

Who Saved the Parthenon?

A New History of the Acropolis
Before, During and After the
Greek Revolution



WILLIAM ST CLAIR



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Cover image: Figure 2.7. 'View of the Acropolis from the banks of the Illysus, Sep^r 1824.' Chromolithograph from a contemporary amateur picture. From: William Black, L.R.C.S.E., Surgeon, H.M.S. Chanticleer, *Narrative of Cruises in the Mediterranean in H.M.S. "Euryalus" and "Chanticleer" during the Greek War of Independence (1822–1826)* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1900), frontispiece. The chromolithograph was made by McLagan and Cumming of Edinburgh c.1900. Public domain.

Cover design by Anna Gatti.

23. Whose Parthenon?

Attached to the Bastion on the summit of the Acropolis is the only physical memorial on the site to the modern history of Greece.¹ The small metal plaque, inscribed in Greek, shown being viewed in the photograph at Figure 23.1, commemorates an event that took place just a few days after an invading German army had ceremonially raised the swastika on the Acropolis. During the night of May 30/May 31 1941, Apostolos Santas and Manolis Glezos, students at the University of Athens, climbed up through the Mycenaean tunnel on the north side, took down the German flag, and escaped to safety by the same route (see Figure 23.1).²

Santas and Glezos said later that, having made clippings, they threw the flag into the pit where the sacred snake, Erichthonios, portrayed on images of Athena's shield as defender of the city, had lurked in mythic times. The story of the daring exploit, the symbolism of which the two men had researched in advance with the help of a classical encyclopedia, was soon being gleefully reported round the world by Germany's enemies.³

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- 1 The last memorial erected on the Acropolis summit before then, as far as I can discover, was the inscription in Greek on a slab of marble that the French archaeologist Beulé was allowed to put up in the 1850s, claiming for France (in Greek 'Gallia') the honour of having discovered the so-called Beulé Gate. The slab has since been relocated to a place near the present entrance, where, at the time of writing, it can still be seen. The monument in the form of an obelisk on the south slope, that commemorates the French philhellene Fabvier and his companions who took part in the siege of the Acropolis of 1826/27, voluntarily entering the besieged fortress with much needed supplies one night, and who later agreed to surrender it to Reschid's army as described in Chapter 11, was erected as part of a centenary commemoration in 1926.
 - 2 The stories and later additions are summarized in an article by Nikos Raptis published on his blog 7 May 2011, available, at the time of writing, at: <http://www.zcommunications.org/the-flag-on-the-acropolis-by-nikos-raptis>
 - 3 Examples in Hadjipateras, C.N., and Fafalios, M.S., *Greece 1940–41, Eyewitnessed* (Athens: Efstathiades, 2001), pp. 278–79. The episode provided the title to a series



Figure 23.1. The Bastion, showing two visitors looking at the plaque.⁴

Even before the Santas and Glezos episode, at the first ceremonial raising of the German flag, the public performance of the changed status had not been straightforward. When a German officer ordered the Greek soldier on duty to lower the Greek flag, instead of saluting and handing over the flag, neatly folded, as was expected by the conventions of European war, the soldier wrapped himself in the flag and threw himself to his death over the Acropolis cliffs.⁵ The name of the soldier, Konstantinos Koukidis, is recorded, and a memorial to him was erected at the spot

of poems about the Greek resistance, including some that inserted the fighters into the Hellenic continuity story, with some unusual photographs, by Androulakis, B., *Le drapeau de L'acropole. Preface de Maurice Lacroix* (Paris: privately printed, 1946). An interview with the late Mr Glezos who died in 2020, with English subtitles, and footage of the military occupation was available on Youtube at the time of writing: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enCkU2WNPIQ>

Glezos's role in bringing to justice violent members of Golden Dawn, was noted by Daniel Trilling in *The Guardian* 'Golden Dawn: the rise and fall of Greece's neo-Nazis' 3 March 2020.

4 Author's photograph, 2014.

5 The story was told in 1942 by David Walker, a British journalist who was in Athens at the time. [Walker, David] *The Greek Miracle by 'Athenian' Translated, with a foreword, by David Walker* (London: Chapman and, Hall, 1942), 15. The book includes quotations from, and summaries of numerous official statements, communiqués, and speeches made in Greece, Italy, Germany, and Britain both in the run-up to and during the course of the campaigns in Greece, suggesting that 'Athenian' had access to a bureau in Athens that collected these documents as they came out.

where he met his death.⁶ Since nothing beyond the soldier's name has made its way into the written record, the historicity of the episode has been doubted, but as a myth it recalled the occasions in the Greek Revolution, notably at Missolonghi in 1826, when the Revolutionaries had chosen death rather than surrender, and later in that year in Athens too, when those besieged in the Acropolis had publicly announced their decision to follow the example of Missolonghi and immolate themselves among the ruins, as already recounted.⁷

The German military authorities reacted to the Santas and Glezos episode by condemning the perpetrators to death in their absence and introducing the death penalty for a list of offences, including removing or destroying the German flag.⁸ I do not know whether they took disciplinary action against the German army officers who had allowed Germany to be held up to mockery. What is seldom remembered is that the destruction of the Acropolis by the armies of the Achaemenid Empire, ('the Persians') in 480 BCE, a pivotal moment in the history of ancient Greece and of the whole subsequent classical tradition, was also attributable, in part at least, to a lack of care. When in the spring of 1914, on the eve of the First World War, Agnes Ethel Conway, a nineteen-year-old archaeology student, wriggled up the same tunnel, she wrote that her respect for the ancient Athenians had 'suffered a rebuff'.⁹ Since only one person at a time could creep through, she pointed out, just one of

6 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Konstantinos_Koukidis_monument.jpg

In visits to the Peripatos in recent years, I have not been able to find it. At the time of writing the Peripatos is closed

7 In Chapter 17.

8 Hadjipateras and Fafalios, 279, with a facsimile of a newspaper report in *The Mercury*, Hobart, dated 4 June 1941. The text of the German Proclamation of May 1941, and of the Italian that followed later soon after, are given in English translation by Slocombe, George, *Kultur in Greece* (London: Harrap, 1942), 12, 13. Slocombe, a well-known journalist, with much experience overseas, appears not to have been himself in Greece but to have compiled his account from reports reaching the Greek Government and from American journalists who continued to operate in Greece until the United States entered the War.

9 Conway, Agnes Ethel, Author of "The Children's Book of Art", *A Ride through the Balkans, On Classic Ground with a Camera With Introduction by Sir Martin Conway F.S.A., F.R.G.S* (London: Robert Scott, 1907), 31. According to the account by Herodotus, viii, 53, the Persian invaders, who were encamped on the Areopagus, did not come through the tunnel but climbed up the steep cliffs on a side of the Acropolis that the defenders assumed that nobody could scale, and had kept no watch on that side, but Conway's general point is not much weakened.

the old, sick, or wounded men who had been obliged to remain when the other inhabitants of Athens took refuge in Salamis could have saved it from capture.¹⁰ She might have added that the able-bodied young women whose duty it was to guard the sacred objects preserved on the Acropolis, who had chosen to stay and who had also been put to death, might have done the same.

For decades after 1835, the year the Acropolis was demilitarized, a neat pile of marble cannon balls and metal shells beside the entrance gate reminded visitors that the Acropolis had been bitterly fought over in the Greek Revolution.¹¹ In recent times, however, these physical reminders of the Greek Revolution have now mostly gone. The memory of it has however already, for more than a century and a half, been displayed and performed in a twice-daily ceremony (apart from during times of war or other extremity) that renews the remembrance more effectively than any fixed memorial. Each morning, a contingent of the Greek army dressed in the national ceremonial uniform, ('evzones') marches through clapping and cheering crowds up to the Acropolis, across the summit paths, to the Bastion, and ceremonially hoists the national Greek flag. Each evening another contingent lowers it. By associating the costume of the country people ('palikars') who had borne the brunt of the Revolution with the ancient ruins, the Greek state has re-displayed, re-enacted, and re-performed the story of its foundation, to the delight

10 I sidestep the risks of using modern words, such as priestess, to describe ancient office-holders as will be discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>, including a brief summary of how we might understand and translate the ancient terms for the male and female staff who curated the buildings and the ceremonies, mostly taken from Connelly, Joan Breton, *Portrait of a Priestess, Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007). The extent to which ancient historians, including Herodotus, may have exaggerated the role of Athens to the extent of falsifying what actually occurred as part of building a self-serving mythic narrative, as alleged by Plutarch, is discussed in my *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

11 For example: 'There are marks on the columns of the Parthenon of the cannonade during the war of Greek independence, and there is a pile of shells and cannon balls near the Propylea.' Smith, G. Albert, *Correspondence of Palestine tourists: comprising a series of letters by George A. Smith, Lorenzo Snow, Paul A. Schettler, and Eliza R. Snow, of Utah, mostly written while traveling in Europe, Asia and Africa, in the years 1872 and 1873* (Salt Lake City, Utah Territory: printed at the Deseret [sic] News Steam Printing Establishment, 1875), 311. The marble balls intended for large calibre weapons were noticed earlier by Baird, Henry M., *Modern Greece: A Narrative of a Residence and Travels in that Country* (New York: Harper, 1856), 33. One of the few reminders still remaining at the time of writing was shown as Figure 10.1.

of innumerable visitors including those who know little of the history of the Revolution.¹²

By 1941, the tradition of presenting the neo-Hellenic nation through its army in its distinctive uniforms had been frequently renewed at moments of crisis.¹³ Figure 23.2, for example, shows the Evzones readying themselves for one of the wars in the Balkans that occurred in the early twentieth century.



