

Who Saved the Parthenon?

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



WILLIAM ST CLAIR



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William St Clair, *Who Saved the Parthenon? A New History of the Acropolis Before, During and After the Greek Revolution*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0136>

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ISBN Paperback: 9781783744619

ISBN Hardback: 9781783744626

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781783744633

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781783744640

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 9781783744657

ISBN XML: 9781800642997

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0136

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.

24. The Parthenon in our Time¹

For most first-time visitors, any momentary sightings of the Parthenon or the Acropolis from the air or from the town are preliminary to a visit to the summit.² The single entrance gate, on the west side, is situated a short way from an open space where coaches, taxis, and cars drop off and pick up tourists, and where tickets, snacks, drinks, postcards, guidebooks, souvenirs and modern replicas are sold and washroom facilities provided. That frontier zone between contemporary Greece and ancient Hellas in normal times is workaday, untidy, busy, often noisy, and forever changing. With its colourful splatter of images of numerous contemporary icons, with languages and traditions mixing and remixing without unity or permanence, it is a typical postmodern tourist facility, such as is found in many cities where the London-style red buses present images of the local sights. Figure 24.1 offers two glimpses from recent years.

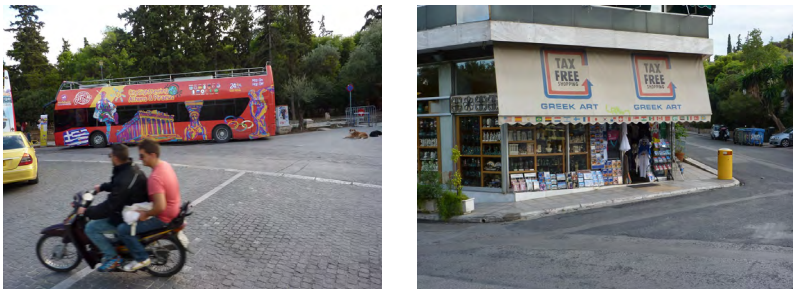


Figure 24.1. Two views of the frontier zone. Photographs by the author.³

- 1 Parts of this chapter were published in St Clair, William, 'Looking at the Acropolis of Athens from Modern Times to Antiquity' in Sandis, Constantine, ed., *Cultural heritage ethics: between theory and practice* (Cambridge: Open Book, 2014), pp. 57–102.
- 2 In describing the recent changes, I do not wish to imply that wrong choices were made or that better options were available among competing considerations. As elsewhere I attempt to recover the viewerly experience.
- 3 Author's photographs.

The numerous ancient artefacts found in excavations on the Acropolis and its environs in the nineteenth century and later suggest that small objects, such as terracotta statuettes that, in modern terms, lie between ‘art’ and ‘non-art’, were available near the Acropolis in ancient times, and to judge from their highly generic dedicatory inscriptions, they may have been manufactured in bulk and been made available to visitors near the site, perhaps to be taken away as souvenirs, or more probably, as part of communal events.

Many visitors look up at the Acropolis and photograph it from the frontier zone but, in visual images made by professionals, this area is normally excluded or elided. Instead, many offer a scene taken from viewing stations where the frontier zone can be excluded from the field of view of the camera, although never from that of the eye. A typical example, commonly encountered, is reproduced as Figure 24.2.



Figure 24.2. The Acropolis, from the west. Photograph reproduced on an entrance ticket 2015.⁴

Although, at most times during daylight, tourists are normally to be seen entering and leaving the Acropolis in both directions, the main modern

4 The photograph from which the image is derived, with many others, was available at the time of writing at: <http://www.stoa.org/athens/sites/acrogeneral/source/p07033.html>

tradition is to omit people. During the early decades of photography, the technology was thought by itself to guarantee the truthfulness of the image ('the camera cannot lie'), but what has been more often offered by professional photographers in recent times is a staged presentation that lies between a factual documentary record of a clicked moment, and a vision of ancient Athens, also emptied of living people, that viewers are expected to wish to form in their minds. Such images prefigure and wordlessly invite visitors to adopt a way of seeing that moves in both directions along a spectrum from contemporary realism to timeless iconicity. They help to reinforce the expectations that have already been formed by many visitors long before they arrive.

When the Acropolis was a military fortress, that is, until 18 March 1835, when responsibility was passed by the Greek state to the newly established civilian National Archaeological Service, it was only from the west that a viewer, whether friendly or hostile, could gain some appreciation or what lay inside. The view encountered today, which gives prominence to the west front of the Parthenon, has however only been available when the walls on this side were low, as they are now, when they mainly serve as balustrades for those looking out. For at least half a millennium before the mid-1830s only the west pediment of the Parthenon could be seen, as one viewer noted, 'peering above' the walls.⁵ The present view meets the needs of today, but we cannot assume that in ancient times more than the topmost part of the Parthenon, that is, the west pediment, was within sight. Indeed the building seems to have been designed so as to be encountered and seen in that way.⁶ Since Greek temples, although each is unique, are architecturally generic, even a glimpse was enough to inform viewers that the building was extraordinarily large, with implications for what the size implied about its probable contents that, as ancient viewers knew, included many of the city's most valued possessions, not only physical treasures such as thieves might covet, but records on perishable materials.⁷

Beyond the modern entrance gate, notices ask visitors to respect the monuments and not to touch the marble. Eating, making loud noises, and the playing of music are forbidden, as likely to disturb the experience

5 Giffard, Edward, *A Short Visit to the Ionian Islands, Athens, and the Morea* (London: Murray, 1837), 138.

6 Discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

7 Discussed further in *ibid.*

of those viewers who are assumed to prefer an atmosphere of silence in which to abstract themselves from their immediate here and now. The 'sacred rock' has some of the characteristics of a modern sacralized space, although none of the buildings, caves, or shrines are now used for religious purposes.⁸ The reverential silence offers a different experience from what was normal in antiquity when, especially at festival times, the Acropolis was a place where all the senses, hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, and tasting, were actively engaged, and the participants, often specially costumed and moving in processions, performed and displayed to one another as well as to others who might see or hear them from a distance.⁹

To their left, as present-day visitors climb the boards and ramps that protect the ancient marble from their eroding feet, stands a colossal marble pedestal, and it is evident that the (now lost) statue or statues that formerly stood on its top dominated the view of the ancient entrance encountered by all who looked at the Acropolis from the west. It is shown in Figure 24.3.



