

# Athens: Modern Planning in an Historic Context

## Planning Initiatives and Their Impact on the Gradual Creation of the Cultural-Archaeological Park of the City

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### 1. Introduction

The ancient architectural heritage constitutes an essential part of the urban structure of many medium-sized towns and large cities throughout Europe. It presents itself in a wide range of varied evidence. This includes archaeological excavation sites within the city area, important groups of monuments, both used or no longer used buildings, individual monuments or their ruins, city walls and gates, as well as park-like spaces where the main features of ancient topography can be recognised.

The problem of integrating the ancient urban heritage in the complex townscape and the variety of functions of today's city life has not up until now been sufficiently investigated. Research is still mainly of strictly disciplinary nature. *The connections and interdependencies between the study of antiquity, archaeological excavations and the tasks of contemporary town planning, tourism as well as cultural revaluation of the ancient archaeological heritage* (fig. 1) are very rarely examined. In the case of Athens (a city with 3,6 million inhabitants today) there have been some first attempts to document the historical development of the archaeological areas, and to emphasise their role in the present city structure. In addition, programmatic suggestions have been put forward for the aims of excavations, the preservation of historical monuments or for the structuring of historic open spaces.

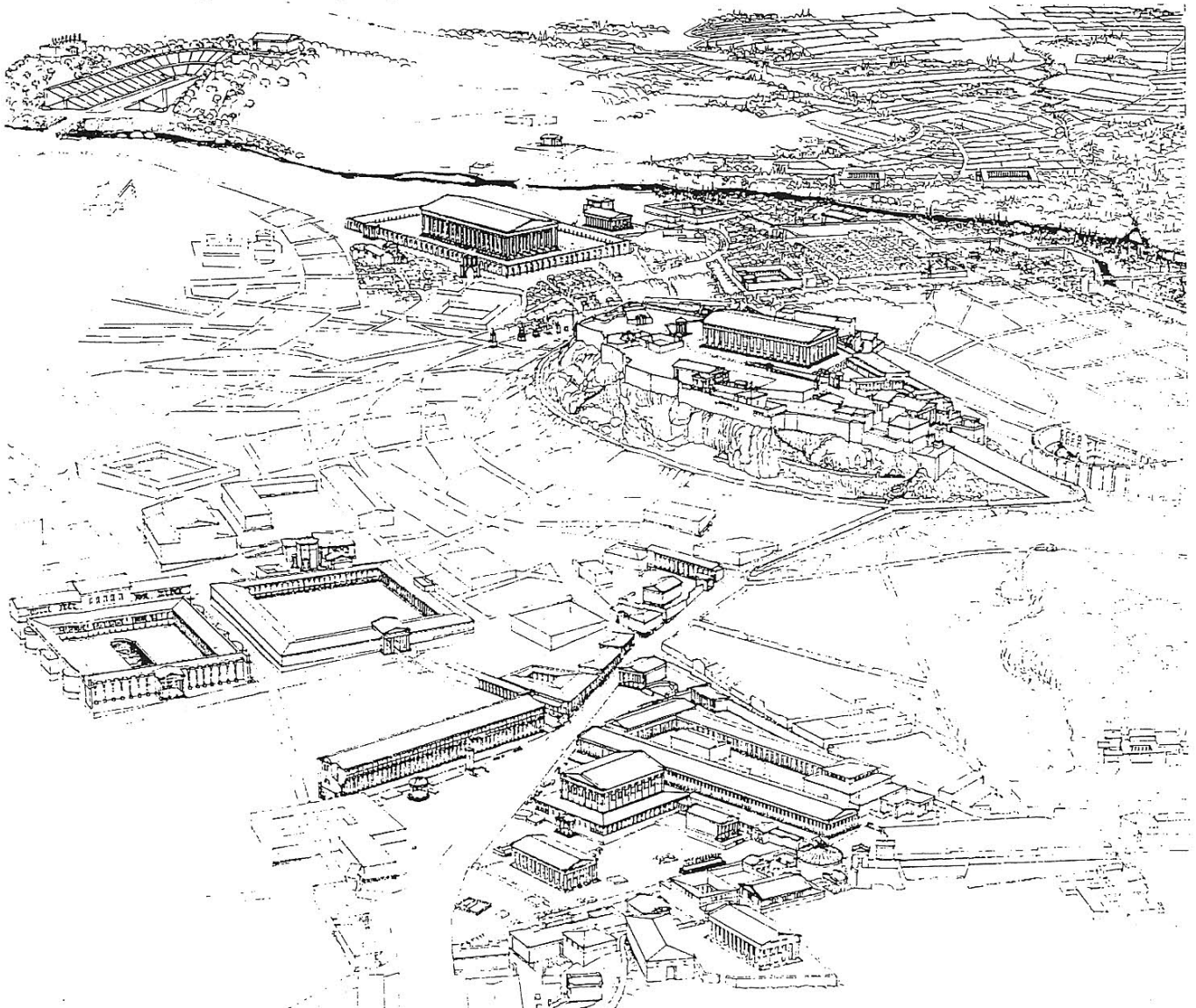


Fig. 1 Ancient Athens in the Third Century A.D., General View from NW. Drawing by Manolis Korres (1972)

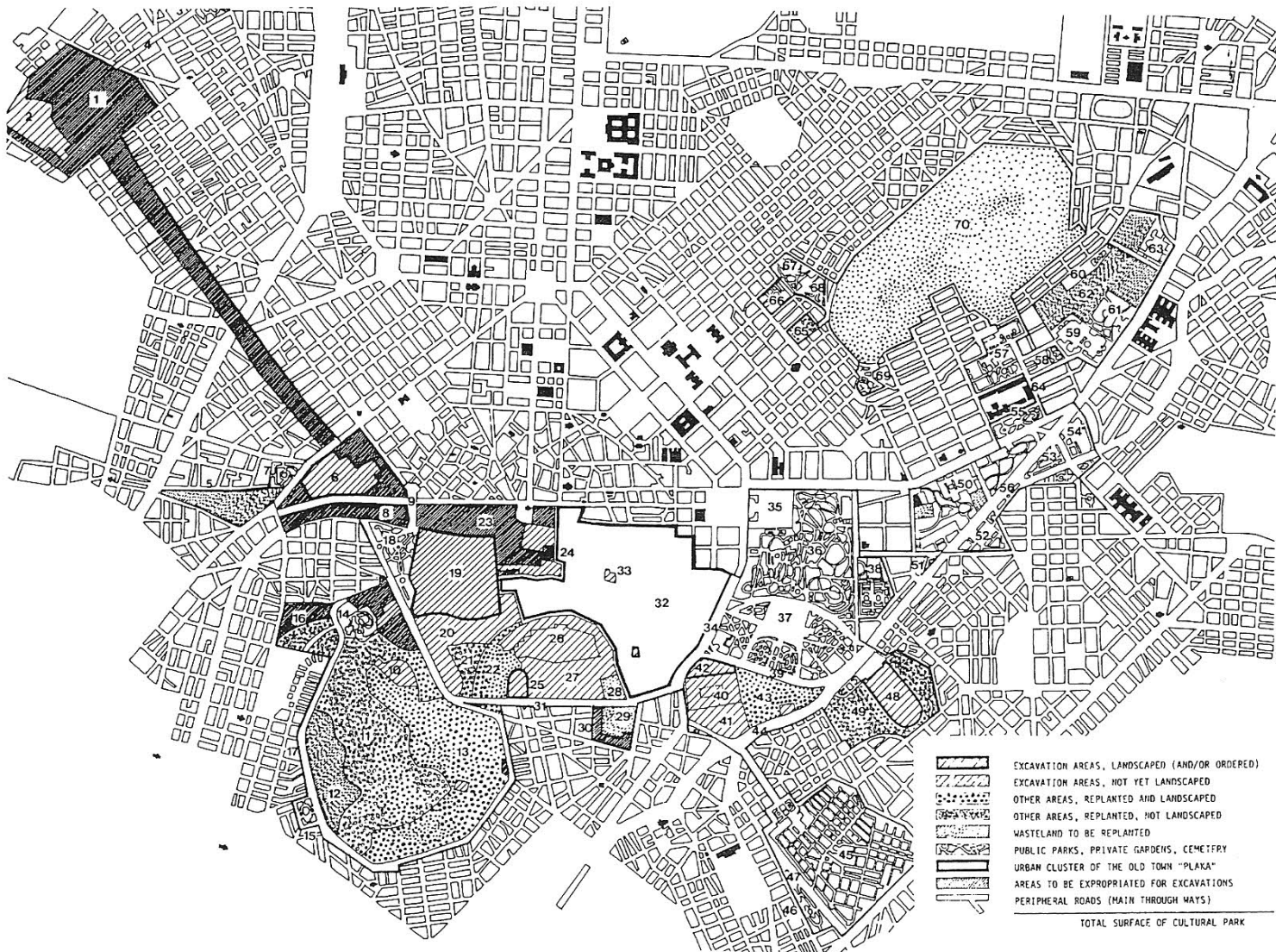


Fig. 2 The cultural-archaeological park of Athens. Drawing by the author

The area of the 'cultural-archaeological park of Athens' (fig. 2) presents itself as a 357 ha crescent-shaped inner city zone including from the west to the east: the area around the ancient Academy, the Kerameikos site of the ancient cemetery and the road connecting the Kerameikos to the Academy, the reafforested hills of the Mouseion, the Pnyx and the Areopagus, the excavation sites of the Greek and Roman Agora, the Acropolis Hill with its monuments, the ancient theatres on its southern slope, the old town (Plaka), the Olympieion area, the rebuilt Hadrianic Stadion and Ardetos Hill, the first Athens Cemetery, the inner city Parks (National/Royal and Zappeion Parks), the Athens Cultural Centre Area and the reafforested Lycabettus Hill.

The main reason for the choice of Athens as the capital city of the new independent Greek State in 1833 was the strong attachment of leading Western European and especially German visionaries to the ancient architectural heritage of the city. *Thus, cultural and ideological motivations, rather than practical considerations, were decisive for the future destiny of Athens.* As the architectural adviser to King Ludwig, Leo von Klenze, stated at the time: 'The sole name of Athens will help to reconstruct the city (and) Athens would have remained the capital of Greece even if another town had been declared the capital.'

Under these circumstances it is easy to understand that *the main concern of all the town planning proposals for the new city was its spatial and locational relation to the historic topographic features and the surviving architectural testimonies of ancient times.* During the first decade (1833-43) of the reign of King Otto, several town planning concepts for Athens were considered, some of them being partially implemented (including those by Kleanthes and Schaubert, and von Klenze), and others remaining in the realm of pure speculation (including proposals by Schinkel, von Quast, and Kaftanzoglou). These concepts differed not only in the basic layout of the new town, but they also treated the problem of the spatial relation between 'new' and 'old', and between built and unbuilt areas, in various ways.



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Fig. 3 General View of Athens Old Town (before the Independence) and the Acropolis from NE. Oilpainting by Carl von Kügelgen 1820



Fig. 4 Town plan of Athens by Kleanthes and Schaubert 1833 (schematic sketch by the author)



Fig. 5 Town Plan of Athens (revised version) by Klenze 1834 (schematic sketch by the author)



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While a consensus about the creation of a vast archaeological zone around the Acropolis existed among all competing planners, divergent options about the precise siting of the new town emerged. Opposing the poetic and unrealistic idea of Athens as a hill town put forward by Schinkel and von Quast and aiming at a direct superimposition of 'the old' and 'the new', Kleanthes and Schaubert developed the concept of a new town built in the northern plain as a juxtaposition to the ancient remains, while Klenze and Kaftanzoglou pleaded for an independent coexistence of the new city and the archaeological area.

The new city actually developed later next to the archaeological area and in close interconnection with the surviving old settlement of Athens (fig. 3), thus following the juxtaposition pattern. *The permanent wish for the creation of an integrated cultural-archaeological park survived the vicissitudes of the city's evolution over five generations, down to the present day.* Happy coincidences and concrete planning measures contributed to a step-by-step realization of the monumental green belt which is today in an advanced stage of expansion and consolidation thus securing a clear identity and a strong image to modern downtown Athens.

The present paper attempts to sketch the main steps of the gradual creation of this focal monumental area in central Athens. During the last 160 years of independent life happy initiatives but also lost chances are related to this issue.

## 2. Alternative Concepts During the First Decade (1833-1843)

The initial Kleanthes-Schaubert plan for Athens may be considered as the creation of a neoclassical early garden city sui generis adapted to a southern climate, and attempting to combine sophisticated central European geometric town patterns, vistas and street alignments with traditional southern dwelling forms, like the free-standing individual family houses with gardens and covered market porticoes around commercial gathering places (agoras). The basic option of this plan was the direct juxtaposition of the new city with the old town, as the town extended towards the north.

The new town (with a built up area of around 215 ha) would be in the form of a crescent around the existing old town, which was to be remodelled with break-throughs of new street axes linking the old town to the new.

The following features are to be found in this scheme (fig. 4):

- 1) The typical triangular star pattern of the 18th century capitals belonging to absolutist rulers (e.g. Versailles, Karlsruhe) with the main street axes radiating from the seat of royal power, the palace.
- 2) Attention paid to direct visual connections - both symbolic and practical - between the main focal points in the town and the monumental ensemble of the Acropolis (e.g. the axis from the Palace southward: Athenas Street leading visually to the Propylaia).
- 3) The very ingenious design of the triangular main street pattern forming a system of partial orthogonal grids diagonally disposed. This scheme unlike other triangular patterns with sharp angles permits the creation of different sections with a gridiron street pattern, while avoiding the monotony of a simple gridiron layout: the different sectors follow the different orientations of the diagonal main arteries.
- 4) The diagonal arrangement of the two main arteries (i.e. Stadiou st. and Peiraos st.) is not only the result of a formal option; the lines of these two streets are virtually identical with the main connections through the valleys among the hills of the Attic basin.

In intentional contrast to this geometrically conceived capital city sited on almost flat land, the southern district comprising the Acropolis, the nearby historic hills and the banks of the Ilissos river were left empty on the plan in order to form a large archaeological zone (about 150 ha) comparable in size to the projected city. Thus Kleanthes and Schaubert's basic idea was harmonious coexistence and interdependence between the new city developing in the north and a huge excavation area to the south. The old town on the Acropolis north slope was either to be demolished (higher part) or remodelled (lower part) in order to allow for the unearthing of the ancient city centre.

Unfortunately the inspired Kleanthes-Schaubert plan was revised in 1834, because of serious expropriation problems concerning the excavation areas and the remodelling of the old parts of the city which had to be integrated into the new concept, and also because of the siting of the palace, controversial right from the beginning. These animosities brought town-planning in Athens to a standstill for about a year (1833-1834). On the initiative of King Ludwig I of Bavaria, and in accordance with the wishes of the Greek regency, expert advice for revising the plan was sought. Thus Leo von Klenze,<sup>1</sup> architectural advisor of Ludwig I (father of King Otto), visited Athens for three

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<sup>1</sup> Leo von Klenze (1784-1864) was born near Hildesheim and trained as an architect in Berlin und Paris, where he worked with Percier and Fontaine. In 1808 King Jerome Bonaparte named him court architect in Kassel. During the Congress of Vienna in 1815, von Klenze was introduced to the crown prince of Bavaria, later Ludwig I. He became his protégé, and as the official court architect in Munich he made a decisive contribution to the neoclassical extension of the Bavarian capital, to the remodelling of the vast complex of the royal palace and to the creation of such important public spaces as the Ludwigstraße and the Königsplatz. Up until the end of his life, von Klenze enjoyed the confidence of the philhellenic king and even after Ludwig abdicated in 1848 he continued working on the extensive architectural program financed by royal funds (Ruhmeshalle 1843-1853, Propyläen 1846-1862). In 1834 von Klenze was sent to Greece on a highly confidential political mission: King Ludwig I had instructed him to alter the composition of the Regency Council in Nauplia. At the same time he accepted an invitation from the Greek government to revise the initial city plan for

months in the summer of 1834, endowed with extensive powers to act in Greek affairs. His revised plan for Athens is an abortive modification of the fine initial plan to adjust to the political and financial realities of the young state.

Klenze took over the main lines of the plan (described above) and decreased the size of the public spaces and of the whole built-up area. He also altered the building densities: instead of a 'garden city', he envisaged continuous lines of buildings along the streets in the major part of the new town. This was von Klenze's conception of a Mediterranean town as he knew it from traditional Italian prototypes. Klenze showed his aversion for pompous axial compositions in town-planning schemes particularly in his work on Athens. He believed that an urban setting on classical ground should follow the free composition of ancient layouts (sanctuaries and town centers) and that integration of the built volumes into the given topography should be the paramount goal.

Klenze favoured 'picturesque' effects and condemned the rigid monumentality of central European classicism, foreign - as he thought - to the Greek spirit. Thus he states that his personal vision for the new town of Athens would be a hill-town of densely built volumes, with a street pattern adapted to the topography and avoiding any monumental vistas, such as those to be found in the initial plan. The plan of Kleantes and Schaubert had however been already adopted the previous year and the main streets had been traced on the ground. Von Klenze as an experienced tactician knew that redesigning the plan at that stage was virtually impossible. Thus he proceeded to revise the initial concept; *this was actually the frustrated reaction of a great master in the face of necessity. It would be unjust to judge von Klenze's talent by this plan (fig. 5)!*

Other aspects of von Klenze's contribution in Athens are more valuable: his belief in picturesque effects led him to make daring proposals for the location of new monumental buildings in direct contact with historic-archaeological sites. Thus he created a design for the palace on various levels on the northwestern slopes of the Pnyx, with large gardens extending far to the east on the hilly terrain including the Theseion as an authentic ancient objet trouvé in his overall garden layout.