Figure 23.2. Evzones parading within sight of the Parthenon. Postcard, undated, early twentieth century.¹⁴

A postcard of c.1900 displayed the same theme in artistic form, as shown as Figure 23.3.

The Swiss makers of the image, one of the earliest printed in colour, imported at a time when the local postcard industry was still new and monochrome, evidently did not know that the Frankish Tower had been taken down a generation before. And, like many others makers of images, whether mistakenly or as part of a deliberate rhetoric, they implied that the Parthenon could be seen from ground level.

12 My discussion of the role of the site in ancient times is in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>

13 At the time of the Revolution and earlier, the costume had been more closely identified with the ethnic Albanians who were to be found, all over Greece where they had long been settled, although no-one knew when they had arrived or from where.

14 Private collection.



Figure 23.3. 'Acropole d'Athènes. Souvenir de la Grèce'. Chromolithographic postcard manufactured by Künzli Frères of Zürich, c.1900.¹⁵

By the time of the German invasion of 1941, the general aims of those who had created the nation state of Greece had been achieved. The symbolic power of the Parthenon and the other ancient monuments belonged to Greece and to the Greeks, both at home and in the diaspora abroad. Buildings that, when first designed and constructed, had asserted the distinctive identity of ancient Athens as a city state that compared itself with other city states with which it was frequently at war, had become a monument to a form of modern political organisation that had never been achieved, or even much desired, in the classical period when it was built or later.

But Greece did not have exclusive rights to the Parthenon. Both world wars took place at a time when the Greek and Latin classical authors were integral to the educational systems in Germany, Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, as well as within Greece itself and in countries far beyond. To the ruling classes in the western European countries that took part in the war in Greece from 1940 to 1945, politicians, diplomats, military officers, members of the professional and business classes, and increasing numbers from the educated working classes, ancient Greece was as much part of their history and of the stories that they told themselves as the more recent events in their own countries. Ancient Athens, both directly and through the buildings round the world that

¹⁵ Private collection.

drew on the monumental architecture of classical Athens, had become incorporated into their heritage too.

The German Army in Athens: A Display of Conquest

The invading German army that in the unusually cold and wet spring of 1941 had lumbered along the same eastern coastal route that the Persian army had followed in 480 BCE, heavily outnumbered an expeditionary force under British command that had been hurriedly put together and sent from Egypt in fulfilment of a promise to help in the defence of Greece. Another invading German army defeated the Greek army who had been successfully resisting an Italian invasion from Albania. Most of the Allied forces, including some Greek units, had, over the following months, been withdrawn in a series of staged retreats, and then been hurriedly evacuated to Crete. After a fierce battle in Crete against invading German paratroopers who suffered heavy casualties, the Allied troops were then evacuated by sea to Egypt, and Germany, with its Axis allies Italy and Bulgaria, was soon able to put the whole territory of Greece under military occupation.¹⁶ One of the first actions of the Bulgarian Government in the spring of 1941 was to deploy a unit of the Bulgarian army to destroy the Greek inscriptions and monuments on the island of Samothrace that had been assigned to them as part of their occupation zone, and that they hoped they would later be able to claim had never been 'Greek'. This was a modern example of monument cleansing and of creating a new visual heritage on the ground, an ancient practice repeated by modern states in our own times.¹⁷

In 1941, a puppet government that consisted mainly of Greek generals, but included a medical doctor married to the niece of the German commander of the invasion forces, the newly promoted General Field Marshall Wilhelm List, had been formed before the German army even reached Athens.¹⁸ A victory march consisting of troops, tanks, horses,

16 The military campaign is discussed in a book that makes plentiful use of archival materials, Stockings, Craig, and Eleanor Hancock, *Swastika over the Acropolis: re-interpreting the Nazi Invasion of Greece in World War II* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

17 Kew T 209/15 page 130 and *Works of Art in Greece, the Greek Islands, and the Dodecanese: Losses and Survivals in the War* (London: HMSO, 1946), 21. Monument cleansing, or heritage cleansing, is discussed among the consumption genres of the Parthenon discussed in my companion book *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>

18 Mazower, Mark, *Inside Hitler's Greece, The Experience of Occupation, 1941–44* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), 18.

and guns through the streets of Athens, at which the salute was taken by General List, was recorded in photographs intended for a German viewership. One that includes the Acropolis with the Parthenon is shown as Figure 23.4.



Figure 23.4. 'Victory parade of Generalfeldmarshall List, 4 May 1941.' Photograph.¹⁹

Another, at Figure 23.5, picks out the banner hung across the street with the single word 'Stadtkommandantur' and a pointer to the German headquarters with its prominent German flag, an image that left no doubt about who were now the rulers

Figure 23.6 shows the advance motorcycle units of the German army arriving in Athens on the morning of 27 April 1941, racing up to the Acropolis entrance past the hill of the Areopagus, to be followed by a charge across the summit. From the viewing station of the man holding the camera deducible from the images, we can be certain that they were staged and perhaps rehearsed, and were intended to convey a message to their viewers that the German army was modern, fast, and nimble.

19 Bathe, Rolf and Erich Glodschey, *Der Kampf um den Balkan* (Berlin: Stalling, 1942), opposite 225.



Figure 23.5. 'The grand German parade through Athens, before General List'. Photograph.²⁰

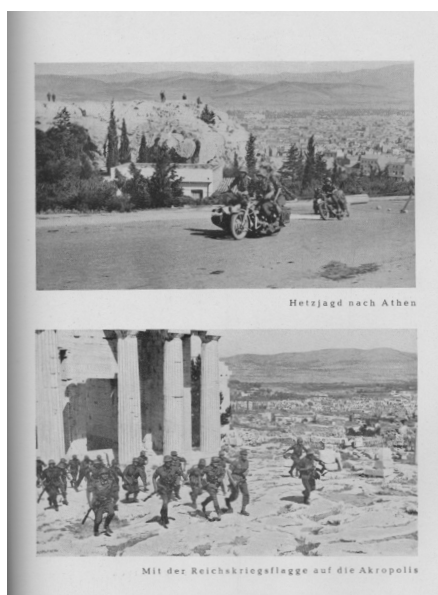


Figure 23.6. 'Hurrying to Athens' and 'With the Reich's war flag to the Acropolis.' German army photographs.²¹

20 Androulakis, B., *Le drapeau de L'acropole. Preface de Maurice Lacroix* (Paris: privately printed, 1946), 68.

21 Weinberger, Andreas *Das gelbe Edwelsweiss, Wege and Werden einer Gebirgsdivision* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP [Central Publishing of the National Socialist

After the initial setbacks, an unusually large German flag was mounted on a tall metal flagstaff so as to be visible from all directions from land, sea, and air. The propaganda units of the German army that accompanied the fighting troops then released numerous photographs and images to mark the moment when the Acropolis of Athens became German. An example is given at Figure 23.7.



Figure 23.7. The German army raising the German flag on the Acropolis (May 1941). German Army photograph.²²

The piece of column with the Ionic capital on top, presented as a capriccio of pieces of ancient marble, appears to have been an addition to a previous staging photographed earlier.²³ The change, which makes the composition more Hellenic, encouraged viewers of the picture to move along the spectrum from seeing the photograph as a documentary record of a precisely dateable historical moment towards accepting a rhetorical presentation of a set of ideas that the viewer is

German Workers Party], 1943), unnumbered, after 224. Another version in Hurtmanns, August, *Soldat in Südost, Ein Feldzugsbericht* (Düsseldorf: Völkischer Verlag GMBH, 1942), last page.

22 Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_101I-164-0389-23A,_Athen,_Hissen_der_Hakenkreuzflagge.jpg

23 They are pieces from the Roman era temple dedicated to Rome and Augustus, of which many fragments remained on the summit, as discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>

invited to admire, to internalize, to adopt, and to act upon.²⁴ There was, however, little ambiguity in the image shown at 23.8, which, like many presentations of the Parthenon, literary as well as visual, in ancient times as in modern, offered a view that was not available to any mortal, even if he or she had been able to fly.

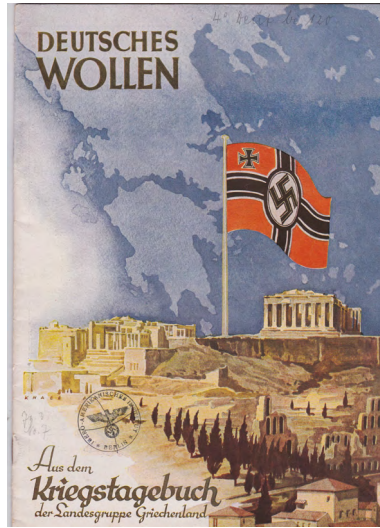


Figure 23.8. The German flag flying over the Acropolis, 1941. Cover of the monthly magazine, *Deutsches Wollen* for July 1941.²⁵

Deutsches Wollen ('The German Will') had been established to promote the German cause both within Germany and abroad, especially in the United States, which had not yet entered the war and which included a large constituency who were, at this time, sympathetic to Germany. The July 1941 issue includes photographs of the German army on the move through the Balkans, with views of the lakes and mountains, local peoples welcoming the invaders, a few concrete pill boxes, prisoners of war, German warplanes flying over Athens, and life in Athens continuing as normal. Readers were given images of the admiration that members

24 A version without the added capriccio is reproduced in Hüniger Heinz [and] Strassl, Ernst Erich, *Kampf und Intrige um Griechenland* (Munich: Central Publishing Office of the NSDAP, 1942), opposite 113.

