



The original post shared by Prof. Tasos Tanoulas:

PLEA AGAINST THE INTERVENTIONS ON THE ACROPOLIS OF ATHENS

Acropolis: SOS

At the end of October 2020, we were taken by surprise when news emerged that the Acropolis was in the process of being paved with reinforced concrete, covering over much of the face of the living rock. Official statements justify these extensive interventions as ostensibly nothing more than an upgrade of old pathways to accommodate people with disabilities, but the sheer scale of the work makes clear that the primary plan is to accommodate even larger crowds of summer tourists.

Objections were expressed about the materials being used, the extent of the works and the aesthetic impact of the interventions, which appear to compete with and diminish the architectural and sculptural achievements of the monuments, and in general devalue the archaeological site as a whole. These interventions have also been criticized for being irreversible and for the damage they have already caused to remains of ancient architecture and to the rock itself, as well as the predictable – but apparently unplanned for – consequence that the type of concrete and its final coating with waterproofing chemicals will cause flooding and other problems to the systems for draining rainwater.

The Ministry of Culture and Sports answered that the new intervention was necessary, not only for the commodity of people with disabilities but, also, for the transportation of marble with heavy machinery, promising that the interventions would not noticeably change the historic image of the archaeological site.

Simultaneously, however, the President of the Committee for the Preservation of the Acropolis Monuments, professor Manolis Korres, described these works as just the first phase of an even larger and more radical transformation of the site: new platforms would be constructed, in the form of earth terraces, on different levels. The objective of the Committee would be to restore, according to his own judgement, the configuration of the ground level in the 5th century B.C., and the “correct appearance” of the monuments.

Objections were, then, expressed that the installation of all these new buildings and interventions would erase any sense of historic unity and continuity, imposing modern forms for which there is no sufficient evidence, while, simultaneously cutting off access to the important archaeological vestiges surviving in situ. It also did not go unnoticed that these new constructions underway, not to mention the future ones, have been

implemented by entirely circumventing international and national Greek legal frameworks and institutional standards.

Rain in December 2020 caused flooding across the archaeological site of the Acropolis, a predictable consequence of the new paving. Outcry against the new pathways intensified when images of the waterlogged monuments became public. At the same time, it also emerged that the configuration of the new pathways would not ultimately fulfil the stated justification of accessibility, which was allowing the independent movement of wheel-chairs and people with disabilities. One would expect that all these problems would lead to a more thoughtful management of the situation by the Ministry of Culture, which would call for discussions leading to a consensus among experts of the scientific fields relevant to the archaeological site of the Acropolis and its sensitive environment. On the contrary, a proposal of the Committee for the Preservation of the Acropolis Monuments on February 2, characterized as urgent, was brought for discussion to the Central Archaeological Board of the Ministry of Culture. The professed purpose of the proposal was the “restoration” of the west access of the Acropolis, something that would “render back” the “monumentality” and “authenticity” of the Monument, while, at the same time, “would solve problems regarding the management of the traffic of the visitors” (phrases in quotation marks are from press releases of the Ministry of Culture). The proposal was approved by general vote, even though the Central Archaeological Board, normally, examines and decides only on completed studies, and not mere proposals. In this case, the normal procedure was sidestepped.

More specifically, the press release of the Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports, declared that a flight of new marble steps will be constructed, modeled upon a Roman flight of steps of the 1st century A. D. The result will be a stepped square starting at the lower end of the west slope of the Acropolis and ascending up to the west front of the Propylaia, which will allow crowds of tourists to enter in between the columns and pass through the monument in order to, finally, get to the Acropolis plateau.

Concerning the post-Herulian gate at the lower end of the west access of the Acropolis, known as the Beulé Gate, the phrasing of the Ministry of Culture seems not to exclude the possibility of dismantling this historic structure in the future, in order that its reused blocks can be restored where they belonged originally, in the choragic Monument of Nikias at the south slope. The new frame of mind regarding the management of the antiquities of the Acropolis which, in the last months, appears threatening, as it deems “authentic” and “correct” the new structural interventions that this frame of mind wants to impose, does not exclude such extreme actions.

It is certain that these new interventions/activities will change dramatically the form of the Acropolis Monument, and its content in the international consciousness.

In addition, they will cause most serious technical and functional problems, such as

1. The living rock and the ancient remains will be extensively covered by a gigantic stepped surface in new material, which will result in the degradation of the natural landscape, and a devaluation of the rock as a natural monument in its own right, as a natural fort. No explanation has been given for why, the “reconstruction” of the Acropolis west access has been chosen as the 1st c. A. D. phase, while for the

Acropolis plateau, according to the earlier announcements, the 5th c. B. C. has been chosen. Should we understand that these choices are dictated by a rhetoric aiming at a selective image of “Ancient Glories”!?

2. Antiquities of many historical periods, both before and after the 1st c. A. D., will be covered over, becoming forever inaccessible.

3. This construction will demand raising the existing ground level, often by more than 3 meters. For the support of the steps and the consolidation of the extensive new structure, massive and densely distributed foundations will have to be built, which will have to rest on the rock and on antiquities that will be covered and concealed.

4. The passage of tourists through the Propylaea will cause congestion on the way into and out of the Acropolis plateau, and will endanger the safety of the monument. In this plan, it is inevitable that the Propylaea ‘s monumental steps will be covered over with stairs allowing visitor access, and that the original marble pavement will be covered in a protective sheathing. These interventions would immensely obscure the architecture of the classical building

5. The existing problems caused by overcrowding of visitors will persist and, in fact, will become more acute.

Considering all the above,

We express our total opposition to the installations which have already been constructed and to the ones that have been announced for construction on the Acropolis plateau, as well as to the proposed reconstruction of the 1st c. A. D. Roman flight of stairs on the western access of the Acropolis.

Such interventions are contrary to the internationally recognized and established principles concerning the preservation, conservation and safeguarding of antiquities. On the contrary, they equal the devaluation, concealment and degradation of the greatest archaeological and artistic treasure that has been bequeathed to modern Greece, in whom humanity entrusts its safeguarding.

We demand the removal of pavement with harmful material characteristics that has already been poured down on the Acropolis, and the cancelation of the projects which have been announced for construction on the plateau and at the west access to the Acropolis; instead, we ask for the implementation of projects which will respect the natural landscape, peacefully coexist with the rock and the architectural landmarks, abate the problems of visitor traffic, offer greater access to people with disabilities, and support the ongoing restoration works. These worthy motives should not be selectively deployed as pretexts for arbitrary interventions that are hastily implemented.

We request the immediate organization of an administrative review to study the traffic of visitors so that the maximum number of visitors that can be safely accommodated on the Acropolis is known in advance before further measures are taken to control the load of visitors on the archaeological site.

We ask for the establishment of institutional procedures that will allow for the exchange of views and discussions leading to a consensus to prevent future incidents where influential individuals can unilaterally impose permanent alterations to the Acropolis.

In general, we draw attention to the fact that claims to “restore” to the Acropolis its original “characteristics and values” and to “contribute decisively to the correct perception” and “authenticity” of the monument by adding extensive modern structures, as the Ministry of Culture now asserts, mark an extremely dangerous path.

Signatures:

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12. Cortes-Camargo Alejandra Michelle
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