The actual development of the town-plan followed, however, its own ways - as is often the case. Neither the original plan by Kleantes and Schaubert, nor von Klenze's revised scheme were finally carried out exactly as conceived. The following features of the initial plan were kept: the basic triangular pattern of the main street axes, the direct juxtaposition of the new and the old town, and the idea of some main breakthroughs of new axes in the old town (i.e. Ermou, Athenas and Aioulou Streets). Von Klenze's reworking gave the plan its hybrid character, the much more modest overall dimensions, narrow streets, continuous alignment of built volumes (abandoning the garden city idea) and the almost unchanged survival of the upper and lower old town; to this we owe the existence of the Plaka and Psiri districts today, but also the labyrinthine maze of the urban fabric in central Athens.

The plan was decisively altered in regard to the siting of the palace and the Royal Garden. Both the initial building site on present-day Omonia Square and the site on the slopes of the Hill of the Nymphs proposed by von Klenze were abandoned; these sites were thought to be unhealthy. Ludwig I was in Athens from December 1835 to March 1836 and during his stay he overruled his vacillating son, King Otto, and chose the definitive site for the royal residence at the eastern tip of the basic city-street triangle. The choice was in many respects a happy one: the palace would enjoy a privileged location, situated as it was on a low prominence with a panoramic view towards Lykabettos, the Acropolis, the Olympieion and the Saronic Gulf. Building it in fairly close proximity to the Olympieion and the Stadium set the stage for the later evolution of the cultural-archaeological park of Athens, not thought of at the time: With the gradual development of the Royal Garden and later of the Zappeion Gardens in this part of the town, the nucleus of the eastern half of the Athenian green belt was created.

Friedrich von Gaertner<sup>2</sup> who designed the final version of the palace had followed Ludwig I to Athens and was commissioned to draw up the plans on the spot. Bound by the limited financial means of the young state, von Gaertner designed the austere, compact building with good overall proportions and no superfluous decor which still rises above the city centre (fig. 6). The original layout for the Royal Garden proposed by Gaertner was to the east of the palace, a semi-circular park, with a diameter of 500 metres and a total area of about 13 ha, designed in a late baroque tradition with a rigidly geometric pattern. Two smaller rectangular orchards (200 x 80 m each) were planned on either sides of the building. Happily enough, this original conventional palace park, laid out in the French tradition and entirely alien to the type of landscape park appropriate to the Athenian site, was never realized. A totally different royal garden developed during the years of Otto's reign, through the personal initiative of Queen Amalia.

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Athens. At the age of fifty von Klenze undertook the tiring three months' trip to Greece (July-September 1834), during which he developed an impressive initiative in many fields. A detailed report of his activities in Greece is given in his 'Aphoristische Bemerkungen, gesammelt auf seiner Reise nach Griechenland', published only four years later (1838) in Berlin.

2 Friedrich von Gärtner (1792-1847) was born in Koblenz. He studied at the Royal Academy of Arts in Munich from 1809-1812 and worked with Weinbrenner in Karlsruhe and Percier and Fontaine in Paris. He was appointed professor of architecture at the Royal Academy of Munich in 1820 and director in 1841. After von Klenze he was the most famous protégé of Ludwig I for whom he designed the buildings of the second phase of the monumental Ludwigstraße, i.e. Ludwigskirche (1829-1840), Staatsbibliothek (1835-1840). Von Gärtner was in Athens in 1835-1836 and again in 1840 to supervise construction of the royal palace.

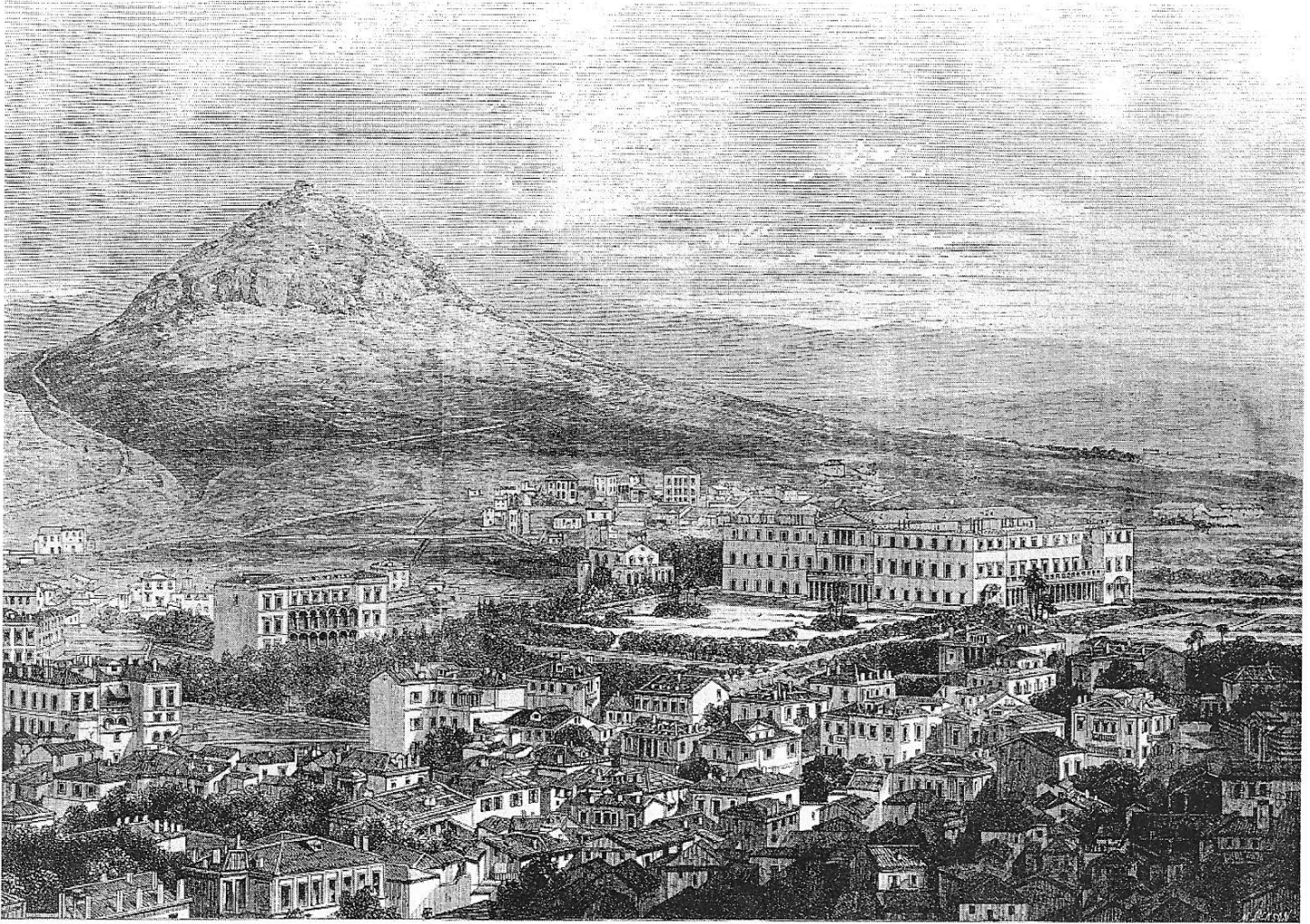
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What were the advantages and the inherent deficiencies of the initial town-planning developments with regard to the preservation of the ancient monuments and their integration in the fabric of the new town?

The first positive aspect is to be seen in the decision to develop the new city in the plain towards the north, leaving the entire area of the Acropolis south slope and the nearby western hills free of every type of building, thus creating the basic preconditions for the further development of the archaeological park in central Athens.

A second advantage is that perspective vistas leading from focal points of the new town to the monumental ensemble of the Acropolis were designed when the street pattern was laid out.

A third happy trend is the early development of the nucleus of an eastern green belt around the Royal Garden, the Olympieion and the Stadium, also affording magnificent views towards the Acropolis.



*Fig. 6 Athens, the Royal Palace by F. v. Gärtner and Constitution Square around 1860*

The later slow increase in population during the 19th century was also a favourable factor. The slow demographic development kept the hilly areas free from abrupt building pressures and allowed the timely reafforestation of the hills around 1900, which protected them from urbanization during the 20th century.

On the negative side the possibility of exploring the ancient city centre, the Agora and the so-called Roman Agora, on the Acropolis north slope was lost for a long time due to uncontrolled early rebuilding in the Plaka district during the 19th century and excessive land speculation in Athens. The same holds true to a great extent for the Kerameikos area, the Academy and the Road to the Academy which are still up to the present time only partially uncovered.

The possibility of creating a continuous green belt (i.e. excavation area) around the Acropolis was also lost; this was to have been effected by eliminating the old town, a dream cherished up to the 1960s by many archaeologists and also laymen; in the meantime the attachment to this vision has faded away.



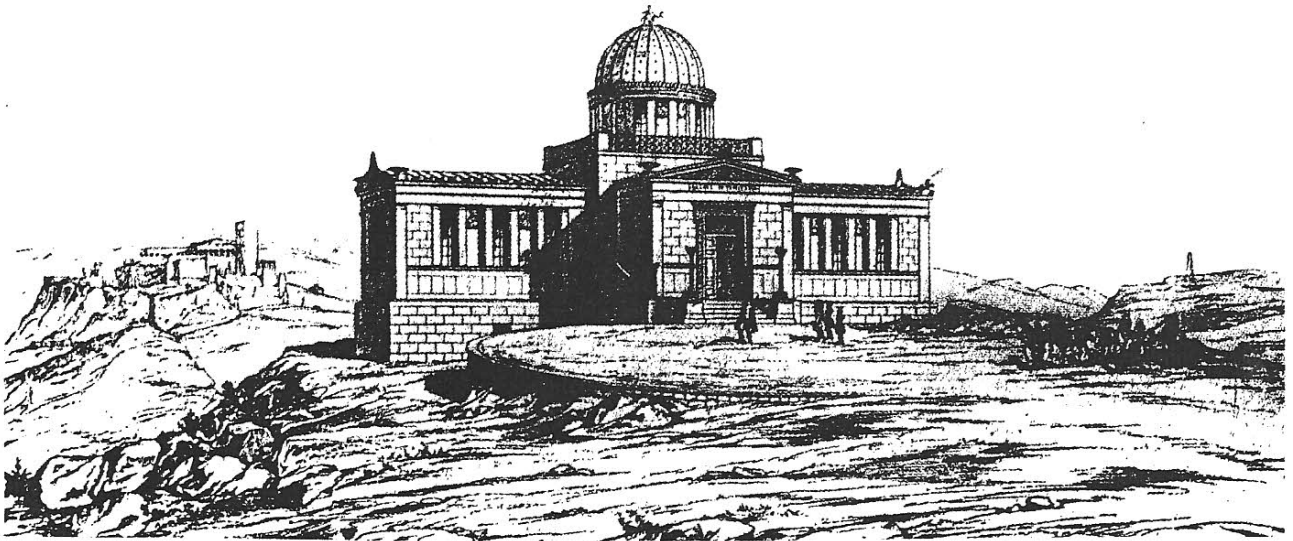


Fig. 7 *The Observatory on the Hill of the Nymphs, 1842-1846, by Theophil Hansen*

Thus in the course of the first decade of Athens' life in the new Greek state the basic preconditions for its later development were set by a happy combination of sound planning measures and spontaneous initiatives, even though there was not yet any recognition of the need for a large unified central cultural-historic area for the future metropolis.

### 3. Later Schemes and Initiatives: The Gradual Creation of the Cultural-Historic Area of Athens

Whereas a very clear formal and functional pattern had been planned for the new city of Athens, the building that was actually carried out was subject to vicissitudes hindering a correct implementation of the initial town-planning scheme. It would, therefore, be wrong to take it for granted that the idea of creating a unified cultural-historic area has been consistently pursued ever since 1833. But, on the other hand, uncoordinated and gradually implemented planning initiatives and also happy coincidences did contribute, over a period of 160 years, to the promotion and partial realization of this aim.

Two complementary basic trends have been the driving forces in the right direction. On the one hand the utopian aim of restoring 'ancient splendour', and on the other hand the ever-present longing for green spaces to relieve the dusty landscape of Athens. Both trends have an equivocal character. They represent genuine desires on the part of the Athenians who, however, were not ready to overcome their petty material interests in order to pursue these idealistic goals consistently. *Thus the good cause has received quite a lot of lip service over a century and a half.*

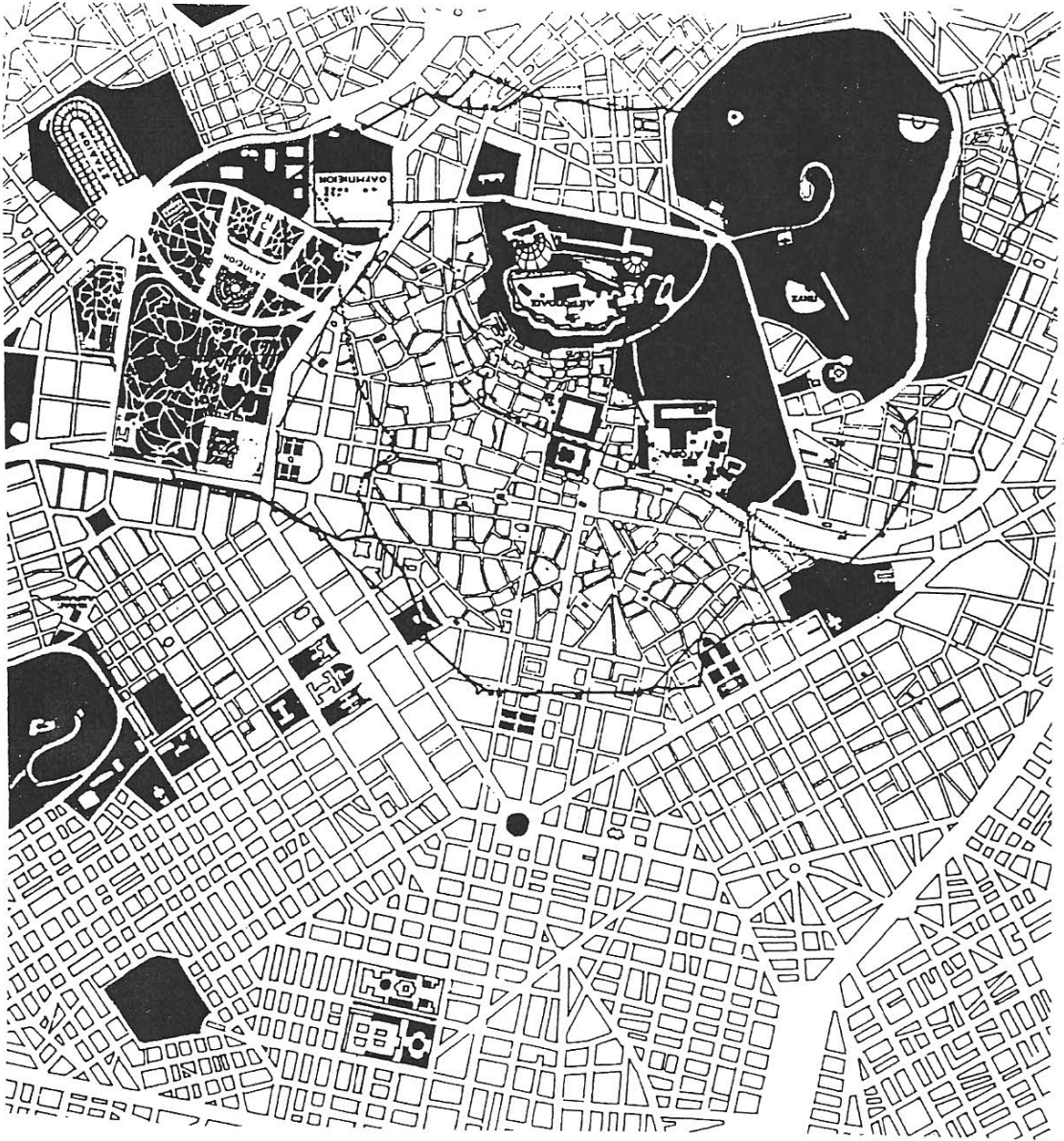
Some negative factors were inherently calamitous: Speculation on urban land and, as a corollary, extreme building densities; the lack of abundant water supply (until the 1960's!) and a low standard of education for the vast majority of the urban population. These are the main factors impeding the creation of a cultural-historic area. Other factors, however, played a positive role as catalysts: the gradual support for excavations and the large-scale expropriations carried out for this purpose (i.e. at the Pnyx, Kerameikos, Agora, ancient Academy); the persistent desire on the part of the Greek sovereigns to develop a green zone next to the palace extending south as far as the Stadium and the Olympieion; the relatively early tree-planting on the historic hills (starting around 1890); and the existence of a large strip along the Ilissos river (occupied by military barracks in earlier times and gradually freed) have repeatedly stimulated the development of the Athenian cultural-historic area.

From the beginning the main thoroughfares in the centre of the modern city, i.e. Peiraios Street, Apostolou Pavlou Street, Amalias Avenue and Olgas Avenue, have chopped up the entire cultural-historic area into separate parts. This disadvantage, inevitably arising from locating the new city centre to the north of the Acropolis (fig. 8), was not a serious threat to developing the cultural-recreational zone as a unit, as long as motorized traffic stayed within moderate bounds (i.e. until World War II). In the meantime these thoroughfares have completely lost their character as boulevards (for promenading) and are now major obstacles to be overcome in the future by introducing underground pedestrian passages.

