leads to the historical roots of the problem because virtually no one in Greece trusts public authority as legitimate. And for good reason, as virtually every source consulted relayed stories of corruption in building departments, taxation offices, medical units, and national government accounting offices²⁰...

Ultimately, the problem goes back to "the other." When "the other" is Germany, Europe's major industrially based lender, the issue of WWII arises. There is no question, valid arguments can be made in favour of more just reparations. However, this problem precedes the Nazis by well over a century because the Greeks never really shared the industrial revolution of the United Kingdom, the Ruhr Valley, or North America as they, like most of the Eastern Block, were only liberated from

¹⁸ Angelos, *The Full Catastrophe*, p. 17.

¹⁹ Angelos, *The Full Catastrophe*, p. 2.

²⁰ Papaconstantinou, *Game Over*, pp. 23-41.

the Ottoman Empire in 1821, depending on the region of Greece in question. So..."the other" was once a Turk, twice a German, three-times a barbarian.²¹ The Greek sense is that they haven't been themselves for centuries through no fault of their own. And by this student's reckoning the first half of the last sentence is true; the second, questionable.



2.2 Typically defaced building, central Athens, Greece, May 2019.

For years after Greece joined the [European] currency, investors deemed lending money to its government to be only marginally more risky than lending to Germany, a far wealthier and more fiscally prudent nation considered one of the safer places in the world to put your money. With the new ease with which it could borrow, Greece's government doled out big raises to its workforce, raised pension benefits, and spent several billion Euros on the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. Greeks freely spent their newly acquired money, which benefited other euro-zone economies (they bought German cars, for instance) and Greece, too (spending at local restaurants and shops, and a construction boom [n.b. the abandoned villas and the omnipresently expressive graffiti, Fig. 2.2, above]).²²

²¹ Bar-bar was the original Greek imitating the sound of the language of outlanders.

²² Angelos, *The Full Catastrophe*, p. 6.

While travelling this spring, every tour bus, as we moved around Athens and then through the Peloponnese, was of German origin. In cases where I didn't recognize the manufacturer, I asked our bus driver who confirmed their German origin. In an economically depressed country, this struck me sharply as I vividly recalled Japan's post WWII means of rebuilding their devastated economy. As Jane Jacobs described it, the Japanese rebuilt through a concept she called import replacement²³, which began with bicycles.

As bicycles failed, after the war, Japanese entrepreneurs began learning how to make the broken parts rather than ordering them from the U.S.A. or Britain. Eventually the ability to manufacture steel pedals, torque arms, sprockets, and frames spawned an entire new industry which was thriving as early as this student's 1970s boyhood. Needless to say, the Japanese went on to build cars, trains, electronics etc. to the point of being a major economic power. Are the Greeks replacing German bus parts with Greek substitutes? It seems not.

As the complaints about WWII reparations were gathered from highly educated Greek colleagues and the consulted texts, the thought of WWII raised the spectre of the Jewish people who have to be at the head of any list of WWII injustices. And yet the Jewish survivors and their descendants have, since 1948 built a cultural, economic, military, and educational dynamo while Greece seems to have sunk further into a morass.

Niall Ferguson is a financial historian troubled by the state of the West in the late 20th- and early 21st-centuries. Near the end of his essay "Civil and Uncivil Societies" he wrote:

We humans live in a complex matrix of institutions. There is government. There is the market. There is the law. And then there is civil society. Once...this matrix worked astonishingly well, with each set of institutions complementing and reinforcing the rest. That, I believe, was the key to Western success in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. But the institutions in our times are out of joint.²⁴

²³ Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, pp. 35-38.

²⁴ Ferguson, *The Great Degeneration*, p. 134.

If these institutions are out of joint in the major countries of the West, they are fractured, disabled, and barely communicating in contemporary Greece.

