

Μουσείο Μπενάκη

A Singular Antiquity: Archaeology and Hellenic Identity in Twentieth-Century Greece



‘Artfully classified’ and ‘appropriately placed’: notes on the display of antiquities in early twentieth-century Greece

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‘Artfully classified’ and ‘appropriately placed’: notes on the display of antiquities in early twentieth-century Greece

Μνήμη Αγγελικής Πιλάλη-Παπαστερίου

THE POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL processes which, in the course of the nineteenth century, shaped the dominant ideological credo in Greece, according to which classical antiquities acquired the status of symbolic national capital have been thoroughly analyzed by research.¹ Despite considerable discrepancies, nineteenth-century museum displays reflected and reproduced this ideological orientation by offering visitors a reading which presented antiquities as fine-looking objects and unquestionable national emblems.² Evident in several aspects of civil life and reflected in official ideological apparatuses, museums included, this form of ancestor worship was powerful enough to survive until the beginning of the twentieth century, despite the fact that some ‘cracks’ in the model were beginning to appear as early as 1897.

At the beginning of the new century Greek archaeological museums were blooming: new museums were being founded, museum practices stabilized and permanent staff was appointed. Did this improvement in museum practices also reflect some kind of transition to a different ideological model of the management of antiquities and, consequently, of their display?³ This is the main question on which this paper focuses. More specifically, I am interested in examining how the official rhetoric concerning antiquities prevailing during the first decade of the twentieth century was incorporated, maintained and reproduced within the corresponding museum ‘narrations’.

I shall focus on the time period between 1900 and 1909 because:

- It was an especially prolific period in the development of archaeological museums.

- This development was checked to a great extent after 1909.⁴

- I am interested in examining the degree to which the ideological inheritance of the nineteenth century continued to exert influence during the transition to the twentieth.

‘the Society established a museum in ...’

The development of museums

By the end of the nineteenth century, all major museums in Athens⁵ had been established and important regional museums⁶ had been built. Subsequent efforts concentrated on the creation of a series of small, provincial museums to house antiquities in various regions in the country. The new century began with a flurry of activity. In 1900, four museums were founded: Ancient Corinth, Thera, Chalkis and Mykonos, while the follow-up was equally impressive. From 1903 to 1906, a total of nine museums were built, at a rate of three per year, thus:

1903: Nafplion, Delphi, Chaeroneia

1904: Delos, Thebes, Herakleion

1906: Lykosoura, Corfu, Tegea

1908: Thermon, Volos

1909: Argostolion

A total of 16 museums in nine years (1900-1909) is an impressive record. This was due to the fact that the Archaeological Society at Athens (henceforth the ‘Society’)⁷ concentrated most of its efforts on building archaeological museums, an involvement which led to the systematization

of museum practices during that period. It is sufficient to note that, of the 16 new museums built during that period, 14 were created by the Society and only two by the state, Delphi and Herakleion, the latter being founded by the Independent Cretan State with financial support from the Society.

	Archaeological Society	Greek State
1900	Ancient Corinth	
	Thera	
	Chalkis	
	Mykonos	
1903	Nafplion	Delphi (+ private funding)
	Chaeroneia	
1904	Delos	Herakleion (Cretan State + private funding)
	Thebes	
1906	Lykosoura	
	Corfu	
	Tegea	
1908	Thermon	
	Volos (+ private funding)	
1909	Argostolion (Kephalonia)	

Table 1. Greek archaeological museums 1900-1909 by funding body.

Nine museums were located in urban centres and seven on archaeological sites or nearby (see Table 2). It is clear that there was significant advance planning regarding the creation of museums *in situ* – generally following the termination of excavations at a site (or while excavations were still on-going), despite the fact that a significant number of these sites were located in isolated areas. Indeed, some of them continue to be relatively inaccessible even today. Some museums were therefore created which from the very beginning had only a slim chance of attracting significant numbers of visitors. The collection and preservation of antiquities remained, in other words, the objective of founding museums. With the exception of two museums housed in pre-existing public buildings (the museum at Nafplion which was housed in the *Vouleftiko* – an eighteenth-century mosque converted to assembly rooms by the revolution-

ary Greek administration – and the Argostolion museum in the city's Anglican church), the museums of this period were housed in new buildings erected for this specific purpose and distinguished by a rather spare architectural style (which becomes especially evident when compared with their counterparts in other European countries). Indeed, a specific type of floor plan was commonly used which consisted of two galleries on either side of an antechamber.

Urban centres	Archaeological sites or nearby
Thera	Ancient Corinth
Chalkis	Delphi
Mykonos	Delos
Nafplion	Chaeroneia
Thebes	Lykosoura
Corfu	Tegea
Herakleion	Thermon
Volos	
Argostolion (Kephalonia)	

Table 2. Greek archaeological museums 1900-1909 by geographical distribution.

Museum construction was generally completed in a short period of time. The demanding tasks of classifying and exhibiting antiquities followed, undertaken by archaeologists primarily from the Society but also from the state's Archaeological Service. It should be noted here that the majority of archaeologists organizing displays during this period had studied in other European countries, mainly in Germany.⁸ Some of them were even sent specifically to visit museums in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century. It would therefore be interesting to assess to what extent their contact with display practices in other European countries affected their work in Greece (a topic to which we shall return).

Over a period of ten years, therefore, we have 16 new museums, in new buildings; all in all, a fast pace of development, involving great activity on the part of the Society. But what can we learn from this flowering of museums about the ideological management of antiquities and, by extension, their display?

The displays

The discussion of displays organized during this period

must also include certain museums that had been built earlier, but whose displays were organized during the first decade of the twentieth century. These are the museums at Epidaurus (where the display was set up by Panayiotis Kavadias⁹ between 1905 and 1909) and at Syros (organized during the same period by Nikolaos Politis,¹⁰ then in charge of archaeology in the Cyclades on behalf of the Greek state). We shall also consider the work by Kavadias at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens (henceforth the 'National Museum') as well as that of Konstantinos Kourouniotis¹¹ at the Ancient Olympia Museum. Thus the early years of the century were a busy time as regards the setting up of displays.