25 Private collection. Most copies of *Deutsches Wollen* were destroyed in post-war denazification programmes, when to be found possessing copies could be interpreted as implying that the owner had been a member of the party.

of the German army felt for ancient Hellas, with a photograph, for example, of a German soldier sitting on the Acropolis earnestly reading a book. The issue also contains forty advertisements spread over fifteen pages, inserted by German industrial and financial companies, asserting to readers and viewers that, at this moment of victory ('enemy-free Balkans'), the whole German nation was at one with the government, with the National Socialist party, and with the armed forces.

Although, after the flag incidents of 1941, the penalties for insulting and for resisting the German forces became ever more severe, with summary reprisals, the taking and frequent killing of hostages, collective punishments, and immolation of villages, the memory of the pre-war Bastion provided a focus for silent opposition. The Christmas and New Year card reproduced as Figure 23.9 had been prepared for Christmas 1940, when Greece was braced for invasion by the Italians. When the card was actually sent, in Christmas 1943, the German flag still flew over the Acropolis, but even an old card with an old picture could symbolize resistance, with a memory of a lost past, and a hope for a new future.



Figure 23.9. Christmas and New Year card of 1940, sent in 1943.²⁶

²⁶ Private collection.

It was Walther Wrede, the director of the German Archaeological Institute in Athens, a professional archaeologist who had published academic works on ancient Athenian and Mycenaean fortifications and on the portrayal of war in ancient images, who had arranged for an impromptu crowd to be in the streets of Athens in May 1941 to welcome the German soldiers with cigarettes and flowers. In 1938 Wrede, who was given a high rank in the National Socialist party that entitled him to wear a military-style uniform, had replaced the previous director Georg Karo, who, although he had been an ardent German nationalist during the First World War, was Jewish by religious affiliation and had been dismissed under the Nuremberg racial laws.²⁷

During the 1920s and 1930s, Georg Karo had published a series of articles on the Acropolis conservation works, seeing himself as upholding international scholarly standards against local political pressures. He had also campaigned for a gradualist approach to the return of the Elgin Marbles from London, and thought he had negotiated an agreement for the return of pieces from the Erechtheion with the then director of the British Museum and Prime Minister McDonald, but that could not proceed when the British Museum trustees ('not a single piece could be taken from the museum') refused their consent.²⁸ Without a specific act of the British Parliament, the Museum trustees could not be legally overridden, and no British government, however sympathetic, has yet been willing to find time in the parliamentary calendar. It was now the task of Wrede, Karo's successor, working with the Army propaganda units, to bring the ancient as well as the modern Greeks into the war on the German side.

27 Marchand, Suzanne L., *Down from Olympus, Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany 1750–1950* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996), 247. Wrede is pictured wearing his party uniform when showing Field Marshall Braunsweig and other high-ranking German army officers round the Acropolis, in *Deutsches Wollen*, 15. His titles of Dr and Landesstellenleiter were specifically noted in the caption to a photograph reproduced in Bathe, Rolf and Erich Glodschey, *Der Kampf um den Balkan* (Berlin: Stalling, 1942), opposite 224, an example both of the integration of intellectuals into the German state and how the state used such integration to promote its own legitimacy and claim that it was universally accepted within Germany and abroad.

28 Karo, Georg, 'The problem of the Elgin Marbles' in Mylonas, George E., *Studies presented to David Moore Robinson on his seventieth birthday* (Saint Louis: Washington University, 1951–1953). As the trustees declared: 'not a single piece could be taken from the museum' as noted at page 552.

After the military defeat of Germany in 1945, the flagrant triumphalism of the conquest of Greece would come to be regarded by Germans as well as by others as having been unnecessarily provocative, and therefore as politically and militarily unwise. What surer way to stir up resentment and opposition in an invaded and occupied country than by victory parades and by flaunting the German flag on Greece's most symbolic sites? In 1941, however, as the future was then being planned and, by some, expected, the images were not only acts of picturing that would hold specific moments fixed, but the laying down of the visual materials on which a new history of European civilization, the New Order, would be constructed, consolidated, celebrated, and mythologized in stories, images, monuments, and in future commemorative ceremonies. The static pictures were accompanied by motion pictures that were encountered by German viewers and listeners at regular fixed times in cinemas. To the confident German authorities of 1941, the story being built and promulgated by pictures and words, by displays and performances, was not one of conquest but of liberation from British imperialism and from international finance presented as under Jewish control.²⁹

It was intended also to be a story of a homecoming, an actualization of what the German Minister of Education, Bernhard Rust, had declared in 1937, when receiving an honorary degree in Athens: 'Thus, the Hellenic world truly does live on in the creative work of the new Germany under the political and spiritual leadership of Adolf Hitler'.³⁰ The notion of a special relationship between the ancient Hellenes and modern Germans stretched back to the era of Goethe and Humboldt, when the apparently harmless concept of an 'elective affinity' (*Wahlverwandschaften*) had been invented, championed, and theorized.³¹ During the 1920s and 30s, in Germany and a few other northern countries, that affinity of choice was joined and reinforced by a claimed affinity of common origins and of shared 'blood.' In inventing a largely fictive mythic world of essential

29 For example the war is described as a 'Freiheitskrieg' in the title of *Von Serbien*.

30 Quoted by Irmscher, Johannes, 'Academic Links Between Berlin University and Fascist Greece' in *Journal of Hellenic Diaspora* vol. 13 (1986), 79.

31 Discussed by Andurand, Anthony, *Le Mythe grec allemand. Histoire d'une affinité élective* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013). The phrase comes from Goethe's novel of that name first published in 1809 that had employed what was then a metaphor from inorganic chemistry, as it was then understood, to explore personal and family relationships.

Germanism that offered a sense of a world being re-ordered, and, in a version of providentialism, of the imminent fulfillment of a noble destiny, the leaderships of the National Socialist project were, whether knowingly or by historical coincidence, following in the traditions of many communities, real and imagined, including those of the cities of classical Greece.

Hellenism and Ideologies of Racial Purity

In 1929, four years before the 1933 elections that brought the National Socialist party to power, there had appeared a book by Dr. Hans Günther, a university professor, that gave renewed currency to the old claim that the ancient Hellenes had come from the north of Europe.³² The work was part of a series on the 'races of the world', a subject that had for nearly a century appeared to many to offer a key to understanding notions of 'nation' and to answering some of the questions that had puzzled eighteenth-century philosophers of history.³³ Günther, whose professorial career soared when the NSDAP came to power, had drawn on earlier scholarly historical works, notably those of Karl Ottfried Müller, whose tomb on the Hill of Colonos was pictured as Figure 22.17. Among the conclusions that Müller had drawn was that the Peloponnesian war between the Spartans and the Athenians and their respective allies in the 5th century BCE, as recorded by Thucydides, had been fought by one side that was racially united against another that was arbitrarily formed. The Spartans had their geographical acropolis, a bare rock, their story ran, but had no need for walls, let alone for visual images, for their real acropolis was embedded deep in the minds of the people. The Athenian acropolis, Müller had suggested, had been an attempt to promote an artificial unity among a heterogeneous, socially divided, and politically unpredictable population who lacked the shared customs, kinship, and race that was enjoyed by the Spartans.³⁴

32 Günther, Dr. Hans F.K., *Rassengeschichte des hellenischen und des römischen Volkes ... mit einem Anhang: Hellenische und römische Köpfe nordischer Rasse; mit 83 Abbildungen im Text und 3 Karten und 64 Abbildungen auf Tafeln* (Munich: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1929).

33 Discussed in Chapter 13.

34 [Müller, Karl O.] *The history and antiquities of the Doric race*, by C.O. Müller ... Translated from the German by Henry Tufnell ... and George Cornewall Lewis (London: Murray 1839), especially 73 and 216. That Müller may have been more right than those who have adopted other approaches emerges from the experiment in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

Günther, and the more recent predecessors on whose works he drew, may also have known the works of the Edinburgh anatomist, Robert Knox, who had made many of the same claims about essential racism from his study of the pieces from the Parthenon on display in London.³⁵ In citing the passages in ancient authors that supported his case, Günther's book, which was packed with photographs, provided translations into German—so extending its potential readership and viewership beyond the specialists in universities into the wider German public to whom it may have appeared new.³⁶

As a demonstration of the so-called blood relationship, Günther included dozens of photographs of statues of ancient Greeks and Romans that, he claimed, showed Nordic characteristics. An example, in which he suggested that an unidentified portrait was that of Pheidias, long elevated by western romanticism to be the supreme artist of all time, is shown as Figure 23.10.

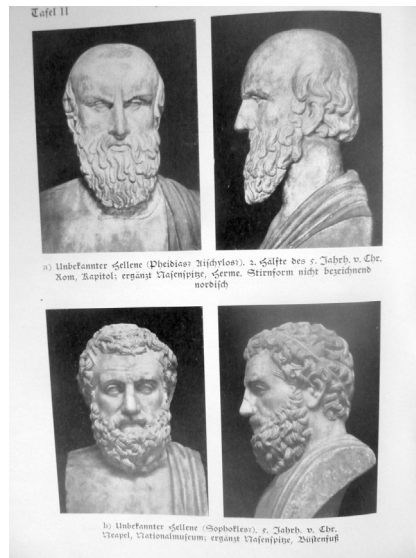


Figure 23.10. Ancient portraits of Pheidias and of Sophocles, allegedly showing Nordic characteristics. Photographs.³⁷

35 Discussed in Chapter 15.

36 Summarized and discussed by Chapoutot, Johann, *Le nazisme et l'antiquité* (Paris: PUF, 2012), 70–83.

37 Günther, Tafel II.

Ancient Greek women too were presented as Nordic, as in Figure 23.11.

