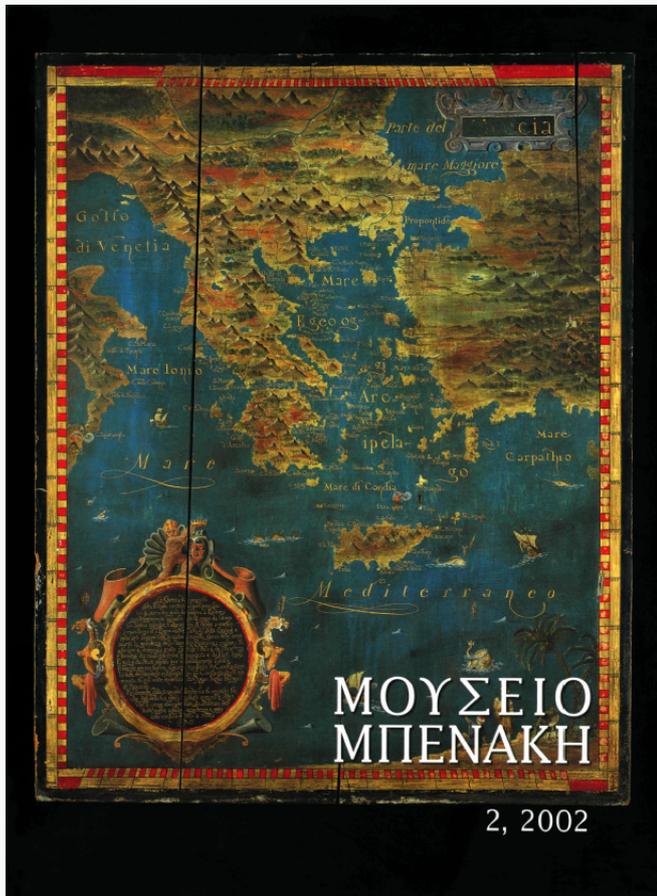


Μουσείο Μπενάκη

Τόμ. 2 (2002)



Φαντασιακές προσλήψεις και αναπαραστάσεις του αρχαίου ελληνικού μνημείου σε χαρακτηριστικά ευρωπαϊκών περιηγητικών εκδόσεων (17ος - 19ος αι.)

Aphrodite Kouria

doi: [10.12681/benaki.18192](https://doi.org/10.12681/benaki.18192)

Copyright © 2018, Aphrodite Kouria



Άδεια χρήσης [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

Kouria, A. (2018). Φαντασιακές προσλήψεις και αναπαραστάσεις του αρχαίου ελληνικού μνημείου σε χαρακτηριστικά ευρωπαϊκών περιηγητικών εκδόσεων (17ος - 19ος αι.). *Μουσείο Μπενάκη*, 2, 125-136.
<https://doi.org/10.12681/benaki.18192>

Imaginary perceptions and representations of the ancient Greek monument in the engravings of European travel literature (17th - 19th centuries)

In memory of Angela Tamvaki

GREEK ANTIQUITIES in their various forms have contributed a rich source of material to the illustration of European travel literature. They played an outstanding part in publications of the 18th and 19th centuries, when they were at the forefront of the iconography of Greece. A large number of these engravings can be found in the Benaki Museum, and also in the important collection of Eustathios J. Finopoulos, some of whose engravings are being published for the first time in this article.

Depictions of Greek monuments, faithful or otherwise, are crucial to the mythology of the ruin, which adopts a multiplicity of forms in European art and haunts the imagination and sensibility of intellectual Europe, especially in the second half of the 18th century. Europe's relationship with Greco-Roman antiquity in its various identities –the antiquity of the imagination, the antiquity of myth, the antiquity of visible, tangible remains– and its representation have journeyed down the centuries making innumerable appearances in European art and culture. One aspect of this broad, multi-dimensional theme in the 16th century has a particular impact on the illustration of ancient Greek ruins in 17th century European travel literature, and brings on to the stage one of the continuing protagonists of this story –Rome and its monuments. The bipolar axis Greece / Rome, Greek antiquity / Roman antiquity in all its manifestations is a decisive component of the iconography of Greek antiquities during the 17th and 18th centuries, extending into the 19th.

In the 16th century a large number of artists from the Low Countries spent a period working in Rome, and this was considered an indispensable stage of their artistic training. The revelatory experience of the Eternal City with its wealth of ancient monuments and with antique works of art lying in 'poetic confusion'¹ and continually brought to light by excavation, and the strong attraction all this held for artists from Northern Europe engendered a large number of drawings, prints and paintings of ruined buildings and sculptures, often in imaginary configurations within real or invented scenery, in the tradition of Flemish and Dutch panoramic landscapes.² In these works artists made a conscious attempt to depict in a ruined state even those buildings which were still intact. A vanished world of decay suggests the idea of Ovid's "devouring time" ("tempus edax"), the universal destroyer, as quoted in one of the most characteristic paintings of this type, the *Landscape with ancient Ruins* by Herman Posthumus (1536, Vaduz, Sammlung der Regierenden Fürsten von Liechtenstein). At the same time these images reflect the humanistic interest of the Renaissance in systematically studying the relics of antiquity in order to decipher their secrets, as shown by the activity of the human figures in these works. This perception and vision of the ancient world is clearly reflected in certain engravings with arbitrary configurations of ruins –images of Greece which illustrated volumes of travel literature, mainly Dutch, in the 17th century. An eloquent example is the view of Athens in the Dutch edition of Spon and Wheeler's book (1689), which shows the two travellers, gazing intently at the exterior of a



