

**Replicas and reconstructions in the service of the nation:
Istanbul, Athens, Skopje.**

Handout

[In this presentation I look at two sets of artifacts dispersed in four museums: The Parthenon [Elgin] Marbles and their copies in the British Museum and the Acropolis Museum, 'Alexander's Sarcophagus' in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, and its copy in the Archaeological Museum of Northern Macedonia. I look at the relations between replicas and originals, their relations with the buildings that house them and between the buildings themselves, and their involvement in national debates within and among the respective countries.]

'This copy is unique because it is the only copy worldwide of the original Alexander's Sarcophagus in Istanbul. There was an agreement with the Turkish government.'¹

A copy of 'Alexander's Sarcophagus', whose original lies at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, arrived in 2014 at the brand-new Archaeological Museum of Northern Macedonia in Skopje. Being 'the work of Macedonian and Turkish experts',² it is one of the many cultural projects that the two countries carried out in collaboration in recent years, especially under the VMRO-DPMNE government.³ The original, which was made from Pentelic marble, had been found in Sidon in the late 19th century by Osman Hamdi Bey and is still today the most important exhibit in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum.

Despite its name, Alexander the Great was never enclosed in this sarcophagus, but has a protagonistic role in the reliefs decorating its four sides; the one long side depicts him in a battle between Macedonians and Persians, and the other in a hunt scene. It is thought that the sarcophagus contained the body of Abdalonymus (311 BC), made King of Sidon by Alexander;⁴ however, the fame and connotations acquired from the its onomastic vagueness, being of great importance for the past government of North Macedonia, led the tomb of this Phoenician to find its way as a replica in Skopje's Archaeological Museum. Alexander the Great was at the center of North Macedonia's identity-branding in the VMRO period, to

¹ Tour guide, Archaeological Museum of Northern Macedonia, February 2014.

² The head – at the time - of the country's Cultural Heritage Bureau, archaeologist Pasko Kuzman stated that 'we'll be the only country in the Balkans possessing such a copy, so we expect it to stir great interest in countries across Eastern Europe'.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2012/07/17/hunt-for-lost-treasures-has-macedonia-divided/>

visited 2 October 2019

³ Most recently VMRO-DPMNE was in power for 10 years consequently, 2006-2016.

⁴ Other scholars have argued that it was the tomb of Mazaeus, Persian governor of Babylon.

the fury of neighboring Greece, which perceives the warrior as an integral part of its own historical narrative.

The replica holds an exceptional position among the holdings of the museum; it is the finishing point of the guided tour,⁵ returning us to the Hellenistic period after a chronologically structured narration from the ancient Paeonians to medieval Slavic kingdoms and Byzantium. Situated at the end of a room, it is positioned under a specially lit area, on a platform, which allows visitors to walk around it and examine it closely. Photography is not allowed; a restriction that helps bestow the exhibit with an aura of uniqueness, consolidating the copyright of 'the only copy'.⁶



Fig.1 'Alexander's Sarcophagus', Ist.Arch.Museum



Fig.2 The Archaeological Museum of Northern Macedonia.

The Archaeological Museum of Northern Macedonia is a brand new building in a classical style; massive Ionic columns line up to create a long facade, towered with a bas-relief pediment in the middle and two smaller domes in the corners. 'The whole building is just a facade', says Nikos Causidis, professor at the University of Cyril and Methodius. Indeed, with a depth of just 10 meters, in which the exhibition rooms are squeezed, the building creates a curtain covering the modernist buildings behind it (Figure 2).

The choice of style is not coincidental; the museum was part of the 'Skopje 2014' project to embellish the city by means of four methods: reconstructing neoclassical buildings that had been destroyed by the 1963 earthquake,⁷ dressing up socialist architecture of the 1960s and 1970s with classical facades,⁸ adding new constructions in a neoclassical/baroque style (such as the Archaeological Museum

⁵ I took the guided tour in February 2014.