Reflection 3: The View from Here: The New Acropolis Museum (NAM)



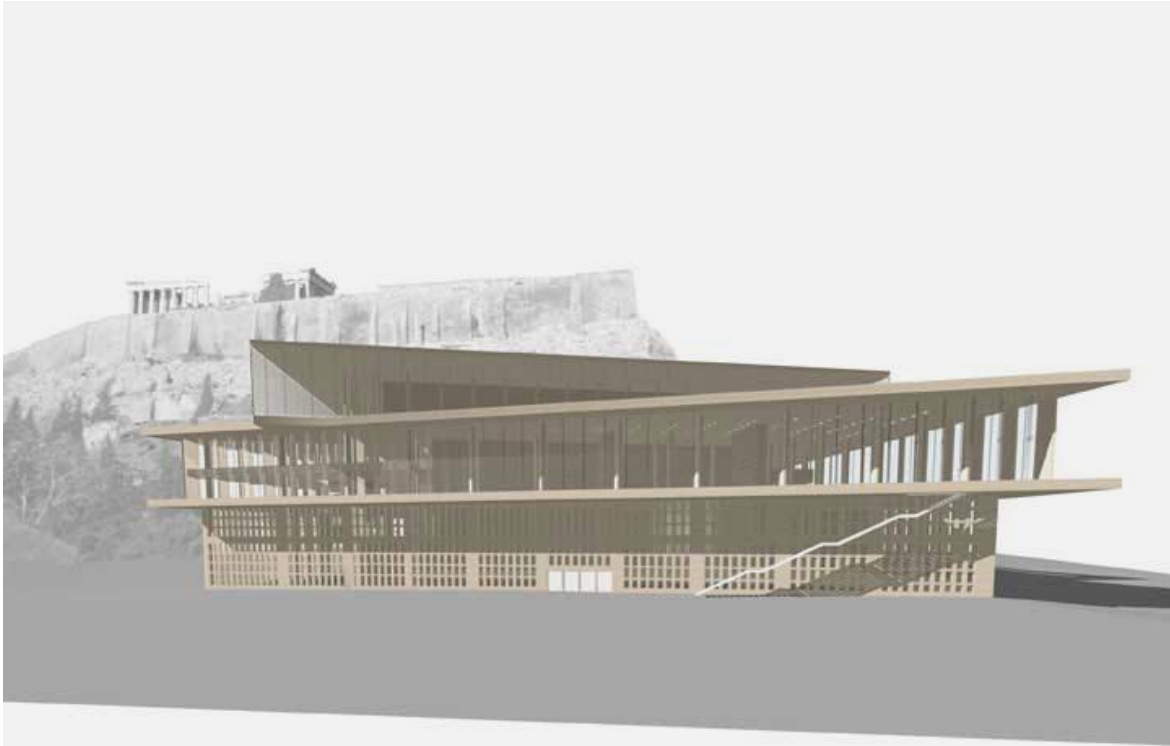
3.1 The Parthenon on the Acropolis, seen from inside the New Acropolis Museum, Athens, Greece, May 2019.

On our final night in Greece, our group had returned to Athens and visited the NAM for about one hour prior to our final dinner. The quality and apparent metaphors manifest in some of the architectural choices were stunning as were the quality of the material palette and construction detailing. The building itself is an artifact worth exploration.

It is important to understand that the point of view through which the NAM is being discussed is not a full architectural précis but as a précis evaluating initial impressions of the relationship of the NAM to ancient and contemporary Greece; this being a narrower architectural subset. With that understood, two central metaphors struck this student with the force of aesthetic blows to the head: the prevalence of screens and the scale of the columns



