



National museums in Greece: History, Ideology, Narratives

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Summary

Greek national identity has been moulded on a threefold historical scheme that was initially sketched in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and had been crystallized by the first decades of the twentieth century. This scheme evolved gradually according to changing political and ideological circumstances. The sense of identity was initially based on Greece's affinity to classical antiquity that was exalted to a revered model. When this affinity was disputed, the - previously discarded - Byzantine heritage was reassessed and accepted as an integral part of national heritage while aspects of folk life started being studied in order to provide evidence of the unbroken continuity of the nation down the centuries. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century Greeks could pride themselves for being the heirs of a famous classical heritage, an important Byzantine legacy, and of a living folk tradition some aspects of which - it was believed - might be traced back to antiquity. This ideological process had been consolidated by the 1920s and has since served as the backbone of national master narratives.

National museums such as the National Archaeological Museum (henceforth NAM), the Byzantine and Christian Museum (henceforth BCM), the Museum of Greek Folk Culture (henceforth MGFA) and the National Historical Museum are entrenched in this scheme, support the master narrative and present the notion of an eternal Hellenic spirit that guides the nation through different historical periods. Thus, Greek national museums perpetuate national myths and make official collective memory visible. As large proportions of collective memory is supposedly embodied in emblematic objects of national significance, the public is expecting national museums to act as treasure-houses of national memory, and this is indeed one of the main reasons instructing museum visiting. Moreover, as significant national institutions museums are normally seen as places that tell 'the truth', whereby 'truth' represents nationally sanctioned views of the nation's trajectory. Ruptures, silences, difficult heritage or other voices are hard to be accepted, although significant shifts have been under way for more than a decade now.

This report maps the dynamics of establishing national museums in Greece and provides an overview of the most important national museums in the country through a discussion of selected case studies. For the purpose of this research, which was part of EuNaMus' *Mapping and Framing Institutions 1750-2010* project, a 'national museum' is defined as an institution owned and controlled by the state, which claims and is recognised as being national and which articulates and negotiates national identity and knowledge with public exhibitions. A national public position and a focus on the national narrative are at the core of the investigation.

Summary table, Greece

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
National Archaeological Museum	1893	1866	Archaeological Service	State, Autonomous status, Ministry of Culture	Archaeology	Territorial representation, National narrative	Greek Neolithic to Late Antiquity (7 th millennium BC to 5 th AD)	Neoclassical architecture, city center, Athens.
Byzantine & Christian Museum	1930	1914	Archaeological Service	State, Autonomous status Ministry of Culture	Byzantine Art and Culture	Byzantium as a multifaceted society, a rupture to the national canon.	Early-Christian period (4 th c. AD to 12 th c.)	Contemporary architecture, city center Athens.
Museum of Greek Folk Art	1918	1918	Ministry of Culture	State, Ministry of Culture	Art and Crafts	Territorial representation, National narrative (main building) new approach (branches)	Mid- 17 th to 20 th c. AD	1970s architecture, city center, Athens.
National Historical Museum	1962	1882	Private Society	Historical and Ethnographical Society	History	Territorial representation, National narrative	Fall of Constantinople (1453) to the Greek-Italian war (1940-41)	Neoclassical architecture, city center, Athens.

Introduction

In the pages that follow, I will first trace the circumstances that shaped Greek national identity in an attempt to place national museums formation within this development. As the subject cannot be treated thoroughly within the space of this report, only those events and conditions that played a decisive role in this process will be singled out.

My discussion will make use of Tziovas' (2007; 2008) distinction of four models in the perception of the Greek past. The *symbolic* or *archaeological* model presupposes a distance between past and present which may be bridged at a mainly symbolical level by the revival of the classical past, the purification of monuments from any traces of later historical phases, the changing of place names, and the imposition of a 'purified' language. In contrast, the *organic* or *romantic* model sees the past as living in the present. Nostalgia for the loss of a great past is replaced by nostalgia for the loss of authenticity. As Tziovas (2007: 9) remarks, the first two schemes do not aspire at creating a dynamic Greek 'myth'; rather, they act either passively by adopting a ready-made European myth on the superiority of ancient Hellas, or defensively by shaping the tenet of national continuity when the race's purity is disputed. A dynamic view of Greek identity is, for the first time, put forward by a third scheme which Tziovas names *aesthetic* or *modernist*. This also presupposes the presence of the past in the present, but the relation between the two is now seen as rather aesthetic than historical. The past lives in the present as a manifestation of style and aesthetics. According to this scheme, the notion of continuity is not endangered as it acts 'underneath'. Finally, the *critical* or *post-modernist* scheme sees the past as open to continuous interpretations and rearrangements. The notion of historical continuity is set aside; precedence is now given to the study of disruptions, silences and neglected periods. Certainly, these are not the only models for perceiving the past, but they may be instructive for understanding the forces that shape museum exhibitions.