Thus the history of the gradual creation of the cultural-historic area is focussing mainly on two complementary (although disparate) types of phenomena: *planning initiatives which have been implemented and planning schemes and proposals which have not been carried out.* Each has equal importance for the understanding of the ideological and social driving forces that conditioned the development of the inner city green belt. In one way or another these

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issues have been seminal to the further development of the Athenian cultural-historic area and cover a wide range of questions related to this planning procedure over a long period of time.



*Fig. 8 Athens, the inner city and the green areas in 1998*

In studying the planning concepts for Athens developed by Leo von Klenze it becomes obvious that the famous architect was torn by two conflicting impulses: a deep respect for the historical site demanding that it be kept free of modern architecture and his desire to make his mark with a creation of his own in the glorious setting. This latent but persistent ambition natural to architects has, in general, been kept under good control in Athens over the last 150 years. Apart from some controversial restorations of ancient buildings and some offensive architectural volumes (e.g. the Athens Hilton Hotel) on the periphery of the cultural-historic area, no other modern building has been put up on a prominent site in the vicinity of the Acropolis ensemble.

There is, however, an early exception, unique of its kind: the National Observatory (fig. 7), built in the years 1842-1846 on the top of the Hill of the Nymphs. This site was finally chosen although the Bavarian Academy expressed strong reservations about a scheme altering the character of the archaeological zone. Theophil Hansen (1813-1891) worked out the final plan for the observatory, using neoclassical vocabulary; this was the first project executed by the young architect who later became the leading academic classicizing architect of public buildings

in Athens and Vienna. The relatively small size (25 x 17 m) of the cruciform building, the graceful dome and the extreme simplicity of the repertory of ancient forms lent the Observatory the serene character of an ancient hilltop temple. Although the Observatory stands on the site of an ancient shrine of the Nymphs and Demos (as attested by a rock-cut inscription near the entrance to the building) and is in the immediate vicinity of the Assembly Place of the Pnyx, it has been successfully incorporated into the landscape as a discreet crowning element that has never provoked criticism for being a visual offence to the site.



Fig. 9 The eastern part of the Cultural Park of Athens from SW: Olympieion, Zappeion, Royal Garden, Stadium and Ardetos Hill

The various initial proposals for the layout and siting of the Royal Garden are alternative solutions linked to the basic town-planning options for Athens. None of the schemes was carried out. The present garden reached its final extent (about 16 ha) and layout after a development lasting about 25 years (1837-1862).

The Royal Garden (fig. 9) occupies a nearly rectangular area between the palace and the Olympieion. *From the beginning it was conceived as an urban park sui generis, a freely designed miniature landscape garden*, densely planted with a variety of plants from both northern and southern Europe, giving it something of the character of an arboretum. The rich flora is arranged according to 'a free landscape' style, adapted to the warm climate by an ingenious scheme of densely planted sections, thus creating an agreeable microclimate in the midst of the dry city.

By comparison with urban parks in other European capitals, the Royal Garden (now the National Garden) is relatively small (about 400 x 450 m) but it is truly a delightful microcosm, due to its compactness and seclusion. Today the whole park is irrigated by means of a network of open channels, guiding the water in a complex system of compartments which can be watered as required. This ingenious design made it possible to develop Athenian parks on flat ground fairly quickly.

We owe this exemplary enterprise to Queen Amalia's tenacity, by means of which the new town was provided with public amenities and aesthetic pleasures hitherto unknown in those latitudes. There was not, however, immediate unanimous acceptance of central European urban landscaping schemes applied to Athenian terrain. The controversy about the extent to which 'greenery' should be introduced into the Athenian setting is still alive today. Edmond About mentions that Theophile Gauthier was indignant at greeneries planted on such a picturesque site, hiding the rock formations. In spite of all the controversies about the desirability of imposing 'western' landscape



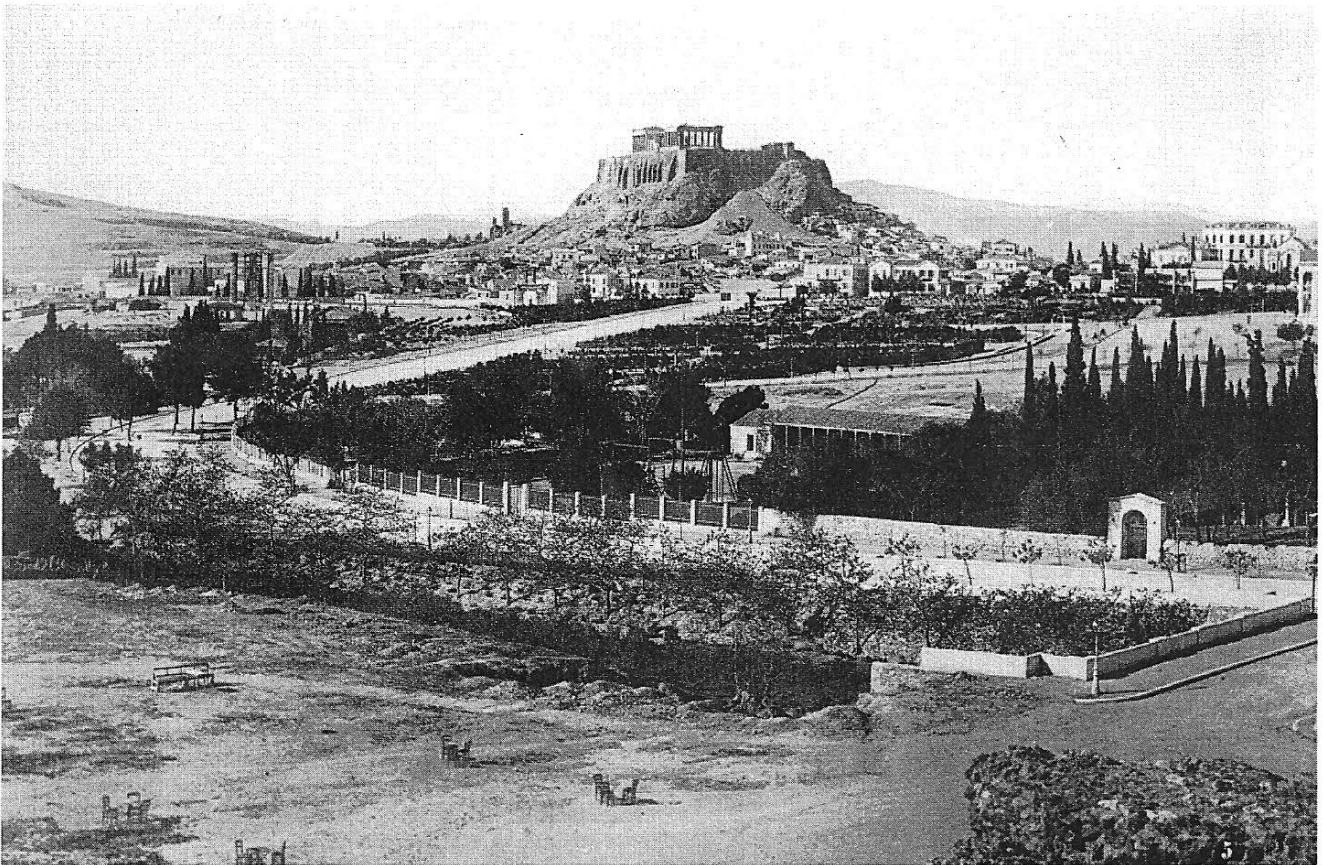
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designs on classical soil, the fact remains that the green nucleus of what would later become the eastern half of the historic area of Athens was established by the first sovereigns of Greece who saw to it that the Royal Garden was planted and that the adjacent land as far south as the Olympieion was safeguarded by leaving it unbuilt for a later extension of the park.

In 1832 when Kleanthes and Schaubert planned the new city of Athens, the Stadium was still unexcavated and nothing of it could be seen although the site had been identified in the gully between two hills on the banks of the Ilissos. The architects, however, took the symbolic significance of the Stadium into consideration and oriented one of the three main avenues of their plan to its axis. This avenue (named Stadion Street) which was supposed to connect the original site for the palace (present-day Omonia Square) with the entrance to the Stadium was interrupted at the half-way point by the construction of the palace at Syntagma Square and by planting the palace garden in the eastern part of town.

In 1869 Ernst Ziller<sup>3</sup> began excavating at his own expense on the innermost part of the gully where he was successful in finding the sphendone (semi-circular end) of the track.

In 1895, at the instigation of Baron Pierre de Coubertin, King George I proclaimed - against the will of his government - the first international Olympic Games of modern times, to be held in Athens in April 1896. By this time the Zappeion Exhibition Hall had been completed and the Zappeion public gardens extending as far as the Stadium on the east had been planted (fig. 10).



*Fig. 10 The Acropolis seen from the Stadium, ca.1890. In the foreground the Ilissos, behind it the newly planted Zappeion Gardens*

The Stadium was rebuilt for the first Olympic Games, an ambitious plan, far beyond the financial resources of the young state. Only the ancient substructure for the seating arrangements remained in situ; the entire cavea of

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Ziller (1837-1923), born in Oberlössnitz, studied in Dresden under Gottfried Semper and first came to Greece in 1861, aged 24, as an assistant to Theophilus Hansen in order to supervise construction of the Academy and the National Library, designed by Hansen. After four years of further training in Italy (1864-1868) he settled down in Athens for the rest of his life where he became the leading architect of the second half of the 19th century and up until the first World War. He designed important public buildings, such as the palace for the crown prince (the New Palace, now the Presidential Mansion), the National Theatre in Athens, the town hall in Hermoupolis, and a great number of private residences, the most famous of which is the Iliou Melathron, Schliemann's house in Athens. He was professor at the Polytechnion in Athens and served as director in the Ministry of Public Works.

white Pentelic marble had to be rebuilt, but scattered fragments of architectural material enabled the architect, A. Metaxas, to achieve an admirably accurate reconstruction, the largest one of all times on classical ground (fig. 11). The restored Stadium, although huge (with upper longitudinal axis of 250 m), exactly occupies its original site in the hollow between two hills and therefore gives the impression of fitting into the natural contours rather than being superimposed. The Stadium took about ten years to build (1896-1906) and was financed by the Greek benefactor Georgios Averoff of Alexandria, who generously donated 120,000 gold pounds. *With its completion a spatial frame of reference was created by three monumental landmarks: the Zappeion exhibition hall to the north and the Olympieion and Stadium to the south* framing the Zappeion Gardens and the unbuilt area on the banks of the Ilissos extending as a continuation of the Royal Garden to the south.

The restored Stadium not only fulfilled practical functions as a place where large crowds could attend athletic and cultural events, it became an important symbolic landmark of the modern city, imbued with the aura of ancient times. The reconstruction also played a decisive role in keeping the surrounding hilly area unbuilt and thus made it possible to replant from the beginning of the 20th century onward.

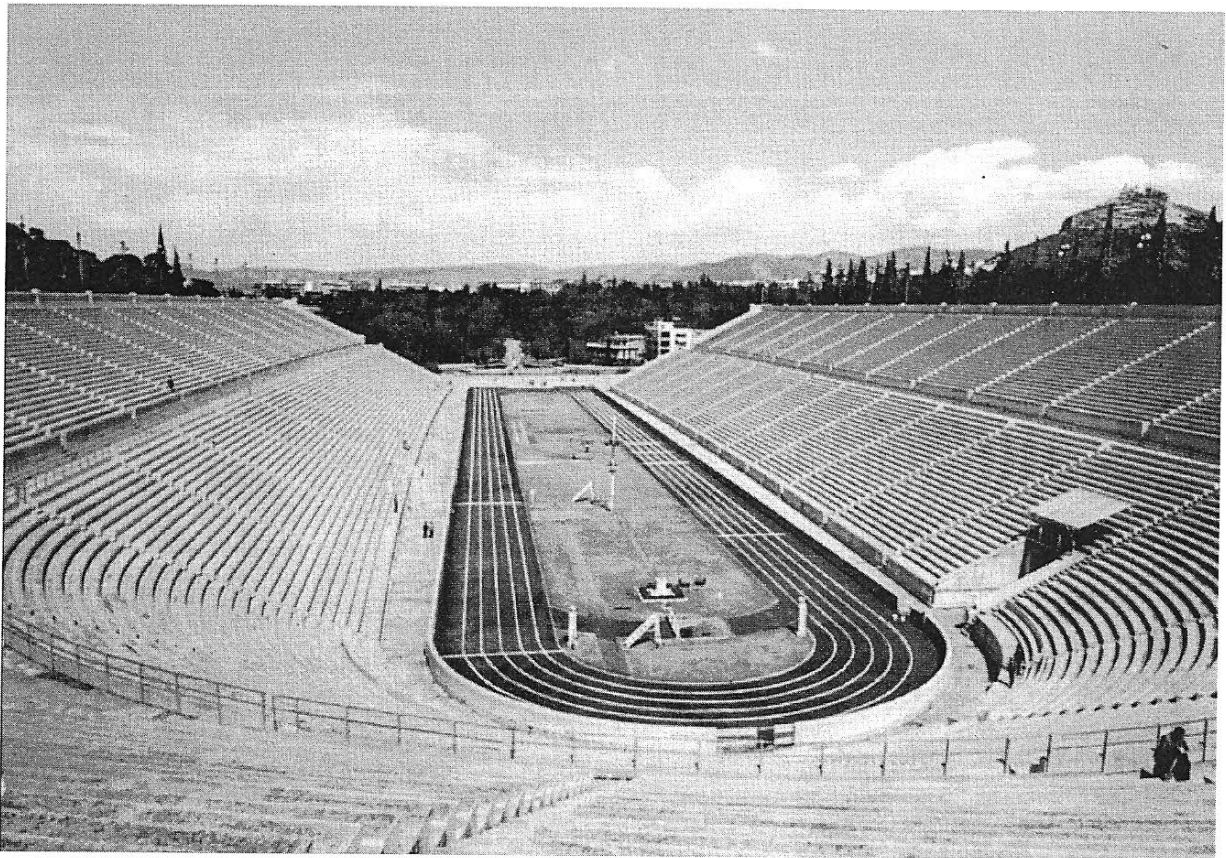


Fig. 11 The Panathenaic (Hadrianic) Stadium after its reconstruction in the Years 1896-1906

After George I became King of the Hellenes in 1864, a period of political stabilization set in and trade and industry gradually developed. On the initiative of Evangelos and Constantine Zappas, rich merchants belonging to the Greek community in Rumania, the so-called Olympia Festivals were organized between 1859 and 1888, periodic national exhibitions of commercial and industrial products.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The first Olympia exhibition was held in 1859 in a wooden barracks at the beginning of Peiraios Street near Omonia Square, the second in 1870 was held in the half-finished building of the National Museum on Patission Avenue, the third in 1875 in a temporary building on the west side of the present Zappeion Gardens, and the fourth Olympia exhibition in 1888 in the newly completed Zappeion Exhibition Hall.



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A magnificent exhibition hall was built in 1875-1888 with a sizable donation from the Zappas brothers; the site was a large esplanade south of the Royal Garden, facing the Stadium, the Olympieion and the Acropolis. As in the case of many 19th century buildings in Athens, the Zappeion venture depended on private donations; the main contribution from the state was a suitable building site. It is obvious that the most important state property on the border of the inner town was the southern extension of the Royal Garden, which had to be offered for the construction of the national exhibition hall.

Right from the beginning the public function of the new building and the open layout of its surrounding gardens were in sharp contrast to the secluded, tranquil atmosphere of the Royal Garden. This contrast between the two neighbouring recreation areas was perceived as a positive element, the two parks being compatible in their formal designs

The original plans of the Zappeion building were drawn up by the French architect Boulanger (who also designed the Metropolitan Church of Athens). His design was strongly influenced by the contemporary European fashion for iron structures and had a central rotunda with a dome 27 meters in diameter! Pompous spacious staircases were planned in front of the main entrances to the building. The Zappeion building (fig. 12) is large, with about 6000 square metres of covered and 3000 square metres of uncovered floor space, and it took a long time to build. Boulanger died in 1875 and in 1880 the building committee asked Theophilus Hansen for expert advice on how to continue this interminable project. The great architect hit on the brilliant idea of converting the central roofed rotunda into a round patio with an Ionic colonnade, ideal for open-air concerts and solemn festivities.

By eliminating the bulky staircases and adding a large central portico with eight Corinthian columns and also by giving the facades severely classicizing formal features, Hansen succeeded in creating a Greek Revival structure harmonizing with the two ancient monuments to the south: the Stadium and the Olympieion. For a hundred years the Zappeion building has served as the only public exhibition hall of some size in Athens; for some decades it also housed the temporary exhibits of the National Gallery and the biennial Panhellenic exhibitions of contemporary painting; during the last decade one part of the building was adapted to serve as the headquarters for the sessions of the European Community in Athens.