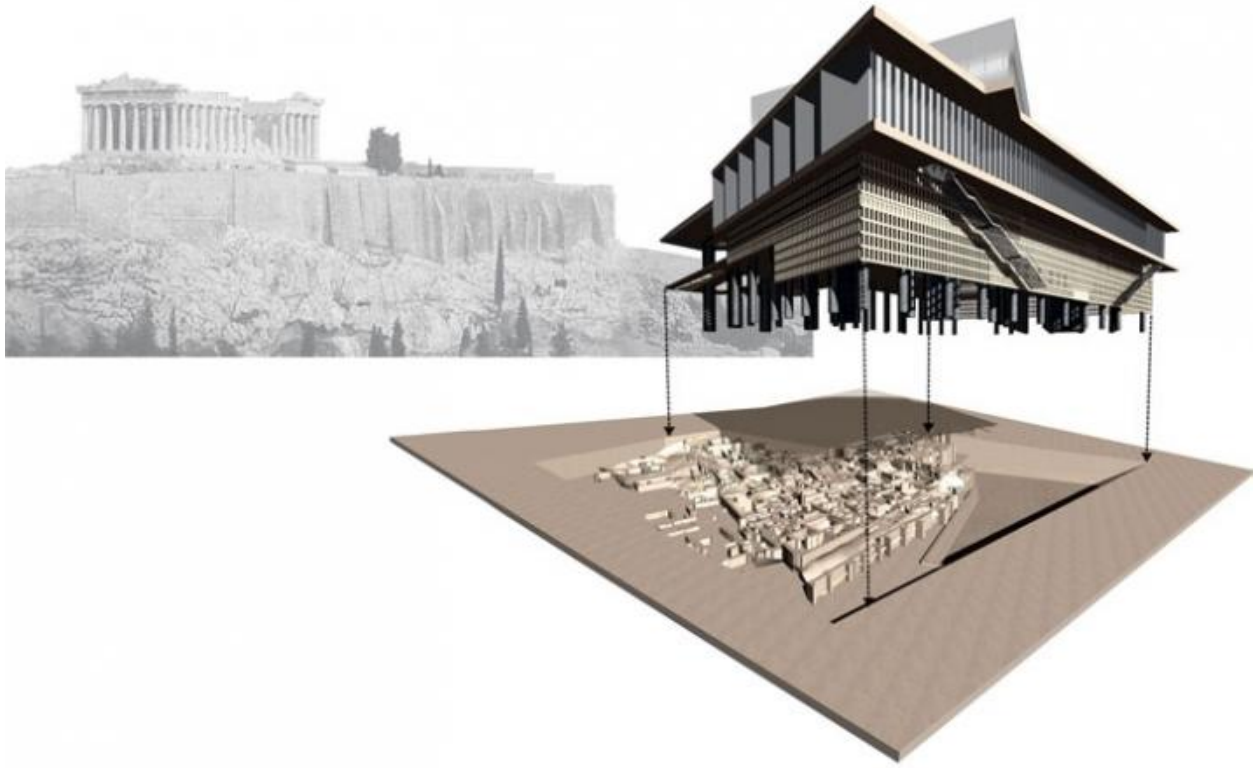
3.2 The New Acropolis Museum, Athens, Bernard Tschumi Architect, 2009. Southward view from the Acropolis illustrating the torqued top floor apparently cranked into parallel with the Parthenon.



3.3 Northward perspectival building section through the NAM illustrating the parallel lines of the top floor plate with the predominant line of the Acropolis. Note the torqued upper mass and the differing curtain walls (exterior wall materials) at each floor level²⁵

²⁵ Courtesy e-architect at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=plan+new+acropolis+museum&tbm=isch&tbs=rimg:CQEIJSi6o7SeljgA2cRkaq2dG_16KzWNZ-0aRE6rfeTYyqlsrXKXDOvYoH15lQ0x-rg6_1Qshn2Q6lUPeWMys2URFm7ioSCQDZxGRqrZ0bEQ_1kAhLVBC8RKhIJ_1orNY1n7RpERUt2IoPNP6f4qEgkTqt95NjKqWxFXuF1GhoYroCoSCStepcM69igfEe05CBY2-dDhKhIJXkiDTH6uDr8RBcZ44U6--1sqEglCyGfZDqVQ9xGrEhV-



3.4 Southwest view of the Parthenon on the Acropolis juxtaposed with the exploded axonometric view of the NAM revealing the ancient ruins beneath the new building.²⁶