Fig. 1. *Spon and Wheler in Athens*. Engraving, 12.5 x 16.5 cm, from *Voyage Door Italien, Dalmatien, Grieeckenland, ende Levant... Door Jacob Spon... En Georgius Wheler...* (Amsterdam 1689). Athens, Gennadius Library.

building, placed within the theatrical framework of an Athens overrun with ruined edifices (fig. 1); another is the engraving of the antiquities of Delos in a mountain landscape (fig. 2) from the Dutchman Olfert Dapper's *Naukeurige Beschryving der Eilanden in de Archipel...* (Amsterdam 1688, French translation 1703).³

In the 18th century Rome and its antiquities remained one of the two equally powerful poles as regards the European perception and representation of the ancient Greek monument. Italian paintings and engravings now played the dominant role, and became the direct and primary model, as attested by certain engravings of Greece executed mainly in the second half of the 18th century (figs 3-7).

The obsession with classical antiquity –on a conceptual / ideological and aesthetic level– throughout the century, together with the fascination and magnetism exercised by Rome itself through its grandiose architectural settings, is expressed in the visual arts by a host of paintings and prints: actual and imaginary landscapes and topographical views (*vedute reale / vedute ideate*), and architectural *capriccios* or fantasies, the work mainly of Italians, but also of French artists (the so-called *ruinistes*) –Giovanni Paolo Panini and his followers, among them Hubert Robert, G. B. Busiri, J. N. Servandoni.⁴ In the art of engraving Giovanni Battista Piranesi was the undisputed master. These vastly po-

pular works circulated in numerous versions by the artists themselves. The same monuments and works of art recur in different locations, with changes in the *staffage* –supplementary pictorial elements and motifs such as miniature figures (*figurette*), architectural segments and fragments of works of art. Paintings also circulated in the form of numerous skilful and more or less faithful engraved reproductions, often on a large scale, which had the status of independent works of art. These engravings, together with the famous etchings of Piranesi, adorned the so-called print rooms of the mansions of the antique-loving British aristocracy –wealthy collectors and travellers who had made the Grand Tour through Italy, and who constituted the basic clientele for such material.⁵ Compilations of these engravings were also issued in special albums.

A particularly interesting example of Greek material is the broadsheet engraving of *The Ruins of Attica* (fig. 3): this is a reproduction of a painting by Panini of almost the same dimensions, as the legend indicates. The specific reference to the original, which was clearly aimed at potential customers and enhances the value and authority of the engraving, is significant; we may read in this print an eloquent statement on the elevated status of engraved *vedute* in the 18th century European market.

A comparative study with Roman *vedute reale* and *ideate* and architectural *capriccios* reveals the inspiration and origin of certain engravings of imaginary or actual Greek antiquities, and their points of convergence on the iconographic and the morphological level. The arbitrary juxtaposition of heterogenous monuments and works of art, these contrived assemblages (as they have been called) in a fictitious, ideal space,⁶ the association of the grandiose edifice with fragmentation and ruin, the theatricality of the image with its scenic framework⁷ and graduated planes which direct the eye as it wanders through the 'spectacle' of the antiquities, the exaggerations of scale, the *staffage*, the expressive use of chiaroscuro and the dialectic relationship between nature and the creations of man –all these provide direct or indirect references to Panini, Piranesi, Hubert Robert and Busiri. Together they form a code to the conceptual language which is conveyed by these pictures –sophisticated vehicles for the expression of ideas which obsessed the European consciousness and imagination. These images pronounce a discourse on the Sublime, the lofty character and noble grandeur of works of Greco-



Fig. 2. *Ruins of Delos*. Engraving, 27.5 x 34 cm (from: *Description exacte des Isles de L'Archipel... Traduite du flamand d'O. Dapper* [Amsterdam 1703]). Athens, Benaki Museum.

Roman antiquity, within the spirit of Neoclassicism, with intimations of the Romantic, while at the same time echoing the refined, elegant aesthetic climate of the 18th century with touches of Rococo picturesqueness.