⁶ A replica of the Sarcophagus had also been produced for Japan, for the Kashiwazaki Turkish Culture Village, a theme park which however closed in 2003. Both replicas were constructed 5% smaller than the original. Another instance of reproduction took place in 1900, when copies of the reliefs on the sarcophagus were made by Mr Smith – on behalf of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. See Annual Report of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Issues 26-32, p.39, Issue 26, for the year Ending December 31, 1901. Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son Printers, 1902.

⁷ such as the National Theatre, the church "Konstantin i Elena" and the Officers Club.

⁸ like the Vlada building and the City Mall.

itself) and installing dozens of sculptures all over the city. In so doing, the project attempted on the one hand the restoration of a 'European' identity, which the VMRO government claimed it used to have in the pre-communist era and was destroyed by communism. At the same time, however, by positioning Alexander the Great (and the Hellenistic world) in the center of this narrative, it argued that this European identity is not 'imported' it was already integral to the nation's history.⁹

Museum, exhibits and the refashioning of the whole city become elements of the same narrative. As the architect of the Archaeological Museum Slobodan Zivkovski mentioned, 'this classic architectural style belongs to all western civilizations. One integral part of that cultural experience is also Macedonia, especially in the imperial period. Alexander the Great, we know, raised seventy cities in this style'.¹⁰ The Archaeological Museum, the nation's depository, contains, reproduces (in its form) and reflects this identity to the whole city and the world.¹¹

The building's distorted proportions, with a thick architrave and frieze, a double cornice, and its complete lack of windows (the glass is decorative) that turn it into a closed box, bring to mind the sarcophagus it encloses. A replica of a sarcophagus which itself imitates a temple, housed in a building that resembles a tomb; the connection to Wendy Shaw's analysis of the Museum as Mausoleum, referring to the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, cannot be missed.

Around 700 km to the South, the last floor of the New Acropolis Museum also imitates a temple, but in structure rather than in form, and with a very different agenda. The last floor of the museum is structured so that metopes, pediment sculptures and frieze are positioned in the same way as they would be on the temple. 46 concrete columns, exactly as many as in the original temple, surround a room imitating the *cella*, the inner chamber, on the exterior surface of which the sculptures are exhibited. At the same time, natural light entering from the huge glass windows creates the feeling of outdoor space, thus simulating the way the sculptures were seen at the original site (Figure 4).

⁹ See Mijalkovic, Milan & Urbanek, Katharina, *Skopje - The World's Bastard*, (Klafengurt: Wieser Verlag 2011), pp 9-11.

¹⁰ quoted in *ibid*, p.93.

¹¹ Despite the fact that in the upper floors there are authentic artefacts from the Ancient Macedonian era, in the VMRO era Alexander's Sarcophagus became almost the very reason the museum existed, and intensified the connection between ancient and modern Macedonia.



Fig.3 Copies and originals side by side, Acropolis Museum, Athens



Fig.4 The Parthenon gallery is a simulation of the temple in a glass box, allowing natural light to create the feeling of outdoor space. Acropolis Museum, Athens

In this giant simulation of the Parthenon, both the original sculptures that are still in Greece and the copies of the ones at the British museum are exhibited side by side, stressing their inherent continuity and integrity, crucial in order to understand their narrative: one horse's body starts in Athens and ends in London (Figure 3). The captions of the copies do not describe the copies themselves, but describe their originals abroad. Here the copies, underlining their 'fakeness', are the most drastic, visual call for return, inviting the visitor to reflect and to desire their replacement with the originals. The whole building and its interior layout are the mechanism through which the copy is situated next to the replica in a way that invokes the feeling of absence - the absence of the original. Here Baudrillard's 'precession of simulacra' is a relevant reference; the simulation of a complete collection of the Parthenon Marbles precedes its realization – it in fact aims to bring it into reality.¹²

The long-standing campaign for the return of the Elgin Marbles, which were removed in a controversial manner from the Parthenon in the early 19th century by Lord Elgin and ended up in the British Museum, has hence found a new strong argument in the opening of the New Acropolis Museum,¹³ a building designed by Bernard Tschumi after a much promoted international competition. Museum and copy work together as a political argument embedded in material form.

¹² Jean Baudrillard, *The Precession of Simulacra*, p.1.