Figure 24.3. Tourists passing the pedestal of the Monument of Agrippa as they go through the Propylaia.¹⁰

8 The phrase appears to be an early nineteenth-century coinage, although consistent with how the Acropolis was regarded in ancient times. It is used routinely by de Moüy, Cte Charles de, Ambassadeur de France à Rome, *Lettres Athéniennes* (Paris: Plon, 1887) who lived in Athens for six years in the 1880s, and occasionally by others back to the time of the Greek Revolution.

9 Discussed further in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

10 Author's photograph, 8 October 2014.

Marcus Agrippa, the Roman military commander in whose honour a colossal bronze portrait statue was placed on the pedestal in 27 BCE, as was discovered from an ancient inscription found in the eighteenth century, was one of a succession of notables in whose honour portrait statues were placed on this prime site, including Antony and Cleopatra whose forces Agrippa had defeated at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE. The first occupant was a king of Pergamon, a Hellenic city in present-day Turkey, who had won the chariot race in the Panathenaic games of 178 BCE, a reminder that, in an ancient Greek city, more than half a millennium after the building of the classical Parthenon, success in competitive sports, whose association with success in war was never absent, could be turned into political prestige. The episode reminds us too that in antiquity the stories offered by the built environment ('heritage') were liable to be changed, with each change looking backward as well as forward in time, and with the promoters of each change expecting, or at least hoping, to give an impression of permanence.¹¹ Although the pedestal of Agrippa dates from centuries after the classical age, and was unusual in having escaped the nineteenth-century clearances, in its present untenanted state it detracts little from the apparent monumental unity of the Acropolis entrance.¹²

A photograph, shown as Figure 24.4, taken when the clearances were not yet started, shows how the monument was more damaged than classical-era buildings erected centuries earlier. Small fissures that had been opened by natural causes, especial the wind, had gradually widened, not only damaging the appearance, but shortening the life expectancy of the building. This was a phenomenon known to the classical-era designers and builders and helps to explain why the Parthenon had apparently been engineered to such a high degree of precision.¹³

11 Discussed further in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

12 The clearances were described in Chapter 21.

13 The phenomenon of winds enlarging small apertures, like a river cutting its way through narrows, is noted, with a reference to an ancient author in my attempt to reconstruct the discursive environment in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.



Figure 24.4. The monument of Agrippa. Sepia photograph, perhaps by Constantinos.¹⁴

On their right, visitors see the small, externally now almost complete, building dedicated to Athena Nike ('Athena as Victory'), in modern times sometimes called the 'Victory without Wings' in an implied contrast with personifications such as the 'Winged Victory of Samothrace' now on display in the Louvre.¹⁵ One of the four buildings of the classical era on the Acropolis summit that still stand, the Nike temple too is visible from a distance as well as from close up. It is shown in Figure 24.5, as it looked after the recent conservation, before the new marble had weathered to begin to match the old.



Figure 24.5. Athena Nike temple (2011), after conservation. Photograph by Rafael da Silva.¹⁶

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- 14 Loosely inserted in an album of nineteenth century photographs of Greece, none dated. Private collection
- 15 As explained by, for example, Frazer in his edition of Pausanias, iv, 257, the temple is not dedicated to a personification of victory but to 'Athena as victorious', and Athena is always presented as without wings.
- 16 Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ATENAS_-_TEMPLO_DE_ATHENA_NIKE_-_ACR%C3%93POLE.JPG

As discussed earlier it was the first classical-era building to be rebuilt after independence.¹⁷ With its combination of ancient and newly-cut marble, and its sculptural components that told ancient stories presented in facsimile, the building is now, apart from the absence of polychromy and painted metal, as near in form to the classical structure as is possible. Hitherto, the final step of restoring the colour has been resisted as a step too far.

The Acropolis Conservation and Restoration Programme that began in 1975 has, from the beginning, been carried out in conformity with the principles of the Venice Charter, the UNESCO convention on best practice in conservation that was adopted in 1964, among whose provisions is a requirement that viewers should be able easily to distinguish any new additions and that changes should be reversible. The Venice Charter and its more limited predecessor, the Athens Charter of 1931, were the first formal steps in the development of an intergenerational code of ethics in the care of ancient monuments.¹⁸ Their adoption owed much to later dissatisfaction with what had been done to the Acropolis in the nineteenth century. There was also a determination not to repeat the mistakes made, with exceptions, as old buildings that had previously given a distinctive local identity which had been destroyed during the Second World War all over Europe were crudely rebuilt or replaced.

As visitors reach the clear ground on the Acropolis summit plateau, they realise that they have passed through an imposing ceremonial entrance, the Propylaia ('Before Gates'). Although the Propylaia of the classical-era Acropolis, unusually for such a building, had five entrances, one wide enough for vehicles, enabling ancient visitors to arrive and depart in large numbers simultaneously, today's visitors are funneled through the central way as seen in Figure 24.6. They may glance at the large detached empty chamber to their right as they descend—the stance from which the photograph was taken—a building that in classical Athens served as a picture gallery of the history of the city, part of the showcased and officially recommended memory, and one of the wonders of the classical Acropolis.

¹⁷ In Chapter 21.

¹⁸ Some of the issues are discussed in Sandis. A collection of primary documents that relates the history of the issues back to Ruskin is provided, for example, by Price, Talley, and Vaccaro.



Figure 24.6. Tourists passing through the Propylaia.¹⁹

The dislocation of the column drum, which is due to be corrected as part of the current conservation programme, is a reminder that Athens stands in an earthquake zone and that the ancient buildings of the Acropolis have withstood being shaken many times. The fact that the ancient columns had been able to survive earthquakes is vividly shown in Figure 24.7, one of the first images made by the then recently invented technology of light on a chemical plate.