History, ideology, and changing notions of 'national' heritage

Modern Greece (see Koliopoulos and Veremis, 2002; 2010) was established as an independent state in 1830, following a seven-year revolution against the Ottoman rule. In the meantime, count Ioannis Kapodistrias had been elected as the state's first governor. After his assassination in 1831, the so-called 'protecting powers' (Russia, France, Great Britain) imposed the Bavarian prince Otto A' as king. Otto was well imbued in the classicist atmosphere of the royal court in Munich. Both he and his Bavarian court were determined to restore Greece to a condition worthy of ancient precedent (Hyxley 1998: 16). From then on the cultural orientation of the new state would be 'influenced and indeed distorted, by the burden of Greece's classical past' (Clogg 2002: 71).

For the Greeks the affinity with the classical past was the only 'title of honour' they could use in their effort to consolidate a distinctive national identity. In this affinity the Greeks saw the ideological and political justification for the existence of a Greek state after four centuries, and Europe found a moral justification for her intellectual debt to the Greeks. As classical monuments were the only 'ready' national symbols for use, archaeology became the national discipline *par excellence* and was invested with considerable ideological and political value. The two

main agents of archaeological activity, namely the Greek Archaeological Service and the (private) Archaeological Society, were founded as early as 1833 and 1837 respectively.

Proving the ancient origin of modern Greeks was essential in nation-building ideology for yet another reason. In the 1830s Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer (1830 and 1836) had published his views that contemporary Greeks had no biological relation to the ancient Greeks as they were heavily mixed up with the Slavs from the sixth century AD onwards. Attempts to refute Fallmerayer's theory had a long-lasting effect on Greek intelligentsia (Veloudis 1982). Yet, if the biological link between modern Greeks and their ancient predecessors was broken, their cultural link could easily be proven. Thus, history, archaeology, and early folk studies embarked on a plan to bring to light evidence of the unbroken evolution of the Greek nation from antiquity down to the nineteenth century. This shift also signalled a mental change in the conception of national time: from the scheme of revival to one of continuity (Liakos 2008a: 208).

In contesting Fallmerayer, Spyros Zambelios was the first to acknowledge the Greek character of Byzantium. Ancient Greek civilization, he argued, had not faded away, but had been creatively reshaped as it met with Christianity during the Byzantine period (Loukatos 1992: 62-63). The work of Zambelios paved the way to a comprehensive national history to be written. Konstantinos Papareghopoulos, the founder of Greek national historiography, undertook this project. His seminal work, *History of the Greek Nation, From Antiquity to Modern Times*, was published in five volumes from 1860 to 1874. In this, Papareghopoulos conceived and narrated the entire course of the Greek nation down the centuries adopting the tripartite distinction of the nation's main periods (*ancient Hellenism, medieval Hellenism, and modern Hellenism*) already introduced by Zambelios. The basis for the formation of national identity in Modern Greek society was thus set, and the concept of the diachronic continuity of Hellenism, as an essential part of nation-building ideology was introduced. Since then Papareghopoulos' tripartite scheme would constitute 'the race's gospel' (Kyriakidou-Nestoros 1993: 41).

And yet, as has rightly been remarked:

This official historical theory that was established by the end of the period stood as a simple logical construction. It did not transcend consciousnesses; it did not reach the level of mentalities: there the ancestors' position was jealously kept by the ancients. (Polites 1993: 107)

This observation is critical in explaining the strength of the classical paradigm that colored Greek mentalities for a very long time; arguably until today.

In the 1850s, irredentist ideas which have been working under the surface for sometime were crystallised in the concept of the 'Great Idea', that is the aspiration of equating the Greek state with the Greek nation through the incorporation of all people who were considered Greek within the Greek territory. From then on, and in parallel with the evolution of historiography, irredentist aspirations colored the socio-political and ideological climate of the country. As an ideological instrument the 'Great Idea' was transforming itself according to changing political, economic and social circumstances at least until the 1880s (Kremydas 2010: 107-12), if not, as is usually held, until 1922. The 'Great Idea' influenced notions of continuity in space and time, and thus weighted heavily on the formation of national narratives. A reappraisal of Byzantine heritage initially, and then of that of modern Hellenism (1453-1830), was an indispensable theoretical

requirement for the state's irredentist aspirations. Yet, this theoretical scheme was not easily endorsed in practice: mainstream Greek archaeology would be very late to embrace both Byzantine archaeology (initially as a study of Christian religious art), and Prehistoric archaeology (with the only exemption of what could be viewed as a prelude to classical civilization; see Kotsakis 1991: 67; cf. Voutsaki 2003: 250-51).

A growing interest for preserving a wider range of monuments manifested itself around the turn of the century, with the foundation of the Ethnological and Historical Society in 1882, the Christian Archaeological Society in 1884, and the Greek Folk Society in 1908. Yet, it was not until 1914 that a Byzantine museum was established in Athens, while the 'National Museum of Decorative Arts' (today the Museum of Greek Folk Art) was founded in 1918. Nevertheless, despite the theoretical restoration of later phases in the history of Hellenism, antiquity remained a powerful model.

On the political level, the second half of the nineteenth century saw major attempts at reforming the state, reorganizing the economy and modernizing institutions. In 1862 Otto was dethroned, and the Danish Prince William George was enthroned as King George I of the Hellenes. Borders were extended with the annexing of the Ionian Islands in 1864 and of a large part of Thessaly in 1881. In 1897 an unfortunate war against the Ottomans led to a 'humiliating' Greek defeat and debased national pride. 1897 marked a turning point in Greek awareness: the disillusionment following the defeat in war brought about a desire to 're-examine everything from scratch' (Yanoulopoulos 1999: 179), and an effort to redefine a sense of national identity. The search for a new identity included a renegotiation of the relationship with antiquity.