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²⁶ Courtesy ARCHISCAPES at:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=plan+new+acropolis+museum&tbm=isch&tbs=rimg:CQEIJSi6o7SeIjgA2cRkaq2dG_16KzWNZ-0aRE6rfeTYyqlsrXKXDOvYoH15JQ0x-rg6_1Qshn2Q6IUPeWMys2URFm7ioSCQDZxGRqrZ0bEQ_1kAhLVBC8RKhIJ_1orNY1n7RpERUt2IoPNP6f4qEgkTqt95NjKqWxFXuF1GhoYroCoSCStepcM69igfEe05CBY2-dDhKhIJXkiDTH6uDr8RBcZ44U6--_1sqEglCyGfZDqVQ9xGrEhV-](https://www.google.com/search?q=plan+new+acropolis+museum&tbm=isch&tbs=rimg:CQEIJSi6o7SeIjgA2cRkaq2dG_16KzWNZ-0aRE6rfeTYyqlsrXKXDOvYoH15JQ0x-rg6_1Qshn2Q6IUPeWMys2URFm7ioSCQDZxGRqrZ0bEQ_1kAhLVBC8RKhIJ_1orNY1n7RpERUt2IoPNP6f4qEgkTqt95NjKqWxFXuF1GhoYroCoSCStepcM69igfEe05CBY2-dDhKhIJXkiDTH6uDr8RBcZ44U6--_1sqEglCyGfZDqVQ9xGrEhV-0L4jHioSCZYzKzZREWbuET0la_15p86Yn&tbo=u&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj3scXqutDjAhUDGs0KHRpqC_wQ9C96BAgBEBs&biw=1600&bih=757&dpr=1#imgrc=orNY1n7RpEtgM:)

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3.5 South elevation, NAM, Athens, May 2019. Note lack of vertical structural evidence between the three main floors of the building while the thickness of the floor slabs is exaggerated. Note also the three different treatments of each floor - vertical concrete screen, vertical glass, horizontal glass, moving upward from grade.



3.6 Partial south elevation of NAM, Athens, looking westward, May 2019. Note 1) skewed floor plate, top floor; 2) vertically oriented concrete wall screen at first floor, vertically oriented glass at second floor, horizontally oriented glazing at torqued top floor; and, 3) that the lowest floor plane appears to float over grade.

Per Figures 3.3 - 3.6, all above, the reader will note that the wall treatment on the NAM changes floor by floor. As above, the ground floor wall is made of a concrete or stone screen with vertically oriented openings, on the outside of the glazing. This "waffle-slab" screen is not completely dissimilar to the coffered ceiling Fig. 3.9, below. It also serves as an upward expanding scale of openings widening as the visitor ascends the levels of the NAM. This is obvious as the second storey wall is vertically oriented glass panels while the top floor is horizontally oriented glass panels with an articulated fastening structure. While these details are seductive, they are less important than the fact that, from the outside skin (i.e., from a museum-goer's first approach), this building is "speaking" or communicating a message from one's initial encounter.



3.7 Westward view from mezzanine, NAM, May 2019. Note screened glazed floor creating the illusion of a floating stairway, hanging in time and space. Note also the perforated (i.e., screen-like) wall treatment recalling that even the stair treads were screened glass.

That same message is communicated in the entrance hall with the stair way, illustrated in Fig. 3.7, above. The walls are perforated in a rational (i.e., evenly and predictably spaced) paneled manner providing the museum visitor with a sense of the penetrability of space, and metaphorically, of time--one of the essential (if implicit) subjects of any museum. This purported metaphor gets a huge confirmatory affirmation in the design of the ground floor system which is, itself, a screen of glass permitting the stairway to appear suspended in space (and time). (For clarification, the term *screen* is being used to mean a partially penetrable planar surface.) But, like the stair treads, the floor glass is only partially penetrable as it was manufactured with a rational grid of circular dots embedded within the glass, Fig. 3.8, below.



3.8 Screened glazing at ground floor also used at stair treads, NAM, May 2019. Note untouchable artifacts beneath floor plane.