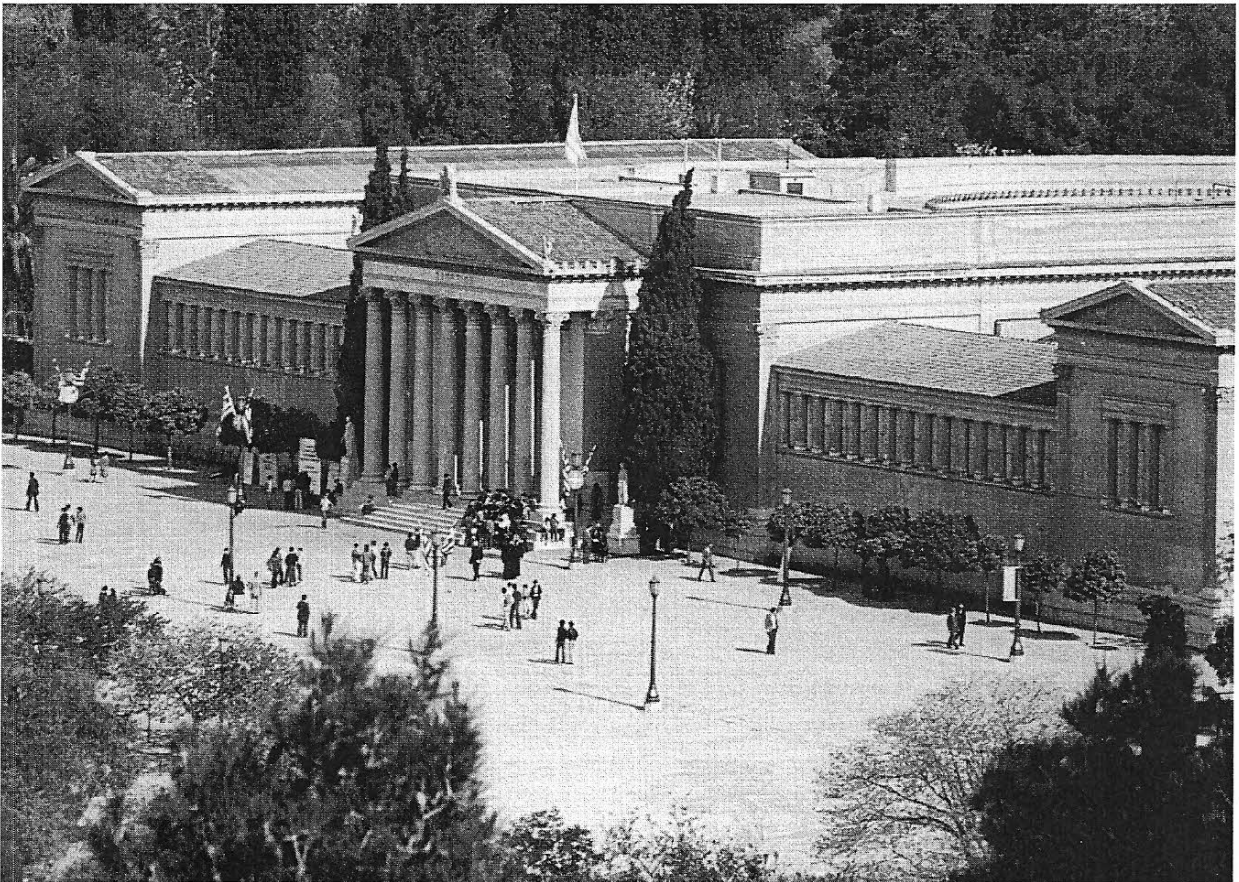


Fig. 12 The Zappeion Exhibition Hall (1875-1888)



The Zappeion Gardens around the exhibition hall, extending from the Stadium at the east to the edge of the old town (Amalias Avenue) at the west, are fairly large at 11.4 ha, i.e two thirds of the surface of the Royal Garden. Here, too, Theophilus Hansen did the planning and his French colleague Desiré Matton designed and planted the parterres and emphasized two main axes. The esplanade, 200 x 60 m, was designed as a monumental setting in front of the building. During construction a Roman bath complex was found at the site; it is now covered over by the esplanade. The great Zappeion terrace gently sloping southwards is one of the most popular places of recreation for the general public in present-day Athens; the Athenians have bonded with it. Occasionally it is used for exhibitions, but more than that, it is a favourite place for promenading in a green environment. *Except for the tops of the inner city hills, the Zappeion esplanade is the only place in the town affording magnificent views towards the ancient monuments nearby, the Acropolis and the mountains of Attica.*



Fig. 13 The Ilissos bed in front of the stadium, and the eastern part of Athens around the mansion of the duchess of Piacenza

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Although ancient authors have given us an idyllic vision of the Ilissos valley,<sup>5</sup> most of the 19th century pictorial documents and the accounts of visitors present the Ilissos (fig. 13) as a dried out, dusty river bed. In the 19th century the most interesting part of the Ilissos valley was the short section between the Roman bridge at the Stadium and the Kallirrhoe spring south of the Olympieion. The maximum length of this area is 800 m, the maximum width 200 m. Here a flat island was formed between two arms of the almost dry brook; it was called Vatrachonisi (Frog Island).

In the early 1870s, before the Zappeion gardens were planted and the Stadium was restored, Vatrachonisi became a centre for open-air amusements. In a rather haphazard way makeshift theatre facilities and café dansants establishments were installed one after another in this area. Within a very short time, 1871-1873, three open-air establishments were set up on Vatrachonisi; they had names with ancient associations: the 'Cave of the Nymphs', the 'Theatre of the Ilissian Muses' and the 'Paradise'. These early centres of entertainment near the Ilissos determined the future of the district as an area for recreational uses. The theatres and cafés were followed by gradual installation of athletic facilities: tennis courts, Olympic swimming pool, National Athletic League. Although this evolution did protect the right bank of the Ilissos from being built over with houses, it did not allow a park-like design along the river banks, which could have lent the Athenian townscape an especial charm, if even a small amount of running water would have been provided to revive the historic fame of the Ilissos.



Fig. 14 The central part of the Cultural Park of Athens from NW. In the foreground: Areopagus, Acropolis, old town 'Plaka'. In the background: Olympieion, Zappeion, Stadium, Ardetos hill, First Cemetery of Athens

Ernst Ziller, the most successful Athenian architect of the second half of the 19th century, was not only a brilliant designer in the late neo-classical eclectic style, he was also an impassioned archaeologist who investigated the Stadium, the Theatre of Dionysos and the optical refinements of the Parthenon. He was the first to study thoroughly the water supply system of ancient Athens, tracing the lines of the so-called Peisistratid and Hadrianic underground water supply channels.

5 In the *Phaedrus* Plato gives us a delightful description of the Ilissos valley: '*Socrates*: Let us turn aside here and go along the Ilissos; then we can sit down quietly wherever we please. - *Phaedrus*: I am fortunate, it seems, in being barefoot; you are so always. It is easiest then for us to go along the brook with our feet in the water, and it is not unpleasant, especially at this time of the year and the day. - *Socrates*: Lead on then, and look out for a good place where we may sit. - *Phaedrus*: Do you see that very tall plane tree? - *Socrates*: What of it? - *Phaedrus*: There is a shade there and a moderate breeze and grass to sit on, or, if we like, to lie down on.'



In a first phase Ernst Ziller had envisaged building a monument (heroon) commemorating Greek Independence, an idea which Lysandros Kaftanzoglou had tackled with a design in 1835, the site not specified. Ziller's monument was to be on the summit of Lykabettos, a square building with a crowning cupola, the total height about 50 m, and a large square peristyle, the whole to be supported on large substructures as an artificial peak crowning the hill. Had this megalomaniac project been realized, it would have been wildly out of scale, ruining the natural skyline of the town, competing with the Acropolis ensemble to the south in a confusing way.

Ziller's landscaping proposals were far more realistic. By means of evocative water colours he proposed around 1886 a general embellishment scheme for the slopes of Lykabettos. A general perspective view from the SE shows lofty clumps of trees (both coniferous and deciduous) scattered on the slope with airy pavilions and terraces at vantage points, enlivening the setting. *Although the project was not implemented, Ziller's proposal had a decisive impact on the later treatment of Lykabettos and other Athenian hills.* The extensive reforestation program initiated by Princess Sophia around the turn of the century, with the aim of protecting the Athenian hills from being settled, harks back to Ernst Ziller's ideas for embellishing Lykabettos.

A central section of the cultural-historic area (fig. 14) has been formed by sites which have gradually increased by means of donations of property and expropriation measures. Due to von Klenze's decisive intervention as early as 1834 the Acropolis plateau was freed and preserved as a monumental ensemble and inviolable archaeological precinct ever since. As a consequence almost continuous investigations were carried out on the Acropolis throughout the 19th century down to the large-scale campaign of 1886-1890.

Excavations outside the Acropolis have not been pursued on any systematic plan. At the turn of the century, however, a first inner archaeological zone was created after the following sites had been investigated: the Olympieion, Theatre of Dionysos, Stoa of Eumenes, Odeion of Herodes Atticus, the Areopagus-Pnyx Valley and the Pnyx terrace. Investigations here and there within the old town cleared the Stoa of Attalos and part of the Odeion of Agrippa (1859-1862); after the bazaar of the old town burnt down the Library of Hadrian was partly cleared (1885) and also the Roman Agora (1890-1891). From 1863 on the Kerameikos site was continuously investigated by the Archaeological Society at Athens.

*Thus archaeological research during the 19th century secured the status non edificandi, of the immediate surroundings of the Acropolis, of the western hills, of the Olympieion and Stadium,* while the large scale campaigns for clearing the Agora, the Kerameikos and the Academy were still to come.

At the beginning of the 19th century the aridity, desolation and neglect of the Attic landscape (fig. 15) in the immediate vicinity of Athens after many centuries of slow decay and depopulation was a sad fact, to which many foreign visitors and precise pictorial documentation attest. There was scarcely any improvement during the entire 19th century. Except for the Royal Garden (a unique oasis of greenery on the eastern edge of the town) and the age-old olive grove in the Kephissos plain extending north to southwest of the town, no other afforestation existed in the capital of the new state.

This problematic state of the natural environment did not, however, diminish the immense attraction and charm exerted by the Attic setting. Over and over again, European visitors accustomed to much greener and more luxurious landscapes in their native countries were spellbound by the *limpidity of the atmosphere, the sculptural qualities of the rock formations, the changing effects of light and shadow, the brilliance of the colors and the harmonious contours of the mountains.* Western visitors discovered a new kind of natural beauty on classical ground. On the one hand there were ecological and climatic disadvantages caused by a number of factors including the drying up of underground water reserves, lack of recreational areas in the town and of physical barriers against the winds. On the other hand, the aesthetic image of the Athenian landscape was not only accepted but even deeply admired by visiting architects, archaeologists and artists as a natural setting of great beauty further enhanced by the unique historical associations and ancient monuments.

From the beginning, however, various dangers threatened the natural contours with their historic associations. Fortunately, the early planning proposals for developing the new town on the western hills, i.e. the Areopagus, Philopappos hill and the Hill of the Nymphs, which would have involved obliterating these historic sites, were not carried out. During the 20th century need for housing caused uncontrolled rapid building, with the result that the lower slopes of Lykabettos were covered over, the same happened also at Strephi hill (Anchesmos) and at the hill of Kolonos; even the heights of Pankrati were completely urbanized. The main bulk of the historic hills (including Ardetos, Hill of the Nymphs, Philopappos, Areopagus) did, however, remain unsettled, mainly because they were planted with trees around the turn of the 19-20th century.

The most destructive calamity afflicting the historic hills of the inner town during the 19th century was uncontrolled quarrying. The first Greek law concerning ancient monuments, promulgated as early as 1834, prohibited lime kilns within 2500 m of archaeological areas; no restrictions on quarrying were included. Quarrying began in 1835 on the northern slopes of Lykabettos, on Strephi, and the Pnyx range. The authorities reacted to these



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depredations by prohibiting them by law. These ordinances, however, had a very questionable validity, as a good part of the hilly terrain was thought to be private property liable to expropriation in order to protect the landscape. During the first building boom in Athens, between 1835 and 1842, illegal and uncontrolled quarrying continued on all Athenian hills, carving deep wounds in the delicate natural contours of the landscape, still visible today. The main deformations are on the southern and central part of Lykabettos, on the peak of Strephi, and on the southwestern slopes of Philopappos. This last area was legally exploited until the end of the 19th century!

Up to the end of the 19th century almost nothing was done to improve the image of the town by new planting. The actual program of replanting the Athenian hills started only about the turn of the century and was pursued tenaciously for three generations. The plants are very well chosen: cacti, pine trees, cypresses and wild olive trees, i.e. evergreens that can survive on rainwater alone; their sculptural forms go well with the contours of the landscape. The total surface of the inner city hills is about 120 ha, 100 of which have been replanted. This was the first constructive treatment of the historic areas, banishing forever the threat of building operations at those places. *This timely replanting is one of the most constructive planning measures taken for the city* (especially if one considers the otherwise rather unhappy and uncoordinated evolution of the town), although genuine landscaping treatment maintained by an irrigation network developed only in the course of the last decades.

A final point is that up until today, apart from some provisional open-air theatres and tourist pavilions, *no large modern structures have been inflicted on the historic hills to the detriment of nearby ancient monuments*. Thus the hilltops have not been disfigured with any so-called crowning elements and the crowning insult to the Attic landscape planned by the dictatorial regime of 1967-1974, i.e. a gigantic church, conceived as the Athenian answer to Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, to be built on Tourkovounia in northern Athens, was never carried out to the great good fortune of the Athenian cityscape.

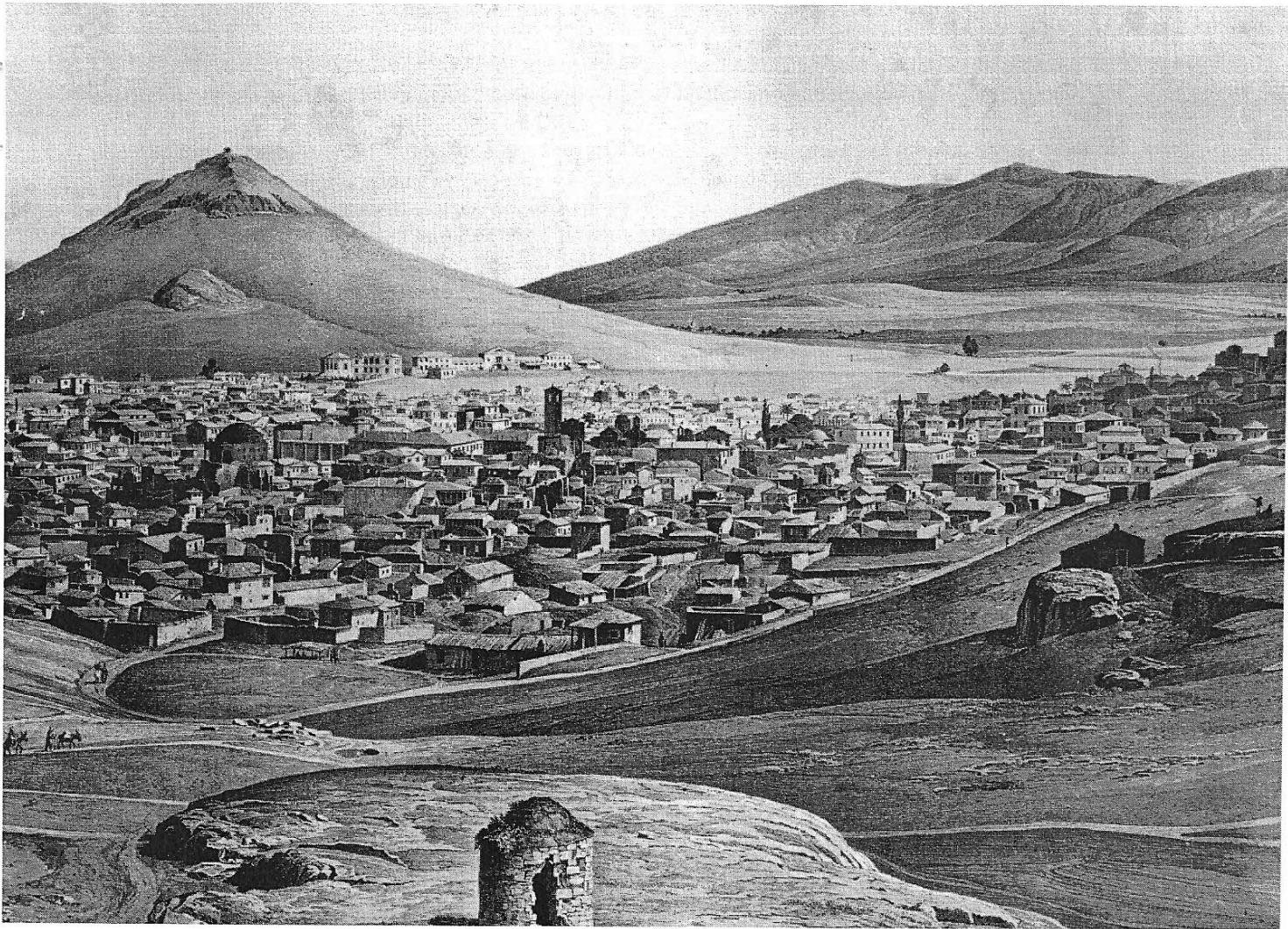


Fig. 15 Central part of the Athens panorama by Ferdinand Stademann (1836)

During the course of the 20th century a considerable number of master plans, aiming at both the rehabilitation of the central Athens area and at orderly expansion, have been elaborated by private experts, town-planning advisors appointed by the government, and also by municipal and state town-planning administration. By the turn of the century the population of Athens was over 120,000 and the congestion in the centre of the old city, i.e. the southern part of the triangle bounded by Ermou, Peiraios and Stadiou Streets, was considered as the unhappy legacy from the time before 1821. Starting with Paul Vakas' proposals for regulating traffic in central Athens in 1896, the basic idea of a new axis to be cut through the old town was repeatedly formulated by various professionals and government authorities during the following decades.