¹³ 'The Museum will accommodate all the surviving pieces of the Parthenon and is expected to include the Marbles we are claiming from the British Museum'. Giorgos Voulgarakis, Greek Minister of Culture, at the 61st General Assembly of the United Nations, 4 December 2006, Press Release (5 Dec 2006), <http://www.yppo.gr/4/marm/>
'In the meantime, with the creation of the New Acropolis Museum, which is a real masterpiece in museological and architectural terms, we are strengthening our arguments even more.' Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis, in *Apogevmatini tis Kiriakis*, 4/06/2004 <http://www.yppo.gr/4/marm/e68213.html>

The original marbles have lost their meaning as symbols of the victory against the Persians, and of Athenian political hegemony in the Greek space.¹⁴ They are symbolically detached from their ancient connotations, and their involvement in the controversy with Britain becomes a performative reproduction of Greek identity, a contemporary consolidation of the ancient as a necessary ingredient of the present. Meanwhile, the replicas are rejecting their potential role as surrogates. It is exactly their - claimed - inability to replace the originals that constitutes the essence of their existence among the originals; their main mission is their call for their replacement.

However, by a twist of fate, these copies are in fact irreplaceable in terms of their capacity to reveal historical information. These are the copies that Britain sent to the young Greek Kingdom in 1844, when the country first asked for their return, so they have a life of over 150 years. Most important, they were cast before the originals went through a catastrophic 'cleaning operation' in the hands of British Museum officials in the 1930s. The original marbles were scratched and scrubbed relentlessly at the time in order to recover their 'true' white color, and as a result suffered considerable damage. Hence, suddenly, the copy potentially carries information that has now been lost by the original; should the original return, the copy can still not be thrown away, as it has an archival value of its own.

A history of archaeology, displacement and replacement.

The Parthenon marbles and Alexander's Sarcophagus do not share only their Pentelic origins or their strong involvement in national agendas. Both are major landmarks in the history of archaeology in the Near East, marking two distinct and opposite periods. The removal of the Parthenon marbles in the early 1800s represents a period when collectors, amateur archaeologists and *dilettanti* from Western Europe could roam the Ottoman Empire with great freedom, remove and send back to their respective countries archaeological objects. In contrast, the discovery of 'Alexander's Sarcophagus' in Sidon by Osman Hamdi Bey in 1887 and its removal to Istanbul is the most important achievement of Ottoman archaeology, which was developed in reaction to European activity (archaeological and political) in the area.¹⁵ Moreover, both findings influenced or even triggered the construction of the institutions that housed them in London and Istanbul, almost one and a half centuries before they did the same in Athens and Skopje.

Ian Jenkins has shown how the purchase of the Elgin Marbles by the British Museum in 1815 was debated by the Trustees, who evaluated them in comparison to the –until then- uncontested Roman pinnacles of sculpture, the Belvedere sculptures (especially the Apollo and the Torso). The latter's displacement to the Louvre by Napoleon in 1795 had sent shock waves across the British upper circles,

¹⁴ Hamilakis, *The nation*, p.276 translation by the author.

¹⁵ Edhem Eldem has put it very eloquently in the title of his chapter 'From blissful indifference to anguished concern', in the book he edited together with Zeynep Çelik and Zainab Bahrani, *Scramble for the Past. A story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, 1753-1914*, 2011.

who found themselves lagging behind in terms of cultural ownership, and were suddenly forced to travel to an enemy country to study and admire these ultimate works of art.¹⁶ The purchase of the Elgin marbles was certainly also influenced by this competition, and later the return of the Belvedere sculptures to Vatican after Napoleon's fall drastically changed the balance in favor of the British.

While Greek Revival had already appeared in the late 18th century, mostly in the private scene, in the first decade of the 19th century and especially after Classical Greek art was available as close as Bloomsbury, the style became a very prominent choice in the design of public buildings.¹⁷ The British Museum with its massive Ionic South façade designed by Robert Smirke¹⁸ in the 1820s and 30's (construction was complete in the mid 50s) is one of the most characteristic examples.



Fig. 5. The Elgin Room, now room 16.