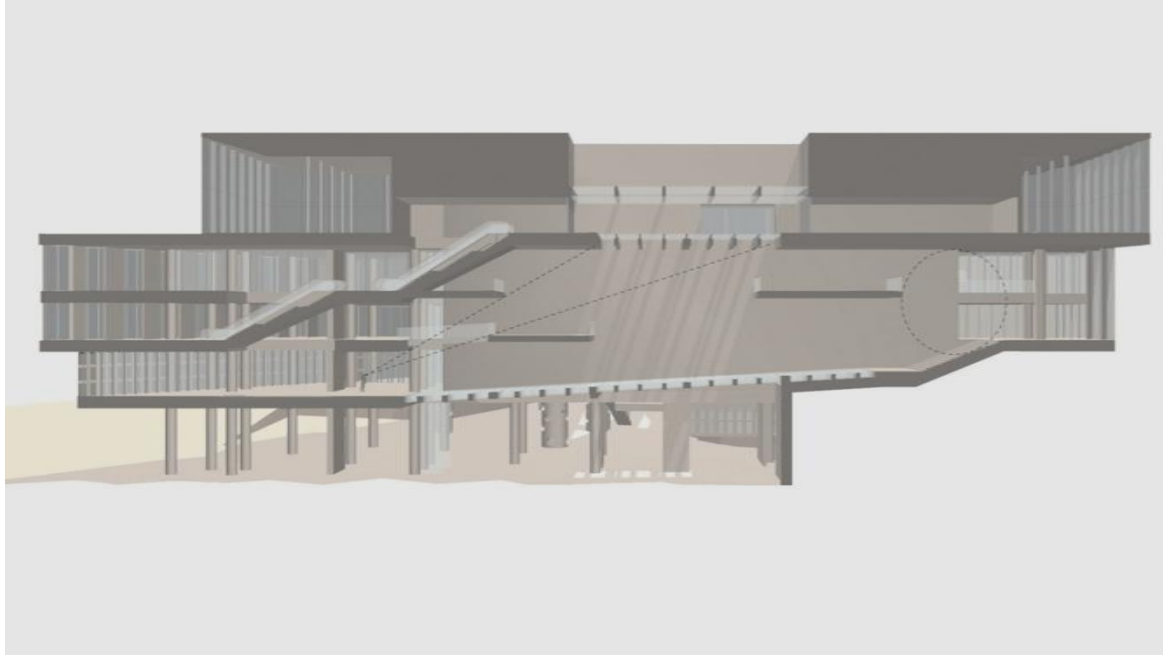
Such screens speak to the rational grids underlying many design explorations but also to the partiality of touching, grasping, of even fully comprehending what appears to be visible history in

the artifacts below, within, and without the NAM. And that is the first principal metaphor: per the screen of time and culture, we can't fully touch or know the ancient realm. Whether or not one accepts the assertion, the argument is posited.

This rhetorical position is also illustrated in the coffered ceiling that acts as a screen to the light well, Fig. 3.9 allowing light down through the building per the building section, Fig. 3.10, both below.



3.9 View of deeply coffered ceiling, NAM, May 2019. Such ceilings were also typical of classical spaces though this one was intentionally designed without the typical layers of ornamental moulding associated with more classical precedents.



3.10 Eastwest (L-R) building section of NAM showing illustrating light transmission, vertical relationships, and central courtyard cum light well, a traditional feature of ancient Greek temples. ²⁷

The second metaphor concerns the scale and spacing of the very visible circular columns.

Per Fig. 3.11, below, visitors to the NAM are introduced to these gargantuan members upon arrival, as with the screens. While it is possible the two columns shown in the forecourt have seismic loading to contend with, this would not be the case with the columns in Fig. 3.12.

While touring through Athens, the islands, and the Peloponnese, it was difficult not to wonder how the Greeks deal with their own magnificent history. Angelos mentioned this point: "Doomed to perpetually contrast themselves with the unmatched splendor of their predecessors, Greeks often confront a nagging sense of inadequacy and strain under the weight of their own historical narrative like few other people on the planet. This sentiment is expressed by a common Greek quip: 'We gave light to the world and held onto the darkness.'"²⁸

²⁷ Courtesy arup.com, proposed lighting design.