Thus, at the turn of the century Greek society found itself in a clash between traditional ideas and new social needs that could not be satisfied through the traditional schemes put forward by intellectuals or other social agents. Two different national ideologies were fiercely confronting each other with language providing the major battlefield. Proponents of demotic language saw it as a mechanism for the general reformation of Greek society. Proponents of the 'pure' language strongly resisted any reform. Of course, much more than language was at stake: concepts of society and education, attitudes toward the past and its uses. In 1911, the struggle would ease temporarily with the adoption of *katharevousa* (pure language) as official language of the State (see Stavridi-Patrikiou 1999, 2000 and 2010: 113-141; Frangoudaki 2001; Mackridge 2010).

As Leondaritis (1983) remarks, the dominant ideological model that followed a traditional-ethnocentric scheme was so powerful that it could not easily be displaced by reformist attempts. Clearly, the notion of national identity based on ancient Greece was very persistent and would survive until well into the twentieth century.

On the political level, mobilizations aiming at reforming the political life of the country culminated in the 1909 'Ghoudi revolt'. Eleutherios Venizelos, one of the most prominent figures in the history of modern Greece, was recalled from Crete to undertake the economic and political modernisation of Greek society (Dakin 1972: 183-189). The ten-year period (1910-20) that followed was marked by efforts to shape Greece as a modern state. At the end of this period, Greek irredentist aspirations in Asia Minor, initially reinforced by the Great Powers, led to the painful 'Asia Minor Catastrophe' in 1922. Some 1.200.000 Greeks were uprooted and flooded Greece as refugees.

The defeat of the Greek forces signalled the final cancellation of all remaining traces of the ‘Great Idea’: irredentist aspirations came to an end, and the Greek nation was once and for all equated with the Greek state. This would deeply upset the quest for national identity. Until then Modern Greek ideology was about national integration and Greek cultural identity was ‘introvert’ as the main issue for the nation was continuity and unity in space and time. Now the quest for cultural identity becomes ‘extrovert’ in an attempt to define Greekness (Hellenicity) dynamically (Tziovas 1989: 51), and in direct conversation with Europe. Indeed, this was the first time that the search for a distinctively Greek identity was modelled neither on imposed European models (antiquity) nor on defensive attempts to prove the cultural continuity of the nation (Byzantium, Modern Greek heritage).

In the 1920s, the notion of Greekness comes dynamically to the fore bringing about a clear Helleno-centric character as Greeks are now called to redefine a sense of heritage and to reinvent their tradition. ‘Return to the roots’ is a central quest shared by intellectuals, artists, architects, and researchers (Hadjinikolaou 2003: 14). As a consequence a strong interest in folk art and vernacular idioms develops in architecture, festivals, domestic furniture.

The trends initiated in the 1920s would intensify during the next decade. Indeed, the 1930s marked a significant break with both the *archaeological* and the *romantic* scheme of viewing the past. The so-called ‘Thirties Generation’, a group of writers, artists and intellectuals, sought the essence of being Greek in archetypal forms of Greekness as expressed mainly in artistic creation, literature and folklore. This is what Tziovas (2007) calls the *aesthetic* or *modernist* model of looking at the past. Interestingly, however, Greek intellectuals - especially artists - now ‘discovered’ and appropriated Byzantium as a source of ‘indigenous modern art’ (Kourelis 2007: 429). Greek modernism included elements of both Byzantine and vernacular culture as manifested, for instance, in modernist Greek architecture and painting of the time.

In 1936, Ioannes Metaxas establishes a dictatorship that would last until 1941. Metaxas envisaged the creation of a ‘Third Greek Civilisation’, a civilisation that would mix the best elements of ‘Greekness from time immemorial’ (Carabott 2003: 26). Although his turn to antiquity was a distinctive one in that he turned to societies that promoted collective over individual achievements and had an austere character (like ancient Sparta and to a lesser extent ancient Macedonia; his vision also comprised a quest for what is authentically Greek and highlighted elements of ‘traditional culture’; see Hamilakis 2007: 169-204). In the years to follow a latent turn to the past and tradition would manifest itself in many aspects of intellectual and social life, especially literature (Vitti 2000), but also research, museums, and fashion. Folk studies, in particular, were employed to serve the ideal of a national culture based on notions of ‘popular authenticity’ (Tziovas 1989: 149).

Greece came out of World War II practically destroyed. The euphoria that prevailed immediately after the liberation ignited changes in the wider intellectual environment. The glorification of collectivity, of ‘people’, of ‘nation’, etc., prevailed, especially among the Left. The defeat of the communists at the end of the Civil War (1945-1949), however, would mark a new turn to antiquity as a symbol of the intellectual revival of the country. As Hamilakis (2009: 27) observes, “Cultural continuity with the ancient Hellenic past was never seriously challenged, even by the ‘others’ of the nation, such as persecuted leftists and communists of the pre-war and post-war years”. Post-war archaeology, in particular, preserved - and perhaps even reinforced - its

Hellenist orientation. The worship of Hellenism led to theoretical isolation which kept Greek archaeology away from intellectual developments taking place elsewhere (Morris 1994: 12; Kotsakis 1991). This had a definite impact on museum exhibitions.