The solutions proposed were quite similar in their essentials: *the common element was the breakthrough of a straight avenue, 400 m long, leading from the University building halfway down Panepistimiou Street to Monastiraki Square next to the Library of Hadrian on the northern edge of the archaeological zone.*

The implicit, and in some cases explicit, motivation for this proposal can be found in:

- a) the intention of creating a direct visual and functional link between the 'Athenian Trilogy' in the new part of the city, half way between Omonia and Syntagma Squares and the excavation area on the SW edge of the inner town. A symbolic axis was envisaged linking the cultural facilities of modern Athens with its ancient heritage.
- b) the tardy attempt to excavate a substantial portion of the ancient residential area of the town situated in this large area (400 x 125 m, i.e. 5 ha), which could be excavated were the avenue to be constructed.

This recurrent idea is to be found in the following master plan concepts for Athens:

- 1896 plan by the architect Paul Vakas
- 1908 plan by Athanasios Georgiadis
- 1911 town-planning expertise and a master plan of Athens by Ludwig Hoffmann
- 1914 town-planning expertise and master plan of Athens by Thomas Mawson
- 1918 plan by Stylianos Leloudas
- 1954 master plan of Athens worked out by the Ministry of Public Works
- 1959 study for the breakthrough of Korais Street worked out by the housing division of the Ministry of Public Works.

The most recent attempt to realize this recurrent scheme was made as late as 1959. Under the aegis of K. Karamanlis, the then Prime Minister, the housing division of the Ministry of Public Works produced an urban restructuring study based on a detailed expropriation survey in order to make a breakthrough on the line of Korais Street and to create a state administrative district, 45 years after the first very similar proposal of Mawson and 130 years after the foundation of modern Athens.

All of these proposals remained in the realm of theory. The costs of expropriation and the hardships for commercial enterprises in the central area of the town were insurmountable difficulties hindering the realization of this plan. The creation of a district for government offices in the heart of the town would have been by the way a severe planning error, increasing traffic congestion and making a barrier of high-rise buildings in the immediate vicinity of the monumental heritage.

Although the various proposals and planning interventions described so far are of considerable importance for the gradual emergence of the cultural-historic area, they are not essentially comprehensive. They are to be considered as substantial early contributions to an overall concept not yet explicitly formulated, as preliminary steps in the right direction.

*The seminal concept of creating a large unified inner city green belt emerged for the first time during World War I: It was Mawson's 'Replanning of Athens' scheme in 1914-1919. After World War II it was reintroduced in an expanded version (Biris' plan in 1946) and for a third time by a group of architects in 1980 (Photiadis' plan). It is worth noting that the authors of later proposals never referred to similar earlier ones; thus the idea seems to have been invented, or rather reinvented, each time anew. The Greek state and/or the municipality of Athens never ratified a plan for creating an integrated inner city green belt. The idea came into being via the studies mentioned above and survived as a latent principle influencing all later thinking.*

The main concern of Mawson's plan was the functional reorganization of a modern metropolis of 400,000 people (planning target set by the study) rather than the extension and beautification of the archaeological zone. Yet his plan does contain the kernel of the idea for unifying, to a certain degree, the various recreational areas in the centre of Athens: 'The internal life of the city needs consideration (...) an obvious necessity is a boulevard, park and playground system which shall add dignity to the metropolis and match its requirements'. The plan clearly aims at creating a direct link between the Stadium/Zappeion area and the Acropolis with the western hills. Radiating out from the entrance to the Stadium two proposed main axes are prolonged as tangential boulevards, leading around the Acropolis and converging in the Hephaisteion area. These streets, although not designed as pedestrian malls, are conceived as urban promenades linking the most attractive and prestigious sites of the inner city (namely

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the Stadium, Zappeion, Olympieion, Theatre of Dionysos, Odeion of Herodes Atticus, Plaka, Hephaisteion) and as offering an overall visual experience of high quality. On the plan the heavy traffic routes acting as barriers, such as Amalias Avenue and Apostolou Pavlou Street, both of which present obstacles to unifying the area, have not been eliminated or at least pedestrianized nor even alleviated by underpasses; furthermore the fabric of the old town is largely destroyed by numerous unjustifiable breakthroughs of new secondary streets.

The ancient monuments on the lower north slopes of the Acropolis are treated in a very characteristic way. Whereas no general excavation of this focal area of ancient Athens was envisaged, the ancient sites were treated eclectically: the Hephaisteion, the Stoa of Attalos, the Library of Hadrian and the Roman Agora are considered as huge objets trouvés, as visual focal points surrounded by promenades and also by some blocks of the 19th century town which should be preserved. Here again the antiquities function as representative elements adorning the modern metropolis. Even though the Mawson plan (judged unrealistic at the time and never implemented) did not by any means aim at creating an archaeological excavation zone, it has the indisputable merit of being the first to introduce the concept of unifying the inner city green areas and remains the prototype of all later considerations relating to the inner city green belt.

When modern buildings are erected in the vicinity of ancient monuments or historic sites, establishing and enforcing the right architectural scale poses a major aesthetic problem. Inappropriate and incompatible built volumes introduced on or near critical sites not only disturb and detract from the aesthetic effect of the monuments themselves, they also destroy the original harmonious relationship between the ancient monuments and the carefully chosen sites on which they were built. Thus a sound policy for the preservation of historic monuments has to cope not only with the technical and structural problems of conservation, but must also keep under control parameters of a more general nature such as:

- a) Preservation of the natural features of the historic landscape.
- b) Exclusion of incompatible modern functions from the vicinity of historic sites.
- c) Establishing and maintaining a suitable scale for modern architecture in the vicinity of historic sites.

The serious damage imposed upon the historic Athenian landscape by quarrying has already been discussed. Incompatible and environmentally harmful land uses in the vicinity of the cultural-historic area have been the exception rather than the rule in Athens.<sup>6</sup> In the past the only industrial pollution threatening the monumental heritage was the gas plant at the end of Ermou Street; this source of pollution has recently been removed and the gas plant is being converted into a park of industrial archaeology.

Modern building activities are responsible for different kinds of aesthetic offences against the historic monuments. *A general threat is the upzoning of the central districts of the city which occurred during the last fifty years.* The airy classicizing town of the 19th century, with its two-storey buildings disposed on the old layout of streets, evolved into an extremely dense urban fabric with maximal building heights of six to ten storeys. Thus a continuous wall of modern structures has been erected north of the Plaka (downtown area), along one side of Amalias Avenue to the east and along Syngrou Boulevard to the south. Although the Acropolis monuments can still be glimpsed from Syntagma Square and other locations of the inner city, the Acropolis and the western hills can no longer be seen as an ensemble. The monuments are cut off from their natural pedestal, floating in the air above the distracting scenery of the apartment houses.

The visual conditions are, however, quite different for an observer either on the Zappeion esplanade or in the as yet low-rise districts south and west of the Acropolis. From here the inner city hills and their monuments are still perceived as an ensemble; i.e. in the context of their natural setting with Lykabettos, Hymettos and Penteli in the background. The chain of the inner city hills and large unbuilt areas, as for example, the Olympieion and Zappeion terraces, still offer interesting vantage points from which the townscape and several parts of the cultural-historical area of Athens may still be seen as a whole.

The Greek Archaeological Service exercises control over building activities inside a radius of 500 m from any listed monument. This has been fairly although not invariably effective in keeping building heights near historic monuments extremely low (i.e. 1-3 storeys). In general it may be stated that the velum of the Athenian urban fabric has been kept fairly even with no dramatic variations in height. About a dozen high-rise buildings of 12-30 storeys constructed during the last two decades are situated, happily enough, at a considerable distance from the core of the town.<sup>7</sup> There is, however, one exception to this favourable distribution: The unique blow to the setting of the

6 Athens has been fortunate in that early industrial developments in the Attic basin in the 19th century were established mainly in the harbor town of Peiraeus or in the Kephissos valley to the west of the city. Thus the entire central part of the agglomeration situated between the inner city hills was left free from any industrial establishment.

7 Two offensive built volumes, private apartment houses with many storeys, were expropriated and demolished during the 1960s for aesthetic and/or functional reasons. The one was next to the Theatre of Dionysos on Dion. Areopagitou Avenue and the other was south of the Byzantine Museum on Vas. Konstantinou Boulevard.



Acropolis occurred as late as 1958-1962, when the Hilton Hotel, 14 storeys, 50 m high, was erected on the eastern edge of the cultural-historic area, at the juncture of Kephissias and Vas. Konstantinou Avenues, 2 km east of the Acropolis. The Hilton venture was severely criticized at first. Nowadays, almost 35 years later, opinions are less unfavourable. *The aesthetic disturbance caused by this building is fairly harmless compared to the intrusion that would have been caused by skyscrapers in central Athens. Fortunately this did not happen.*

In 1929-1930 Syntagma Square was remodelled on the occasion of the construction of the Monument to the Unknown Soldier, a rather unhappy design by E. Lazaridis including a retaining wall which ruined the original esplanade in front of the palace. An oversized open-air theatre was started to the west of Philopappos hill, left unfinished in 1940 and is now an unsightly blot marring the historic site with its important remains of ancient roads and houses.

During World War II an architectural competition was launched with the obvious aim of unifying the area extending from Vasilissis Sophias Avenue on the north to the site of Kallirrhoe Spring and the Ilissos banks to the south in order to create an integrated recreational area for the capital. The competition was launched by the Steering Committee of the Zappeion Building and Gardens, an independent body administering the Zappas endowment.

It is interesting to note that during such a depressing period many entries were presented; nine different projects were submitted. Although the texts are, unfortunately, missing, the designs themselves are self-explanatory. By analyzing these projects some general concepts, held in common, can be recognized as follows: A common feature of all the projects was to do away with the Ilissos river bed between the Stadium and the Olympieion, filling it up and making a boulevard on top connecting the Stadium esplanade with the start of Syngrou Boulevard south of the Olympieion.

All of the projects proposed an extension of the green areas around the Olympieion and the elimination of Vas. Olgas Avenue as an east-west traffic route. The majority of the proposals treat the ancient terrace of the Olympieion with respect, keeping this area untouched and the columns of the temple as a gigantic landmark in the overall composition. Only two projects show a decorative landscape treatment of the terrace with parterres, a design depriving the ancient setting of its severe majesty. In all projects the proposed planting compartments and parterres have a patchwork character. No clear decision is reached whether to have a more informal landscaping treatment as in the Royal Garden or geometric patterns as in the Zappeion Gardens. All projects try to reach an impossible compromise between the two types of design, with very poor results.

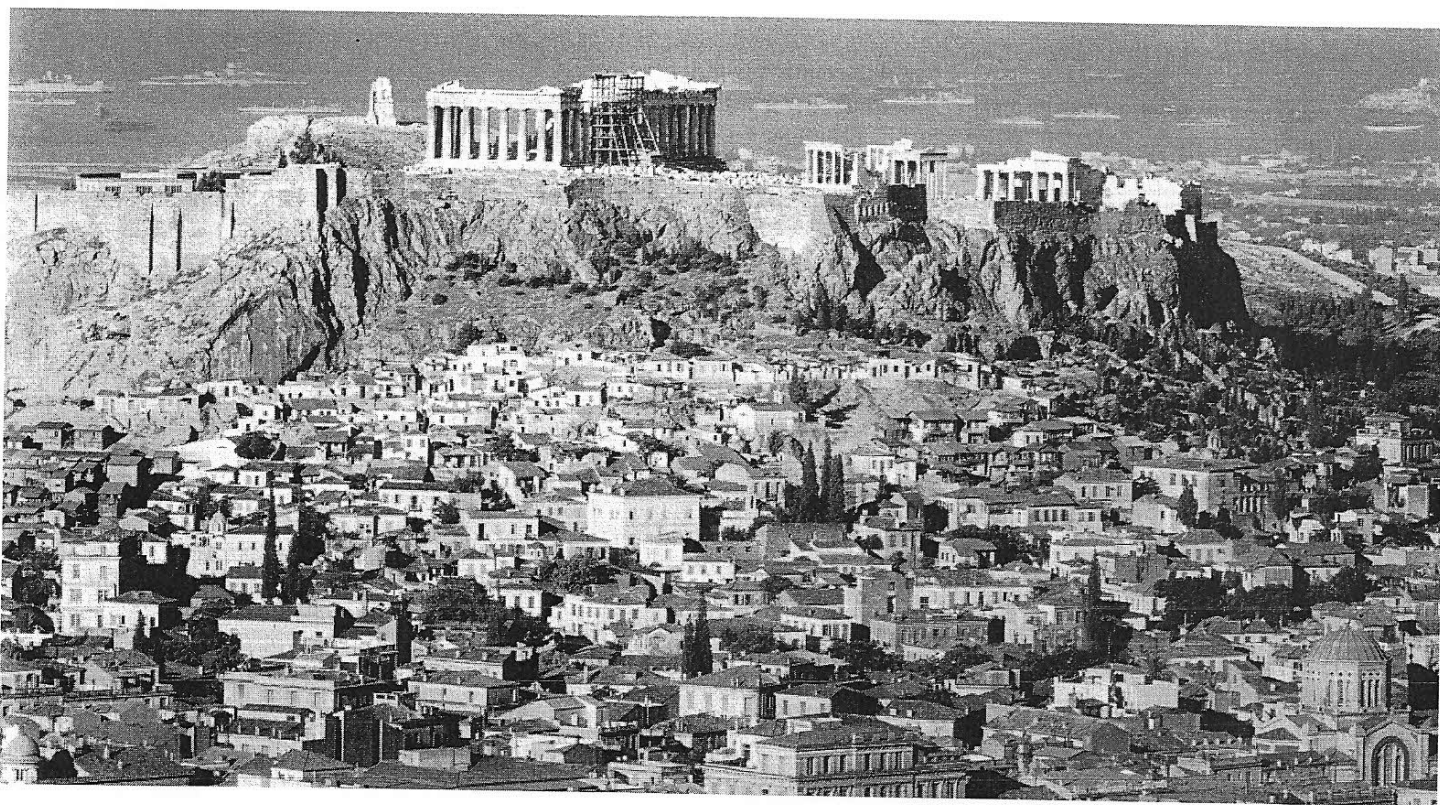


Fig. 16 The Acropolis and the old town 'Plaka' on its northern slopes. Photography by Walter Hege, 1933

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All of the designs are marked by a strongly formalist and almost embarrassed attitude. Whereas the constructive step of unifying the area was the aim of the competition, the proposals for fulfilling this aim display a remarkable poverty of ideas and downright uneasiness. *The only reasonable solution, i.e. to incorporate the three units (Zappeion, Stadium, Olympieion) in a large-scale freely landscaped area while keeping the Royal Garden intact seems to have been overlooked by all the participants.* None of the projects has been carried out.

By the end of World War II important excavations in the Agora, the Kerameikos and the Academy area had increased the amount of unbuilt areas in the inner city. But the idea of creating a unified recreational area by linking the urban parks, the replanted hills, the excavations areas and the ancient monuments in the centre of town seemed to have fallen into oblivion.

The architect and town-planner Constantine Biris deserves praise for reviving this idea directly after the war. But no concrete steps were taken and his proposals were ignored, just as in the case of the similar proposal first made by Mawson in 1919. For forty years, from the mid-1920s to the mid-1960s, Biris was the town-planning chief officer of the Athens municipality. He was constantly frustrated because his own department was not able to coordinate planning initiatives for Athens. At that time local self-government was a fiction and the decisions were actually taken by the central government (the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of the Athens Metropolitan area existing between 1936-1940).

In 1946 Biris still had hopes that his proposals would meet with a favourable response and published (in Greek and English) an outline of a master plan of Athens, pleading for the creation of a parallel administrative capital to the west of Athens at Megara and for converting Athens into a residential and cultural national centre. Biris insisted on the necessity of large-scale excavations in order to implement (even a century later) the initial proposal of Kleanthes and Schaubert: *'Of chief importance in rehabilitating Athens is the question of uncovering and displaying the site of the ancient city. The entire civilized world is interested in this. The American people were the first to provide the financial means for a large operation; we refer to the uncovering of the ancient Agora with its archaeological finds of great scientific value. Shortly afterwards, the late Mr. P. Aristophron, a Greek, provided the funds which revealed the ruins of the Academy of Plato. At this moment we are at a turning point in the history of civilization. When the post-war turmoil ceases, the interest of the world will again be focussed on cultural and humanitarian ideals. The imperishable fame of ancient Athens will again attract the interest of the world. We should be prepared to take care of this future interest in Athens. We need to make a world-wide appeal for assistance to uncover the whole site of the ancient city. The modern buildings which cover the site and which approach too closely the Acropolis and the archaeological localities of the Academy, the Kerameikos and the Agora should be removed, and the site itself should be excavated.'*

The unified cultural-historic area proposed by Biris was too grandiose and ambitious a scheme. While almost doubling the recreational area, a quite unrealistic proposal, Biris kept important traffic routes, such as the Sacred Way, Apostolou Pavlou Street and the prolongation of Alexandras Avenue as throughways cutting through the proposed archaeological park. He also wanted modern cultural and athletic facilities to be constructed next to the antiquities 'in suitable places', structures incompatible with the character of the historic landscape and the ancient monuments. 'In suitable places in the Park might well be erected a large stadium, an open-air theatre for performances of ancient drama, museums, schools of archaeology, an international university, a special library, and other institutions of international interest. All these might make up the center of a world-wide intellectual association'.