It is extremely difficult to arrive at comprehensive conclusions concerning the appearance of exhibitions during this period, as they were marked by significant variation and heterogeneity. This was due to a variety of factors such as the relative importance and anticipated popularity of each museum, the availability and appropriateness of spaces, financial difficulties, lack of staff and shortages of technical equipment. The National Museum continued to attract most attention, although there were a number of provincial museums that were more or less systematically organized (for example, the museums at Olympia, Epidaurus, Tegea, Delphi, Thebes, Herakleion, Volos and, to a lesser extent, Argostolion). As regards the remaining exhibitions, two comments can be made:

1. Despite considerable disparities, they managed to a large extent to shake off the strictly repository character of previous periods;

2. In general, the common requirement for chronological and typological classification of collections and their 'proper' display was achieved in most cases. We will return to this later.

How were antiquities displayed?

To begin with, the antiquities displayed were generally 'the finest of the rescued', or even, 'all of the archaeologically and historically important finds'. A reflection of this preconception can be seen in the report by Valerios Stais¹² written in 1909 on works displayed beneath the showcases of the Mycenaean gallery at the National Museum. He characterized them as of secondary importance to visitors, but nevertheless felt the need to justify their display and



Fig. 1. Post card from Herakleion Archaeological Museum, ca. 1910.

thus added: 'very interesting however from an artistic point of view'.¹³

In addition, there was a tendency to display as many objects as possible. For example, in 1907, of the 5000 sculptures reported in the collections of the National Museum, 2725 were displayed in galleries,¹⁴ while regarding the museum at Thebes, Antonios Keramopoulos reported: 'I counted 4471 clay vases therein displayed'.¹⁵ The information given by Stephanos Xanthoudidis¹⁶ regarding the museum at Herakleion (fig. 1) is also typical: 'More than one hundred large, glass-covered cases made of oak include the most part of the heirlooms, while many more [heirlooms] are also displayed in a dignified and artful manner'.¹⁷

The general rule followed for the display of antiquities was that of classification based on chronology and typology in various combinations (e.g., chronology-typology or typology-chronology). Frequently a typological classification implied that sculptures might be exhibited in one gallery, for example, and vases in another. Alternatively, finds were presented according to their provenance and subsequently classified chronologically or typologically. After that, finds were classified according to the construction material used and generally placed according to their dimensions; less commonly according to a thematic order. In one case, that of the museum in Volos, the display criterion was the degree of preservation of the finds. Smaller finds were often displayed in show-cases, arranged according to the type of material (fig. 2).

Interpretation was minimal. Frequently, however, dis-



Fig. 2. Ancient Corinth, Archaeological Museum, East room, undated (photo: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Corinth Annex, no. 1546).

Fig. 3. Thebes, Archaeological Museum, view of showcase with vases from Ritsona graves, 1922 (photo: Ure Museum, Reading University).

plays were rounded out with plaster reproductions and with painted depictions, which acted as visual aids. The quantity and quality of informational material was related to the size and importance of each museum. The most complete exhibitions from this perspective were to be found at the National Museum, where supporting material included catalogue numbers, information signs, the names of the galleries on the walls and plaster casts. The work of Apostolos Arvanitopoulos¹⁸ at the museum of Volos is an example of such an approach. He wrote: ‘Upon the walls we inscribed some notices toward the general understanding of the kind and importance of the ancient finds in each room’.¹⁹ When in the foyer of the museum, a funerary monument was reconstructed in order to show how the *stelae* were placed in ancient times he noted: ‘we proceeded to the reconstruction of a funerary monument’.²⁰ Of course, a simple label inscribed on a wall does not provide much in the way of enlightenment or ‘understanding’ of the ‘importance of antiquities’, nor does a reproduction help much if it is not interpreted to the visitor. Nevertheless, here we have an example of what we might name ‘visitor provision’.

No care was taken to praise the archaeological context, with one possible exception, namely the museum at Thebes, built in 1904-1905, but organized mainly in 1909. The person in charge was Antonios Keramopoulos.²¹ The display on the ground floor of the building did not deviate from the norms of the era. On the upper floor, however, Keramopoulos displayed the finds from the excavations at Ritsona, in ancient Mykalyssos, in a manner much ahead of his time: ‘The gifts to the dead of each grave, clay or metallic, even the bones of the dead, are all displayed together’.²²

For the exhibition of the finds at Ritsona, Keramopoulos collaborated with Percy Ure,²³ the excavator at Ritsona along with Ronald Barrows.²⁴ Ure and Barrows espoused the views of Italian archaeologist Paolo Orsi who had excavated a number of cemeteries in Sicily and propagated a new excavation rationale, according to which the entire contents of each individual grave ought to be studied as a unit and not only those that seemed to have exceptional aesthetic merit (as had been the usual practice until that time).²⁵ Likewise, using the concept of archaeological context, Keramopoulos organized the display so that all the contents of a grave, skeletal remains included, were displayed together on shelves (fig. 3).

Ure would write in 1934: ‘It is due to him that the complete

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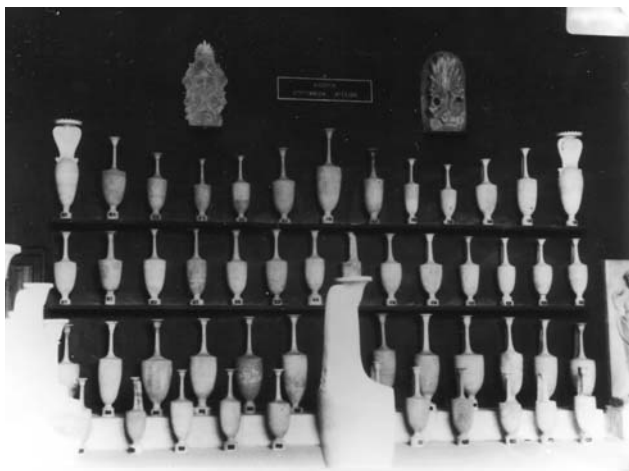
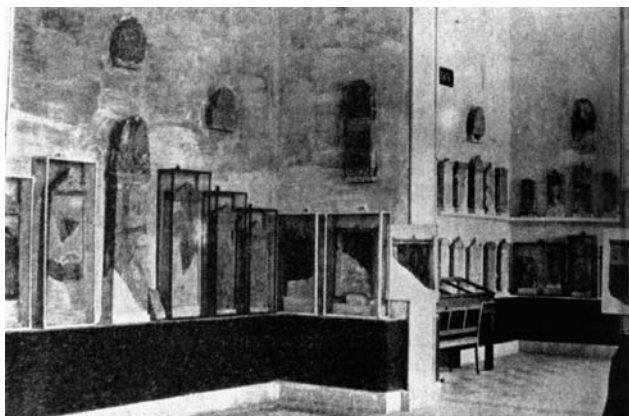