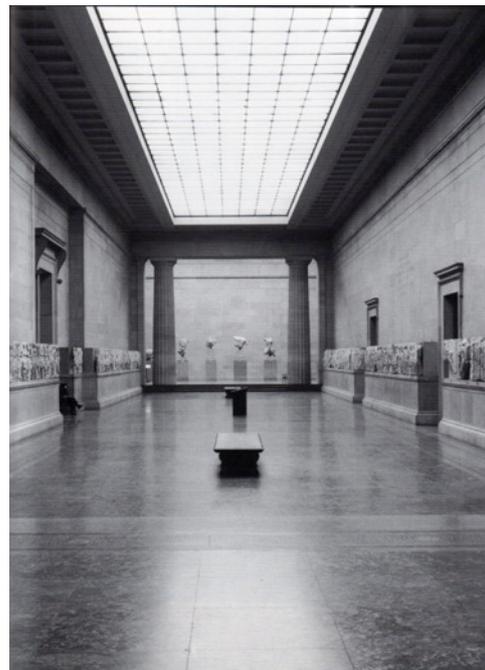


Fig.6. The Duveen gallery, housing the Parthenon marbles today.

While British archaeologists did not manage to remove any more pieces from the Parthenon in the decades that followed (mainly because of Greek independence), they sought and usually managed to acquire casts of every new piece that was discovered on the Acropolis. These casts were used to produce copies that were

¹⁶ Ian Jenkins, "Gods Without Altars': The Belvedere in Paris', in Matthias Winner, Bernard Andreae, and Carlo Pietrangeli, eds., *Il Cortile delle Statue: Der Statuenhof des Belvedere im Vatikan. Akten des Internationalen Kongresses zu Ehren von Richard Krautheimer, Rom, 21-23 Okt. 1992* (Mainz: Von Zabern, 1998), pp. 459-469.

¹⁷ Its most important advocates were Robert Smirke, architect of the British Museum, William Wilkins and Decimus Burton. Greek Revival flourished mainly in England, Germany and the US as a counterbalance to France and Italy.

¹⁸ Robert Smirke had carried out his Grand Tour between 1801-1805 and spent a whole month in Athens. He was greatly influenced by the antiquities there and considered them to be much superior to Rome's.

then studied in London, and when connections to the existing originals were found, then they were joined and exhibited together (and new casts were taken from the whole, leading to new expanded copies). When the Duveen gallery was made in the 1930s however, 'a new minimalist approach to Museum display, generally, required the removal of the casts from the main body of sculpture'.¹⁹ Copies in the early 20th century had value no more; the weight of the quest for authenticity could not allow them to coexist with the originals. The originals in London are fragmentary but complete – they had and have no requests, they present no demands; whereas in Athens, the casts have returned to accompany the originals, for the exact opposite reason.

As the British museum was being constructed (with the pace of expansion struggling to meet the pace of acquisition of antiquities), things were changing in the Ottoman Empire. Influenced by Western examples, in 1846 the Imperial Museum was founded. As Wendy Shaw eloquently put it, 'in the Ottoman Empire, archaeology and the museum alike emerged not in affiliation with covalent artistic and literary discourses, but in resistance to the territorial imperialism implicit in European archaeological collection in Ottoman territories – Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Asia Minor – from which a European discourse of the past often became conflated with a territorial claim in the present'.²⁰

Collecting and categorizing objects by territory rather than anything else, its discourse 'divested from aesthetics but wed to territory' and nourished a 'centralized patriotism'. And while Ottoman bureaucrats and museum's first directors started sending out orders for any found objects to be shipped to Istanbul, new legislation attempted, first in 1869, then in 1874 and finally with more rigor and determination in 1884, to control and prevent the displacement of antiquities abroad.²¹

In Sidon the necropolis was known for several decades, and in 1855 a black stone sarcophagus was discovered and shipped, after some controversy, to the Louvre. French interest in the region alerted the Ottoman authorities, and when the first Ottoman director of the Imperial Museum, Osman Hamdi Bey (1881-1910) received a message that a new chamber was discovered, he personally led the excavations. He was soon rewarded, as the chamber contained 16 greatly preserved sarcophagi, of which four²² were extraordinary. The most important one, and still considered to be the central exhibit in the museum, was what was soon named 'Alexander's Sarcophagus' in order to distinguish it from the others, based on its reliefs. Osman Hamdi quickly wrote and published the findings of this excavation,