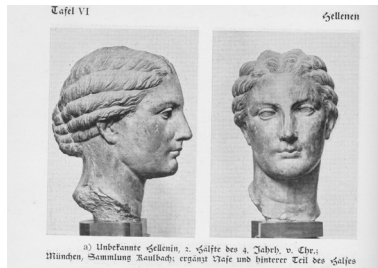


Figure 23.11. Ancient portraits allegedly showing Nordic characteristics. Photographs.³⁸

Günther, like many others, assumed that ancient statues offered realistic presentations of ancient persons, and he ignored the fact that the noses of many statues had been mutilated and subsequently restored. It may, however, have been from the photographs in Günther's book that Oskar Graf, an artist favoured by the NSDAP, offered images of modern German women as objects of emulation and desire in the ancient tradition, here reproduced from postcards sold at the Haus der Deutschen Kunst ('House of German Art') in Munich, a gallery from which all modernist and abstract 'decadent' art was banished. An example is reproduced as Figure 23.12.



Figure 23.12. 'Aphrodite.' Postcards of a picture by Oskar Graf, sold at the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, 'House of German Art', in Munich, 1942.³⁹

³⁸ Günther, Tafel VI.

³⁹ Private collection.

The imagined world compiled and promoted during the German Third Reich of 1933–1945 drew on many traditions, of which the alleged affinity with ancient Greece was only one, and, like the others, it was firmly in place long before the coming to political power of the NSDAP. Had not the ancient Hellenes, like the modern Germans, the story ran, come from northern Europe, from a land of mountains?⁴⁰ Were they not a race of fair-haired warriors who had subjected and reinvigorated the decadent inhabitants who had previously occupied the land of Greece?⁴¹ Had not Athena herself been celebrated for her blue eyes? Was not the crooked cross on the Acropolis a sign that the true Hellenes, that is, the Aryans, by whom the swastika on the German flag had allegedly been invented, had returned home? As *Die Zeit* of Reichenberg reported on 12 April 1941, ‘the Germans have become the holders of the true Greco-Nordic spirit, German man has taken over the inheritance of his Nordic tribal brethren in Greece’.⁴² Nor was this just a fable offered as populist propaganda to the rank and file. In Germany itself, in the wartime higher educational system, the history of Greece from its origins to the present, compiled by a team of eminent scholars, the title-pages of whose books are heavy with the academic distinctions of their authors, began with the Aryans.⁴³

The notion was illustrated in a map in a schoolbook, prepared in 1940 by German scholars, to help in the education of the boys and girls who would soon be recruited into the German army. It is shown as Figure 23.13.

40 That Greece was a land of mountains had been promoted in pre-war Germany by such works as Penck, Albrecht, Prof. Dr., *Griechische Landschaften* (Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen and Blasing, second edition, 1939). The first edition had been in 1933, the year the NSAPD came to power.

41 The attempts to show that the ancient Greeks shared racial characteristics with modern white Europeans, drawing on a body of ancient writings on physiognomy, were described by Lapouge, Georges Vacher de, *Les Sélections Sociales; cours libre de science politique professé à l'Université de Montpellier* (Paris: Thorin, 1896), pp. 409–490. The interest in theories of essential racism that pervaded classical studies in the late nineteenth century resulted in the publication of a monument to scholarship, Foerster, Richard, editor, *Scriptores physiognomonici graeci et latini recensuit Richardus Foerster* (Leipzig, 2 volumes, 1893), but most of the authors had been available in print in western countries since the earliest days of print.

42 Quoted in translation by Casson, Stanley, *Greece against the Axis* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1941), 198–99.

43 For example Chudoba, Prof. Dr. Karl F. editor (and nine other ‘Prof. Dr.’ from universities in Germany), *Griechenland. — Kriegsvorträge der Rhein-Friedr.-Wilh.-Universität Bonn* (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 1944).

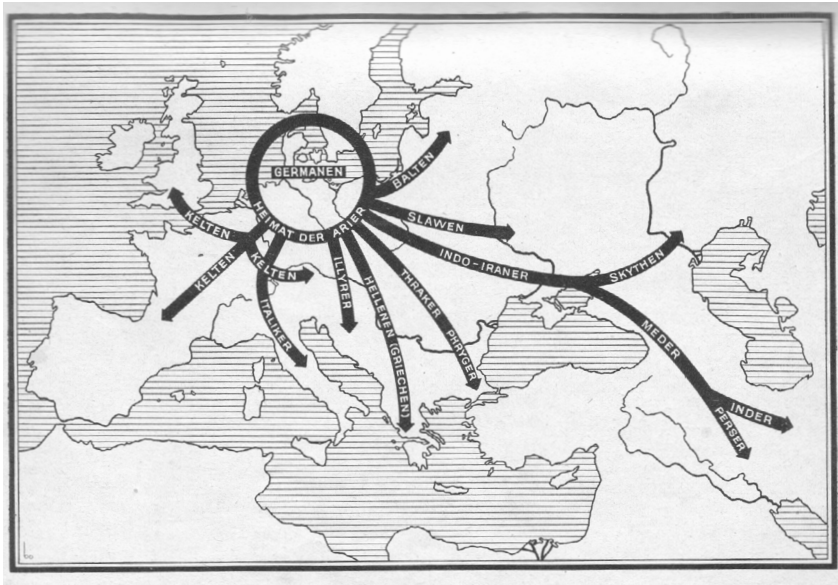


Figure 23.13. 'Landnahme der Nordleute' ('Taking of the land by the Northpeople').
Illustration in schoolbook, 1940.⁴⁴

The German army that invaded Greece in 1941 had expected to be welcomed. The military attaché in Athens had advised that Greece could be easily conquered, and militarily occupied with a small garrison.⁴⁵ And the attaché had reason to think that he was well-informed. As a professor of the University of Thessaloniki, Nikolaos Andriotis, had recently declared at a congress in Berlin, in the presence of the Greek Ambassador: 'We Greeks of today depend on Germany and shall always depend on her if we wish to remain Greek'.⁴⁶ And even after the conquest of 1941, there were prominent Greeks who were sympathetic to the proposed future that Germany appeared to offer, as one of the countries of Europe with fascist and semi-fascist governments, including Italy, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, to whom Germany

44 [Klagges and Nickel] *Volk und Führer. Deutsche Geschichte für Schulen, Klasse 2. Herausgegeben von Dietrich Klagges. Ausgabe für Mittelschulen im Verbindung mit Schlittat Dr. Gustave Märlich. Klasse 2: Arier und Germanen. Bearbeit von Dr. Ernst Nickel, Berlin (Frankfurt: Moritz, 1940)*, opposite 28. The following page included an illustration of the Parthenon on the Acropolis, as it might have appeared, although only from a viewing station in the sky, in the classical period

45 Mazower, 19.

46 Quoted by Irmscher, 79.

offered a privileged place in the New Europe. And there are reports of such attitudes continuing even after the German invasion. The American journalist, Robert St John, for example, in a book published in 1942 in which he recounted his experiences in Greece, including the bombing of Patras in 1941, describes a conversation with a Greek engineer who lived there, who continued to profess great admiration for the German way of life, and who spoke about how wise Hitler had been 'in setting up an economic scheme that was not based on gold'.⁴⁷

The government of General Metaxas, which had come to power in Greece in 1936, was in some respects more like the fascist and semi-fascist dictatorships of Europe than the liberal democracies of France and Britain. Metaxas had established a Greek youth movement, introduced the fascist salute in the Greek army, and promoted the benefits of a healthy outdoor life with camping, eating, drinking, and singing. He styled himself the 'first peasant' and the 'first worker' and, following the example of the German 'Third' Reich, presented the Greece of his day as the 'Third Hellenic Civilisation', the first being ancient Hellas, the second Byzantium, and the third the modern nation state, omitting the seven-hundred-year gap between the second and the third.⁴⁸ As part of his contempt for modern democracy, with its claimed pedigree in classical Athens, Metaxas banned Greek schools from teaching the funeral oration of Pericles.⁴⁹ Because the *Antigone* of Sophocles celebrated acts of defiance of authority, only expurgated versions could be performed.⁵⁰

It had been mainly German advisers, soldiers, architects, engineers, and businessmen from Bavaria and elsewhere in Germany who had helped transform the newly independent Greek state in the years after 1833. German archaeologists had been leaders in the excavation, conservation, and display of the remains of ancient Hellas, not only on the Athenian Acropolis but also in Olympia where the Olympic Games had taken place in ancient times. German classical scholars were among the most highly respected in the world, professionals in the systematic scientific study of antiquity, *altertumswissenschaft*, at a time when the best

47 St John, Robert, *From the Land of Silent People* (London: Harrap, 1942), 193.

48 Discussed by Zacharia, Katerina, 'Postcards from Metaxas' Greece: the uses of Classical antiquity in tourism photography' in Tziouvas 194. See also Hollingworth, Clare, *There's a German just behind me* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1942), 130.

49 Hollingworth, Clare, *There's a German just behind me* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1942), 130.