Figure 24.7. 'Les Propylées à Athènes, 1839' Engraving from a daguerreotype.²⁰

¹⁹ Author's photograph, 8 October 2014.

²⁰ Made by Lerebours, copied photographically by Dusseq and Company from the copy engraved by Riffaut. Included in Lerebours, Noël-Marie-Paynal, *Excursions daguerriennes: Vues et monuments les plus remarquables du globe* (Paris: Dusacq & Co.,

This picture shows how the site appeared after the initial clearances, which had involved digging out the ancient building from its rebuilding by the successors to the Frankish crusaders in the European Middle Ages. It also shows how the huge lintel that had so impressed Cockerell had survived to that time, although, like the huge block of the Parthenon, it later had to be rescued as an emergency when it was beginning to crack.²¹

Until the rapid urban expansion of Athens in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, those descending through the Propylaia had a framed view across the plain with its olive plantations, to the island of Salamis in its natural harbour. An example from the early twentieth century that uses bibliographic signs, including archaizing sepia, to help the viewer imagine himself or herself back into classical Athens, is reproduced as Figure 24.8.



Figure 24.8. The outward view to the sea from the Propylaia c.1910. Cover of a book of photographs taken earlier by Frédérick Boissonas, 1921.²²

1841), in which the images were kept loose so that they could be passed round as separate pictures among groups of friends and discussed as a drawing room practice for those obliged to stay at home.

- 21 Discussed in Chapter 6 with an illustration at Figure 6.5. My discussion of why the ancient Athenians decided, in modern terms, to over-engineer the Parthenon and other public buildings is in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.
- 22 [Boissonas and Deonna] *L'Image de la Grèce, Athènes Ancienne, Photographies de Fred. Boissonas, Introduction de W. Deonna* (Geneva: Éditions d'Art F. Boissonas, 1921).

Some inscriptions lightly carved on the columns of the ancient buildings during the Byzantine era can still be seen, but only if visitors know where to look. An example from the Propylaia is shown as Figure 24.9.



Figure 24.9. Christian-era inscriptions carved on a column of the Propylaia.²³

In recent times, with the loss to air pollution of the topmost layer of the marble, many of the inscriptions are no longer readable. Fortunately, most from the Byzantine period and some from the Frankish period, which lasted from 1204 until the Acropolis was handed over to the sultan's army in 1459, were copied and published in the nineteenth century.²⁴ First noticed in the 1850s, at a time when many of the monuments were

²³ Author's photograph, 3 October 2013.

²⁴ For an edition, with line drawings that show the sheer miscellaneity of what was recorded, as well as the variety of scripts, see [Orlandos, *Inscriptions*] Orlandos, Anastasios K., *Ta charagmata tou Parthenōnos: ētoi epigraphai charachtheisai epi tōn kionōn tou Parthenōnos kata tous palaiochristianikous kai vizantinous chronous* (Athens: Akadēmia Athēnōn. Kentron Ereunēs tou Mesaionikou kai Neou Hellēnismou, 1973). A summary account with photographs of some of the inscriptions on the Parthenon is given by Kaldellis, Anthony, *The Christian Parthenon, Classicism and Pilgrimage in Byzantine Athens* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 76 and 77. Noted also by Korres in Tournikiotis, 147. Some are illustrated, along with other fragments, in [Kourouniōtēs and Sōtēriou] *Mesaionika mnēmeia Attikēs*, Parts 1 and 2 by K. Kourouniōtēs and G.A. Sōtēriou; part 2 in addition by A. Xyngopoulos; part 3 by A.K. Orlandos (Athens: [n.d.], 1927–1933). Some surviving on the Erechtheion are noted and illustrated by Lesk, Alexandra L., *A Diachronic Examination of the Erechtheion and its Reception* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2004), <http://www.erectheion.org/images/pdfdocumentation/lesk%20phd%20vol%20i%20text.pdf>.

covered with modern graffiti, two hundred and thirty inscriptions were found on the columns of the Parthenon, eighty on the Propylaia, and a few more on the Erechtheion. They include epitaphs of named local ecclesiastical office holders, prayers, and graffiti by visitors. Examples from woodcut reproductions of drawings made when the inscriptions were first identified are given in Figure 24.10.

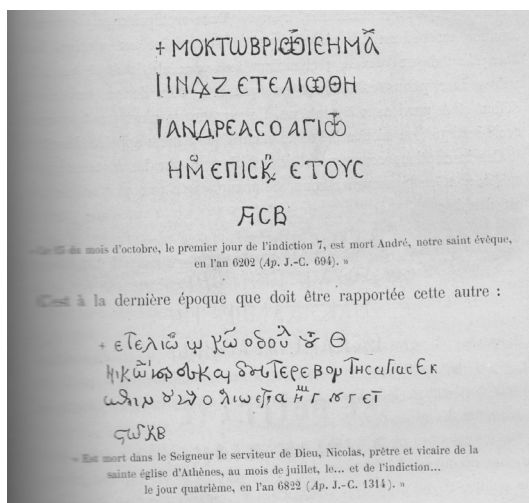


Figure 24.10. Examples of Byzantine-era inscriptions on the columns of the Parthenon. Wood engravings.²⁵

Just as at the end of antiquity the Christians who took control of the eastern Roman Empire had put a stop to the practice of setting up three-dimensional statues, acting under a Christian discourse of forbidding 'idolatry', they had also, the archaeological record confirms, banned free-standing inscriptions ('stelai'), yet another way in which the new rulers distanced themselves from the practices of the Hellenic-Roman world that they had superseded.²⁶ Since the inscriptions on the columns are carved on what had by that time been architecturally adapted and re-sacralized as Christian churches, we can be confident that most had required the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities then in control of the Acropolis. Although not long ago described as 'vast ledgers',

²⁵ Breton, 137.

²⁶ Discussed by Smith, R.R.R., & Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Last Statues of Antiquity* (Oxford: OUP, 2016) drawing on an online database.

the inscriptions are mostly in the changing non-monumental scripts used in manuscripts and could never have been easily consulted or read.²⁷ Indeed, although they are not graffiti, it is hard to understand how they may have been used in their time, or indeed why the words may have been inscribed. Apart from some of the lists of ecclesiastical office-holders, they lack any obvious organizing principle. It is hard to regard them as presenting a coherent social memory for members of the organizations then in control of the Acropolis, let alone for visitors.