The incorporation of statues, reliefs and ornate antique vases into the representations, and their juxtaposition with buildings in a totally implausible manner is a common practice of Roman *vedute ideate*, architectural fantasies and *capriccios*, and is also observable in engravings of 'Greek' antiquities, as previously mentioned. Sometimes edifices and vases are transplanted arbitrarily from the Roman paintings (fig. 4).⁸ Intact or mutilated, set on pedestals or 'accidentally' thrown to the ground,

prominently displayed or half-hidden, to be discovered by the eye of the viewer / traveller, illuminated by a glorifying light or animated by more subtle nuances, they remain symbols charged with meaning, emblems of a world of ideal beauty that is lost for ever.

There has been much academic discussion about the prestige and the magnetic attraction exercised at that period by certain celebrated works of art such as the so-called Borghese Vase,⁹ the Laocoon, the Farnese Hercules, the Apollo Belvedere and the Belvedere Torso, which adorned famous Italian private collections and the Vatican and Capitoline museums. The cult of the ancient work of art is associated with the contemporary



Fig. 3. *The Ruins of Attica. Engraved after the original Picture painted in Rome by G. P. Panini...*, 18th century. Engraving, 39.5 x 52.5 cm. Athens, E. J. Finopoulos Collection.

study of antiquity and the excavations at Herculaneum (1738) and Pompeii (1748) as well as Rome. Winckelmann himself, who extols the ancient ideal of beauty in a generalised fashion, is at the same time held captive by the irresistible fascination of certain Greek statues. 'Topoi' of various projections and fantasies, objects of desire for collectors and others, antique sculptures are at the same time the models par excellence for artists, in accordance with the theories and also the pedagogic disciplines of Neoclassicism. "Slaves of the marbles" is the description given by scholars to the artists of that time,¹⁰ who were obliged to measure themselves

against the unsurpassable models bequeathed by antiquity. The well-known drawing by the Swiss painter H. Fuseli of the artist overwhelmed by the magnitude and the grandeur of the ruins of antiquity, as indicated by the title of the work, is a significant piece of evidence, subject to multiple interpretation.¹¹ It also assists in the understanding of how Greek antiquities were depicted in certain travel engravings of the second half of the 18th century. It has been noted that Fuseli chooses the extremities of a massive statue, the Colossus of Constantine, to represent the art of the ancient world. In this way he points to an additional criterion



Fig. 4. *The Remarkable Ruins of the Morea, formerly called the Peloponnesus, in Attica, now Turkey in Europe*, second half of the 18th century. Engraving, 18.8 x 28.8 cm, after a painting by Giovanni Paolo Panini. Athens, private collection.

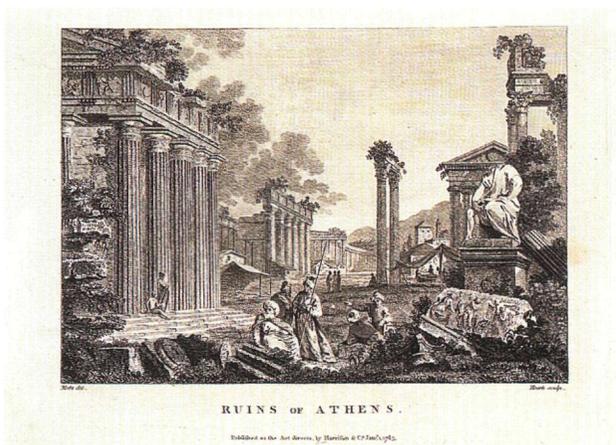
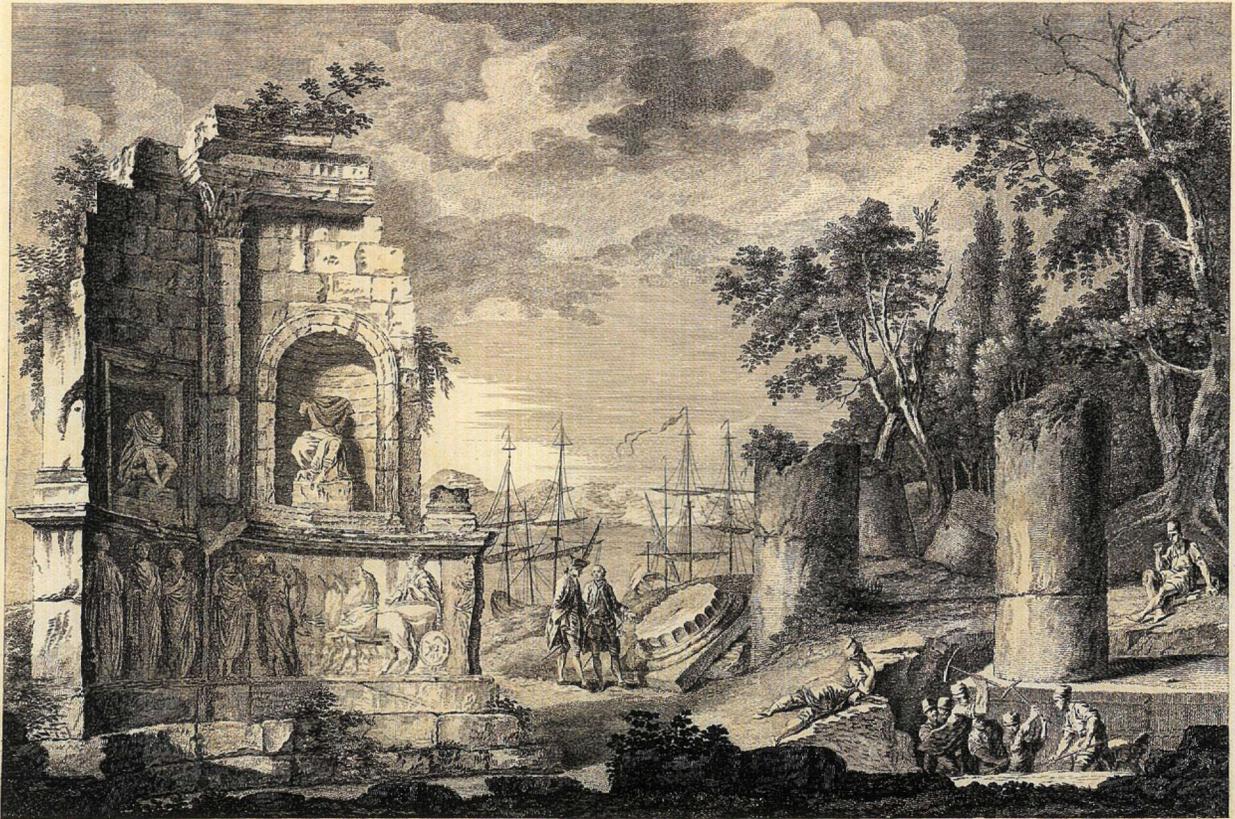