50 Noted by Gomme, A.W., Lecturer in Ancient Greek History, University of Glasgow, *Greece* (Oxford: OUP, 1945), 73. Hollingworth, 130.

known of the British, such as Gilbert Murray, seemed like sentimental, middlebrow gentlemen-amateurs by comparison.⁵¹

In 1938, shortly before the start of the European war, a group of German and Greek scholars, with the backing of the German government published a beautiful volume, *Unsterbliches Hellas* ['Immortal Hellas'] that gives a glimpse of the future that Germany appeared to offer Greece. In numerous photographs printed in dreamy sepia, Greece is presented as a country with clean-line modern architecture, universities, hospitals, theatres, sports facilities, cinemas, and museums. It is a land of electricity, of steel bridges, and tractors, but also of poets and musicians, and of soldiers with a proud military tradition back to Alexander and Pericles. The men march in youth groups and the peasant women wear national dress at folk festivals that spring up whenever a photographer is near. And, as the example at Figure 23.14 shows, in the hierarchy of the New Europe, the Greeks of 1938, like the Germans of that time, had been invited to see themselves as living incarnations of the ancient Greeks as they had been portrayed in ancient statues.

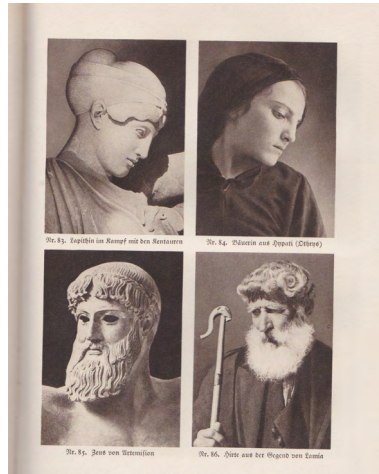


Figure 23.14. 'Unsterbliches ('immortal') Hellas'. Photographs.⁵²

- 51 Illustrated by, for example, [Wilamowitz-Moellendorff] *The Prussian and the poet: the letters of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff to Gilbert Murray (1894–1930)* [edited by] Anton Bierl, William M. Calder III, and Robert L. Fowler (Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1991).
- 52 [Kriekoukis-Bömer] *Unsterbliches Hellas. Herausgegeben von Major Dr. Charilaos Kriekoukis, Pressechef der Königlich Griechischen Gesandtschaft zu Berlin und Prof. Dr. Karl Bömer Reichsamteiler im Aussentpolitischen Amt der NSDAP Mit Geleitworten von A. Riz-Rangabé, Königlich Griechischer Gesandter zu Berlin, und Alfred Rosenberg,*

After the German conquest in May 1941, the Acropolis was fortified, with batteries of anti-aircraft artillery installed both on the summit and on the open ground beside the temple to Olympian Zeus. A photograph that was intended for a readership and viewership in the United States, and was sent to newspapers there by the recently invented wire technology, is reproduced as Figure 23.15. Included in the image is the telegram that includes advice on the political angle ('on guard') that the German authorities, or possibly the correspondent himself, suggested that the newspaper should adopt.



Figure 23.15. The Acropolis fortified by the German army. Photograph taken before 4 June 1941, the date of the censorship approval, with the accompanying telegram.⁵³

Chef des Aussenpolitischen Amtes der NSDAP (Berlin, Zeitgeschichte-Verlag Wilhelm Andermann, 1938), opposite 136. The images were also printed in Greek magazines of the time, as reproduced by Zacharia, 'Postcards', 202.

- 53 Private collection. The image arrived in the United States on 13 June 1941. The photograph was reproduced in Lange, Major i. Genst von, *Gegen Bomber, Bunker, Panzer* (Berlin: Verlag Scherl for OKW [Army High Command], [n.d.], 1942), after 240, along with others showing the fortification of the Acropolis and of the area of the temple to Olympian Zeus. Reproduced also in *Deutsches Wollen* 13. Another photograph of an anti-aircraft gun mounted on the Acropolis in *Kampf und Intrige in*

In 1941 there was no formal international law for protecting monuments in time of war, although arrangements were made that had saved Paris, Rome, and other cities from aerial bombing. By militarizing the Acropolis of Athens, the Germany army had made it a legitimate military target, in effect inviting the British and their allies to bomb it from the air. The Acropolis and the Parthenon were worth more to the German state and its cause if they were to be destroyed or damaged by British aircraft than the lives of a handful of replaceable German soldiers.

But if the Germans were daring the British to bomb the Parthenon, they had no qualms about destroying the place where many of its finest pieces were held. At the time when British and Allied forces were hurriedly withdrawing from Greece, London came under sustained aerial attack by the German Air Force. On the night of 10/11 May 1941, the British Museum, which then included the national library, was struck by dozens of incendiary bombs that caused 150,000 books to burn. The Duveen gallery, which was intended to house the now artificially-whitened pieces of the Parthenon, the construction of which had been begun before the war but was not yet complete, was badly damaged, as were two of the other galleries in which Greek antiquities were normally exhibited. But almost all the contents of the British Museum had been taken to deep cellars and to an unused part of the London Underground in 1938 and 1939, and were protected with sandbags. To the British Museum authorities, as to the British Government, who had connived at the concealing of the damage done by the Museum's workmen at the instigation of Duveen, the bombing of the Duveen gallery, which provided an excuse for withholding the pieces of the Parthenon from public view, was something of a relief.⁵⁴

Griechenland, opposite 129. It is not clear whether a Greek flag was flown alongside the German for the occasion, or whether it is an Italian flag.

54 In addition to the documents and photographs about the episode published in St Clair, William, 'The Elgin Marbles: Questions of Stewardship and Accountability' in *International Journal of Cultural Property* 8 (2) 1999, I was able to take account of what I was told by the late Dr Harold Plenderleith, the last of those who had direct personal involvement in the Duveen scandals whom I visited as part of my researches. He told stories of what he regarded as the less-than-heroic scurrying about of the then director, Sir John Fordsyke, during the bombing raids. He also confirmed that his own part in the cover-up included applying brown wax to the raw white sub-surfaces of the marble that had been exposed by the scraping away of many areas of the surfaces, actions that had made him complicit in a pretence that he told me that he subsequently regretted. The late Martin Robertson, a member of

‘Men like ourselves’: Competing Claims to Ancient Heritage

On 28 June 1941, the victorious German army arranged a ‘Marathon Sport-Fest’ at Marathon, the place on the coast of Attica where, in 490 BCE, the Athenians, without help from other Hellenes apart from a contingent from the small city of Plataea, had repulsed a Persian invasion. The mound where the heroes of Marathon were thought to have been buried in a communal grave can still be seen, and arrowheads and other artifacts were found when the site was excavated.⁵⁵ Among the celebrations and speeches, the German army re-enacted the battle, wearing ancient costumes, as photographed in Figure 23.16.

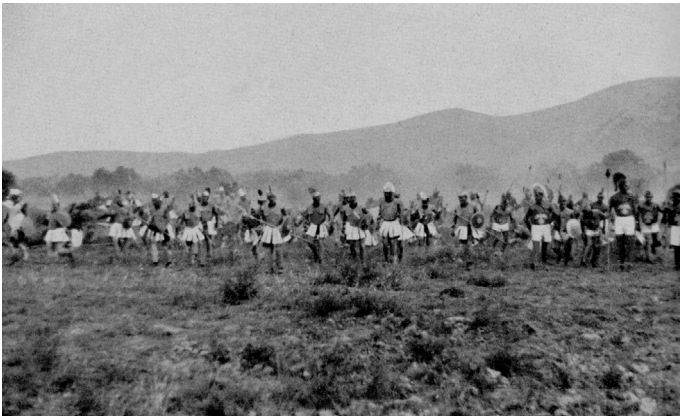


Figure 23.16. ‘The Battle of Marathon’ 28 June 1941. Photograph.⁵⁶

To the victorious German soldiers, it was they who were the gallant Athenians defending western civilization. Some of the German regiments, notably the mountain troops who had taken part in the invasion, only accepted men who looked conspicuously German. By contrast it was the British, and soon the Russians, with their multi-ethnic armies who were to be cast in the role of the Persians, modern oriental hordes against whom western civilization had again to be defended. In an official publication, the German army noted that the prisoners-of-war

the Museum staff at the time, also told me what he knew, as did others who had been informed, sometimes in confidence, by others who were in the know.

55 Examples are on show in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

56 Weinberger unnumbered, following 224.

of the 'mixed empire' from the Greek campaign consisted of only 2,000 'island English', 1,500 Australians and New Zealanders (that included Maoris), 1,000 men from Cyprus, 1,500 Jews and Arabs from Palestine, plus 'half-blood' sailors and Serbs.⁵⁷ The photograph reproduced as Figure 23.17 attempted to make the point visually.



Figure 23.17. British Army prisoners of war captured in Greece. German Army photograph.⁵⁸

Among those who were captured were many telephone engineers hurriedly recruited in Palestine from both the Arab and Jewish populations, who laid many miles of telephone wire right to the front line, much of which had to be abandoned.

The German forces were proud of their highly mobile radio units, as shown by the photograph reproduced as Figure 23.18, taken by a soldier who was a member of one of these units, who preserved it in the album that members of the German forces were encouraged to prepare for their families for Christmas 1941. The album shows the troops as if they were on holiday, with beaches, swimming, visits to the Acropolis, welcoming peasants, shoe-shine boys, and only incidental pictures of the war, the damage it had done, and its consequences for the Greek people who by that time, as a result of seizures of food by the occupying armies, were on the verge of starvation.