In the 1950s, the country entered a long period of economic and social recovery with the financial help of the American Marshall Plan. Major public works were undertaken, urbanisation grew, and Greek society was rapidly transforming itself. Archaeology and preservation now entered the tourism agenda as Greece started deploying its cultural attractions as a considerable means of finance. The large-scale cultural regeneration of the 1960s - mainly evident in music, cinema and literary production - was interrupted by a harsh dictatorship that lasted from 1967 to 1974. During those years, the regime emphasized the notion of a distinctive Hellenic-Christian civilisation.

The restoration of democracy in 1974 and Greece's accession to the European Community in 1981 would signify the beginning of a new era which employed the notion of the Europeanism of Greek culture for asserting its place in the new landscape. The late 1970s and the 1980s brought about a renewed interest in the use of antiquities as 'symbolic capital' (Hamilakis and Yalouri 1996) for emphasizing the country's position in the world. Archaeology was now called upon to substantiate the dissemination of ideological messages about Greece to an international audience: starting from 1979 a number of large Greek exhibitions organised by the Ministry of Culture were sent abroad (e.g. to France, USA, Australia, Canada) aiming at either consolidating Greece's position within the EU, or reminding the eternal (and international) ideals of ancient Greek art, or even boosting up national pride among Greeks of the Diaspora (Mouliou 1996).

From the late 1980s onwards, significant changes have taken place in many fields which concern us here: a growing self-awareness and critical approach has been adopted in the fields of history (Kitromilides and Sklavenitis 2004, Liakos 2004) and archaeology (Hamilakis 1993 and 1992-1998, Eugenidou 1993); museum studies were introduced in Greek universities (see *ILISSIA* 2008, Vemi and Nakou 2010); specialized museum professionals started being employed by state museums; and cultural anthropology emerged as a discipline overtly distinctive from traditional folk studies (Toundassaki 2003; Avdikos 2009; Gefou-Madianou 2009). But these changes are not reflected in cultural policy, theory and practice yet alone in 'national' imagination. Popular views of history, archaeology and heritage continue to be anchored in deeply rooted national myths, and attempts at revisiting such myths trigger fierce reactions (see Stathis 2007).

In contrast, celebrating national myths is usually well received. The opening ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, for instance, offered a - highly, but not unanimously, praised - series of *tableaux vivants* celebrating Hellenism down the centuries: 'Emphasis on continuity..., a celebration of the all-time classic Greek ideal..., an allusion to some of the eternal Greek values ... all suitably packaged for worldwide broadcast ... throughout...' (Plantzos 2008: 11). Not surprisingly, the majority of these *tableaux* related to the ancient rather to the Byzantine or modern periods.

Clearly, national pride and national identity continue to be based on the reminiscence of Greek antiquity (Liakos 2008: 219-20), and it is this period that the Greeks repeatedly return to in their effort to project themselves in a post-modern world (Mackridge 2008). Within this climate, shifts observed in academia and research are difficult to infiltrate the level of mentalities and to be translated into concrete policies and practices. Museums are not exempted from this rule.

In the pages that follow, I will attempt to place Greek national museums within the frame outlined above in order to analyze their dependence to or deviation from the canonized national ideals of each particular period. Before going to this, I will briefly sketch out the structural system within which Greek museums operate.

Greek cultural heritage: the administration system

Legislation

The legal system of protection of cultural heritage has always been closely intertwined to changing notions of national identity, and as such has always heavily depended on state intervention (Voudouri 2010).

The first archaeological law, the work of Bavarian Georg Ludwig von Maurer, was instituted in 1834 (Voudouri 2003: 18-30). It declared that '*all antiquities in Greece, being works of the ancestors of the Greek people, are considered as national property of all Greeks.*' Interestingly, protection vaguely referred to '*works of art from the very ancient times of Christianity to the so-called Medieval Times*'.

The second archaeological law, enacted in 1899, established the complete property of the State on all antiquities without exceptions. Provision also extended – although in a rather negative way – to medieval antiquities. At a legal level, this law reflects the 'Hellenisation' of Byzantium by means of the 'Papareghopoulion' narrative (Voudouri 2003: 63). In practice, protection was exclusively geared towards classical antiquities, and attempts at 'purifying' monuments to their initial glory, led later phases into destruction.

In the course of the twentieth century, the scope of protection was gradually extended so as to include Byzantine and Post-Byzantine monuments along with significant modern monuments and historic sites. The third archaeological law (No. 5351), a highly protectionist piece of legislation, was enacted in 1932 (for a comprehensive discussion see Mouliou 1998).

In 1977, a Directorate of Folk Culture was established in the Ministry of Culture. Despite its rather restrictive title, this service was entrusted with the protection of a large part of Modern Greek heritage ranging from traditional architecture and modern material culture to collection, museums, folk music and dance (Hadjinikolaou 2003: 17). The Directorate was later renamed as Directorate of Modern Cultural Heritage.