²⁸ Angelos, *The Full Catastrophe*, p. 12.



3.11 Southward view from beneath entrance canopy, NAM, Athens, May 2019. Note the biologically shaped floor opening, the scale of the columns, and the unreachable artifacts below.

As illustrated in Fig. 1.1, above, classical columns serve as structural members carrying roof and upper floor loads vertically down to grade where the foundations transfer the weight to the soil. As such, the manner in which a column meets grade, rises, and meets its upper members is laden with history, metaphor, and structural implications. Classical columns, an obvious subject of the NAM, defined this language with column bases and upper capitals. Significantly, there are no column bases or capitals forming parts of the enormous columns visible in some parts of the NAM.

This was an issue of structural honour and design integrity to the modernists as showing bases and capitals at each floor was sometimes structurally dishonest as the vertical loads are transferred more directly from floor to floor with vertically aligned columns. And so this modernist explanation serves to possibly explain the lack of columnar articulation but still does nothing to

justify the scale, specifically the diameter of the columns seen in the figures directly above and below.



3.12 View from mezzanine to second floor hall of columns, NAM, May 2019. Note the number, spacing, and size of the circular, drum-formed, concrete columns.

What does help explain these vast structurally superfluous columns (a modernist no-no) is Angelos' metaphor of the crushing weight of ancient history now borne by contemporary Greeks. This was a possibility this student sensed walking through the colonnade in Fig. 3.12: *look at the weight of history; look at what the West is carrying.* That weight is the Greek darkness.

As one reaches the pinnacle of the museum, the view of the Parthenon is visible through a high-tech, articulated horizontal screen per Fig. 3.1, above. (The high-tech articulation is manifest in the visible connectors showing how the glass panels are secured to their screens.)



3.13 Northeasterly view toward abandoned or failing buildings, NAM, Athens, May 2019. (Dashed white lines mark perimeter of detail in Figure 3.13a, below.)



3.13a Detail of buildings with unscreened openings visible from the forecourt of the NAM, Athens, May 2019.

For architecturally or aesthetically sensitive visitors, leaving the NAM cannot help but be anti-climactic. While this student doesn't agree intellectually with many of the implicit messages of the building, he has absolutely no doubt that this is one of the most finely designed, thought-out, and executed buildings he has ever visited: this is architecture: building with meaning and intent.

While the easy route through these three reflections is a dismissal of continuity, it would also be dishonest. Returning to Jane Jacobs, her position regarding the creation of wealth was that it was city based rather than provincial or national. "...city import-replacing of any significance occurs explosively and unleashes five great economic forces of expansion: city markets for new and different imports; abruptly increased city jobs; technology for increasing rural production and productivity; transplanted city work; city-generated capital."²⁹ This means that the problem of the abandoned villas is probably best solved on a local level rather than a district or national level.

That argument: that wealth is built city by city is much more consistent with the asymmetrical Athenian Erechtheion than with the symmetrical Spartan Parthenon for the former is about difficult balance amongst heterogeneous entities while the latter leans to a nationally imposed, one-size-fits-all, top-down symmetrical solution.

If the Greeks are to comfortably bear their own historical burden, this too will be an asymmetrically distributed load. In a country famous for shifts from near-communist governments to liberal mixed-economies, acceptance of diversity in difficult balances (the asymmetrical Erechtheion of Periclean Athens) has to be the way forward. Neither the graffiti, Fig. 2.2, above, nor the graffiti artists will stop overnight. Only when there are jobs, and better purposes to awaken to in the morning, will the spray painting cease.

In conclusion, while the geometric uniformity of the screens, apparent in the NAM, may be a valid means of mapping *patterns* of change, that Parthenonesque, Spartan uniformity is probably not a fruitful cultural assumption for forward planning. The future, like the quieter, more refined aspects of the past, is almost certainly one of asymmetrical heterogeneity.

²⁹ Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, p. 47.

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