57 [German High Command] *Das Zweite Kriegsjahr. Mit dem siegreichen deutschen Heer an der Kanalfrent, durch Rumänien, Bulgarien, Serbien, Griechenland und Nordafrika, Herausgegeben von der Berichterstaffel des O.K.H.* (Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert Verlag, 1943), opposite 178.

58 [German High Command] *Das Zweite Kriegsjahr*, 175.



Figure 23.18. A German mobile wireless unit in Greece, 1941. Photograph⁵⁹

What the Germans did not know, nor did most others until long after the war, was that while the telephone lines kept communications secure, the British were intercepting German army communications. On occasions the British-led forces, notably the New Zealanders, were ordered to make a last stand, like the Spartans at Thermopylae, only to be ordered to retreat to a prepared fall-back position at the last minute.⁶⁰

Also captured were troops of the British Indian army as shown as Figure 23.19.

Although a few Indian soldiers accepted German offers to change sides, the British Indian army was to become the biggest wartime voluntary force in history, with nearly two million men joining and fighting under British and Indian officers. Even when Germany seemed to be winning in 1941 and 1942, they knew that, if Germany and Japan had won the war, they would be ranked near the bottom of the racial hierarchies of their enemies, and in 1944 in Greece the desolation that they had caused was evident to all.

59 Inserted in *Kriegsweihnacht 1941* 4./G.K.N.A.449. *Funkkompanie Einsatz Griechenland u. Serbien*, Private Collection.

60 Among the many acts of resistance for which the German military authorities imposed a summary death penalty was sabotage of communications, including cutting telegraph wires. Noted by Slocombe, 18. It is unlikely that the men who risked their lives knew that, by forcing the German forces to use wireless, they were facilitating interception by the Allies.



Figure 23.19. Indian army prisoners captured in Greece, 'cannon fodder made to bleed for England'. Photograph.⁶¹

Shimon Hacohen, an officer in the British army, in peacetime a port engineer in Palestine, made numerous sketches, not all flattering, of his fellow officers who were captured in Greece who were, like himself, held in a prisoner-of-war camp. An example is at Figure 23.20.

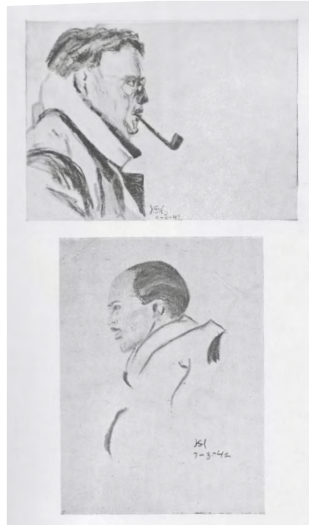


Figure 23.20. 'The westerner and the oriental.' British officer prisoners of war, 1942. Photograph of a sketch made on the spot on 7 March 1942.⁶²

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- 61 Hüngrer and Strassl, after 272. A photograph of other prisoners opposite noted that the British army 'even had Jews.'
- 62 Hacohen, Shimon, (Palestine Port Operating Royal Engineers) *A Symphony of Captivity*, 96 *Sketches* (Haifa: privately printed, 1947), 38. Hacohen had hoped

In the British army, as in Britain and the British dominions, colonies and other territories overseas, although there was much informal racialism, 'nation' was much the same as 'nationality', a matter of certificates and passports, a status that could be acquired and chosen, not an immutable identity that could never be resigned.

In the British press, Greece was presented with little exaggeration as the only country outside the British Commonwealth that had resisted Italian and German aggression. It was compared with little Plataea, the only city in Hellas that had fought alongside the Athenians at Marathon. The other countries in the Balkans who had permitted the German armies to pass through, or who accepted their invitation to join the New Europe had 'Medized', the term used by the ancient historians for the cities that made an accommodation with the Persian invaders in the invasion of 480 BCE.⁶³ Nor was this appropriation of the battle of Marathon a piece of propaganda exploited for current purposes. In the cultural struggle that was occurring alongside the clashes of armed forces, the men of Marathon had not only achieved immortal fame but had saved 'Europe'. According to Edward Freeman, the professor of history at Oxford University in Victorian times who had lamented the loss of the Frankish Tower, 'the men who fought at Marathon fought as the champions of every later generation of European man.'⁶⁴ And it was a small step for others to claim that both the immediate result of the battle and its alleged long-run effects were the result of a Christian providentialism. As Fisher Howe, one of those who set the agenda on Mars' Hill, wrote at almost the same time, in a book replete with endorsements by high-ranking ecclesiastics: 'The heroic Greeks quite unconsciously fought for Europe and distant ages [...] The hand of a higher Wisdom, and greater might than man's, controlled the issue. History and its recorded events, great and small, to human vision, are imperfectly understood when God's

that his sketches could be sent to Britain through the Swiss authorities who had access to the Prisoner-of-War camps, but although they were deliberately kept free of any overt political message, permission was refused by the German authorities. The drawings that showed officers in handcuffs were confiscated 'as apt to bring a necessary German measure into contempt and could furthermore be used for propaganda purposes in England.' From the document photographed in Hacofen 48.

63 A theme of Mackenzie, Compton, *Wind of Freedom, The History of the Invasion of Greece by the Axis Powers, 1940–41* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1943).

64 Freeman, 54.

providential agency is lost sight of in that review'.⁶⁵ To many Victorians, their Christian god was not only orientalist in his assumptions and in his policies, but had been intervening in historical events for at least half a millennium before the birth of Jesus.

The British poet, Robert Graves, famous for exposing the realities of the First World War, and the gap between what was happening and how it was presented, caught the tone of the British official presentation of the series of defeats, retreats, and evacuations that the British forces suffered in the early years of the war. In 'The Persian Version', he imagined how the Persian army might have announced the defeat at Marathon, of which I quote the first and last couplets.

Truth-loving Persians do not dwell upon
The trivial skirmish fought near Marathon. [...]
Despite a strong defence and adverse weather
All arms combined magnificently together.⁶⁶

Although the British did not use the language of an 'elective affinity', they too claimed something similar. To Professor Mahaffy, for example, whose numerous popular and scholarly books dominated perceptions of ancient Greece in the anglophone world for many decades in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: 'The Greek classics are writings of men of like culture with ourselves, who argue with the same logic, who reflect with kindred feelings [...] In a word they are thoroughly modern, more modern than the epochs quite proximate to our own'.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Fisher Howe, 63.

⁶⁶ It first appeared in *Poems 1938–1945* (1945). Part of the joke is that, although Persia was a vast empire, the sources for understanding it other than through the lens of the Greek narrative and metanarrative sources, consist only of a few archaeological remains, some clay tablets, and a few papyri, sources that, even although they are sparse, scattered, and indirect, are also replete with top-down self-celebration. What can be said about the Persian army and organization at the time of the battle, with reports of recent scholarly debates, although only those conducted in the English language, is summarized by Fink, Dennis L., *The Battle of Marathon in Scholarship. Research, Theories and Controversies Since 1850* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2014), pp. 14–29.

⁶⁷ Mahaffy, J.P., Author of 'Prolegomena to Ancient History'; 'Kant's Philosophy for English Readers'; 'Social Life in Greece'; Etc. *Rambles and Studies in Greece* (3rd edition extended, London: Macmillan, 1887), 1. The phenomenon has been extensively explored by, for example, Jenkyns, Richard, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: OUP, 1980); Turner, F.M., *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New York and London: Yale UP, 1981); Stray, Christopher, *Classics Transformed*.

And in the nineteenth century, as part of the spirit of Periclean Athens of which they claimed to be the heirs, they also began to claim the ancient Athenians as champions of democracy.

On 18 April 1941, when the German army was approaching Athens, the Greek Prime Minister, Alexander Korizis, who had taken over the leadership in January after the unexpected death of General Metaxas, shot himself.⁶⁸ In negotiations with the British he had requested the transfer to Greece of Cyprus, then a British colony, as a base from which the King of Greece could lead a continuing resistance. It was around this time too that the British Foreign Office drew up plans to offer to return the Marbles to Greece after the war, as part of a reassertion of old ties, and the offer appears to have been made. However, after the German invasion had been successful, the fact that the offer had been made was publicly denied.⁶⁹ By 1940 the sculptural pieces had become a part of the commonly-taught and officially-projected British national identity as a free, intellectual, and artistic people who had inherited the heritage of classical Athens. And, to judge from soldiers' accounts, the British army's troops, including those from the British dominions geographically far away who regarded themselves as kith and kin, had no difficulty in seeing the Acropolis as symbolic of the democracy for which they were fighting.⁷⁰ A seriously wounded British officer, who had considered taking his own life, records how he was encouraged by his first sight of the Acropolis to begin to think that life might still be worth living.⁷¹

And if the Germans could make the ancient Athenians work for them in the arena of international public opinion, the British had to

Schools, Universities and Society in England 1830–1960, (Oxford: OUP, 1988) and the many others who have written about the portrayal of ancient Greece persons and themes in Victorian era 'art.' The clash between Freeman and Mahaffy over the monument cleansing of the Frankish Tower from the Acropolis in 1874 was discussed in Chapter 21.

68 Hadjipateras and Fafalios, 231.

69 Discussed in St Clair, *Lord Elgin* (1999), 334. The exchanges in Parliament are noted by Hitchens and others.

70 For example Helm, A. S., *Fights & Furloughs in the Middle East. A story of soldiering and travel in Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Greece, Crete, Transjordan, Syria, Irak and Iran, by a Kiwi of the 2nd N.Z.E.F.* (Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs, [n.d.], [1944]).