Fig. 4. Thera, Archaeological Museum, sculpture room, 1900s (source: Gärtringen & Wilski 1904, fig. 16).

Fig. 5. Volos, Archaeological Museum, north-east corner of the first room, 1909 (source: Arvanitopoulos 1912, 226, fig. 26).

Fig. 6. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, room XIII, datable probably before 1906 (photo: National Archaeological Museum, Photographic Archive).

finds from each of our graves are exhibited as a unity in the cases of the museum at Thebes. The temptation to follow the easy and unscientific course of exhibiting only the showpieces and keeping the mass of material out of sight is even now not always resisted in some quarters, and was the normal procedure twenty-five years ago'.²⁶ The beneficiaries of these efforts, however, were probably researchers rather than the public, as is clear from Keramopoulos' accounts.

The exhibits were, as a rule, arranged in a linear fashion (fig. 4). Some archaeologists, though, such as Arvanitopoulos, who in 1909 organized the display of the inscribed stelae of Demetrias²⁷ at the museum in Volos, had a sense of the ghastly impression given by the uniform alignment of the works (fig. 5): 'This system of basing stelae upon successive pedestals in a row is admittedly tedious and generally unrefined. However, in order to ensure that the stelae were rescued, it would have been in vain and comically ambitious to pursue a more appealing or opulent basing of them'.²⁸

Finally, there was a clear tendency to create harmonious (fig. 6) and aesthetically appropriate displays: 'Care was taken in order for the ancient finds to occupy a position merited by the symmetry and harmony of the surrounding area and the neighbouring classes (*sic*)'.²⁹

It should be noted here that the exhibition of antiquities in chronological order became a legal requirement under the terms of the 1885 *Decree Concerning the Organization of Athenian Museums*: 'Museum antiquities should be [...] classified in the rooms [...] according to the various periods of art history'.³⁰ The same decree also required the 'decent' display of antiquities, an expression found throughout relevant texts of the time. I quote: 'for the appropriate and decent placement of the ancient finds',³¹ 'they were artfully classified',³² 'they were appropriately placed',³³ 'and for the decent placement of the others',³⁴ 'decently and appropriately placed'.³⁵

What exactly constituted this notion of suitability and harmony? It was, of course, a legacy from the nineteenth century. At that time, in line with the view that they were 'sacred heirlooms', antiquities were presented as timeless and indisputable values, as cultural treasures. An attempt to create 'suitable' exhibitions, in 'harmony' with the historical and artistic value of the finds, was part of this ideological framework. Was this still the case though, at the dawn of the twentieth century?

To answer this question, we must shed some light on the ideological character of the era, and simultaneously assess to what extent the legacy of the nineteenth century continued to exercise its influence. We must similarly examine how archaeology was developing in Greece at the time, as well as how archaeological displays in other European countries were being organized.

• ‘The finest of the rescued’
• ‘All of the archaeological and historically important finds’
• As many objects as possible
• Classified according to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Chronology and typology ◦ Provenance ◦ Material ◦ Theme (rarely)
• Minimal information (e.g. captions, inscriptions on the wall)
• Reconstruction or addition of missing pieces
• Linear spatial arrangement
• Concern for aesthetics and harmony

Table 3. Main trends in displaying antiquities.

The historical and ideological context

In 1896 the first Olympic Games of the modern era took place in Athens resulting in an increased sense of national pride. However, this pride was severely dented the following year after Greece’s ‘humiliating’ defeat by Turkey in 1897. That generation was marked by introspection, a desire to ‘re-examine everything from scratch’,³⁶ and their efforts to redefine a sense of national identity.³⁷ The search for the identity of the Greeks led, among other things, to a renegotiation of the relationship with antiquity. The usefulness of antiquity to modern life began to be questioned. This trend was expressed symbolically in Andreas Karkavitsas’ allegorical novel *The Archaeologist* published in 1904. In it, an ancient sculpture, discovered with painstaking effort by an amateur archaeologist who then places it in the middle of his home, falls and kills its owner. A telling detail is that, in his attempt to avoid the falling statue, the protagonist grabs the ends of a piece of embroidery – material symbol of his time – which hangs on the wall.³⁸ Kostis Palamas’ *Dodecalogue of the Gypsy* and

The King’s Flute published in 1907 and 1910 respectively, reflected the new critical attitude vis-à-vis the use of antiquity in modern Greece. In both works the poet showed the complementarity of the Greeks’ diverse pasts (the ancient Greek and the Byzantine) when creatively synthesized with contemporary folk culture. In the same vein, Ion Dragoumis criticized the tendency to adopt ancient Greece as the modern Greeks’ only heritage, thereby alienating modern Greeks from their living tradition and distorting their understanding of their overall past.³⁹ This attempt to discern what was relevant and valuable to the present in each past era would mark the beginning of what Kitromilides⁴⁰ has characterized ‘the era of ambivalence’, that is the attempt to reappropriate antiquity as a subsidiary medium of symbolic expression in the age of modernity.