If there was also a papyrus and vellum-based system, as there had been in the ancient world—which seems likely—all the records have been lost. And, as for any later ecclesiastical records on paper, with few exceptions, everything combustible was destroyed during the Greek Revolution. What we can say about the inscriptions of the Christian era is that, compared with what went before, the practice was low-tech, the patterns haphazard, the content basic, and the numbers tiny. It was a drastic change from the days when the Hellenic Acropolis was a forest of free-standing marble and bronze statues, and of myriad inscriptions, almost all of which were clearly carved and easily readable by those who were literate in Greek and which, in some cases, continued undisturbed for centuries after they were first put up.

It was in the waters visible and framed as in Figure 24.8, which were seen by everyone exiting the Acropolis, that classical Athens and her allies had won a decisive victory over the invading Achaemenid (Persians and their allies including some from Hellenic cities) in 480 BCE. Although most Athenians had direct experience of the bay of Salamis and of its islands, it was only from the high ground of the famous hills that they could gain a totalizing view, and it was only when returning back through the Propylaia that they were obliged by the architecture to hold their gaze steady. Since, as was discovered when the building was examined and measured in the nineteenth century, a change had been made to the orientation of the building during the course of its construction, the recent suggestion by Samantha Martin McAuliffe and John Papadopoulos that it may have been repositioned in the post-Salamis classical age with that exact outward sightline in mind is highly plausible.²⁸

27 The phrase used by Kaldellis, *Christian Parthenon*, 75.

28 Samantha Martin McAuliffe and John K. Papadopoulos, 'Framing victory: Salamis, the Athenian Acropolis, and the Agora', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*

And if Salamis was a reminder of the victory over the invaders, it was also a reminder of where the non-combatant population had successfully sought refuge. During most periods in its history, Athens had been vulnerable to sea pirates landing on the coast and bands of marauders arriving from landward. Salamis, so close to the shore as to be almost a peninsula, is hard to blockade by sea. On numerous occasions during its long history when Athens was threatened, some people had sought refuge in the Acropolis but, as in the Greek Revolution, the majority had gone to Salamis in hopes of being able to sit out the crisis.²⁹ Lookouts on the tops of the Acropolis buildings could see invaders before they reached the town from any direction, but could also see the islands in the bay and the mountains on the inland side to which the people had historically been able to flee.³⁰ Thucydides in the fifth century BCE had speculated that it was because the Acropolis lay a few miles inland that it had originally been chosen for human colonization at some remote time.³¹ And, if it was important for the defenders to be able to look outwards from a high point inside, it was also helpful if the fortress could give an appearance of invulnerability to those looking at it from outside.

The Propylaia, when seen from a distance from outside, is still easily imaginable as forbidding, not only in all the centuries before gunpowder, but even with the weapon technology of the early nineteenth century.³² And that it had achieved this purpose is confirmed by remarks made by the ancient authors. For example, the 1st century BCE Roman writer and politician Cicero, who had studied the art of rhetoric in Athens, in

71 (2012), 332–61. That the irregularities that were introduced in the course of the construction of the Propylaia were aimed at improving the sightlines for those looking up from outside had been suggested by Elderkin, George Wicker, *Problems in Periclean Buildings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University. Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology. no. 2. 1912).

29 For example in the Greek Revolution; during the invasion of 1687/88: in 490 BCE; and probably on other occasions.

30 In 480 BCE.

31 The main passage in which Thucydides discusses what he knew about the pre-history of Hellas, including Athens, is at the commencement of his history, in Book i, 2–12. How he presented what he had put together from the sources available to him as a progressive narrative of economic and social development, as did others, and how some of the components of that narrative made their way on to the stories presented on the Parthenon, is discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

32 My discussion of the considerations likely to have been present in those who commissioned the building, or rather rebuilding, in the fifth century is in *ibid.*

making the general point that excellent public art had not always united Athens politically, mentions its glories in the following order: theatre, gymnasia, portico, famous Propylaia, Acropolis, the works of Pheidias, and the Piraeus.³³

When, over a century later in the year 101 CE, in a rare recorded example in the ancient world of local resistance to the destruction of what today is called the built heritage in the name of economic development, Dio of Prusa made light of the protests of his fellow citizens to a proposed clearance scheme by declaring that it was not as if he was proposing to tamper 'with the Propylaia of Athens or the Parthenon'.³⁴ In a rhetorical exercise by the same author, the itinerant philosopher and teacher ('sophist') Diogenes of Sinope is said to have declared that, in his wide experience, well-made Hellenic cities were more effective in appearance than the much larger imperial Asiatic capitals of Babylon or Ecbatana, citing among his examples 'the Athenian acropolis and the Propylaia'.³⁵ Visible from ground level within a wide arc to the west, the Propylaia was more often seen in ancient times than the Parthenon, and it appears to have been valued at least as highly. Indeed, they seem to have been built almost simultaneously as a pair, a fact that suggests that they were designed to serve complementary purposes.³⁶

Figure 24.11 shows the view of the Parthenon that opens up to the visitor arriving on the summit. The modern path both protects the ancient surface underneath and silently guides visitors to the main recommended viewing station.

The paths accord with a provision of the Venice Charter that aims to limit the extent to which any one generation can deliberately or inadvertently foreclose options that a future generation might prefer, as happened with the nineteenth-century interventions discussed in Chapter 21. If a future generation were to decide to make changes to

33 Cicero, *De Re Publica* 3.32.44, quoted by Davison, ii, 1018.

34 Dio, *Fortieth*, 8. He mentions among other then untouchable sites the temple of Hera of the people of Samos, the temple of Didyma of the Milesians, or the temple of Artemis at Ephesos.

35 As recorded in the rhetorical exercise by Dio of Prusa, *Sixth Discourse*, 5. I purposely avoid 'more beautiful', the usual translation of καλλίωνας, because of that word's association with the western romantic aesthetic. The Greek word seems normally to have contained a notion of 'beautiful for a purpose.'