In the 1990s, the concept of *diachronia* was revived in the official rhetoric of the Ministry of Culture. In the words of the then Minister, E. Venizelos:

In the Ministry we are interested in highlighting the diachronia of Greek culture' and 'this diachronic axis is very much at the core of the Ministry's concerns, for it is directly related to museums and exhibition policies, to the promotion of Greek culture abroad...' (Venizelos quoted in Mouliou 2009: 236-37)

In 1997, Law 2557 'Institutions, measures and actions for cultural development', and then Law 3028 'On the protection of antiquities and cultural heritage in general', in 2002, established the legal framework that was necessary for putting into practice this political doctrine (Mouliou 2009: 237). Protection now covers cultural heritage of all periods, with internal chronological divisions corresponding to different degrees of protection. The list of properties is widened to include intangible heritage and historic landscapes. Important steps are taken towards the organisation of the museum sector and the improvement of museums operation, and a *Museums Council* is

established for the first time in Greece in 2002. The Council has an advisory and consultative role, and is responsible for suggesting museum policy to the Minister.

Management

The main body responsible for policies on cultural heritage and the Arts is the Hellenic Ministry of Culture (and Tourism, today) that was founded in 1971. At Ministry level, the *General Directorate of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage*, consisting of eight central Directorates, is responsible for issuing policies and monitoring work in this field. Of interest here are the Directorates of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Antiquities, and of Modern Cultural Heritage. At regional level, all archaeological and museum work is undertaken by regional services known as 'Ephorates' (Ephorates also follow the division into prehistoric/classical, Byzantine/post-Byzantine.). Today, there are 39 Ephorates of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and 28 Ephorates of Byzantine Antiquities. Things are much more complex as regards Modern Heritage as its protection is split among many departments: movable cultural goods and folk museums are controlled centrally from the Directorate of Modern Cultural Heritage, while monuments and other architectural structures are managed by units coming under the General Directorate of Restoration, Museums and Technical Works (things are further complicated by the fact that responsibility for traditional architecture, for example, is also regulated by The Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change).

The Ephorates of antiquities are staffed by archaeologists outweighing, by a certain percentage, all other professionals. Given this and the fact that, with the exception of eight major museums which function as autonomous administrative units (The National Archaeological, the Byzantine and Christian, the Numismatic and the Epigraphical museums in Athens, the Archaeological Museum and the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki, the Herakleion Archaeological Museum in Crete, and the Museum of Asiatic Art in Corfu), all state archaeological museums operate under the relevant regional Ephorates, it is easy to understand that museum operation is just one out of a myriad other tasks - ranging from excavation to bureaucracy - entrusted to archaeologists working in the Archaeological Service. The shortcomings of this system are obvious and have often been criticised (Voudouri 2003: *passim*).

The new *Organization of the Ministry of Culture*, which was passed in 2003 (Presidential Decree no. 191, 'Organisation of the Ministry of Culture', FEK A' 146, 13/6/2003) tried to remedy some of these inefficiencies. One major initiative was the establishment for the first time of separate units of 'Museums, Exhibitions and Educational Programs' within the Ephorates of Antiquities. Units of 'Museographic research and artistic planning of exhibitions' have also been created within the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens, the Archaeological Museum and the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki, and the Herakleio Museum in Crete. Interestingly, such a unit is not anticipated for the largest museum in the country, the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. The *Organization* further provided for twelve posts of archaeologists with a post-graduate degree in Museum Studies (4 out of these posts are in the central service in Athens; the remaining 8 are allocated to the autonomous museums referred to above). The 2003 *Organization* also set the criteria for selection to positions that rank high in the hierarchy such as Directors and Unit managers. Here again, archaeologists are given precedence over other professionals even if the post in question refers to museum and exhibition planning.

Museums

Archaeological museums (Byzantine included) form the largest group of museums in Greece, followed by folk museums. Then come art museums and galleries, which are normally municipal, history museums, maritime museums, university museums, natural history museums and technology museums. Other categories are underrepresented. The outline that follows will thus be based on the evolution of archaeology and folk museums.

The ‘pioneer period’ (1829-1874) of museum development was characterized by the effort to collect antiquities and safeguard them in ‘museums’. Already in 1829 Governor Kapodistrias ‘...ordered the establishment of a *national museum*’ at Aegina, then capital of the country, ‘for collecting into it whichever relics were threatened with destruction or were in danger of becoming a prey to foreigners...’ (Gazi 1993: 77).

The first archaeological Law (1834) introduced the foundation of public museums in Athens where ‘the rarest of finds’ were to be deposited, and provided for the establishment of local museums in the provinces, but this was not implemented until the 1870s. Throughout the nineteenth century legislation provided mainly for the organisation of major Athenian museums such as the NAM, the Acropolis and the Numismatic Museum. The ‘formative period’ (1874-1900) was characterized by the organization of the large Athenian museums, and the creation of museums in the provinces. A marked improvement in museum practices took place during the ‘expansion period’ (1900-1909). To that period, all museums in the country (with the exception of the National Gallery which was established in 1900, and some early museums established at the University of Athens) were archaeological and solely devoted to classical antiquities.