And yet at precisely the same time, ‘the era of subservience’ – a phrase coined once again by Kitromilides –⁴¹ that is the uncritical elevation of antique models to the status of unquestioned normative authority in the age of Romantic Neoclassicism, was drawing to a close. In 1901, the publication in the newspaper *Acropolis* of excerpts from the Bible translated into demotic Greek led to a violent reaction from students, the dismissal of the archbishop, and the resignation of the prime minister leaving a trail of blood, and eleven dead. Two years later, in 1903, an attempt to stage a performance of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* translated into demotic Greek incited the wrath of student groups, led to new conflicts with the police and the deaths of another three people. Extreme reactions to be sure, but indicative of the vitality with which the ancestor worship of the nineteenth century continued to thrive. More precisely, these incidents epitomized the ideology of national ‘purity’ which could only be based on a relationship with classical Greece. The despair over the perceived loss of a ‘pure’ language, may thus symbolize something much deeper, namely despair at the loss of the only valid mechanism of boosting national self esteem, which was the resort to classical antiquity, evoked every time there was need.⁴² Interestingly, though, 1903 also marked the publication of the periodical *Noumas*, which would become the demotists’ main forum of expression; during this same period the demotic language movement gathered momentum and entered what K. Dimaras called its ‘heroic’ era.⁴³

Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century Greek society was caught between two different ways of thinking, fighting on two fronts with language providing the major

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battlefield. The quarrel would assume national proportions, as it clearly involved demands for change much wider and deeper than the language question. In fact, two different national ideologies squaring up to one another in an aggressive fashion. The issues at stake concerned concepts of society and education, views of the state, attitudes towards the past and its uses; they also involved a sense of national self esteem. In the words of Fletcher,⁴⁴ those who supported demotic language saw themselves as 'carrying the torch of progress'; those who opposed it saw themselves as 'the guardians of the nation's traditions'. Both sides put forward patriotic claims, as the need for a universally accepted language was not only a proof of national continuity but also a sign of national unity. By taking an active interest in education, however, demotic language aspired to become a mechanism for a general reform of Greek society. The 'purists' on the other hand had the benefit of political power as they held critical positions in government, the Parliament, the Church, the Law, and the University. In 1911 the struggle would ease temporarily with the adoption of *katharevousa* (or pure language) as the official language of the state by the Greek Parliament.⁴⁵

To sum up, at the turn of the century Greek society found itself caught up in a clash between traditional ideas and new social needs, which could not be satisfied through the traditional schemes put forward by intellectuals or other social agents of the era. As Leondaritis has suggested,⁴⁶ reformist attempts were not in fact antagonistic to the dominant ideological model, which could be placed within a traditional-ethnocentric scheme that was highly resistant to reforms. Nowhere was this more evident than in the case of archaeology as will be shown below. We must then ask ourselves here:

How were antiquities and the role outlined in archaeology understood within this context?

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the idea of the nation's historical continuity from ancient times to the present – Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos' seminal work *History of the Hellenic Nation* – had become firmly established. Thus other facets of Hellenic civilization could be explored. For example, in 1884 the Christian Archaeological Society was founded, while in 1899 the

new archaeological law expanded the notion of protection to include Byzantine antiquities.⁴⁷ In practice however Byzantine archaeology was not embraced by the mainstream of Greek archaeology until the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁸ The fate of Prehistoric archaeology, with the exception of anything which could be considered as a prelude to classical civilization, was much the same.⁴⁹ In practice, excavations were mainly carried out at classical sites such as Delos, Tegea and Thermon, and the same holds for major restoration work undertaken at the Acropolis, at Delphi, at the temple of Apollo at Bassae and at Ancient Corinth.⁵⁰ Within this context, it is not surprising that 'the selective "rectification" of the past', as Kotsakis has termed it,⁵¹ involved the restoration of monuments to their assumed original condition by suppressing later historical phases.

Moreover, the practice of archaeology was still seen as above all a patriotic enterprise, as is clearly reflected in the words with which Spyridon Lambros, Dean of the University of Athens, welcomed the participants to the First World Archaeology Conference in Athens: 'For you foreigners the love for and study of Antiquity is not only a scientific need but a life pleasure as well. For us Greeks it further constitutes a patriotic duty'.⁵²

Essentially, then, archaeology was understood in nineteenth-century terms and carried with it strong national connotations. Let us not forget that archaeologists were the 'national intellectuals'⁵³ *par excellence* and that archaeology had very often played the role of the 'patriotic discipline of the nation'.⁵⁴ At the same time the emphasis on the superiority of the classical past continued to predominate and lend great ideological and social value to classical antiquities. Nowhere was this more clearly seen than in the language used to describe antiquities. Indeed, a study of language is revealing as ideologies always leave language traces: ideologies *in* language are always ideologies *about* something.⁵⁵ Four of the many eloquent examples are cited here.

In 1903, referring to the finds from Antikythera which had been temporarily exhibited in the Ministry of Education two years earlier, Ioannis Svoronos⁵⁶ wrote: 'The [Ministry] was transformed into a place of pilgrimage for all the Athenians, Greeks and foreigners' and he went on to say that Greek people 'rightfully consider these works to be the most invaluable heirlooms of their ancestral glory'.⁵⁷

In 1904, the editor of the magazine *Musée Georges*

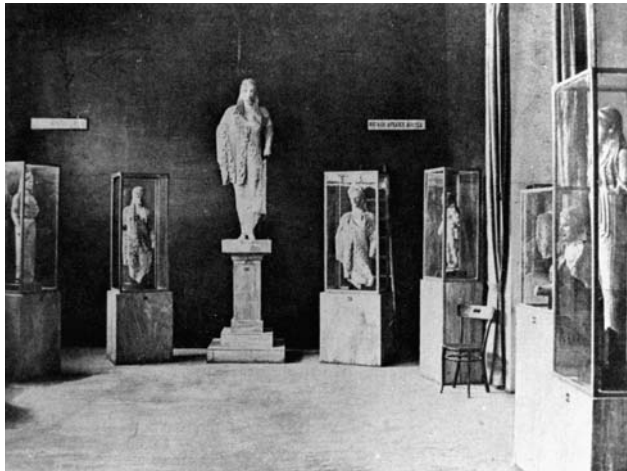


Fig. 7. Athens, Acropolis Archaeological Museum, room VI after 1904 (source: Fougères 1912, 108).