During the 19th and 20th centuries the dried-out river bed of the Ilissos river (fig. 13), about 30 m wide and 15 m deep, was gradually converted into an uncovered cloaca maxima. Instead of rehabilitating the area by planting the slopes of the river bed and by constructing underground drains, a simpler and more radical measure was adopted, i.e. filling in the river bed completely, thus eliminating this important element of the historic Athenian landscape.

This radical intervention was proposed by C. Biris (Technical Services of the Municipality) and adopted by the government in 1939. There was some discussion about the final line of the new avenue to be constructed over the course of the abolished river and a proposal was made to have a curving avenue thereby preserving the original line of the condemned river bed. Finally more practical traffic interests prevailed. The statutory plan for the new avenue was adopted by government decree on August 30, 1941. The plan provided for a 45 m wide straight avenue from the site later occupied by the Hilton to the site of Kallirrhoe spring south of the Olympieion, with a total length of about 1600 m and with three lanes in each direction divided by a green strip down the middle.

From the early thirties the American School of Classical Studies in Athens conducted the first large-scale excavations on an area of about 6 ha in order to rediscover the civic centre of the ancient city. The whole site north-west to the Acropolis was, however, covered by the dense fabric of the old 'living' city quarter 'Plaka' (fig. 16).

Although the emotional identification of the Athenian population with the traditional townscape of the old 19th century district has always been a strong one, the hope for important findings through the excavations, proved to be stronger: absolute priority was given to archeological research.

The scholarly world but also public opinion did not realize - at that time - the inherent conflict between the two goals: *preservation of the living historic district versus the anticipated archeological findings and scientific knowledge to be gained*. Thus one hundred years after the establishment of the new city the initial vision of Kleanthes and Schaubert was partially realized: About one fourth of the area they had proposed in their plan to be freed for future excavations (actually the western part of it) was cleared through massive expropriation measures financed by the American school.

The archeological research venture at the classical Agora (fig. 17), unique in its kinds lasted about 30 years with an interruption during World War II. Its scientific results are of paramount importance not only for our knowledge of the topography and the urban structure of ancient Athens, but also for the understanding of the social and institutional framework of the Greek polis.

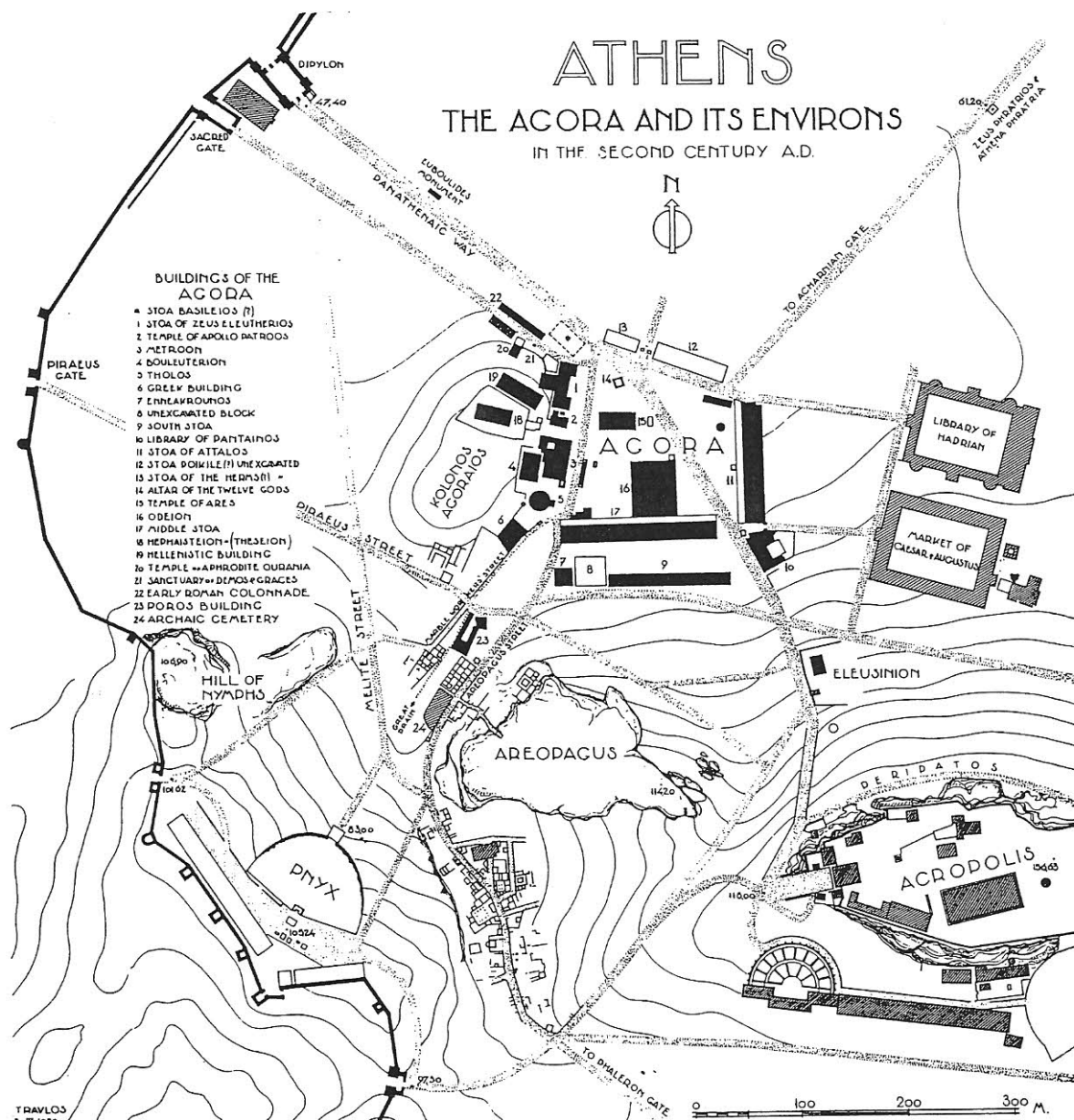


Fig. 17 The ancient Agora of Athens in the second century A.D. Drawing by J. Travlos

After the conclusion of the excavations the entire area has been landscaped. A first attempt has been made to increase the 'readability' of the archeological excavations field by consolidating and clearing the foundations of the ancient buildings in situ, by designing a network of paths covered by natural soil and by planting groups of trees and bushes at critical points of the area. The first archeological park of the city was thus created. *The landscaping*



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*of an archeological site is still one of the most controversial and unsolved aesthetic and functional design tasks and unfortunately very little attention is payed to the matter.* The classical Agora excavations confronted us not only with the still open issue of the desirability of further large-scale excavations around the Acropolis for the decades to come, but also with the comprehensive task of landscaping the historic site next to the archeological research activities.

The first attempt in this direction was made by Demetrios Pikionis<sup>8</sup> in the time between 1953 and 1958. He was given full powers to redesign the accesses to the Acropolis and to the Philopappus monument in a time of a rapidly growing tourist flow. Instead of facilitating the motorized approach and creating large scale modern infrastructure works he tried to calm down traffic while offering an increased accessibility to pedestrian visitors. Pikionis considered the visit of the Acropolis as an aesthetic adventure, as a pilgrimage. He was exclusively concerned with two things: First to be as discreet as possible while adding contemporary elements in front of the 'eternal' monumental ensemble and second to create for the visitor an approach, rich in spatial experiences and suggestive in its historic reminiscences.

This congenial landscape design was based on a relatively small number of drawings which kept the initial vision. The main task, namely the tracing of the intricate system of main access roads and secondary paths - all done in natural stone pavement often enriched by interconnecting concrete slabs - was elaborated in situ. Pikionis, already in his sixties, spent interminable hours on the spot, helped by a handful of devoted pupils trying to establish this circulation network, following a system of harmonic geometrical traces from different important vantage points of the 'processional' sequence. The two main 'loops' thus created offer a progressive visual discovery of the monuments, through an alternation of successive unexpected vistas. Carefully designed observation terraces on the northern slopes of the Philopappus hill offer unique global views of the Acropolis. Historic remnants from different periods, like the antique town wall or the post-byzantine chapel of St. Demetrius 'lumbardiariis' have been carefully restored. A light pavilion (fig. 18) designed by Pikionis in the vicinity of the chapel creates a kind of precinct around an open courtyard. It is a masterpiece of timeless architecture: visible marble stonework, wooden roofs and pergolas, light wooden porticoes develop the eternal themes of Greek architecture on a minor tone.

Only about 6.5 ha (10 % of the total area of the already planted hills of the Pnyx and the Philopappus) have been landscaped by Pikionis. He insisted on the necessity to enrich adequately the grove by adding attic plants like olive trees and laury, while fighting vigorously against any attempt to 'embellish' the slopes by introducing what he would call 'frankish' (i.e. alien) decorative plants. The question whether the remaining important surface of the hills to be landscaped could be treated in the same spirit remains still open. Every attempt, however, to imitate Pikionis achievement would end in a poor formalism: What makes up the exceptional quality of this work is its spatial vision and its extreme sensitivity in the treatment of the materials. To copy its formal vocabulary would be a plagiarism. *The master gave us a great example of how to build next, and in conjunction - not in competition - to the overwhelming monumental heritage.*

From 1965 to 1966 a first planning interest was shown by the Ministry of Housing for the preservation of the 'Plaka' 19th century district on the upper north slopes of the Acropolis. A team of young architects was set up, forming a 'Plaka' bureau in situ. First measured drawings of street ensembles and proposals for the functional and formal rehabilitation measures to be taken were worked out. In 1966, a public hearing was conducted at the Municipality and was followed with great interest by the public opinion and the press. This was an early example of public participation for a major planning issue, i.e. the desirability of further archeological research, or of a generalized preservation policy for the 'living' old Plaka district.

While the representatives of the inhabitants were rightly protesting for 130 years of insecurity about the fate of their living quarters, asking for a definite option in favour of the protection of the 19th century city quarter (fig. 19), the overwhelming majority of the professionals were pleading for a big scale excavation venture to rediscover 'the ancient city' in the total area proposed five generations ago by Kleanthes, Schaubert and also Klenze. Encouraged by the positive results of the 30 years long campaign of the American School at the classical Agora, they were asking for an international campaign (to be financed jointly by the Greek state and UNESCO) to pursue the excavations on the totality of the crescent of the Plaka area, above Hadrian Street (about 35 additional ha of

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8 Demetrios Pikionis (1887-1968), professor of architectural design at the Technical University of Athens, was an exceptional personality. A man with a wide humanistic culture, he has been educated as a building engineer, studied and practiced painting in both Paris and Munich, and was one of the few representatives of the architectural functionalist movement in the early thirties in Greece. His profound attachment to the Greek landscape and his identification with the culture of his country over the centuries, allowed him, however, to develop very early a strong personal approach to matters of architecture. Pikionis has been an early 'regionalist', long before this term was created, trying to include the spatial principles of antique and vernacular mediterranean architecture as well as strong reminiscences of historic forms in his work. For this he has been misunderstood by many - at a time of the uniform tendencies of the 'modern style' - and attacked as an excentric formalist. Although his formal options were often undoubtedly eclectic, the extreme quality of the constructive details, the harmony of his spatial arrangements and the constant care for an absolute integration of the manmade elements into the natural setting, gave this man the status of the 'hellene' architect par excellence.

surface). Only a small minority of scholars were insisting on *the necessity to preserve the 'living' old Plaka district as the only urban ensemble of the 19th century still surviving in Athens and as an ideal visual transition between the modern city centre and the monuments of the Acropolis*. Because of the enormous expropriation costs needed for the proposed big scale excavations and the social hardships connected with the expulsion of the about 4500 inhabitants of the district, no concrete steps were taken in favour of this major archeological venture. A 10 years latency period during which the 'Plaka' area survived under pityfull conditions of social pauperisation and architectural deformation followed. The Plaka urban revival started only after 1976 and is evolving positively ever since. The importance of the 1966 meeting is, however, to be seen in the fact that the issue of the future of the old town was raised publicly and that a first awareness of the problem was thus created.

Meanwhile the archeological service has pursued a consequent policy of punctual purchase of private houses in the Plaka area in order to facilitate eventual punctual future excavations. More than 100 houses belong thus to the state. Although no big scale demolition works have been allowed in the last decades, there is a latent consensus that the area between the Hadrian Library and the Greek Agora should be sacrificed one day or another, in order to achieve the unification of the Greek and the Roman Agora excavation areas and to complete the research in the Roman Agora (fig. 20). A first step in this direction was done in the early seventies, when the American School continued its excavations on a corridor leading from the Panathenian Way to the entrance of the Roman Agora (Athena Propylon). In this area the important library of Pantainos has been excavated. Furthermore on the northern periphery of the classical Agora, parallel to the subway rails, the remnants of the Poikile Stoa have been excavated and identified.

Thus during the last forty years important measures have been taken in support of the further development of the cultural-historic area. A considerable part of the archaeological sites have been landscaped, about 20 ha including the Agora, parts of the Pnyx and Mouseion hills and the Olympieion area. Other archaeological sites are still waiting to be treated in a comparable manner.

The urban rehabilitation of the old town of Athens was also given special attention. *Important urban design measures and conversion of streets to pedestrian malls have contributed to an urban renaissance of the Plaka and its integration into the overall scheme of the cultural-historic area.*

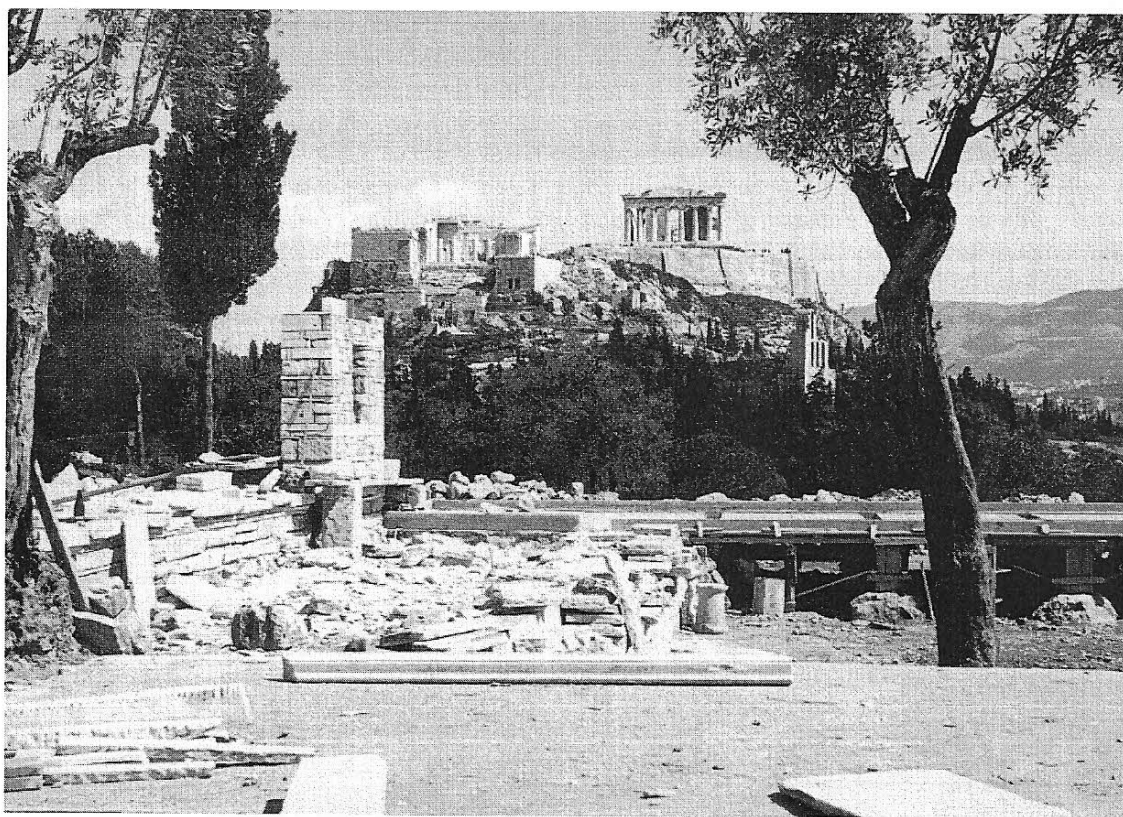


Fig. 18 The Lumbarini pavilion under construction in 1956. Architect Demetrios Pikionis

Another long lasting initiative was the gradual rehabilitation and upgrading of Lykabettos (44 ha) as a recreational asset for the city. As mentioned already, this extensive area was severely disfigured by quarrying in



the 19th century, but was later planted with pine trees, cactus (agave) and cypresses in the early 20th century. The only building erected on the hill is the picturesque chapel of Haghios Georgios in the style of the white-washed island churches, built in 1885.



*Fig. 19 Aerial view of the center of Athens in 1962*

In recent years the Ministry of housing finally took the initiative: irrigation networks and lighting systems have been installed; shrubs have been planted; and new paths, stone benches and steps have made the slopes of the hill more attractive for promenaders. Two café pavilions were added and small retaining walls have been built where necessary. With a minimum of investment and also, happily enough, with a minimum of alterations to the natural contours the replanted slopes have been turned into a handsome grove and have at last been made available to the Athenians as a variegated cultural and recreational area.