Other types of museums started being established in the first decade of the twentieth century, but the strong emphasis on archaeology continued until the 1960s. The long ‘regeneration period’ (1948-1976) was a time of intensive reorganization of most archaeological museums; the prevailing interpretive museum paradigm was the ‘classical past as linear evolution of art’ (Mouliou 2008: 83). In the years 1977-1996 archaeological museums started employing a more empirical and objective analysis of archaeological finds without abandoning the past-as-history-of-art approach. During this period also emerged the need for a more educational and hence more useful to society museum, but this view did not manage to out stage the two earlier interpretative models in the production of permanent displays (Mouliou 2008: 84).

In the meantime, following the rapid transformation of traditional communities after World War II, collecting ‘folk art’ has become a primary concern of local societies and individuals alike. Many collections are formed all around the country, but no attempt is made at recording information, cataloguing objects or scientific study. Enhanced by the Junta’s ideological devotedness to tradition, the expansion of folk museums that characterized the 1970s was informed more by a desire to ‘save’ vanishing aspects of ‘traditional’ life than by specific policies. Tradition was fossilized in time as a romantic reference to vanished rural societies, and the notion of identity as a continuously evolving entity was missed (Hadjinikolaou 2003: 17). Thus, although the establishment of the Directorate of Folk Culture in 1977 (see above) signified the state’s intention of approaching tradition in a more systematic way, and despite many efforts made since then by both the Directorate and the MGFA to organize local folk museums around the country, these museums have largely kept a very backward orientation, cut off from the dialogue which has been underway in research centers or in academia (Caftantzoglou 2003: 36).

Many more types of museums such as natural history museums and art galleries came into being from the 1980s onwards. The 1980s and the 1990s were mainly characterized by the proliferation of private museums, the growth of educational activities, the proliferation of temporary exhibitions and the introduction of new technologies (Gazi 1999a). The first decade of the twentieth-first century experienced an unprecedented proliferation of temporary exhibitions along with the redisplay of many permanent collections. This period has been seen as a time of great opportunities and of pressing challenges (Mouliou 2008: 84).

In brief, the Greek museum system is heavily dependent on state policy, is highly controlled by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and is predominated by archaeologists who stipulate what is to be allowed in modern Greek culture and ‘continue to produce and recycle aesthetic value for the sake of the nation’ (Plantzos 2008: 16).

Today there are 8 museums in Greece which may qualify as ‘national’ on the basis of their name, ownership, scope of collections and national significance: the NAM, the BCM, the MGFA, the National Gallery-Alexandros Soutzos Museum, the War Museum, the National Museum of Contemporary Art, the State Museum of Contemporary Art, and the New Acropolis Museum. The above museums are state-controlled, have collections of national importance that represent Greek culture from prehistoric times to date, while their displays have a strong focus on national narratives. The only exceptions to this rule are the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens and the State Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki whose collections cover both Greek and international art.

There are 3 more museums which are not state-owned, but hold collections of national importance, and occupy a significant public position in the articulation of national identity: the National Historical Museum, the Benaki Museum, and the Hellenic Maritime Museum.

Case studies

Here, I focus on the NAM, the BCM, and the MGFA. These museums are generally considered as ‘the’ national museums *par excellence* because:

- they cover the three ‘canonized’ periods of Greek history (ancient, Byzantine, and Modern),
- they exhibit important works of national cultural heritage, and inform the public’s understanding of ‘national heritage’.
- they ‘elaborate and diffuse the notion of historical continuity of the nation and its unit in time and space. Moreover, their policies illustrate the national will to hide problems of discontinuity and alterity’ (Toundassaki and Caftantzoglou 2005: 229).
- they are perceived by visitors as places where notions of continuity, heritage and descent can be traced, and also as agents that may boost national morale. They may thus be considered as *loci* of ‘imaginary security’ away from disturbing notions of otherness, discontinuity and contemporary unrest (Caftantzoglou, Toundassaki and Frydakis 2005).

In addition to the above, a short section on the development of the National Historical Museum in Athens will illuminate how Greek political history is treated.

The National Archaeological Museum

Introduction

The Museum's foundations were laid in October 1866. Construction was based on plans drawn by Ludwig Lange, but the building was completed in 1889 by Ernst Ziller who gave the museum its neoclassical character (Karouzos and Karouzou 1981: 12-13; see also Kokkou 2009). Officially, the museum was established in 1893:

The foundation of the National Museum aims at the study and teaching of the archaeological science, the diffusion of archaeological knowledge among us and the development of love for the arts. For this reason all antiquities which are significant for understanding the history of ancient art and knowing ancient life... are to be assembled in it. (Royal Decree 'On the Organization of the National Archaeological Museum' 31/7/1893, FEK A' 152)

Today it is the largest museum in Greece, housing 5 large permanent collections:

- *The Prehistoric Collection*, which includes works of the civilizations that developed in the Aegean from the seventh millennium BC to 1,050 BC (Neolithic, Cycladic, Mycenaean);
- *The Sculptures Collection*, which shows the development of ancient Greek sculpture from the seventh to the fifth centuries BC;
- *The Vase and Minor Objects Collection*, with representative works of ancient Greek pottery from the eleventh century BC to the Roman period;
- *The Metallurgy Collection*; and
- *The Egyptian and Near Eastern Antiquities Collection*, with objects dating from the pre-dynastic period (5,000 BC) to the Roman conquest.