71 Howell, Wing Commander Edward, O.B.E., D.F.C., *Escape to Live* (London: Longman, 1947), 60. 'My eyes filled with tears at the beauty of the scene ... I had not shed a tear through months of drawn-out pain and moments of sharp agony; but this was too much. I lay on the bed and wept.'

think of ways of doing the same. On 23 April 1942, a few months after the United States had entered the war, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador in Washington, put a proposal to the British Foreign Secretary in a private letter. The episode has not hitherto been noted in histories of the Parthenon.

Halifax, who in 1939 had favoured the British making an accommodation with Germany rather than going to war, noted that imaginative ideas were needed to help raise enthusiasm for the war in the United States. More was needed, all agreed, than the already overworked 'returned hero and all that' clichés of war propaganda.⁷² Halifax sent on a copy of a letter from 'a very intelligent American writer and publicist, rejoicing in the good Anglo-Saxon name of David L. Cohn' with whom he had recently talked.⁷³ The proposal was for the some of the Marbles to be secretly sent on board a British warship to the United States, where they would be put on public exhibition. The money raised would go to help the people of Greece, but the aim was wider. As Cohn wrote: the 'Marbles typify and are in themselves a glorious expression of western civilization at its highest peak, that civilization which western man inherited which is now being threatened with destruction, which we and our allies are struggling to preserve.' As part of the proposed plan, once they were safely transported, the British Prime Minister would publicly announce the intention to return them to Greece at the end of the war, where they would be put back on the Parthenon, as a symbol of the restoration of civilization.

72 The phrase is from Evelyn Waugh's novel, based on his personal experience in the Crete campaign. Waugh, Evelyn, *Sword of Honour; with an introduction and notes Angus Calder* (London: Penguin, 1999), 448. At page 360 the novel notes the pestering by various government department to find ways 'to boost civilian morale and Anglo-American friendship.'

73 I have not been able to establish who was the David L. Cohn mentioned in the letter. One possible candidate is the David L. Cohn, author of 'I've Kept My Name A forthright rebuttal to 'I Changed My Name', an anonymous article published in the February 1948 edition of *Atlantic* (available to read free online). The author claims that the family actively chose the name Cohn: 'Our idea was to find a name soothing to the greatest possible number of preconceptions and prejudices we were likely to meet. Our choice, we had agreed, was not to be pure Anglo-Saxon (although that's such a marketable strain) because we are both dark, resembling our father rather than our mother, a blue-eyed blonde. No telling what shade our children might decide to assume. So, clasping hands in enthusiasm over our own shrewdness, we steered clear of a number of British pitfalls.' The coincidence is so neat that it is almost as if he is quoting Halifax's letter.

What is striking about the episode is that someone with the authority of Halifax, who had been within a few Cabinet votes of becoming Prime Minister, should consider that the Marbles carried so much symbolic power that Britain would be willing to consider diverting warships to transport them, to say nothing of incurring the risk of the Marbles being lost if the ships were sunk. As T. North Whitehead, the Foreign Office official, wrote on the file, using a classical allusion of Nero fiddling while Rome burned that he knew his readers in the Office would pick up: 'when we are feeling reverses and possible defeat, have we no greater sense of urgency than to use our ships to create a mild surprise. Shades of Nero!' ⁷⁴ In his polite reply, the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, made no direct reference to the risks, but only noted that any plan to lend the Marbles abroad would raise a storm of protest among the Greeks and their British supporters. ⁷⁵

The Athenians of the classical period played their part in the Second World War, as they had in the Revolution. When, however, the German Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, spoke of 'the Greeks', he meant not the Athenians but the Spartans, as was pointed out by his colleague Albert Speer. ⁷⁶ Walther Darré, for some years the minister of agriculture in the NSDAP-led government, who used his position to publish many works in praise of the allegedly racially pure class of German small farmers under the slogan 'blood and soil', claimed Lycurgus, the mythic founder of the Spartan constitution, among his predecessors. ⁷⁷ Nor, as with other aspects of Hitler's policies, was his admiration a secret. In a speech of 1929, he had spoken of his respect for the 6,000 Spartans who been able

74 Kew FO 371/33195. Thomas North Whitehead, son of the philosopher, had emigrated to the United States where he pioneered the study of human relations in industry at Harvard University. During the Second World War he returned to Britain, serving in the Foreign Office as adviser on American affairs.

75 Eden to Halifax, 23 April 1942, Kew FO 371/33195.

76 Quoted by Lösemann, Volker, 'Sparta in the Third Reich', 449, in [Birgalias, Buraselis and Cartledge] *Diethnes Institouto Archaia Hellēnikēs Historias "Sōsipolis", Hē symvolē tēs archaias Spartēs stēn politikē skepsē kai praktikē epimeleia* (Parallel title: *The contribution of ancient Sparta to political thought and practice Nikos Birgalias, Kōstas Bourazelēs, and Paul Cartledge, editors* (Athens: Alexandraia, 2007), pp. 449–63.

77 Noted by Bramwell, Anna, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's Green Party* (Bourne End, Bucks: Kensal Press, 1985), 62. He may have known the remark of Thucydides in making his comparison between Athens and Sparta, and how his posterity was at risk of being misled if both societies left only ruins, that it was the Spartans who were so organised that defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War, to be discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

to make 340,000 enslaved helots work for them. And the Spartan polis, described by Hitler as ‘the purest racial state in history’, was to be the political model for German control over the peoples of eastern Europe. As the Commander of the nationwide, newly established Adolf Hitler Schools, Kurt Petter, wrote in his introduction to the main textbook compiled by German scholars in 1940 before the outbreak of war and later updated, it was Sparta that was the model for the Great National Socialist Reich that the chosen boys would help their leader (Führer) to create.⁷⁸ Early in his political career Hitler had made clear that his policies included the putting to death of sick, weak, and deformed children, as had been practised in classical Sparta and also in Athens.⁷⁹ Using the example of Sparta and Leonidas at Thermopylae, he had called for an unconditional duty for Germans to sacrifice themselves in battle, and even, as he was to attempt in 1945, a ‘strategy of magnificent defeat’.⁸⁰

For over a century in Germany before the Second World War, the Royal Prussian Cadet-Schools, which trained boys from the age of ten to become army officers, and the *Nationalpolitische Erziehungsanstalten* (‘Napolas’), which aimed to educate the future leaders of Germany, included a vision of Sparta, or rather of ‘Sparta’, in their curriculum. Pupils were taught that the Spartans were a racially pure Germanic people.⁸¹ A book for teenage boys, *Spartanerjungen* (‘Spartan youth’) originally published around 1910 on the eve of the First World War and set in the late nineteenth century, which purported to be letters from a cadet to his mother, described the regime of discipline, physical hardships, harsh punishments, ritual humiliation, and secret courts, all allegedly based on Spartan ideals, including the claim that the cadets hoped for war and hoped to die in battle like the previous family members whose names were displayed on war memorials. The story

78 [Vacano, Dr O.W. von, and others] *Sparta. Der Lebenskampf einer nordischen Herrensicht* (Berlin and nation-wide: Arbeitsheft der Adolf-Hitler-Schulen, 1940) unnumbered 5. The second edition, dated 1942 but including material from 1943, published as Bücherei der Adolf-Hitler-Schulen, included at page 120, a transcript ‘Stalingrad – Thermopyla’ an appeal by the Reichsmarschal of the Army [Göring not named] to the army surrounded at Stalingrad to imitate Leonidas and die fighting,

79 The point is relevant to the question of what is displayed on the Parthenon frieze to be discussed in Chapter 24.

80 Lösemann, 450.

81 Discussed by Roche, Helen, *Sparta’s German Children: The Ideal of Ancient Sparta in the Royal Prussian Cadet-Corps, 1818–1920, and in the Nationalist-Socialist Elite Schools (the Napolas), 1933–1945* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013).

praises the Spartan virtues of committing crimes provided you are not found out and, especially, of never sneaking on comrades, a bonding mechanism much practiced by criminal gangs now extended to a vast corps of military officers.

The cover of an edition reprinted before the Second World War is reproduced as Figure 23.21.



Figure 23.21. A German cadet as a young Spartans. Cover of Szczepanski, Paul von, *Spartanerjungen. Eine Kadettengeschichte in Briefen* (Leipzig: Wigand, [n.d.], 12th edition c.1930).⁸²

In some respects, the ethos recommended was not much different from that of British schools where boys destined for leadership were taught 'muscular Christianity'.⁸³ In Britain, however, although there were claims that the classical Athenians were 'men like ourselves', no serious author claimed a 'blood' relationship with either the Athenians or the Spartans.

⁸² Private Collection.

⁸³ It was published in an English translation made by a classical scholar and educationalist as Szczepanski, Paul Von, *The Prussian Cadet: Letters from a Cadet to his Mother* (London: Routledge, [n.d.], c.1910) along with Wildenbruch, Ernst von, *A Story of a Cadet Life*.