36 As will be discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>



Figure 24.11. The Parthenon from the north-west.³⁷

the visitor experience at the summit in order to make it more truthful to ancient times, for example, by restoring the grass and other greenery or by altering the recommended viewing station, the paths could be repositioned without damage to the ancient fabric.³⁸

The image catches a moment in the changing appearance of the Parthenon as it is currently being conserved and restored. Although not discernible as such from the ground, the sculptures that visitors see on the buildings are facsimile replicas of the ancient originals that have in recent years been taken to atmospherically-controlled environments indoors in the Acropolis Museum where they can be viewed close up. As any visitor can, however, at once appreciate, the sculptural components of the ancient buildings are as integral to their architectural design as the walls and the columns. The actual Parthenon that changes as the conservation programme proceeds coexists with an image of a timeless Parthenon, shown without scaffolding or people, that appears on the entrance tickets, as shown in Figure 24.12.

³⁷ Author's photograph, 8 October 2014.

³⁸ The Venice Charter and its predecessor the Athens Declaration, attempts to formulate a notion of inter-generational responsibility are discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.



Figure 24.12. The Parthenon from the north-west. Entrance ticket to the Acropolis, issued 6 October 2013.³⁹

This view of the Parthenon from the north-west is reproduced on the posters, postcards, and covers of guidebooks to be seen in the windows and on the racks of the shops and kiosks that surround the Acropolis. It is the most commonly encountered image throughout Greece and abroad. For more than a century and a half it has set an agenda for the main modern ways of looking at the Acropolis, for ways of symbolically presenting ancient Hellas in visual form, and for the recommended viewing station.⁴⁰ Nor, although there are grumbles that the conservation works are taking too long, do present-day viewers appear to have difficulty in eliding the scaffolds from their minds as easily as they elide the other, apparently temporary, but in reality permanent, modern fixtures on the Acropolis, such as the lamps for electric floodlighting. A periphery of iconicity has implicitly recommended the viewing experience long before visitors reach the entrance gate. And just as, when visitors look at the restored buildings, they cognitively operate simultaneously in more than one temporality by distinguishing the ancient marble from the new, they also operate at more than one level of interpretation, seeing the actual stones, imaginatively replacing at least some of what has been lost since ancient times, and often drawing wider meanings from the experience. Since no attempt has been made to restore the colour and metal that helped the ancient viewer to see and

³⁹ Private collection.

⁴⁰ The main viewing stations in ancient times, and for which the Parthenon was probably designed, were at the far end of the Parthenon as discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>

understand the stories displayed, the images risk implying to modern viewers that ancient viewers saw bare white marble.⁴¹ In ancient times too, we can be confident that visitors to the classical Acropolis brought horizons of expectations, and ways of seeing and making meaning, that those who were responsible for the design and construction of the site in classical times built into their plans and designs.⁴²

We can be confident that the modern recommended viewing station of the Parthenon was not privileged in classical Athens, if, as is doubtful, it was available at all. The side of the building on which modern viewers are encouraged to fasten their gaze was then the back, and it included a small door into a strong room.⁴³ The main action in ancient times took place at the other end of the building where a larger gate, probably also normally closed, could be opened to reveal in a dark chamber the cult statue of Athena, made to appear as if it was entirely constructed of gold and ivory.

Beyond the Parthenon, arriving visitors see the fourth classical-era building on the Acropolis, commonly called the Erechtheion although it is a composite of three buildings, as shown in Figure 24.13. It too stands in isolation with roped-off walkways that enable visitors to see its complex three-part structure from angles all round.



Figure 24.13. The Erechtheion conserved.⁴⁴

41 The ancient experience is discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*.

42 Discussed further in *ibid*.

43 Discussed further in *ibid*.

44 Author's photograph, October 2013.

Although there are still areas of the summit where visitors can wander at will, they are now mostly obliged to keep to the roped walkways. By such discreet measures, the cavities and cuttings on the rock floor that record the shape and size of ancient buildings, and of the plinths of statues and other dedications that formerly stood there, are protected for the future, including the possibility that they may help to answer questions not yet thought of with technologies not yet invented.⁴⁵ On the summit, today occasionally a darting lizard can be glimpsed, but although the noise of jackdaws is incessant, few birds visit. Nor apart from a few of the cypresses and the olive tree is there much vegetation. The Acropolis summit today probably supports less flora and fauna than at any time since the first settlers cleared the plateau at some time in the neolithic past.

At some places, fragments of other buildings that formerly stood on the Acropolis have been collected on the area of the summit where the main action occurred in ancient times. An example is shown in Figure 24.14.



Figure 24.14. Fragments of the round Temple dedicated to Rome and Augustus.⁴⁶

45 For the archaeological importance of the cavities and cuttings in the bare rock, see, for example, Keesling, Catherine M., *The Votive Statues of the Athenian Acropolis* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 3.

46 Author's photograph, 26 June 2014. The monument is discussed by Schmalz, Geoffrey C.R., 'Athens, Augustus, and the Settlement of 21 B.C.', *Greek, Roman and*

Located just east of the Parthenon, the small circular temple of which these pieces were formerly part is thought to have been constructed around the year 20 BCE, soon after the Roman military commander Octavian renamed himself 'Augustus,' (in Greek, 'Sebastos') Caesar and became the first emperor of Rome, although he himself studiously avoided that title. For centuries after that time the little building reminded visitors that, despite the continuation of many of the ancient political and cultural practices, the Acropolis was no longer primarily an Athenian or even a Hellenic site, but had become part of the imperium of Rome. When first dedicated, the building had also marked the then recent triumph of the forces of Octavian over those of Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium in 31 BCE when, as part of the spoils of victory, Octavian and Marcus Agrippa had won what turned out to be the opportunity to make a more enduring change in the visitor's viewing experience at both ends of the Acropolis.