Fig. 8. Rome, Museo Capitolino, the Philosopher's Hall (photo: Foto Alinari, no. 5967).

Toudouze described his visit to the museum of the Acropolis (fig. 7) as follows:

‘Seized by a strange sensation, you walk from room to room. Instinctively, as if you were in a sacred place, you lower your voice, lighten your footsteps, the silence deepens. [...] But here is the miracle: an exceptional room, an entire room [...] to whose centre you approach [...] quietly, as if you were afraid of perhaps desecrating a holy place. Ten figures stand upright within glass cases’.⁵⁸

In 1906, Nikolaos Politis characterized antiquities as ‘sacred relics of Ancient Artistry’ and the Ephors of Antiquities as ‘zealous men [...] having as their only religion the adoration of the marbles which speak loudly about the greatness and appeal of our ancestors’.⁵⁹

In 1908, in the prologue to the catalogue of sculptures of the National Museum, Georgios Kastriotis wrote: ‘[the Museum] also became [...] a sacred shrine, within which collected treasures of ancient art [...] are exposed to the adoration and admiration [...] of all those who make the pilgrimage’.

This was the official rhetoric and the prevailing attitude to the antiquities during the first decade of the twentieth century. The inheritance of the nineteenth century *was* indeed significant: the orientation towards an idealized understanding of antiquity and a strong tradition of classicism. The *era of ambivalence*, as expressed in other areas

of cultural life, did not yet find fertile ground in Greek archaeology which continued to be ideologically oriented to the *era of subservience*. Here, therefore, is where we find the explanation for the obsession with the requirement for suitable and appropriate display with which we were concerned in the beginning. The deep-rooted perception of museums as places of religious pilgrimage where antiquities are venerated as sacred relics and serve as objects of worship is indeed remarkable.⁶⁰

Researchers have already analyzed the historical and ideological need for such an orientation in nineteenth-century Greek museums.⁶¹ If the persistence of this approach seems overwhelming,⁶² one should remember the long tradition of classicism and of the view of archaeology as history of art in Greek archaeology. This has been an approach so ‘self-evident’ and ‘self-contained’ that it has kept Greek archaeology in a state of theoretical and interpretative stagnation even in later years.⁶³ Then again, one may find Williams’ influential discussion of *archaic*, *residual* and *emergent* elements in the formation of culture elucidating.⁶⁴ The *archaic*, he says, is that which is wholly recognized as an element of the past, to be observed, examined, or even on occasion to be consciously revived in a deliberate way. The *residual*, on the other hand, is an element which has been fully formed in the past but continues to function as an active agent in the present, in other words it is incorporated into the present. Although usually residual elements are about experiences, values

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and meanings which may not be accommodated within the dominant culture, they are often incorporated into it as active agents in the present; it is exactly this aspect which I have found useful for purposes of discussion in this paper. Finally, *emergent* elements are about new meanings and values, new practices and relationships; they may constitute an alternative or a complete antithesis to the dominant culture.

In light of the above, it could be argued that *emergent* elements such as demoticism or a sympathetic approach to Byzantium could not in fact displace more *archaic* or even *residual* elements of ideology, namely the deeply rooted ancestor worship of the nineteenth century. This may account for the climate of ideological rigidity, particularly evident in the case of antiquities, as has been shown above.

There are other issues though which are worth examining here. First, it is interesting to comment on the ways in which the morphology of displays reflected the archaeological methodology of the time. Second, we should return to another point already mentioned above: in the early twentieth century many Greek archaeologists travelled abroad, especially to Germany, either for their studies or for further education. What did they encounter there in terms of museum displays and how did this influence their own display work in Greece?

Archaeology and archaeological displays in late nineteenth- early twentieth-century Europe

The period 1870-1914 has been characterized as 'époque de l'archéologie flamboyante'.⁶⁵ This was the time of large-scale excavations, the worship of objects and of typological order. Archaeologists were exclusively occupied with the examination, recording, taxonomy and publication of a large number of excavation finds. This trend of the time was also reflected in the publication of a series of *corpora* for various categories of antiquities (e.g. vases, sculpture, coins, etc.) or museum catalogues.⁶⁶ As Morris observes, categories of artefacts formed the objects of analysis, and ordering them stylistically and/or chronologically was the main form of explanation.⁶⁷

According to this epistemological model, after being collected, stylistically analyzed and systematically classified, antiquities found their place in exhibitions. Indeed, the character of displays in all European museums of the time

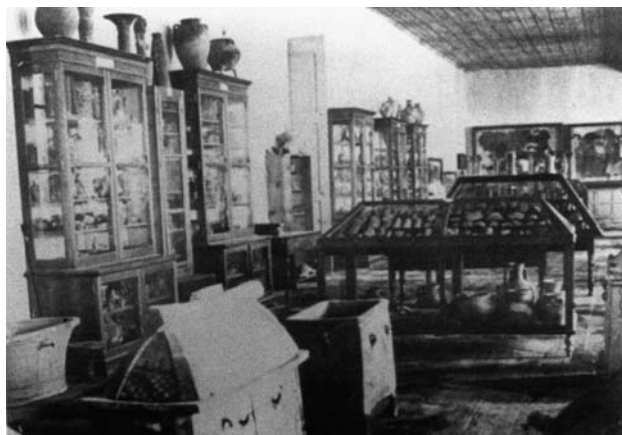


Fig. 9. Post card from Herakleion Archaeological Museum, ca. 1910.

was taxonomic. Objects were grouped – chronologically or typologically, as shown above – according to strict criteria and displayed in a linear fashion (fig. 8). This strongly linear approach with respect to the management of space corresponds to a knowledge classification model, which can be compared to a classification table in which each object has its place. Knowledge was presented to the visitor as certain, obvious, axiomatic and, ultimately, legitimate. One could argue that this linearity encourages a simple and soothing reading of the past, suitable for the creation of a sense of order and security. It is important to remember that this was an era when the process of knowledge transmission was not very different from that of knowledge acquisition, in other words 'what the expert knew was the same classification that was made visible to the visitor'.⁶⁸ A less structured space would present knowledge as a proposition rather than a fact, a proposition that could encourage further thinking. But the time was not yet right for this.