The partial excavation of the ancient Kerameikos extra muros and of the Academy area have yielded, among other things, some definite information about the location, if not the exact extent, of these two districts of the ancient town. The area between the Kerameikos excavations and the Academy, about 1200 by 400 metres, with its ancient thoroughfares linking Athens to Eleusis, the Academy and Kolonos Hippios, has so far been investigated only sporadically. Since the buildings in this north-western part of the new town are low-rise houses and small



businesses, timely gradual expropriation of this area would have offered both the opportunity of filling out topographic and archaeological investigations of ancient Athens and the advantage of increasing the planted surfaces so badly needed in this part of the town. Nevertheless no comprehensive measures have been taken so far in this direction.

Various master plans and urban remodelling schemes for Athens included a recurrent proposal for creating a monumental administrative centre involving the break-through of new street axes in the centre of town. This town-planning *idée fixe* was an attempt to carry out, after a considerable delay, a provision in the initial planning scheme of Kleanthes-Schaubert that had not been realized, i.e. grouping the ministries in the vicinity of the Royal Palace, a symbol for centralized 'enlightened' power. From time to time several locations in the inner city have been considered for the site of such an administrative centre, e.g. Korais Street on the axis of the University building or the area around Koumoundourou Square on the north-western edge of the old town.

In 1924, following five years of deliberations, the government adopted an urban rehabilitation scheme for Athens, known as the 'Kalligas Plan', which was soon abandoned because of a massive protest by the landowners in Athens. This plan was the first to come forward with the idea for a new straight avenue to be created on the abolished Ilissos river bed, combined with a proposal for developing an administrative centre on the extensive grounds of military installations existing in this part of the city.

*The idea of an administrative centre located in downtown Athens never got off the ground and has now been definitely abandoned because of extreme building congestion in the centre of the city.* By the end of the 1950s Vasileos Konstantinou Avenue was at last laid out on the line of the eliminated Ilissos river bed and considerable grounds (about 14 ha) on both sides of the avenue were freed from the military installations, barracks and weapon depots. This privileged area situated on the eastern edge of the inner city, between the Royal Garden and Lykabetos and tangential to the main arteries of Kephissias Avenue and Vasileos Konstantinou Avenue, was destined to fulfil some representative urban functions. Some important new buildings were already under construction or planned in the vicinity of this area: the American Embassy designed by Gropius and built in 1957-1958 at the north; the Athens Hilton designed by Vassiliadis, Vourekas and Staikos, built in 1958-1962, in the centre. Others were to follow: the National Gallery, designed by Moutsopoulos, Fatouros and Mylonas, built in 1968-1973; the National Research Foundation, designed by Doxiadis Associates, built in 1965-1967; the Friends of Music Concert Hall designed by Keilholz and Vourekas, recently completed.

In 1959 the Housing Department of the Ministry of Public Works launched an architectural competition with an extremely overloaded building program. About a dozen different buildings serving public cultural functions and also educational purposes were to be erected on the 7.5 ha of the triangular site bounded by Kephissias Avenue, Vasileos Konstantinou Avenue and Rigillis Street. By densely concentrating a variety of functions in one place a national cultural centre was to be created on the eastern edge of the traditional business and administrative district in central Athens. So-called 'enlightened centralism' was vaguely aiming at a new target.

*The very fact that the state took the initiative towards comprehensively developing at least a part of the extensive available land in downtown Athens was a step in the right direction, banishing forever the threat that state-owned property would fall into private hands with subsequent dense building for private housing schemes.* The initial idea was to create a monumental group of varied buildings; the centre was to include a wide range of facilities devoted to the arts: an academy of music, a theatre complex, a national gallery and museum complex etc. This concept, plus the fact that the authorities were committed to an over-intensive use of the site, was detrimental to the future development of the eastern half of the cultural-historic area and also involved worse traffic congestion and insoluble access problems. These fundamental flaws in the project were realized only later.

The 1959 competition was won by John Despotopoulos, a respected university teacher, one of the few Greek followers of the Bauhaus movement with an international reputation. Complying with the basic requirements of the program, Despotopoulos worked out a well-defined scheme characterized by monumental free-standing, clear-cut, differentiated volumes, dynamically interrelated, grouped around a large stone-paved plaza. The rigid axiality of the basic generating grid plus the absence of any green area was meant to convey an explicitly urban character. The exaggeratedly large size and the schematic nature of the project were, however, evident.

This grandiose concept was condemned to failure by the megalomaniac objectives set by the administration,<sup>9</sup> Despotopoulos' weaknesses, and the advent of the dictatorship (1967-1974). As early as 1966 the Archaeological Service had for the first time formulated a counter-proposal whereby a large grove would be created in which the existing buildings of the Officers' Club and the Byzantine Museum (both listed buildings) would be kept.

The whole area of the so-called cultural centre of Athens is still today an uncertain conglomeration of various

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<sup>9</sup> The proposals for this rigid layout went so far as to envisage moving the Byzantine Museum on rails to a new site 250 m to the east! The Byzantine Museum is a neorenaissance building, formerly the mansion of the duchess of Piacenza, built in 1840-1846 by the Greek architect S. Kleanthes.

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spaces and functions. However, two-thirds of the area is covered with greenery. The Conservatory of Music Building stands awkwardly isolated at its southern edge; the Byzantine Museum still awaits renovation and extension; and there is still hope that one day the bulky volumes of the Officers' Club and the War Museum will be removed. After more than thirty years of wavering deliberations and unsettled treatment the de facto creation of a park-like link between the Lykabettos area and the existing parks of central Athens is more probable than ever.



Fig. 20 The propylon of the Athena Archegetis in the Roman Agora, surrounded by 19th century neoclassical private houses

By the end of the 1970s environmental pollution, traffic congestion and urban decay had reached an unprecedented peak in central Athens. In lively reaction against the deteriorating conditions in downtown Athens, several planning initiatives of different kinds emerged, and a slow but steady upgrading of the urban environment in the course of the last decade followed: *The rehabilitation of the Plaka district, pedestrian zones created in the commercial central district, a campaign for planting shrubs and trees along the streets, and last but not least drastic measures for protecting and conserving the Acropolis monuments are mutually beneficial steps in the right direction.*

After thirty years of an uncontrolled building boom promoted by private investors and of state interventions which did not address the essential problems,<sup>10</sup> a belated interest for public amenities and for humanizing the centre of town arose at last. An increased interest in developing recreational areas fits well into the picture of the above-mentioned reconsideration of values in urban life. As a direct consequence of this trend, the old idea of unifying the urban parks, replanted hills and archaeological areas, which had been forgotten for a long time, came to the fore once again and is increasingly gaining support in public opinion.

Once again the initiative came from a group of private architects and planners as had been the case in the past proposals by Mawson in 1919 und Biris in 1946. In 1979 the spokesman of this group, the architect Alexander Photiadis, published a comprehensive proposal for the creation of a unified cultural park and went public with several interviews and also with recommendations to the authorities.

The authors of the proposal deserve praise for their crusading spirit and their practical plan for subsidizing the project by means of coordinated short and middle term policies of public investments. The proposed scheme tackles the main concrete planning issues for the first time, albeit rather superficially, and attempts to outline precise measures dealing with traffic, landscaping and pedestrian zones in order to achieve the overall objectives. Although a general preliminary concept could hardly be expected to present definite and workable solutions for all the

10 Konstantinos Doxiadis, the renowned town-planner, had criticized the nature of work done in regard to public amenities in Athens as early as 1961: 'I believe that in a spirit of objectivity and responsibility we could assert that what is put forward today in Athens (i.e. by the authorities) are urban embellishment works (...) And thus we come to the conclusion that the administration devotes itself to urban cosmetics, while the private investors build the town'.

different aspects of a large-scale project, yet some of the specific measures proposed are disappointing because they tend to oversimplify the complex problems involved.

One of the proposals, for example, is for a pedestrian overpass more than 250 m in length to be constructed above the railroad north of the Hephaisteion in order to link the Kerameikos and Agora excavations. But it is naive to imagine that archaeological sites may be significantly related to each other by means of elevated walkways! The real issue has been overlooked, i.e. the desideratum of excavating the ancient Panathenaic Way from the Dipylon Gate in the Kerameikos excavations as far as the previously excavated portion in the Agora excavations.

The scheme also includes creation of an artificial hill to the east of the Olympieion 'in order to separate the archaeological site from the athletic installations to the east'. This proposal reflects a painful lack of awareness of history: altering the historic contours in such a radical way is unthinkable. The genius loci would pack up and depart were an artificial hill to obliterate the ancient landscape in the vicinity of the Olympieion and the Ilissos valley ...

The planning measures mentioned above are typical of an architect's one-sided outlook, having in mind only the practical problems of accommodating the functions of a recreation area. *But the goals set for a cultural-archaeological area include many other desiderata of paramount importance, such as: preservation of the ancient landscape, avoidance of showy modern structures, conditions promoting further archaeological investigation, and creation of a suitably tranquil environment.* These goals seem to have been neglected by the authors of the proposal. Some other provisions of the plan are sound, especially those pertaining to regulating traffic and establishing pedestrian routes in the eastern part of the area. Even though the Photiadis plan does not cover the entire cultural-historical area and in spite of the fact that its recommendations are not thought out in depth, the plan does have the merit of having reactivated the debate concerning a coordinated plan for the cultural-historical area.

#### 4. An Appraisal of the present Utilization of the Cultural-Historic Area of Athens

What are the different ways of experiencing historic monuments and sites in metropolitan areas today? To what extent are they perceivable by and available to the inhabitants and the visitors? In the present era of mass tourism, what has become of the cultural goals which originally motivated the idea of travel to a great extent? How may art, history and nature still be experienced under these conditions? And how can they reveal themselves and communicate their messages? The desirable cultural-political aim of allowing as many people as possible to have access to these experiences has been largely achieved in the industrial nations, but at a price.

The feeling of enjoying something previously reserved for the socially privileged spurs many people on to make real use of the possibilities offered. The general opening up has of course had the foreseeable result that the character of many cultural assets has been radically altered and that others have become virtually inaccessible. So many cackling people crowd into the passage through the Propylaia that the way up to the Acropolis plateau is an exasperating struggle rather than a pilgrimage.

The problem has several other aspects, not the least of which is that the monuments themselves are so endangered by traffic, the crush of the crowds and pollution that the effect they were meant to have on the beholder is distorted or even lost. This is the ambivalent nature of the phenomenon: The very ones who approve mass tourism from the cultural-political standpoint, are absolutely not able to condone the fair-grounds atmosphere to which cultural monuments are subjected; and still less the 'Baedeker and bikini' mood created by the tourist industry, leading many to believe that they have paid their good money for the right to behave as obstreperously and noisily as they please.

But is this profanation of the heritage or a new approach? As long as the object, the building or artwork etc., still maintains its original function, it is easily appropriated by the public. For example, a building in use can create its own effect by the very act of being used, rather than being presented as an encounter with a work of art. But when the function has lapsed and the object has become a museum piece, it loses its powers of communication and becomes problematic. Certain conventional approaches to works of art, especially those of Greek and Roman antiquity, developed in Europe, beginning in the 18th century. This mostly amounts to contemplative observation, i.e. losing oneself in a solemn reverie in which aesthetic experience and thoughts about the content are vaguely intermingled. This no longer has much to do with the way the artist intended his creation to operate on the beholder.

The resulting intellectual approach to art, which has prevailed in the western world during the last two centuries, is profoundly abstract and eclectic. To many sensitive people, museums and excavation areas are not only the 'sacred precincts' but also the 'cemeteries' of art. Thus the attitude of permissive leisure, which more and more characterizes modern society, brings into being new (but in reality old) values which correspond to the original functional-tactile experience of architecture. *If the disturbances caused by the massive tourist flows could to some extent be eliminated by introducing inventive and differentiated routes, then the emerging Homo ludens would be able to experience the monumental site not only in a narrowly passive way, but also through a more existential*



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*approach.* This would include becoming familiar with the site and making it a part of one's life through repeated visits, so that it gains new meaning through the interplay of personal and historic recollections. It remains, however, an open question if this new approach is compatible with the aims of preserving and conserving the monuments.

But beyond these different approaches and behavioral attitudes toward the cultural heritage in general, a successful experience of the historic Athenian townscape in its considerable variety, on the part of both the inhabitants and groups of visitors, depends mainly on working out a variety of in-depth approaches to the cultural-historic area. A successful experience of the historic Athenian townscape is achieved when visitors are actively motivated to receive visual, intellectual and emotional stimulation through a blend of personal acquaintance and knowledge of the historical circumstances. The variety of the patterns of utilization depends on the different potentialities of each area but also *the innovative new uses which can be developed in conformity with the genius loci of the historic site.*

Access to the various sectors of the historic-cultural area varies greatly according to the diversity of existing uses, i.e. archaeological excavation sites, green spaces of replanted hills, athletic installations, urban parks, private parks belonging to cultural institutions, and the historic town sector of the Plaka. Individual areas have gradually been compartmentalized and isolated due to haphazard developments. Thus the crescent of the cultural-historic area is subdivided into no fewer than 57 distinct areas forming a patchwork of 18 fenced-in spaces, not open to the public, 20 fenced-in spaces open to the public for a part of the day, and 19 open spaces open to the public day and night. Many of the areas are treated in a reasonable way (i.e. as open green areas) while others seem isolated for no apparent reason. Thus while the main areas of the replanted hills (such as Mouseion hill, Pnyx hill and the Hill of the Nymphs, the Areopagus and Lykabettos) always remain open to promenaders, Ardettos hill beside the Stadium is permanently closed to visitors, although this site offers the most magnificent panoramic view over the ancient sites, the urban parks and the other replanted hills of the inner city.

Most archaeological excavation areas are fenced-in and accessible only at certain limited hours, while others are left unfenced, such as the area south of the Olympieion, the banks of the Ilissos and the Academy area. The National Garden, the First Cemetery of Athens, the garden of the Presidential Mansion and the gardens of several institutions (the Observatory, archaeological institutes, Gennadius Library, etc.) are all fenced-in and are accessible either on a tight time schedule or not at all, depending on their functions, private, semi-private or public.

The situation around the Acropolis is even more puzzling. The Acropolis south slope is a fenced-in site open to visitors at stated times and has two entrances, one at the upper west and below the temple of Athena Nike and the other at the south-west below the Theatre of Dionysos. The upper north slope of the Acropolis with its caves, ancient sanctuaries, rock-cut inscriptions and its unique view over the old town and the modern city center is also fenced-in but remains closed to the public! As a result, the Peripatos, the ring walk around the upper Acropolis slopes, is still not open to the public. On the other hand, the large area of the Agora excavations has at last been linked to the immediate surroundings of the Acropolis entrance and the Areopagus by a walkway, although it is still sharply separated from the Roman Agora and the new excavations north of Adrianou Street. *This awkward state of affairs is caused by narrowminded measures taken by the authorities to protect excavation areas by fencing them in.* While such places as the Acropolis or the Panathenaic Stadium obviously need to be closed at least at night in order to protect the monuments from vandalism and the visitors from risks, the archaeological remains in excavation areas would be much better protected by thoughtful landscaping and permanent guarding than by fencing.

Visitors attempting to reach the Acropolis and Agora excavations from the Plaka are often baffled and disappointed. The access points are few and no urban design features, such as attractive walks, signposts with section plans or recognizable transition points tempt the visitor to explore the Plaka and the neighbouring sites.

Creating a unified inner city green belt (fig. 2) with a total length of about 6 km by linking the separate tracts seems more than problematic, in fact impossible to achieve under the prevailing traffic conditions and the unavoidable network of the main arteries and urban through-ways in the city center.

The creation of a strictly unified recreational area is also impeded by the diversity of the functional uses in the various sectors and the many different types of terrain: i.e. steep hills such Lykabettos and Ardettos, the gently hilly terrain of the western hills, rock formations like the Acropolis and the Areopagus, sloping ground as in upper Plaka and the eastern Lykabettos slopes, and almost flat regions like the urban parks in the center, the Academy, the Kerameikos, the Olympieion and the First Cemetery areas.

Built-up areas of the modern town break up the continuity of the cultural-historic area at critical points (fig. 8). As far as traffic is concerned, whereas the through axis of Dionysiou Areopagitou Avenue - Apostolou Pavlou Street dividing the central archaeological area into an eastern section (Acropolis-Agora excavations) and a western section

(the western hills) could be relieved of vehicular traffic by adequate measures, the other important obstacles to unification can be eliminated only by expensive underground diversions of the following main arteries: Peiraios street next to the Kerameikos; Amalias Avenue between the Plaka area and the Olympieion; Olgas Avenue between the Zappeion Gardens and Ardettos hill; and finally Vasilissis Sophias Avenue between the so-called cultural centre and the eastern slopes of Lykabettos.