Fig. 5. *Ruins of Athens*, 1783. Engraving, 12.5 x 17.5 cm. Athens, E. J. Finopoulos Collection.



Fig. 6. J. D. Le Roy, *Temple of Olympian Zeus*. Engraving, 28 x 44 cm (from: *Les ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* [Paris 1758]). Athens, Benaki Museum.



Triumphal Monument of Philopappus. ATHENS. Pl. 5. Temple at Mount Laurium.
London Printed for Rob^t Sayer, opposite Letter Lane, Fleet Street.

Fig. 7. Athens, Triumphal Monument of Philopappus. Temple at Mount Laurium, imaginary composition after Le Roy. Engraving, 25.5 x 38.5 cm (from: *Ruins of Athens, with Remains and Other Valuable Antiquities in Greece* [London, for Robert Sayer, 1759]). Athens, Benaki Museum.

for the evaluation of antiquities –that of scale, which he emphasises in his structuring of the picture. The impressive dimensions of ancient remains, indelibly associated with their monumental grandeur and magnificence, become a prerequisite of this panegyric, emotionally charged approach and of the perception of them visually *as a spectacle*, under the inspiration of Piranesi's example. Awesome proportions become part of the discourse on the Sublime in its association with the aesthetics of antique edifices and sculpture.

The emphasis on impressive scale is also the crux of the attitude taken by their contemporary, the French architect Julien David Le Roy, towards antique monuments, again with direct consequences on their treat-

ment as images. We are now dealing with actual, extant monuments in Greece, as found in the finely wrought prints of Le Roy's book, *Les ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce...* (Paris 1758) and the variants based on it (figs 6-7). In the introduction to the second edition Le Roy makes his intentions quite clear, disassociating himself from Stuart and Revett and their meticulously accurate impressions: "*And surely I would not have travelled to Greece simply to observe the relation of the edifices and their parts with the divisions of our feet... These ruins, in the views which I have presented, occupy a much greater part of the picture than those of Mr Stuart; they thus affect the spectator more vividly, and succeed in passing on to his soul all the admiration*

by which one is stricken when looking at the monuments themselves.”¹² Although Le Roy had observed the antiquities at first hand, he does not hesitate to take liberties with reality. For instance he provides the Theseion with a greater number of columns than it actually has, in order to give it a more striking appearance.

The presence of nature is often crucial both to the design and also at a conceptual level in those depictions of ruins which address basic ideas of Romanticism –the relationship between human achievement and Time, the transitoriness of the works of man in the unchanging cosmic cycle, fragility with connotations of *vanitas*. The rendering of decay on the robust and rugged rocky masses by engraved lines well suits the semantics and the poetics of the illustrations. The same applies to *chiaroscuro*, which dramatises the monuments within this elegiac, ambiguous climate of mortality and survival.