The temple dedicated to Rome and Augustus was the last public building to be erected on the Acropolis summit in ancient times. Pausanias does not mention it and its name is only known from an inscription discovered in modern times. The heaped stones therefore remind us that, although the world of Greco-Roman antiquity continued in Athens for roughly half a millennium after the building of the classical-era Parthenon, at the time when the little round temple to Rome and Augustus was first planned, commissioned and built, the classical buildings were already a 'heritage' that those who controlled the Acropolis could choose either to destroy and replace, or, as happened on this occasion, to save, maintain, adapt, and appropriate to their own rhetorical purposes.⁴⁷ And with the appropriations, as with the buildings appropriated, consumers could choose to ignore or resist the rhetoric that they offered, both as viewers themselves and as authors or speakers who made recommendations to others.

Since enough remains to enable a rebuilding ('anastelosis'), some of the leaders of the Acropolis Conservation and Restoration

Byzantine Studies, 37, 4 (1996). For a discussion of why it was built, see *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>. Examples of modern reputation cleansing are noted there.

47 An image appears on a Roman coin of the 3rd century.

programme have proposed that the temple should be reassembled. It would be a way of giving visitors a fuller sense of the long history of the Acropolis in ancient times, modifying the visual concentration on the classical period brought about by the nineteenth-century clearances. Although, in one sense, to do that could be regarded as a form of decolonizing of the Athenian past from the hegemony of the classical period, which some might regard as diversifying, it would, in this case, be to recolonize it with a colonizing building.⁴⁸ The question of what to do with the heaps of stones therefore brings to the fore wider questions about which pasts deserve to be rebuilt and on what grounds. The mere fact of sufficient stones having survived not only remits decisions about what ought to be done now and in the future to the contingencies of past events, including the unexpected survival of the monuments during the Greek Revolution, but reinforces a bias in favour of conquerors and appropriators. Although much can be, and is, done by modern labelling, the visual past cannot easily be updated to match modern understandings; instead it instantiates political decisions from moments in the past that were often contested at the time they were taken, even in the case of the classical-era Parthenon. At the time of writing, a decision about the future of the temple to Rome and Augustus has been indefinitely postponed.⁴⁹

A capital from one of the columns of this building was brought to London by agents of Lord Elgin in the early nineteenth century, in accordance with his aim of providing examples of ancient design for the artists and architects of his time to use as models in their own work, although there is no record of this piece ever having been used for that purpose. A 'necking drum' was itself appropriated from the Erechtheion nearby by those who made it in ancient times and it is, at the time of writing, in a basement gallery of the British Museum which is often closed, seldom visited, and exclusively given over to 'architectural' fragments, reinforcing the modern western distinction anachronistically imposed on the ancients by Winckelmann and others, that puts the design of inanimate objects above the use to which objects were put when they were first made, and treats 'architecture' as of less value than 'sculpture'.

48 An experiment in recovering ways of seeing prevalent in the Roman period is offered in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

49 *Acropolis Restored*, 8.



Figure 24.15. Capital from the temple dedicated to Rome and Augustus.⁵⁰

This picture reminds us that Elgin's agents, as part of his aim of providing actual exemplars for the use of modern artists and architects, removed substantial pieces, architectural as well as sculptural, from all four of the classical-era buildings that were then still standing on the summit, as well as from the other ancient buildings on the Acropolis slopes and in the town.⁵¹ The extent to which the architectural exemplars were used, for example by those who designed buildings in the second wave of neoclassical building in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, after the publication of the second edition of Stuart and Revett's *Antiquities of Athens* in 1830, has not been investigated, but I know of no example of this piece ever having been used for this purpose, and for around a century any serious architect commissioned to build in the Athenian style has preferred to look at the buildings as they exist in Athens.

Pausanias does not mention the statue of Agrippa at the Acropolis entrance. As early as the eighteenth century it was being suggested that Pausanias's neglect of Roman monuments was evidence of a passive-aggressive resentment at the fact that the cities of ancient Hellas had lost their independence.⁵² That, however, may be to assume that writers in the Greek language at that time thought of themselves as Hellenes or Greeks rather than as Romans, and may therefore risk an anachronistic imposition of modern notions of 'nation'. What we can say with greater confidence is that Pausanias knew that the potential readers of his book,

50 Photograph, 21 April 2014 by Luciana Gallo for the author.

51 See 'Note on the phrase Elgin Marbles' in Appendix A.

52 For example, Chandler, *Travels in Greece*, 43. The recovery and the unique value of the work by Pausanias were discussed in Chapter 8.

including those who might use it as a guide when visiting the site, were more interested in the monuments of classical Athens than in those that were then contemporary or modern.⁵³ Like present-day viewers, they selected what was salient to them and elided what was not. Although there are other remains of buildings and sanctuaries, both pre- and post-classical, that are well explained on modern labels, the exceptions detract little from the sense that the Acropolis summit today is an open-air museum that contains four magnificent examples of the architecture of classical Athens: Propylaia, Athena Nike, Parthenon, and Erechtheion, all built of white marble, standing on a rough bare plateau at odd angles and with no apparent unity or logic. None of the buildings can now normally be entered, as was probably also the norm in ancient times.⁵⁴

There are a few cypress trees that may have marked the sites of cemeteries.⁵⁵ More often pointed out is an olive tree, as shown in Figure 24.16, growing in its own well-watered enclosure.