As a valley set in a mountainous region, as shown for example in Figure 23.22, taken from a German textbook on Sparta of the time, the site of ancient Sparta was presented as especially suitable for the ancient Spartans, who were said to have arrived from the far north—implying a geographical ‘natural’ and geo-determinist affinity between the two peoples, alongside the cultural ‘elective’ affinity of the eighteenth-century ideas about the effects of environment on character that had themselves drawn on ancient ideas.⁸⁴



Figure 23.22. Sparta, 1930s. Photograph.⁸⁵

The theory of the Aryans had been promoted throughout western Europe and North America during the nineteenth century. What had started as an empirically well-attested discovery about the common linguistic characteristics of certain language groups had been amalgamated with older speculations about why the ancient Hellenes had achieved so much. In France, however, in Germany, and elsewhere, the ‘Aryans’, about whom almost nothing was known or indeed knowable, provided a fantasyland within whose fluid boundaries could be invented mythic histories, lost paradises, and future utopias outside the constraints of evidence. To Count Gobineau, for example, one of the fathers of modern racial theory, the Aryans had practised an ideal society such as he imagined pre-Revolutionary France to have been, where the best men,

⁸⁴ Vacano, 17: ‘den nordischen Menschen.’

⁸⁵ Vacano, frontispiece.

by which he meant aristocrats and churchmen, provided leadership and where the uneducated masses ('les *imbéciles*, les *drôles* et les *brutes*' so italicized) were content with their lot, obediently did what they were told, and played no part in public policy. According to Gobineau, the invention of democracy in classical Athens, with its official fiction that citizens were equal, had proved to be a fatal error for the ancient city, and the modern version as adopted in Europe after the French Revolution, where citizens did not even live in proximity with one another, with its inbuilt 'bio-social determinism' spelled doom for western civilization.⁸⁶

Nor was the account that the western theorists propounded unfair to ancient Hellas. Unusually for a woman, the wife of a French count, Valerie de Gasparin, who became a famous author, decided to read what Plato had actually written about the death of Socrates.⁸⁷ Although she remained sympathetic to his theism, as she went on to read what Plato had written on how an ancient city ought to be governed, she was horrified at what she called his tyrannical war on individuality, including his proposals for giving the state the responsibility for bringing up children, regulating family size, and, she might have added, his advocacy of infanticide as part of a policy of eugenics.⁸⁸ Were the prescriptions of the Christian god as set out in the Christian Bible, which the western missionaries were pressing on peoples round the world any more admirable, she wondered? Were they not much the same as the ancient Jewish laws and customs set out in the biblical book of Leviticus?⁸⁹ But de Gasparin's views attracted few adherents. According to a visitor to Athens in 1872, where her book was discussed among the foreign community among whom proto-fascist ideas were becoming more common, her views were 'absolutely insupportable'.⁹⁰

86 Discussed by Assimacopoulou, Fotini, *Gobineau et la Grèce*. Studien zur Geschichte Südosteuropas Bd. 15 (Frankfurt [and elsewhere]: Peter Lang, 1999). It is possible that Gobineau picked up his language of 'brutes' from ancient authors where it was fitted into another long run narrative back to ages for which there was little or no evidence at their time as will be discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

87 'Une femme, lire Platon!' [de Gasparin, Valérie] *Journal d'un voyage au Levant. Par l'auteur du Mariage au point de vue Chrétien* (Paris: Marc Ducloux et Ce., 1848), 86.

88 de Gasparin, pp. 86–105. Infanticide and exposure in classical Athens are discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

89 de Gasparin, 100. And she might have added the advice of Paul in his *Epistle to the Romans*.

90 Eudel, 358. The remark, that was attributed to the archaeologist Burnouf, he says was shared. Eudel does not say whether they objected to a woman daring to enter

And there were many educated men and women in Europe and the United States, including many from within the governing elites, who accepted this broad analysis, internalized it, and adapted it to their local situation. According to Stewart Houston Chamberlain, a member of a prominent British family, whose 1899 work, *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (*The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*) became one of the foundational texts for twentieth-century American and German racism, there were only two races with any claim to 'purity', the Germans and the Jews, and they were perpetually at war.⁹¹ Already by the time of the outbreak of the First World War, the 'Aryans' had become a box of two compartments into which everything good or bad that had happened in the history of world could be fitted. The Aryans, we may judge, were useful too for articulating anxieties and insecurities, including revulsion against modern industrial and especially commercial society with its puzzling flows of financial capital and its international networks. The ancient Greeks and Romans, and a selected list of western Europeans were in put in the Aryan compartment: the rest in the other. Jesus of Nazareth presented a particular problem, especially at a time when, on the whole, the Christian churches were on the authoritarian political right. Chamberlain's answer was that Jesus had been Aryan. And, lying somewhere in the gap between historic times about which knowledge was steadily increasing, and the Aryans about whom nothing could be known, lay the ancient Hellenic Dorians and Ionians, the two main categories into which the Hellenes had divided themselves, each with its own myths and personified named founders. Among the conclusions of Karl Otfried Müller, whose ideas made their way into the mainstream across the Europeanised world, the 'slow and deliberate conviction' of the Spartan Dorians could be contrasted with the 'determined rashness' of the Ionian Athenians. The Dorians 'wished to preserve their ancient dignity and power', as well as their customs and religious feelings. The Ionians, Müller had noted, picking up the sneer that had been thrown at the Athenians by

a mainly male sphere, or what is more likely, that her remarks undermined some of the views prevalent among both the Hellenists and the counter-Hellenists on Mars' Hill.

91 Quoted by Simon Goldhill in Gange and Ledger-Lomas, 103.

the narrator of the biblical Acts of the Apostles, were 'commonly in pursuit of something new'.⁹²

During the German occupation of Greece, O-W von Vacano, an archaeologist and high ranking officer in the Hitler Youth, who in 1940 had published a book called *Sparta Der Lebenskampf einer nordischen Herrensicht* ('Sparta, the Struggle for Existence of a Nordic Master Race'), carried out excavations at Sparta, the finds from which were sent to Germany.⁹³ According to a post-war assessment, the aim was to prove the 'kinship' of ancient Dorians with modern Germans.⁹⁴ A few pieces of broken pottery would give an apparently scientific proof to ideas that, by their very nature, could never either be validated or falsified from techniques and resources then foreseeable. Here too we are given a glimpse of an intended future, the laying down of tangible materiality from the earth for an intended new history. If Germany had won the war, the authors of museum labels, we can be confident, would have made the mute potsherds tell that story.

In the Second World War, although there had been shots fired at the Acropolis, the monuments were never in serious danger of being damaged in the fighting, whether from the Greek insurgency forces, from British bombing, or by the occupying Germans. Nor was there ever an occasion when military commanders were faced with the choice between saving the lives of their soldiers or destroying the ancient monuments, such as occurred frequently elsewhere in the war.

As it happened, the 4th Indian Division, which included British and other Allied units, that had been rushed to Greece from Italy in November 1944, had taken part in the most famous case of that dilemma in the war. Knowing that his troops were to be ordered to assault Monte Cassino, with its famous monastery, the British commander had decreed that it should be destroyed, despite its having been declared a war-free zone by the Germans and becoming a refuge for non-combatants, on the grounds—later disputed—that it was being used as an observation post from which to direct artillery. However, in the event, the rubble provided cover for the defenders, and in the assault the Indian division

92 Müller, *Doric Race*, especially 73 and 216. The sneer and its context are discussed in Chapter 21.

93 Lösemann, Volker, 'Sparta in the Third Reich' in Birgalias, Buraselis and Cartledge 455.

94 Kew T209/129.

sustained nearly fifty per cent casualties before they were beaten back. Monte Cassino, far from offering a sharp choice between preserving a material monument of European civilization and prosecuting a war aimed at saving civilization itself, had shown that the dilemma had been misunderstood.

A photograph of some members of the 4th Indian Division visiting the Acropolis after they had helped to secure Athens from the 'December days' insurgency of 1944/45 is reproduced as Figure 23.23.

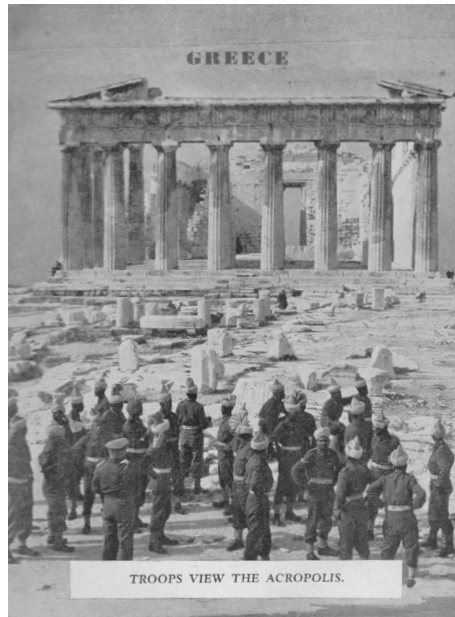


Figure 23.23. Troops of the 4th division of the British Indian army looking at the Parthenon, 1944 or 1945. Photograph.⁹⁵

How far the Indian soldiers may have thought that they were fighting for the values of classical Athens, as 'men like ourselves,' cannot easily be judged. The language of Aryans was 'Indo-Germanic', and some scholars had promoted the idea that the Aryans had come from India to northern Europe before moving to Greece.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ From *Red Eagles, the story of the 4th Indian Division, Tunisia, Italy, Greece* (Bombay: printed and published by G.S. Borker for the War Department, Government of India, c.1945), last page.

⁹⁶ Maps showing the alleged ancient migrations of the Aryans in Chapoutot, Johann, *Le nazisme et l'antiquité* (Paris: PUF, 2012), 593.

These histories reflect the changing meanings and identities that have been symbolised by the Parthenon throughout its existence. It has been a monument to the endurance of classical Hellas and a manifestation of its fragility, a beacon of democracy and a tool of fascist empire-building. The weighty presence of the stones themselves has been appropriated by a shifting set of narratives to meet political, ideological, and cultural needs ranging far beyond Greece itself.