Moreover, the classicist tradition, particularly visible in Germany, dominated the display of antiquities. Archaeology was exhibited as history of art with the emphasis on the aesthetics of the objects rather than on information. Exhibitions of this type, Pearce reminds us,⁶⁹ depend upon an acceptance that the objects embody a very particular kind of symbolic power with universal aesthetic appeal, and this is offered to the visitor not as an interpretation but as a 'matter of faith'. In this way exhibitions detach the object from its context in time and in space and offer it to the visitor as 'objectified value'.⁷⁰

These elements characterized the majority of exhibitions in European museums from the eighteenth century onwards.⁷¹ Thus the Greek model was consistent with the template found throughout Europe. If we omit practical considerations and forget the differences in scale between the Greek and other European museums, the display philosophy itself did not change.

A final example, that of the archaeological museum of Herakleion, is an excellent illustration of the display ideals of the era. The first archaeological museum in Herakleion was built between 1904 and 1907. The display was organized in 1907 by Iossif Chatzidakis, a well-known scholar of the time.⁷² Despite the fact that the display was overflowing (fig. 9), the museum was considered a good example. A letter from G. Caro, deputy director of the German Archaeological Institute in Athens, written in 1911 to Chatzidakis, is indicative:

‘With no flattery, I must congratulate you on a project that almost no other European museum director has managed to accomplish. For if we are able to truly appreciate [...] the unique Cretan treasures, we owe this [...] to your [...] exemplary and highly visible display of those treasures, to the successful use of space and to the meticulous additions which facilitate the uninitiated in comprehending antiquities, without impeding their study by the experts.’⁷³

In light of the last sentence, a final question not previously addressed is posed: To whom were the museums and displays of the period addressed?

Museums for whom?

The existing data is insufficient to formulate a reliable argument regarding the way in which the displays of the time were perceived by the broader public. For example, research into press reports of the time does not provide especially illuminating evidence, although it has not been carried out methodically. We can, however, proceed with greater confidence to certain conclusions regarding the manner in which the archaeologists themselves perceived museums and displays.

I shall use three indicative quotations on which I have already commented. The first concerns the classification

of the Ritsona finds into groups, ‘so as a scientist may study and understand safely which vases are contemporary to what dolls’.⁷⁴

The second concerns the words of Stais, when he reported that beneath the showcases were displayed works of secondary importance: ‘very interesting, however, from an artistic point of view’,⁷⁵ in other words ‘interesting’ for researchers. The third is Caro’s comment in the letter to Chatzidakis: ‘additions which facilitate the uninitiated in comprehending antiquities without impeding their study by the experts’.

It is clear – if only implicitly – that museums were geared to specialists. And yet, some thought was given to the ‘uninitiated’ visitor, a public not made up of ‘knowledgeable’ archaeologists or other aesthetes. As I argued above, attention is given to this type of uninitiated visitor in the form of complementary materials (such as those praised by Caro in his letter to Chatzidakis), painted reproductions (such as those at the museum in Epidaurus), and the (albeit scant) descriptive signs. The issue, however, remains open to further investigation.

In conclusion

Let us therefore attempt a comprehensive assessment of the displays of the period 1900-1909. Display practices became more systematic, many displays surpassed the simply repository character of previous periods, while others went on to be considered exemplary. Nonetheless antiquities continued to be displayed as treasures, as ancestral heirlooms and as *objets d’art*. Thus, despite improvements at the level of museographic practices, the ideological model did not change.

The primary objective of Greek archaeology was the discovery and collection of antiquities and their preservation in museums. Museums continued to act *primarily* as storage areas. Displays, too, also functioned to a large extent as storage cases for objects. Thus they included whatever had been discovered by archaeologists and were arranged according to the models of research and taxonomy used by the discipline at the time. The linear and taxonomic displays which followed were inevitable. As discussed above, displays of this type are found in the early stages of museum development when whatever was presented to visitors was classified according to the specialists’ knowl-

edge. In the case of Greek archaeology it was enough to bring antiquities to light and exhibit them to the public. But since the symbolic quality of antiquities as national emblems was a given, no explanation was required. Displays were based on an underlying acknowledgement that the antiquities possessed a symbolic power with universal appeal, so there was no need for interpretation. Indeed, as Hamilakis suggests,⁷⁶ it was exactly the materiality and physicality of antiquities, their tangible nature and aura of authenticity which endowed them with such enormous symbolic power and exalted them to the status of 'material truths' of the nation. It is no wonder they were presented to the visitor as self-evident and legitimate, their importance being as 'a matter of faith'. Let us remember the wording used: antiquities 'speak loudly' about ancestral glory and appeal; they are exposed to the 'admiration' of all those who make the 'pilgrimage' and the like, as seen above. In this way, the official rhetoric and the dominant ideological perception of archaeology and antiquities were incorporated into and reproduced through museum displays.

It has been persuasively argued that, from an ideological point of view, the Greek nineteenth century was especially long, ending only in 1922 with the Asia Minor *Catastrophe*.⁷⁷ This certainly seems to be the case with archaeology.

This may help us to understand the ideological rigidity of the first decade of the twentieth century and explain why Greek archaeological museums and displays in the period 1900-1909 remained conservative.

Yet, it would be unfair to end on this note. Leaving aside the question of ideology, given the meagre resources available and the massive technical and other difficulties in those years, the work done must be acknowledged as significant. It is worth noting the exceptional diligence of those archaeologists, which is confirmed by all the supporting evidence we have. It is important to remember that museums were being built at an average rate of two per year and that displays were organized without delay. There were also efforts to introduce new museographic elements and some type of 'provision' for visitors. If, finally, we consider the fact that the character of displays in some museums continued unchanged even into the late twentieth century, we will perhaps recognize the pioneering nature of the actions of many archaeologists of those earlier generations.