Figure 24.16. The olive tree by the Erechtheion, the Parthenon behind.⁵⁶

The present tree is said to have been planted in 1952 from a sprig from a tree that had died during the German and Italian military occupation

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- 53 My attempt to recover some of the admiration of classical Athens during the circumstances of the so-called 'Second Sophistic' is in the companion volume.
 - 54 Plans to install a floor inside the Erechtheion, to enable it to be entered, were reported in October 2014 in *Archaeology News Network* 9 October 2014 quoting the Athens newspaper *To Vima*.
 - 55 For the burials on the Acropolis summit see Chapter 8. Since all the trees on the summit appear to have been destroyed for their wood during the two sieges of the Acropolis of the Greek Revolution, 1821/22 and 1826/27, the present trees may not date back to before the mid-nineteenth century.
 - 56 Author's photograph October 2013.

of 1941–1944, although I have been unable to find confirmation of this.⁵⁷ In ancient times, as visitors then already knew or soon learned from their guides or guide-books, the olive tree gave living expression to a famous episode in Athenian history. It was said that on the day after the destruction of the Acropolis by the Persian armies in 480 BCE, the olive tree that the invaders had cut down sprouted a new branch four feet long, a graphic reminder to Athenians of the resilience of their city during its greatest test, when it was beset by both external enemies and their internal supporters.⁵⁸ Already in pre-classical times, the tree took Athenian viewers back to their mythic pre-history, when, according to one of the city's founding legends, Athena and Poseidon had contested for the territory of Attica. Poseidon, the god of the sea, who was the loser, had struck the rock with his trident, and a spring of salt water had sprung up. Athena, who caused an olive tree to grow even on the sparse soil of the Acropolis, had established the foundations for the expansion of the Athenian economy and of the social and intellectual development with which it was associated.⁵⁹ The oil from harvested olives was a crop of extraordinary value, a nourishing food, but useful for many other purposes, including for lamps for lighting and for cleaning the body. The pulp of the olives from which the oil had all been pressed was made into cakes that, when dried in the sun, made an excellent bio-fuel.⁶⁰ Olive oil is easily stored, easily transported, and, although there are differences of quality, as a commodity it is exchanged as a form of easily negotiable currency and may have been so used.⁶¹

57 The olive tree is to be seen in photographs and postcards of the time of the occupation, and in Wigram, W.A., *Hellenic Travel, A Guide* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), opposite 29, a book that was published soon after the end of the Second World War and that appears to use photographs that had been made at that time. I have been unable to find the date when the first modern olive tree was planted. Since no tree appears in the photographs by Boissonnas or those made earlier, my guess is that it was part of the anastelosis of the early twentieth century.

58 Herodotus viii, 55 and noted also by Pausanias 1. 27. 1, and by other ancient authors. The story of the olive was known, from his reading, to the Renaissance architect Alberti who, in book vi, mentions the columns, obelisks, and trees left by great men in order to be venerated by posterity 'as for instance the olive transplanted by Neptune and Minerva which flourished for many ages in the citadel of Athens.' Quoted by Loukaki, Argyro, *Living Ruins, Value Conflicts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 1.

59 Discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

60 Noted by, for example Laurent, i, 161.

61 With the rapid growth of underwater archaeology in recent decades and the discovery all over the eastern Mediterranean of wrecks loaded with amphorae,

The place where Poseidon had struck the rock with his trident, a mark that was shown to visitors in ancient times, has not been identified for certain. However, in 1847, the French architect Jacques-Martin Tétaz, who was searching under the pavement of the Erechtheion, noticed three holes with a channel that had apparently been used in ancient times by the temple staff to ensure that visitors, including Pausanias, could be sure of seeing running water, at some times at least.⁶² The ancient stories were not only anchored to the ancient ground, but they were performed as in a staged re-enactment.

The Acropolis Museum: Understanding at the Monument Today

The Acropolis Museum, formerly known as the New Acropolis Museum, whose roof can be seen by those looking down from the Acropolis summit, was opened in 2009 after years of consideration of the options. Since then, a visit to the Museum has been for many an intrinsic part of their experience of looking at the Parthenon and the Acropolis, especially for those visiting for the first time.⁶³ Constructed mainly of glass and with large, faintly-tinted windows, the Museum constantly draws the eye of the viewer to the Acropolis rock towering nearby on the southern side from where part of the Parthenon is visible behind the defensive walls. With the Acropolis itself always in sight, from outside as well as inside the Museum, as in Figure 24.17, visitors are constantly reminded of where the exhibits have come from.

some with residues still detectable, I am surprised at the extent to which oil and wine growing localities appear to have incurred the expense and risk of exporting and importing commodities. If the commodities were used as a form of international currency, at least as stable as a store of value as coinage, and more easy to enforce that letters of credit, that could be exchanged at every main port, the question would be answered. The understanding by the authors of the classical period that 'money' is a useful convention, a 'nomisma', is discussed in the companion volume.

62 Penrose, F.C., *An Investigation of the Principles of Athenian Architecture, or the results of a survey conducted chiefly with reference to the optical refinements exhibited in the construction of the ancient buildings at Athens* (London: Macmillan & The Society of Dilettanti, 1851), 4.

63 For the architectural design, see *The New Acropolis Museum Edited by Bernard Tschumi Architects, contributions by Dimitrios Pandermalis, Yannis Aesopos, Berbard Tschumi, and Joel Rutten* (New York: Skira Rizioli, 2009).



Figure 24.17. The Acropolis as seen from the terrace of the Acropolis Museum.⁶⁴

Since the Acropolis Museum can be visited online, with excellent virtual walkthroughs, it need not be described or pictured here.⁶⁵ The displays on three floors are broadly arranged like archaeological layers. Arriving visitors moving up the escalators are helped to imagine themselves passing in time through the ancient centuries. Modern information technology is used to present alternatives, not of the ‘some say this: some say that’ convention that encourages myth-making and cultural relativism, but moving screens that display how the objects may have appeared in ancient times before they were damaged, including alternatives where there is room for difference of understanding within the modern scientific and scholarly traditions. A screen that helps viewers to imagine the colour that has been lost from most of the dedications that formerly stood on the summit is shown at Figure 24.18.

Besides looking outward and upward, visitors to the Museum can also look down through a glass floor into the excavated site on which the building stands. That excavation yielded 40,000 archaeological objects dating from the earliest human settlements to the end of antiquity. Some are of great informational value for understanding the history of the city in late antiquity, notably evidence that cultural practices not usually

⁶⁴ Author’s photograph, 3 October 2013.