In their exaltation of the antique monument and also in their morphology, the engravings of Le Roy and their variants underline the affinities with the etchings of Giovanni Battista Piranesi. They do not of course have the visionary power and visual effectiveness of the Italian master’s pictures, which gave new content to the monument, creating new conditions for its perception from the conceptual-aesthetic viewpoint and for its ‘appropriation’ by the eye of the viewer. Moreover, the arbitrary and ornamental assemblages in clearly fictitious locations and the idyllic picturesqueness are generally faithful to the concept of ‘ruin painting’ which also flourished in France –mainly with Hubert Robert– as a later phase of the great tradition of the *paysage historique*.¹³

The engraving in fig. 8, the frontispiece of *A New Collection of Voyages* (second half of the 18th century), contributes its own illuminating evidence, in particular through the rhetoric of the legend,¹⁴ which matches the attitude of Le Roy, *Two Travellers attended by a Guide viewing with Surprise the stupendous Ruins of a magnificent Pile. A distant View of a City with a Prospect of the Sea, etc.* This print with its legend may be said to constitute an emblematic image, juxtaposing travel, antiquity and exoticism, three prominent themes of 18th century European travel literature.

The 19th century would provide its own responses to these themes. The first decades of the century saw the actuality of modern, real-life Greece, spearheaded by the Greek Revolution, emerging to establish a position on

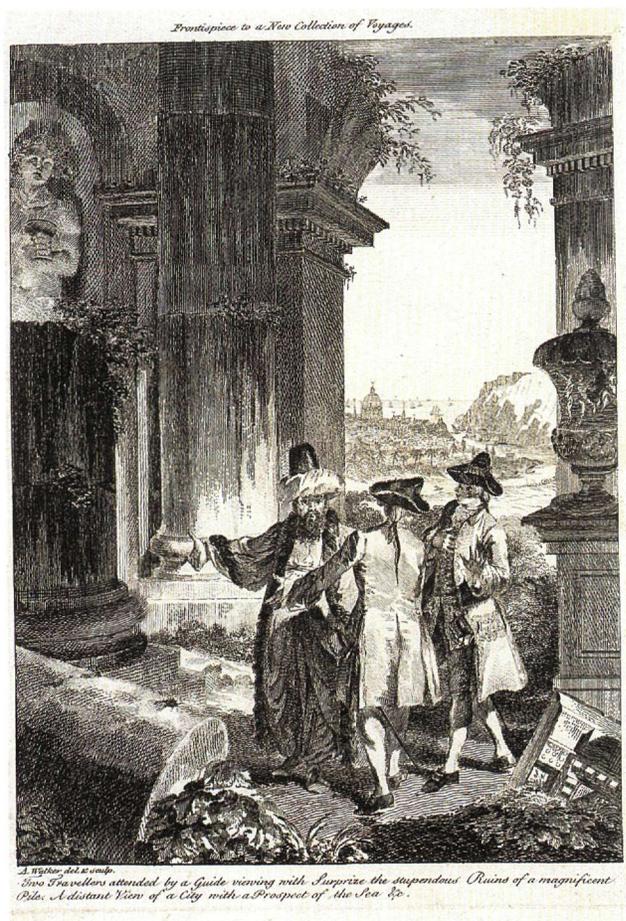


Fig. 8. *Two Travellers attended by a Guide viewing with Surprise the stupendous Ruins of a magnificent Pile. A distant View of a City with a Prospect of the Sea, etc.* Engraving, 21 x 16 cm (from: *A New Collection of Voyages* [second half of 18th century]). Athens, E. J. Finopoulos Collection.

the intellectual scene and in the European consciousness and sensibility. This process was fuelled by Romanticism, Orientalism, and Philhellenism, which added their own ideological and aesthetic filters, their own points of reference and their own ‘colour’ to the European vision and approach to Greece. The direct, physical encounter with Greece by many European intellectuals, artists, architects and archaeologists in the context of travel should also be taken into account. All this created new foundations and new conditions for the relationship of Europe with ancient Greece, the Greece of visible monuments and the Greece of a visionary revelation. Its historical present, moreover, provided fertile soil via other



Fig. 9. *A View of the Eastern Portico of the Parthenon*. Engraving, 30 x 44.5 cm (from: *The Antiquities of Athens Measured and Delineated* by James Stuart... and... Nicholas Revett, *Painters and Architects* II [London 1787]). Athens, Benaki Museum.

routes for the shaping of imaginary representations. This bipolarity of reality and imagination presents a special interest through its diverse pictorial handling, and here again travel prints are useful and telling pieces of evidence. The thematic repertory of antiquities is 'hellenised' with specific, actual and recognisable, monuments and works of art, in particular those which for varying reasons had become the current focus of attention (figs 10, 12). It is no coincidence that it is the Elgin Marbles, the Acropolis and the Caryatids that now dominate the interest of the art-loving intelligentsia of Europe, a public already sensitised through many 'channels'. The new thematology demanded new models. Fig. 10 refers directly to an engraving from the painstaking work of Stuart and Revett on the monuments of Athens, *The Antiquities of Athens, Measured and Delineated...* (London 1762-1816) (fig. 9),

which had met with a great response in antiquarian circles in England and beyond. But it is characteristic that the mosque inside the Parthenon, not yet demolished, is here omitted. Yet compositional devices and iconographic motifs of the earlier tradition –of 'ruin painting' and the prints associated with it– survive in the inclusion at the foreground of sculptures scattered on the ground. Echoes of this artistic tradition are also recognisable in the engraving entitled *Greek Ruins on Crete* (fig. 12), where influences can also be traced from *Byron's "dream"* (1829, The Tate Gallery, London), the painting by the well-known English artist Sir Charles Lock Eastlake,¹⁵ which was reproduced as an engraving (fig. 11).