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ABBREVIATION

Praktika: Πρακτικά της εν Αθήναις Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας (Proceedings of the Archaeological Society in Athens).

NOTES

* Special thanks are due to Dr Victoria Sabetai for having indicated important material on the old Thebes museum and kindly offered me access to it.

1. The relevant literature is vast so I shall restrict myself to citing some of the most influential or recent pieces of research such as Hamilakis 2007; Hamilakis & Yalouri 1996; Kotsakis 1991; Kotsakis 2003; Lowenthal 1988; Shanks 1996; Skopetea 1988; Tolia 2004; Voutsaki 2003.

2. Gazi 1993; Gazi 1994; Gazi forthcoming.

3. For the purposes of this discussion the term 'display' is used rather than 'exhibition'. The distinction made here is based on the semantic differences between the terms in English, as the relevant Greek term *έκθεσις* is a neutral one, which may be attributed to both a 'display' and an 'exhibition'. Thus, 'display' is a far more general term, which may be defined simply as 'the showing of objects' (Burcaw 1983, 5) and may refer

‘to an individual exhibit, group of exhibits or an entire exhibition’ (Miles et al. 1988, 186). ‘Exhibition’, on the other hand, is a much more specific term which usually refers to a series of displays which explore a particular theme and sub themes through objects arranged in ordered sequences and supported by interpretative aids. The chief components of such an exhibition are a concept or a story line (Alexander 1979, 175-76; Miles et al. 1988, 186). In light of this, early presentations of archaeology in Greek museums are more appropriately entitled ‘displays’ and this term will therefore be used throughout this paper.

4. The beginning of the twentieth century was characterized by uprisings aimed at curtailing royal power and reforming the political life of the country. After the culmination of these attempts in the 1909 ‘Goudi coup’, Eleftherios Venizelos, one of the most important figures in the history of modern Greece, was recalled from Crete to undertake the reorganization of the state (Dakin 1972, 183-89).

5. Namely, the National Archaeological Museum, the Acropolis Museum, the Numismatic Museum and the Epigraphic Museum.

6. Such as the Ancient Olympia Museum, the Sparta Museum and the Epidaurus Museum.

7. The Archaeological Society was established in Athens in 1837 and has greatly contributed to the safeguarding, excavation, preservation and study of antiquities in Greece ever since. Its role was especially crucial during the 19th c. (see Petrakos 1987a; Petrakos 1987b).

8. The predominance of the German model in the study of Classics remained unchallenged throughout the nineteenth century. Note, for instance, that the majority of Greek philologists also studied in German Universities (Kakridis 1996, 28, 38-39), and German pedagogy exercised a heavy influence on the Greek educational system for a very long time (see, among others, Dimaras 1988, esp. κβ’).

9. Panayiotis Kavadias (1850-1928) was one of the most prominent figures in early Greek archaeology. He studied Classics in Athens and Archaeology in Munich. Ambitious and restless by nature, he managed to dominate the archaeological scene in Greece by occupying various crucial posts: Secretary of the Archaeological Society (1895-1909; 1912-1920), General Ephor of Antiquities (1885-1909), Professor of Archaeology at the University of Athens (1904-1922) and member of the Academy of Athens (1926). He set up the first displays in the Acropolis Museum and the National Museum, started the publication of the *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* (Archaeological Bulletin) in 1885 and worked on the systematic organization of the Archaeological Service. His field work included the large excavations on the Acropolis and those at the sanctuary of Epidaurus. His authoritarian and high-handed manner led to his becoming increasingly unpopular with his fellow archaeologists and his removal from the Society and the Service in 1909 (Petrakos 1987a, 82-84; 108-11; 282-84).

10. Nikolaos Politis (1852-1921) was the leading folklorist of his time and generally acknowledged as the founder of the

discipline in Greece. Professor at the University of Athens from 1882, Politis used both historical and comparative methods in order to demonstrate the uninterrupted, diachronic continuity of Greek civilization from antiquity to the present as evidenced in folk songs, myths and legends, and other manifestations of oral and written tradition. In 1907 he started teaching folklore as part of his archaeology courses; in 1909 he founded the Greek Folklore Society (Kyriakidou-Nestoros 1978, 99-110).

11. Konstantinos Kourouniotis (1872-1945) studied archaeology in Athens, Jena and Munich. He had a long career in the Archaeological Service, served as Ephor of Antiquities in various places and held the post of director of the National Archaeological Museum and the Epigraphic Museum. In 1926 he became a member of the Academy of Athens (*Μεγάλη Ελληνική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια* 15, 80; *Πάπυρος-Larousse-Britannica* 35, 428).

12. Valerios Stais (1857-1923) studied Classics in Bonn, Göttingen, Berlin and Halle. Ephor of the Archaeological Service from 1885, he undertook the curatorship of the vase, figurine and small objects collections at the National Museum in 1887.

13. Stais 1909, 22.

14. Kastriotis 1908, 4.

15. Keramopoulos 1917, 125 n. 1.

16. Stephanos Xanthoudidis (1864-1928) was an exceptional figure in Greek scholarship as his activity expanded beyond archaeology into classics, history, linguistics and folk studies. He was actively involved in the Association of the Friends of Education and served the Cretan Archaeological Service for many years. From 1923 to 1928 he was the Director of the Herakleion Museum, where he continued the work of Chatzidakis (Detorakis 1978; see also *Mnemosyna* 1938-40).

17. Xanthoudidis 1927, 156.

18. Apostolos Arvanitopoulos (1874-1942) studied in Athens and Rome. In fact, he was the first Greek archaeologist who was sponsored by the Society for studies abroad in 1899 (Petrakos 1987a, 103). He worked in the Archaeological Service and was later appointed Professor at the University of Athens. Following the work of Tsountas he excavated Neolithic sites and monuments in Thessaly, where he also brought to light the painted gravestones of Demetrias (see n. 27 below; *Πάπυρος-Larousse-Britannica* 10, 319).

19. Arvanitopoulos 1912, 228.

20. *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* 1915, 43.