The main phases in the organization of the NAM are outlined below.

1881-1891: Formative years

Within the decade 1881-1891 and as construction is still under way all antiquities previously housed elsewhere are collected into the Museum, and exhibition halls are gradually opened to the public. At the same time, important work is being carried out in cataloguing collections, and by 1891 the first two editions of a popular guide to the sculpture collection are published (Gazi 1993: 162).

The main responsible for the museum at the time is Panayotes Eustratiades then General Ephor of Antiquities, one of the most important figures of nineteenth century Greek archaeology (Petrakos 1987: 260, 262, *passim*, and 2007: 72-73).

1895-1909: Shaping the museum

The systematic organization of the Museum is marked by the presence of Panayotes Kavvadias, one of the most prominent figures of early Greek archaeology, who dominated the field by occupying various crucial posts (Petrakos 1987: 82-84, 108-11, 282-84, and 2007).

Kavvadias actively organized all aspects of museum work and initiated the gradual assemblage in the National Museum of important antiquities from all over the country (Kavvadias 1890-92: 39, n. 1). French archaeologist Salomon Reinach wrote in 1893:

In ten years Pan. Cavvadias obtained results which struck me with admiration... their organization became so perfect that I do not know, in all Europe, any better arranged. The National Museum and that of the Acropolis should be today places of pilgrimage to all those who are accessible to the aesthetic emotion. (*Révue Archéologique* 1893: 237)

In their catalogue of the Museum's vases collection, Collignon and Couve (1902: preface) praised the museum as follows: '... grâce à une excellente installation matérielle, et à un classement très méthodique ce musée répond à toutes les exigences et ne connaît aucune comparaison'. And, Gustave Fougeres, visiting Athens in 1912:

The visitor accustomed to the vain show of European galleries, where the repaired Antiquities appear under flattering appearances, will at first suffer to see so many mutilated statues here. However, he will not be long to appreciate the advantage of a simple but sincere exhibition of original works, of known production, and methodically classed. (Quoted in Philadelfeus 1935: 52)

During this period, the museum is viewed as a national shrine: '... [the Museum] ... became ... a sacred shrine, within which collected treasures of ancient art ... are exposed to the adoration and admiration ... of all those who make the pilgrimage...' (Kastriotes 1908). The museum holds and exhibits the very emblems of national pride. As their symbolic power and appeal was taken for granted, exposing antiquities to public view was enough evidence of the affinity of modern to ancient Greece. The objects' symbolic power was offered to visitors as a 'matter of faith' and as 'objectified value' (Pearce 1992: 203). In this way, the museum symbolised the cultural revival of the nation.

As I have shown elsewhere, the display of archaeology as history of art with the emphasis put on aesthetics rather than on contextual information was not only in accordance with the dominant exhibition model of the time in Europe, but was also a reflection of intellectual 'colonialism' imported from German classical scholarship which was particularly widespread among Greek archaeologists who had studied in Munich, Leipzig, Bonn, Gottingen, or Berlin (Gazi 1993, 1994, 1999b, 2008, and forthcoming).

1909-1939: A national treasure-house

From the late nineteenth century until after World War II, the Museum assumed its paramount role as a national treasure house. No major work was undertaken in the inter war period, apart from the addition of new space in 1932-1939 (Kaltsas 2007: 20).

1941-1944: Occupation

With the outbreak of World War II, the Museum's collections were secured either in places outside the building or in the museum's basements and in holes dug up under the floors. Protected by a thick layer of clear sand, antiquities survived the Occupation (Karouzou 1946).

1946-1966: Regeneration

The titanic task of the post-war reorganization of the Museum was the work of Christos Karouzos, acting director from 1942-1964, and his wife Semni Papaspyridi-Karouzou. An emblematic figure of twentieth century Greek archaeology, Karouzos had a broad humanist education (Kunze 1968; *Nea Estia* 1987; Petrakos 1995). In contrast to most archaeologists of his

generation, he kept away of mainstream archaeological practices (e.g. excavation, cataloguing) and pursued the aesthetic study and appreciation of objects. Karouzos was nurtured within the German tradition of art history, also cherished by both his predecessors and his contemporary archaeologists; but he was the only one who clearly explained his philosophy in a plethora of publications. To him the Museum was primarily a museum of history of art and not of history; he further believed that it was the Museum's obligation to enlighten the artistic character of the ancient works (Karouzos 2000: 137-38). As a proponent of the view that art appeals primarily to the sight, he placed particular emphasis on the deep knowledge and the visual cultivation of the instructor, in this case the museum archaeologist, for transmitting this knowledge to the public (Karouzos 2000: 140-41).

Karouzos worked painstakingly for the Museum's revival. The hard and time-consuming work of unmasking the antiquities was his first priority. The process is well described in many accounts (Karouzou 1946, 1984a, and 1984b; Karouzos and Karouzou 1981: 13-14; Petrakos 1995: 108-10; Touloupa 1997; Kaltsas 2007: 20).