The subject of this discussion, multi-dimensional in its diachronic, evolutionary progress, cannot be adequately covered within the limits of a single article. The



Fig. 10. *Remains of the Parthenon, or Temple of Minerva, at Athens, with some of the Fragments brought over to England by Lord Elgin*, 1829. Engraving, 14.5 x 20 cm. Athens, E. J. Finopoulos Collection.



Fig. 11. *Byron's "dream"*, 1833. Engraving, 52 x 67 cm, after the painting by Sir Charles Lock Eastlake. Athens, Benaki Museum 25107.

approach taken here focuses on certain specific aspects, and is based on two co-ordinates, the iconography and morphology of the works, both of which, in more or less equal fashion, display the plurality of the subject's significance –while at the same time indicating the broad area of research demanded by a study of this material. Emphasis is given to the 18th century (the second half in particular), a critical and especially important period for Europe's relationship with classical antiquity as a result of a combination of factors. Of these, the direct contact of a large number of European intellectuals, artists, dilettanti and wealthy collectors with the tangible remains of the ancient world –especially in Rome– was catalytic, and it can indeed be argued that it contributed to the construction of an imaginary perception of Greek antiquity. In this context the ancient monument,



Fig. 12. *Greek Ruins on Crete*. Hand coloured steel engraving, 9.8 x 13.3 cm (probably from: *Meyer's Universum oder Abbildung und Beschreibung des Sehenswerthesten und Merkwürdigsten der Natur und Kunst...* [ca. 1840]). Athens, Alpha Bank Collection.

the ancient ruin both in its natural state and also as an image, is invested with a multiple meaning and charge, a fact which gives to visual representations a particular dynamic for their reading and interpretation. The element of fantasy, a constant throughout the centuries in the iconography of ancient monuments, acquires a special semiological weight and becomes an instrument for the better understanding of engravings relating to Greek antiquity. It sheds light on the conditions under which these pictures were produced, their shaping, their reception and their function within a complex web of relationships, references, obsessive fixations, and intellectual and aesthetic trends against the background of the socio-cultural environment of Europe and the lure of Greece in its double identity: imaginary (a timeless

vision) and real. This dual nature of Greece, arising from the bipolarity of its glorious, near-mythical past and its historical present, is the central element in the way Greek antiquity was perceived and represented in the first half of the 19th century, as new facets were added to the pluralist identity of Greece which step by step down the centuries was constructed and established in the European consciousness.

Dr. Aphrodite Kouria
Art historian
 33, Xenokratous str.
 106 76 Athens
e-mail: kouria@hol.gr

NOTES

1. *D'après l'antique* (exhibition catalogue, Musée du Louvre, Paris 2000) 356.

2. Cf. *Fiamminghi a Roma 1508/1608. Artistes des Pays-Bas et de la Principauté de Liège à Rome à la Renaissance* (exhibition catalogue, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels – Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome 1995); also *D'après l'antique* (n. 1) 356, 357, 360, 369, 379, 380.

3. Compare the imaginary view of Delos encumbered with ruins, in *Les voyages de Jean Struys en Moscovie... et en plusieurs autres pais étrangers* by the Dutch traveller J. Struys (French edition, Amsterdam 1720) with landscapes by the Dutch painter Jan van Scorel, cf. *The Madonnas of Jan van Scorel (1495-1562). Serial Production of a cherished Motif* (exhibition catalogue, Centraal Museum, Utrecht 2000, ed. by M. Faries, L. M. Helmus). On Struys' view of Delos, A. Kouria, Η “περιπέτεια” των ελληνικών αρχαιοτήτων στις ευρωπαϊκές περιηγητικές εκδόσεις, *Αρχαιολογία* 23 (June 1987) 75-76, with a reproduction of the engraving.

4. Cf. E. P. Bowron, J. J. Rishel (eds), *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century* (Merrell in association with Philadelphia Museum of Art 2000). The fascination of Rome and its monuments, ancient and modern, was articulated in a spectacular, indeed emblematic way in the well-known paintings by Panini, *Interior of an Imaginary Picture Gallery with Views of Ancient Rome* and *Interior of an Imaginary Picture Gallery with Views of Modern Rome*: cf. *Art in Rome (ibid.)*, 425-27 pls 275-76.

5. As well as ‘print rooms’ there were also ‘ruin rooms’ dedicated to paintings. These same collectors, together with their French and Italian counterparts, were engaged on a passionate quest for original antique works of art while at the same time commissioning reproductions from artists in Rome. These issues are considered in detail in studies dealing with the relation between Europe and classical antiquity: cf. *Art in Rome* (n. 4); F. Haskell, N. Penny, *Taste and the Antique* (New Haven-London 1998).