21. Antonios Keramopoulos (1870-1960) studied philology and archaeology in Athens, Vienna, Berlin, Munich and Paris. Professor of Archaeology at the University of Athens and member of the Academy of Athens, he excavated in many parts of Greece, mainly in the north. Greek archaeology owes to him the first surface surveys in Macedonia in the thirties.

22. Keramopoulos 1909, 283.

23. On Ure’s biography see Sabetai 2004a; Sabetai 2006.

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24. On Burrows' biography see Sabetai 2004b; Sabetai 2006.
25. See Sabetai 2001; Sabetai 2006, 6.
26. Quoted in Sabetai 2006, 10-11.
27. Demetrias-Pagasae was one of the most important ancient Thessalian cities. It is renowned for its painted gravestones most of which date from the second half of the 3rd c. BC and were later reused as building material in the construction of towers (from within which they were unearthed by Arvanitopoulos). Apart from being important monuments in themselves, many of these stelae are particularly significant for the study of ancient Greek painting (Arvanitopoulos 1909a, 11-29; 63-93; Arvanitopoulos 1928; Papahatzis 1954, 39-40; 76).
28. Arvanitopoulos 1928, 142.
29. Romaios 1909, 322.
30. Royal Decree of 25.11.1885, *Government Gazette A'*, 113, 7 December 1885.
31. *Praktika* 1907, 67.
32. Keramopoulos 1908, 6.
33. *Praktika* 1905, 22; *Praktika* 1907, 63.
34. *Praktika* 1906, 57.
35. Xanthoudidis 1927, 156.
36. Yanoulopoulos 1999, 179. For an interesting account of the intellectual milieu which nurtured this generation see Politis 2006.
37. The issue of national identity and how it should be expressed in literature, for example, was fiercely debated among well-known intellectuals and writers of the time; see Voutouris 2006 for an illuminating account.
38. See Diamandi, this volume.
39. See Petropoulos 1978, 171.
40. Kitromilides 2003, 48.
41. Kitromilides 2003, 48.
42. See Frangoudaki 2001, esp. 131.
43. Dimaras 2000, 398.
44. Fletcher 1977, 167-68.
45. The relevant bibliography is vast and reference to it would exceed the scope of the discussion here. A very instructive analysis of the issues involved in the language question is offered by Stavridi-Patrikiou 1999; see also Stavridi-Patrikiou 2000 on the wider and interrelated ideological and social associations of the demotic language movement. Frangoudaki 2001 offers an elucidating analysis of the political implications, and discusses the sense of national identity as perceived by both sides. Dimaras 1988 remains the ultimate source of original testimonies.
46. Leondaritis 1983.
47. On the legal protection of Byzantine monuments, see Voudouri 2003, 59-76; see also Voudouri forthcoming for a discussion of how the sense of national identity is reflected in legislation related to the protection of antiquities.
48. Even then, however, it was more than anything else an archaeology of Christian religious art (cf. Kotsakis 2003, 65) as was also made clear in the title of the Christian and Byzantine Museum which was founded in 1914 in Athens.
49. Tsountas' discussion of the similarities of the Neolithic palace with the Doric temple of the classical era is an indicative example (Kotsakis 1991, 67; cf. Voutsaki 2003, 250-51).
50. See Malouchou-Tufano 1998.
51. Kotsakis 2003, 65.
52. Cited in Kalpaxis 1990, 13.
53. On the role of 'national intellectuals' in the formation of an ideological national *canon* see Caftanzoglou 2001, 55-58; 94.
54. Yalouri 2001, 23. See also Hamilakis 2007, 86.
55. Moschonas 2005, 17.
56. Ioannis Svoronos (1863-1922) studied law in Athens, and later went to Paris, London and Berlin to continue his studies in numismatics with a grant from the Greek Government. On his return to Athens he was appointed director of the Numismatic Museum at the age of 26. He left a voluminous corpus of publications, characterized by high academic quality (Svoronos 1889, 5-12; Oikonomos 1927, 4-8).
57. Svoronos 1903, 5.
58. Toudouze 1904, 22-23.
59. Published in Politis 1907, 159.
60. Cf. Hamilakis 2007, 46-48, where he describes Greek archaeological museums as 'temples of the nation'; he further argues (121) that the sacralization of antiquities was nurtured by diverse tendencies e.g. the veneration of Western Hellenism, the religious properties of the nation and its rituals, Orthodoxy with its icons and ceremonies.
61. Gazi 1993; Gazi 1994; Gazi 1999; Gazi forthcoming.
62. The lack of interpretation in Greek archaeology is discussed by Kotsakis 1991; Kotsakis 2003; see also Gazi 1999 on the repercussions of this on museum displays.
63. See Kotsakis 1991; Kotsakis 2003, 64-65.
64. Williams 1977, 121-27.
65. Étienne 1990, 101-15.
66. See Morris 1994, 27-28. Between 1890 and 1909, for instance, seven catalogues of various collections of the National Museum in Athens were published (Kavadias 1890-92; Kavadias 1895; Kastriotis 1896; Kastriotis 1908; Collignon & Couve 1902; Stais 1907; Stais 1909).

67. Morris 1994, 28.

68. Peponis & Hedin 1982, 24.

69. Pearce 1990, 157.

70. Pearce 1992, 203.

71. A deviation from the formal chronological approach would be attempted, perhaps for the first time, only in 1908 with an exhibition illustrating aspects of Greek and Roman everyday life at the British Museum (Smith 1908, preface; Jenkins 1986).

72. Iossif Chatzidakis (1848-1936) studied medicine in Athens and then continued with classics in Germany and Paris.

President of the Association of the Friends of Education from 1883 to 1899, Chatzidakis greatly advanced the cause of Cretan archaeology and helped in the foundation and organization of the Herakleion Museum (Elliadi 1933, 88; *Mnemosyna* 1938-1940; Vlahos 1989).

73. Cited in *Nέα Εφημερίς Α'*, no. 8, 29 May 1911.

74. Keramopoulos 1909, 283.

75. Stais 1909, 22.

76. Hamilakis 2007, 79; 122.

77. Cf. Clogg 2002.

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