⁶⁵ <http://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en>



Figure 24.18. Tourists using the digital screens on the Archaic floor of the Acropolis Museum.⁶⁶

associated with ancient Hellas, such as cults of the Egyptian Osiris, were already established at that time. The recurrent fear in classical Athens, which eventually turned out to be well founded, that the unique Hellenic culture of the city was at risk of being undermined by the arrival of non-Hellenic cults from neighbouring countries, was commonly voiced in classical times, and was itself probably one of the considerations that caused the Athenians of the fifth century to build the Parthenon and the rest of the Acropolis in the form that they chose.⁶⁷

The Acropolis Museum, without downplaying the achievements of the great men, and a few women, of the classical period, reminds visitors of the many others who participated in the making of the famous buildings, including workers in marble, paint, and metal, some of whom were skilled, and unskilled migrants as well as local citizens and slaves. The internal political struggles of the classical era in Athens are made vivid by displays of the actual inscribed shards, 'ostraka', used in ancient ostracisms with names of famous ancient Athenian leaders, including Themistocles, the victor of Salamis, scratched on them by their voters.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Author's Photograph June 2014.

⁶⁷ As discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

⁶⁸ For the discovery of ostraka inscribed with the name of Themistocles and Kimon, apparently prepared for handing out by opponents and thrown down a well unused, after the election, see Broneer, *Hesperia*, vii (1938), 231, now available as open access. For the difficulties of fitting Themistocles who 'died a satrap', into the liberation story see the companion volume.

The Museum also helps the visitor to reanimate the men, women, and children whose lives were spent in and around the Acropolis, by showing, for example, household objects, plain and painted pottery, and grave goods. In all these ways the Acropolis Museum reminds visitors that the Athens of ancient Hellas was more than the classical period, and that ancient life was more than participating in ceremonies near the Parthenon and other grand marble buildings, important though these were in establishing and reconfirming their identity.

The openness of the Acropolis Museum to daylight also enables visitors immediately to appreciate that most of the larger objects exhibited, whether free-standing, such as material images dedicated to deities (statues), or the sculptured stories in stone that were parts of the buildings such as those on the Parthenon, were intended and designed to be seen in the open air, usually by visitors who were on the move. Viewers today can appreciate the unique translucent qualities of the local marble from the quarries of Mount Pentelikon that is visible on the horizon. The visitor's experience of looking is different in the morning and the evening, the spring and the autumn, in clear or in dull weather. The Acropolis Museum is therefore different from most long-established museums in northern Europe and North America that are often imposing, sometimes forbidding, buildings in which objects are displayed in enclosed spaces, often with spotlights installed by the managers. The success of the Museum is a tribute to the confidence and modesty, as well as to the knowledge and skill, of those responsible. In particular, they did not adopt the easy solution of building a museum in the neo-Hellenic style in marble. They have given priority to the needs of the Acropolis as a monument and to the needs of those who wish to understand it. They have produced a museum that does not upstage its contents. Despite the best efforts of its managers, however, the Acropolis Museum has not been able fully to escape from the power of nineteenth-century romanticism and its conceptual hierarchies, particularly in the case of the Caryatids removed from the Erechtheion that, inside the Museum, stand like detached works of art.⁶⁹

69 Discussed by Beresford, J.M., 'The Caryatids in the New Acropolis Museum: Out of Sight, Out of Light, Out of Mind', *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, 3, <http://doi.org/10.5334/jcms.130>

Some modern scholars, reviving a point of view expressed by some nineteenth-and twentieth-century Greek intellectuals, had hoped that the Acropolis Museum might display the whole history of the site, seeing its exclusive concentration on the ancient heritage as a burdensome imported colonization by a western philhellenic myth that Greece as a country had submitted to, adopted, and internalized during the decades before and after independence, but that it ought now try to modify, or at least to dethrone.⁷⁰ At the time of writing, one idea being discussed is to use the Old Acropolis Museum to display items from the history of the Acropolis after the end of antiquity.

The current Conservation and Restoration Programme has in recent times reinstated other ways of looking at the Acropolis that have until recently been unavailable. The ancient path that circles the Acropolis on its slopes, which for many decades was cordoned off with fences and barbed wire, has been reopened. Visitors, it was intended, could visit more sites, both natural and man-made, look at more vistas, and experience more ancient ways of seeing, both with their own eyes and with the help of the imagination, than have been possible for half a century or more, a much needed re-enfranchisement. Sadly, however, at the time of writing, partly because of the increased risks posed by the now changeable weather and the associated risks of rock falls, the Peripatos has again had to be closed for an indefinite period.

The old photograph of the Acropolis from the town on the north side, reproduced in Chapter 21 as Figure 21.17, shows a row of unfluted column drums built conspicuously into the defensive summit walls. These still arrest the eye, demanding an explanation.⁷¹ They are remains of the 'old Parthenon' sometimes called the 'pre-Parthenon' destroyed by the Persian invaders in 480 BCE when it was still under construction. The citizens of classical Athens and their families, the non-citizen residents from other cities ('metics'), and those slaves who were permitted to go outdoors, were reminded of the foreign invasion whose army was accompanied by members of a prominent Athenian family who had once ruled Athens as tyrants, which had once destroyed the material city, but

70 For example Hamilakis, Yannis, 'Decolonizing Greek Archaeology: Indigenous archaeologies, modernist archaeology and the post-colonial critique', in Damaskos and Plantzos, 281.

71 As will be explored in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

not the perennially renewable and therefore indestructible imagined city.⁷² It was the remains of the Old Parthenon that most classical-era Athenians saw in their daily lives, not its now more famous classical replacement, which lies outside the sightlines of the ancient town from this side. Whether the remains were deliberately preserved by the men of the classical era as a visual reminder of the disaster and how it was overcome, cannot be judged with certainty from the ancient evidence. Indeed, the fact that modern generations, heirs of centuries of traditions of preserving ruins, find that explanation attractive, exemplifies the risks of applying rhetorics of 'men [and women] like ourselves' and of the recent academic practice of 'reception' studies that, whatever other usefulness they may possess, can stand in the way of building an understanding of the strangeness of the ancient past.

72 That the drums had been deliberately placed in the walls so as to be a visual reminder to the town below, suggested by Ludwig Ross in the 1830s and by Leake and others earlier, is discussed by Manolis Korres in *Dialogues*, 144. My own attempt to recover the strangeness, making use of other insights by Korres is in my *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>