6. The recurrent motif of water in the foreground should be noted.

7. Scholars have commented on the influence of theatrical scenery on such works, and on the echoes from garden design. It is no doubt relevant that certain artists (*ruinistes*) were also involved in these activities: *Art in Rome* (n. 4) 417, 434; J. Clay, *Le Romantisme* (Paris 1980) 264-66.

8. Cf. *Sermon by an Apostle*, 1754 (private collection) by Panini. Reproduced in F. Arisi, *Gian Paolo Panini* (ed. Dei Soncino 1991) 113 pl. 36.

9. It is no coincidence that the Borghese Vase often appears prominently in the paintings of Panini.

10. Cf. J. Siegel, *Desire and Excess. The Nineteenth-century Culture of Art* (Princeton 2000) 42.

11. Siegel (*ibid.*) 28, 29, 30, 35, 36, 47; *Art in Rome* (n. 4) 38.

12. Translation from F.-M. Tsigakou, *The Rediscovery of Greece. Travellers and Painters of the Romantic Era* (London 1981) 18.

13. Diderot's pre-Romantic sensitivity towards the ‘Sublime’ was particularly stirred by paintings of ruins: “*ô les belles, les sublimes ruines*”, a work by Robert inspired him to write in his review of the 1767 Salon; *Diderot, Salons III. Ruines et paysages. Salons de 1767* (Collection Savoir: Lettres - Hermann éditeurs des Sciences et des Arts, 1995) 336; on the ‘poetics of ruins’, see also J. Starobinski, *Diderot dans l'espace des peintres* (Paris 1991) 54-57.

14. Such grandiloquent legends should not be interpreted restrictively in the narrow context of the specific picture: they are indicative of a general attitude towards the monuments of Greco-Roman antiquity.

15. Eastlake, who lived for some time in Rome, had visited Greece in 1819. A reproduction of the original painting in Tsigakou (n. 12) pl. IV and 194.

ΑΦΡΟΔΙΤΗ ΚΟΥΡΙΑ

Φαντασιακές προσλήψεις και αναπαραστάσεις του αρχαίου ελληνικού μνημείου σε χαρακτηριστικά ευρωπαϊκών περιηγητικών εκδόσεων (17ος - 19ος αι.)

Με πυρήνα ορισμένα χαρακτηριστικά από τις συλλογές του Μουσείου Μπενάκη και τη σημαντική Συλλογή Ευστάθιου Ι. Φινόπουλου το άρθρο αυτό διερευνά πώς μορφοποιείται η φαντασιακή πρόσληψη του αρχαίου ελληνικού μνημείου σε εικόνες των ευρωπαϊκών περι-

ηγητικών εκδόσεων από τον 17ο έως τον 19ο αιώνα.

Η μυθολογία του ερειπίου σφραγίζει τη σχέση της Ευρώπης με την ελληνορωμαϊκή αρχαιότητα μέσα στους αιώνες, με πολλαπλές εκφάνσεις στην τέχνη και γενικότερα στον πολιτισμό. Η Ρώμη με το πλήθος των

μνημείων της κατέχει πρωταγωνιστικό ρόλο, μάλιστα αποτελεί πολυδύναμο σημείο αναφοράς και για τις απεικονίσεις “ελληνικών” μνημείων τον 17ο-18ο αιώνα με προεκτάσεις και στον 19ο. Ορισμένα χαρακτηριστικά με αυθαίρετες συσσωρεύσεις ερειπίων –σε ολλανδικές κυρίως εκδόσεις του 17ου αιώνα– έχουν ασφαλώς τις καταβολές τους σε έργα με ρωμαϊκές αρχαιότητες φιλοτεχνημένα από καλλιτέχνες των Κάτω Χωρών, που εργάστηκαν στη Ρώμη κατά τον 16ο αιώνα. Σε όλες αυτές τις εικόνες ένας ολόκληρος κόσμος που έχει καταρρεύσει υποβάλλει την ιδέα του χρόνου που καταστρέφει τα πάντα, ενώ οι ανθρώπινες φιγούρες υποδηλώνουν το ουμανιστικό ενδιαφέρον για τη μελέτη των αρχαίων λειψάνων προκειμένου να αποκωδικοποιηθούν τα μυστικά τους.