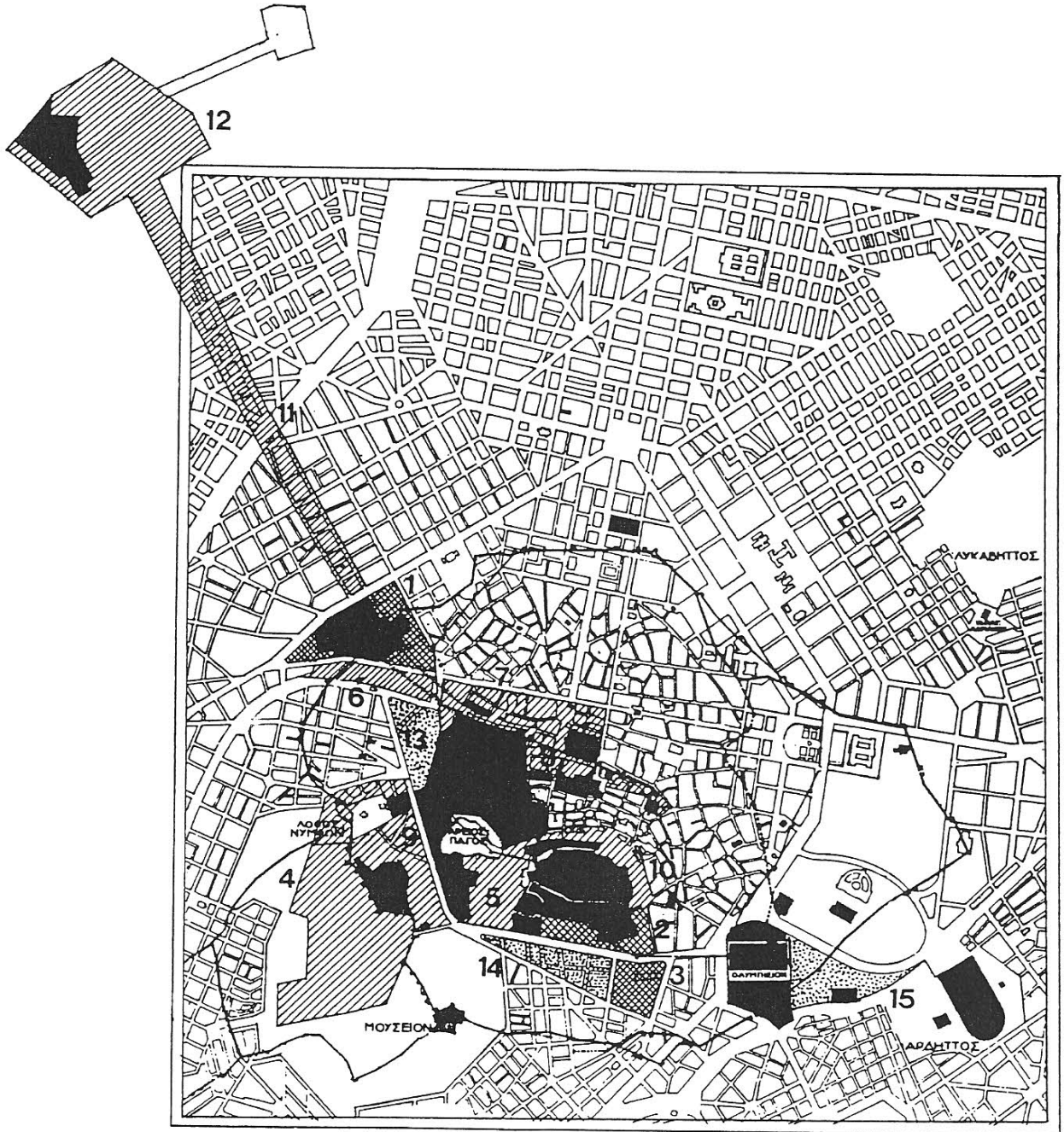







Fig. 21

Total area of the Cultural Park		356 ha	
Area of the archaeological interest		123 ha	(34,5 %)
of which: already excavated		43 ha	(12,0 %)
to be excavated		80 ha	(22,5 %)
Eligible for excavations:	first phase		9 ha (of which in built-up areas: 4,5 ha)
	second phase		62 ha (of which in built-up areas: 35,0 ha)
	third phase		9 ha (of which in built-up areas: 2,5 ha)
Total area to be excavated		80 ha	(total area to be expropriated: 42,0 ha)

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A visually and functionally unified major recreational area could be achieved only by expropriations in the following places: the built-up areas of the ancient road from the Dipylon to the Academy, the remaining unexcavated portions of the Kerameikos, the modern quarter on the Pnyx lower slope facing the Agora, and the southern extremity of Plaka across from the Olympieion. Prohibitive costs, however, make it unlikely that such large-scale expropriation measures will be adopted in the near future.

*With these obstacles in the way of planning, first steps toward a partial link-up of the entire area would be the elimination, as far as possible, of superfluous fencing and the creation of a continuous integrated system of pedestrian routes through the entire area. Replanting linked walkways would, to some extent, mitigate the disruption of the main traffic arteries and the built-up areas. Clearly marked and designed entrances could be established as transition points between the monumental site and the main approaches (by foot and by car) from the city.*

Over the last 150 years the area of our concern has not only been gradually enlarged by the inclusion of the peripheral inner-city eastern hills and the Ilissos area, but has also undergone a considerable change in regard to the treatment of its various sections. The landscaping and/or urban design also varies considerably according to the different functions carried out in various sections of the cultural-historic area (fig. 2).

Only 5.18 % (18.50 ha) of the total area (357 ha) still remains waste land, i.e. the unbuilt area of the ancient Academy Area, the still vacant area of the former municipal gas plant (to be converted into a small park of industrial archaeology), the western slope of Mouseion hill where the abandoned ruins of a huge fascistoid pseudo-ancient theater of the 1930s (to be demolished) offend the historic landscape.

The three hilly areas - the western hills, Ardettos and Lykabetos hill (totalling about 100 ha) - have been gradually replanted in the course of the present century and have also been partly landscaped in recent years, while about half their surface still waits to be made into landscaped urban groves.

The two major urban parks in the area (the National Garden and the Zappeion Gardens), several smaller public parks (Kolonos Hippios, Theseion, Venizelos Memorial Grove and Pefkakia) and the First Cemetery of Athens are designed following various layouts of 19th century parks with a more or less rigid scheme.

A considerable part of the existing excavation areas has been carefully landscaped during the last 40 years. This includes the Kerameikos excavations and the Agora excavations, the approaches to the Odeion of Herodes Atticus, and the area to the north of the Olympieion. Other areas of archaeological interest such as the Peripatos, i.e. the ring walk around the Acropolis slopes, the ancient residential quarter west of the Areopagus, the area of the Dionysos Theater and the banks of the Ilissos still await appropriate landscaping.

Finally, one should keep in mind that a considerable part of the desideratum 'green crescent' is not green at all but still covered with modern constructions. Although it is a built-up area, the Plaka on the Acropolis north slope has to be considered as an integral part of the cultural-historic area because of the special historic and artistic interest of its urban cluster (with structures of many periods closely intermingled) and because of the generally small flow of traffic in the largely pedestrianized area.

On the western side of the cultural-historic area several built-up districts on the site of the ancient Dipylon-Academy Road or on the still unexcavated part of the Kerameikos area and living quarters in the immediate vicinity of the Agora excavations and the Roman Agora are to be considered as eligible for expropriation in order gradually to achieve an integrated Athenian excavation area.

Although the activities of urban life in the Mediterranean countries have always developed to a considerable extent in the open air, an emotional and active relation to nature has never reached the existential dimension of a direct encounter, not to say worship, as in the Scandinavian countries, Germany and England. Greeks enjoy nature in a casual light-hearted manner: communing with nature is not a conscious goal; one seeks out natural settings in order to enjoy the pleasures of swimming and sailing, to keep up contacts with one's village background (most Athenians have strong roots in the countryside) or to practice a rather primitive form of hunting and fishing. The basic approach is an active one: nature is seen as an additional arena for human encounters and sporting activities. Contemplation, quasi-religious absorption in and adoration of the beauty and mystery of nature are mostly alien to the practical-minded modern Greeks.

Walking tours in natural surroundings and even strolling in urban environments are almost unknown activities in the south, if not combined with the specific purpose of socializing in centrally located squares, cafés and terraces. As a direct consequence of such a behavioral pattern, urban parks are mainly used only by elderly people and infants with their minders seeking some relief in the hot season of the year. The type of the well-known 'Volkspark' with its spacious playing grounds and lengthy promenades seems not to be needed in southern cities. This is also the case in Athens.

But other specifically green or at least unbuilt-up areas exist also in Athens as constituent parts of the cultural-historic area: replanted hills and areas of archaeological or cultural interest. How do the inhabitants approach these



areas? Until some years ago, the major replanted areas of Mouseion hill and Lykabettos were quasi-abandoned places with a low grade of security for promenaders. The hilly terrain offering an inviting setting for a real urban promenade, with the additional advantage of overall views of the townscape from elevated vantage points, seems to be of no interest to the inhabitants: they consider such ventures as tiresome and rather boring. The only favoured options are apt to be Sunday walks, or rather an ascent by funicular, to the top of the Lykabettos or a short stroll to the café terrace near the church of Haghios Demetrios Loumbardiariis on Pnyx hill.

In the past, especially during the 19th century, some specific ancient sites have been associated with traditional folk festivities: thus the great terrace of the Olympieion was used as a gathering place for picnics during spring time. The place was known as 'At the Columns,' a name clearly referring to the imposing Corinthian columns of the Temple of Zeus Olympios, lacking any historic notion of what the monument really was. Similar festivities and popular gatherings took place on the large esplanade next to the Theseion (Temple of Hephaistos). There were tightrope walkers' performances and folk dances; later an open-air theater was installed. There was no sense of awe or admiration for the ancient temple of Hephaistos in the immediate vicinity.

Even today important ancient monuments like the choregic monument of Lysikrates or the waterclock of Andronikos are vaguely known by their folknames of 'Diogenes' Lantern' and 'Tower of the Winds'. The former name refers to the cylindrical form of the building, while the latter alludes to the relief frieze of the Winds.

The casual way of using the ancient monuments as a backdrop for festivities and entertainments and the picturesque, inventive names given to them by the inhabitants, are certain indications of what the ancient remains really mean to most of them: landmarks, orientation and reference points in the urban fabric of the modern town. *They possess a strong image and are known by most of the people as familiar visual assets of the townscape. Precise knowledge about their original function, their history and their artistic importance is the privilege of a very small minority.*

*Thus, planned visits and on-the-spot study of ancient remains are definitely not a spare-time occupation for the overwhelming majority of the Athenians.* The emotional identification with the ancient heritage is experienced through rather stereotyped references to heroic ancestors and greatness of the Periklean age; real interest in their achievements is fairly rare. If this state of affairs derives from a low educational level or from a subconscious wish to avoid confronting the reality of modern mass civilization with the elitarian society of classical Greece is still an open question.

Summing up, we may conclude that Athenians do not use the recreation areas of their town intensively or extensively for the following reasons: the cultural-historic area is fragmented rather than unified and lacks convenient access routes; the Athenians themselves lack interest in taking advantage of what the area has to offer. *With the exception of a few sites overrun by foreign tourists, most of the sectors have a very low density of visitors and remain marginal to the urban happenings in the metropolitan centre.*

## 5. Outlook

A central concern today is the overall preservation of the historic cityscape of Athens in order to improve the cultural, environmental and living conditions of the metropolis. A concise examination of the history of town-planning and the initiatives taken in regard to the historic monuments and cultural life of Athens has been presented, leading up to the vision of a green crescent of 357 ha in which the main historical monuments and parks are linked and developed into a single, unified cultural-historic area.

In order to realize this idea important initiatives are still required, particularly in regard to traffic routes (creating overpasses and underpasses), pedestrian routes, landscaping and infrastructure works for extensive unplanted or unplanned areas, and last but not least gradual expropriation of built-up areas for the sake of archaeological excavations.

*In the meanwhile, after nearly two centuries of archaeological investigations the main outlines of the topography of Athens are known and also the main features of the urban configuration of ancient Athens. Areas of archaeological interest comprise about one-third (34.5 %), i.e. 123 ha, of the total area of 357 ha, including 43 ha of already excavated sites and 80 ha (22.5 %) of not yet excavated sites of potential archaeological interest. Thus, the ratio between excavated and non-excavated areas is about 1:2!*

Focussing now on the 80 ha of land to be excavated in the future, a further differentiation may be made: about one-half of this area (38 ha) is already state-owned property, while the remainder (42 ha) has to be expropriated.

Let us try to establish an order of priority for the various future excavations (fig. 21):

In a first phase the following areas should be investigated:

- 1) The Kerameikos excavations should be extended into the unexcavated parts of the triangle bounded by Ermou, Peiraioi and Melidoni Streets.
- 2) The Odeion of Perikles and the area south of the Stoa of Eumenes on the Acropolis south slope.

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3) The unexcavated parts of the city block south of the Theatre of Dionysos where the Centre for Acropolis Studies is situated.

These three areas have a total surface of 9 ha, of which 4.5 ha of land have to be expropriated.

As a second priority nine large-scale excavations should be planned. Because of the relatively large areas involved and because of special problems, such as replanted or built-up areas, these investigations could only be undertaken over a long time (about a hundred years), following a comprehensive plan on the part of the Greek state and supported by the international community, e.g. UNESCO and foreign archaeological institutes:

4) Excavations on Pnyx hill and the Hill of the Nymphs.

5) Excavations on the upper west slope of the Acropolis.

While both of these areas do not require expropriation funds because they are state-owned property, both of these areas present the major obstacle that they have already been replanted which means that the trees and shrubs would have to be sacrificed for archaeological research, a decision hard to take. Only a highly coordinated excavation program envisaging immediate replanting of these areas would be an acceptable solution.

6) The railway trench.

7) The Monastiraki area.

8) The part of the old town between the Roman Agora and the Agora excavations.

9) Residential section of the NE slope of Pnyx hill.

10) Anaphiotika on the upper NE slope of the Acropolis.

Excavations in areas 6-10 would require expropriations of about 11.5 ha of built-up areas.

11) The ancient road from the Dipylon gate to the Academy.

12) The Academy Area.

Excavations in areas 11 and 12 would require a large investment: 23.5 ha of built-up land would have to be expropriated. Thus in the second phase a total of 35 ha is eligible for expropriations (from a total of 42 ha of future excavation sites.)

Lastly, three more campaigns could be undertaken, covering a total surface of 9 ha, of which 2.5 ha would have to be expropriated.

13) The Theseion park.

14) The triangular built-up area on the lower south slope of the Acropolis, bounded by Hatzichristou Street and Dionysiou Areopagitou Avenue.

15) The area of the athletic installations east of the Olympieion.

The overall expropriation costs of the 42 ha of private land needed for excavation cannot be precisely estimated. Most of the areas eligible for expropriation are situated on the edge of the inner town and by the stipulations of the Athens statutory plan the present grade of land use (i.e. plot area ratio) in these areas is rather low. Thus the incentives for redeveloping these areas during the last decades have been lacking and the sectors are covered with the old urban fabric of low quality and have a low dwelling density. As a result of the above mentioned factors land prices are rather modest in comparison to the actual commercial areas: they vary from U.S. \$ 0.5 to 1.5 million per ha. Thus given an average price of one million U.S. dollars per ha, the total costs of the areas to be expropriated would amount to about U.S. \$ 42 million, a sum twice as high as the estimated total costs of the current restoration campaign of the Acropolis monuments.

The importance of this public investment is not negligible and the total expenditure might even increase if we consider the constant rise in the value of urban real estate; but if one considers the long time span, about 100 years, for the estimated realization of such a vast program and the fact that Greece could count on the traditional support of the foreign archaeological institutes, the enterprise seems feasible.

Aside from future excavations on unbuilt land or in built-up sectors of no historic and/or architectural significance, an important topographical question remains open, namely further investigations of the street network of the ancient city and also uncovering ancient public buildings lying in the area of the old city quarters of Plaka and Psiri.

Given the fact that a consensus on the principle of survival of the old town of Athens (Plaka area) has been reached during the last twenty years, plans for extensive excavations in this part of the city have been definitively abandoned. When, however, trenches were dug for the foundations of new buildings, archaeological investigations yielded valuable information about still unexcavated buildings in this area. A policy of ad hoc incremental archaeological interventions, following the possibilities given by the urban rehabilitation of the area is a feasible way of searching for additional information about the ancient city. It remains, however, an open question if the

complete layout of the streets of ancient Athens can be recovered by means of such piecemeal investigations.

There is no doubt that we will come to know more and more about the townscape of ancient Athens. Since the first plans drawn up by the Capucin monks in the 17th century, successive researches have attained a high degree of knowledge about the development of the ancient city plan, the fortifications, the public buildings and sanctuaries and the house plans of the ancient city. Although one will never recover more than a modest part of these structures, there are good chances of discovering missing pieces of this gigantic puzzle. *The idea of a generalized large-scale excavation covering all of the ancient city intra muros has not only been abandoned in the meanwhile, but it is also completely unfeasible, given the fact that the modern city centre and the old town, Plaka, are covering the northern and eastern part of the ancient town.*

This perspective means some disappointments for the classical archaeologist who has to resign himself to the idea that a part of the ancient town fabric will remain inaccessible for the foreseeable future. This state of affairs is not unique to Athens: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Trier and most of the other important urban centres of antiquity which continued to be inhabited uninterruptedly over the millennia, have been and can be rediscovered only partially, the modern city fabric prohibiting large-scale excavations.

Athens has been continuously inhabited since 3000 B.C. Today, in the 20th century city, ancient monuments still in place, excavation sites, mediaeval churches, Ottoman buildings, 19th century classical revival dwellings, coexist with the living fabric of the metropolis. This is a unique frame of historic reference, an identification asset and a stimulating example of continuity and change in urban life; as such it can only be hailed as a precious gift to the future destinies of the city.

Today the objective of an integrated inner city green belt has entered into planning at municipal and state level independently of (yet in conjunction with) other main planning issues of the capital such as environmental protection, traffic regulation and urban renewal. The decades to come are likely to be decisive for the realization of this one century and a half old civic dream.

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