¹⁹ Ian Jenkins, Acquisition and Supply of Casts of the Parthenon Sculptures by the British Museum, 1835-1939, in *The Annual of The British School of Archaeology at Athens*, Volume 85, 1990

²⁰ Wendy Shaw, 'From Mausoleum to Museum: Resurrecting Antiquity for Ottoman Modernity', in *Scramble for the Past*, p.424

²¹ See Eldem, From Blissful Indifference to Anguished Concern.

²² the Alexander's Sarcophagus, the Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women, the Lycian Sarcophagus and the Satrap Sarcophagus.

notably in French (for an international audience)²³ and made sure to transfer the sarcophagi to Istanbul.

A new museum building was necessary in order to respond to this space-demanding finding of massive political importance. Construction of a new museum building started in 1891 and was commissioned to Alexandre Vallaury, a Levantine architect of Greek-Italian descent, who was also professor at the newly founded (again by Osman Hamdi) School of Fine Arts in Istanbul.

Probably by request of Osman Hamdi Bey, the building had direct references to the sarcophagi it housed. The main inspiration came from the Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women, which was Ionic temple with pediments and peristalsis, with figures of women standing between the columns. As Shaw writes 'it was, he suggested, the perfect model for a new museum to be constructed to house the sarcophagi'. In addition, the acroteria on top of the pediment seem to be copied from the lid of Sarcophagus No.2.²⁴



Fig.7. The Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women



Fig.8 Istanbul Archaeological Museum

The Istanbul Archaeological museum 'quotes' its exhibits on its façade, introducing another yet method of reproduction in order to speak out loud its identity and its mission. While on the one hand it confirms its function of 'museum as mausoleum', as a 'repository for the dead and a place of memorialization', it also speaks to its contemporary political and national agendas by making a case for an Ottoman archaeology that is the only legitimate actor in the region, and an Ottoman identity which is truly entitled to the region's ancient past; and through this entitlement, more Western than the West.

²³ O.Hamdy Bey & Théodore Reinach, *Une Necropole Royale a Sidon*, Paris, 1892.

²⁴ Shaw maintains that they are copied from the Alexander Sarcophagus, but I could not confirm this match. In contrast, sarcophagus no.2 seems to have identical acroteria.

Conclusion

How can we measure the value, or 'uniqueness' of a replica? Are the replicas connected to the originals anymore, or do they have a life of their own? Through these case studies, I have examined different types of replicas and different cases of reproduction. All of them, whether 'exact' or not, have histories of their own, and participate in power struggles and ideological debates which politicize matter and form.

The Alexander Sarcophagus in Skopje and the copies of the Elgin Marbles in Athens are loyal reproductions of existing originals. However, although the Sarcophagus tries to claim authenticity by securing its exclusivity (as a copy), the Elgin marbles' copies disavow any value that may be assigned to them - despite their 170 years of age, and the ironic twist of fate which has rendered them precious bearers of information that the originals have lost. It is characteristic that, in the New Acropolis Museum, contrary to the Museum of Northern Macedonia, the Parthenon marbles area is the only area which photography is allowed - a way to disseminate the call for return through the thousands of visitors to a world audience.

In all cases, the exhibits played an important role in the design and construction of the respective museums. The latter adjusted to their needs, adopted their forms, quoted parts of them. The buildings became complementary exhibits, which together with their contents communicated a coherent political message to a local and especially an international audience; Athens to London, Skopje to Athens, Istanbul to London and Paris, post-Napoleonic London to rival Paris (and to the world).

Within this framework, what is striking about these replicas is their operability in diverse contexts, which sometimes makes similar types of replicas function in different ways, and in other occasions brings forward unexpected similarities between seemingly different museums. By focusing on replicas and their stories, I aimed to show that rather than just evaluating them according to a scale of authenticity we need to focus more on the discourses through which they claim their legitimacy, to expose their untold stories, and unpack their multiple functions and meanings within the power struggles that involve them.