Κατά τον 18ο αιώνα η Ρώμη με τη μεγαλειώδη αρχιτεκτονική σκηνογραφία της –αρχαία και νεότερη– ασκεί στη λόγια Ευρώπη μαγνητική έλξη, που εκδηλώνεται και με το πλήθος των απεικονίσεων της “αιώνιας πόλης”, οι οποίες είναι ιδιαίτερα δημοφιλείς. Η ιταλική ζωγραφική και χαρακτηριστική των ερειπίων –με κορυφαίους εκπροσώπους της τον G. P. Panini και τον G. B. Piranesi αντίστοιχα, οι ρωμαϊκές *vedute ideate* (φανταστικές τοπογραφικές απόψεις) και τα αρχιτεκτονικά “καπρίτσια” θα αποτελέσουν το κύριο πρότυπο –με συνεπικουρο τη γαλλική ζωγραφική αυτής της θεματικής– για τα χαρακτηριστικά με φανταστικές ή και πραγματικές ελληνικές αρχαιότητες, όπως φαίνεται από την αυθαίρετη γειννίαση ετερόκλητων μνημείων, αγαλμάτων και αγγείων σε ένα πλασματικό χώρο, τη σκηνοθεσία της σύνθεσης, το *staffage*, την εκφραστική χρήση της φωτοσκίασης, τη διαλεκτική σχέση της φύσης και των έργων του ανθρώπου. Οι αρχαιότητες ως “θέμα”, μέσα στο κομψό αισθητικό κλίμα του 18ου αιώνα, με πινελιές ροκοκό, όπου εγγράφεται και το αίτημα για τη γραφικότητα (το *pittoresque*). Παράλληλα, αυτές οι εικόνες εκφέρουν λόγο και για το *sublime*: για τον “υψηλό” χαρακτήρα και το ευγενικό μεγαλείο των ελληνορωμαϊκών έργων, μέσα στο πνεύμα του Νεοκλασικισμού, όπου αναπτύχτηκε και η λατρεία (*culte*) του αρχαίου έργου-αντικειμένου τέχνης σε συνάρτηση με την αρχαιογνωσία της εποχής και τις α-

νασκαφές. Το εντυπωσιακό μέγεθος, άρρηκτα συνδεδεμένο με το μνημειακό μεγαλείο, συνιστά τότε έναν όρο για τη δοξαστική, συγκινησιακά φορτισμένη αντιμετώπιση των αρχαιοτήτων καθώς και για την οπτική πρόσληψή τους, με άμεση επίπτωση στη διαχείρισή τους ως εικόνων. Από την άποψη αυτή τα χαρακτηριστικά του Γάλλου αρχιτέκτονα Le Roy είναι παραδειγματικά για τον ελληνικό χώρο.

Στο α΄ μισό του 19ου αιώνα, όταν η νεότερη, υπαρκτή Ελλάδα έρχεται στο προσκήνιο, τα ιδεολογικά και αισθητικά φίλτρα του Ρομαντισμού, του Οριενταλισμού και του Φιλελληνισμού θα επηρεάσουν τις αναπαραστάσεις του αρχαίου ελληνικού μνημείου στα χαρακτηριστικά των περιηγητών, και όχι μόνο. Το ρεπερτόριο των αρχαιοτήτων “εξελληνίζεται”, με αναγνωρίσιμα πλέον, πραγματικά μνημεία και έργα τέχνης, και μάλιστα αυτά στα οποία πέφτουν οι προβολείς (Ακρόπολη, Ελγίνεια, Καρυάτιδες). Η νέα θεματική προϋποθέτει και απαιτεί άλλα πρότυπα (βλ. π.χ. την έγκυρη έκδοση των Stuart και Revett). Επιβιώνουν όμως ακόμη μορφοπλαστικοί τρόποι και εικονογραφικά μοτίβα της παλαιότερης παράδοσης, της ζωγραφικής και χαρακτηριστικής των ερειπίων του 18ου αιώνα. Το διπολικό σχήμα πραγματικότητας και φαντασίας παρουσιάζει ξεχωριστό ενδιαφέρον στις εικαστικές εκδοχές του.

Η προσέγγιση αυτού του πολυδιάστατου θέματος εστιάστηκε σε κάποιες χαρακτηριστικές πτυχές του, με άξονα τις δύο συντεταγμένες του: την εικονογραφία και τη μορφολογία των έργων, που και οι δύο, ισότιμα σχεδόν, αναδεικνύουν την πολυσημία του, ενώ παράλληλα καταδεικνύουν τον ευρύ ορίζοντα έρευνας που υπαγορεύει η μελέτη αυτού του υλικού. Έμφαση δόθηκε στον 18ο αιώνα (πιο συγκεκριμένα στο β΄ μισό του), εποχή ιδιαίτερα σημαντική για τη σχέση της Ευρώπης με την κλασική αρχαιότητα, μέσα από τη συνεργία ποικίλων παραγόντων. Ανάμεσά τους, η άμεση επαφή πολυάριθμων λογίων, καλλιτεχνών, πλούσιων και φιλότεχνων Ευρωπαίων με τα απτά ίχνη του αρχαίου κόσμου στη Ρώμη κυρίως, υπήρξε καταλυτική. Μπορεί μάλιστα να υποστηριχτεί ότι αυτή λειτούργησε και ως μοχλός για τη δόμηση μιας φανταστικής πρόσληψης της ελληνικής αρχαιότητας.