Writes Nobel Prize Poet George Seferis:

They now unearth... the statues. ... the workmen excavate with shovels and pickaxes. If you didn't look at the roof... the walls... this could be any excavation. Statues still sunken in the earth, appeared naked from the waist up... It was a dance of the resurrected, a second coming of bodies... Emotion from this sudden closeness. The bronze Zeus or Poseidon was lying on a casket. I touched him... I thought I touched my own body... (Seferis 1986: 38-39)

At the time of writing (1946), a ferocious Civil War is devastating the country. Seferis' resurrected bodies and the strong feelings they provoke transcend historical time, and function as an allegory to a timeless Hellenic harmony. In this way, the resurrection of the National Museum symbolizes the post-war regeneration of the nation (Leontis 1995).

Foreseeing that the museum's reorganization would take many years to complete, Karouzos initiated a series of temporary exhibitions. From then on and until Karouzos' retirement in 1964, galleries opened one after the other (see Anon 1951, Karouzou 1956, 1957, 1984a and 1984b, Sakellariou 1987, Dontas 1987). Writing about the new exhibition's philosophy Karouzos noted:

Some would ask which were the principles followed by those who set up the exhibition. The answer is that they ... did not study any book ... related to what is nowadays called *Museology* nor did they study some specific prototype because there was no such. They did not follow any *a priori* principle apart from one: how each work of art could be exalted, how it could reveal its beauty and talk at times alone at times with its group, without being disturbed by the architectural or chromatic environment. (Quoted in Petrakos 1995: 110)

Archaeologists who assisted Karouzos confirmed this: 'every time we went into theoretical discussions he said: 'Leave the words. The eye will decide' (Sakellariou 1987: 1136), and reiterated by Semni Karouzou: 'None APRIORI [sic] principle, none aesthetic theory was implemented... One single principle prevailed: how each work of art could be exalted...' (Karouzou 1984b: 67).

Karouzos remained closely involved in the Museum's redisplay until his death in 1967. The contribution of his wife Semni was of equal – if not of major – importance (Nikolaidou-Kokkinidou 1998: 244-51; Karouzou 1984a; see also Kokkinidou and Nikolaidou 2000). In her writings she vividly expressed the aesthetic ideal that guided their thought: 'The works of art

must be presented with lucidity and vividness; knowledge must be concealed behind the visual pleasure for a new element has ... emerged, that is vision' (Karouzou 1956: 849). And,

Works have to be presented in space free, self existent, ... earnest so as to affect and to be understood... Every means of showing off ..., rich showcases, pompous bases ... and the like should vanish so as to concentrate on the [work] itself. Not simply to learn but primarily to be moved [i.e. by it]. (Quoted in Zervoudaki 1997: 30)

The Museum's re-opening was heralded as 'a cultural event of global significance' and as 'an auspicious turning point for the revival of the cultural values in our land' (quoted in Mouliou 1997: 114). The Karouzos' work was not only saluted as 'pioneering' (Kaltsas 2007: 22), but also acknowledged 'as a... national service' (quoted in Mouliou 1997: 130). The Museum now materializes the cultural revival of the country after World War II in the same way that it materialized cultural affinity to classical Greece in the nineteenth century.

The presence of Christos and Semni Karouzos left a clear imprint on a whole generation of archaeologists (see, for example, Romiopoulou 1997: 40), and would have a long lasting effect in museological thinking in Greece. The fact that their work remained 'frozen in time' and was revered as 'sacred', a golden cannon in itself, until the passing away of Semni at the age of 97 in 1994, is very telling of the difficulty of Greek state archaeology to move away from prototypes and accept new ideas. Talking at the first conference of the Association of Greek Archaeologists in 1967 Dimitrios Theocharis, a prominent and influential prehistorian, asserted:

Exhibitions of art such as the ones at the NAM... constitute *aesthetic and scientific peaks*, accomplishments which are perhaps unparalleled in other aspects of Greek life... In the National Museum Christos Karouzos wrote an epic of wisdom, aesthetic completeness and sharpness... Thus we ... now have a model in front of us, a prototype to follow. Exhibitions of works of art in Greek museums will aim at this: the exaltation and promotion of "Greek" with Greek means, simplicity and austerity. In this basic issue there is no second opinion. (Theocharis 1984: 80-81; emphasis in the original)

1966-2004: Safe values

The Karouzos' exhibition remained practically unaltered until the 1990s. Partial attempts at refreshing the museum's profile and redisplaying some collections (Romiopoulou 1995) were not enough to face the challenge of new museological theory and practice. Changes were rather aesthetic and museographical than museological / ideological (Demakopoulou 2001). In the words of one of the museum's directors in the 1990s:

The National Museum belongs to the category of large state museums which were founded in the previous century ... in order to house precious collections of works of art ... Their permanent exhibitions have a consciously academic character of *diachronic value*, and they follow tried out display methods. (Demakopoulou 1999; emphasis added)

2004-2009: Missed opportunities

The necessity for a major refurbishment was made urgent by the prospect of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. Starting from 2001, the building had been renovated and its infrastructure was improved. In the summer of 2004 the new exhibitions of the Prehistoric collection (Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2010) and of all sculpture (Vlahoyanni 2010) opened, to be followed in 2005 by the

redisplay of the Collections of Pottery and Bronzes (Proskynitopoulou 2010). All other collections, such as the Egyptian collection (Tourna 2010), were opened by 2009.

The museum's redisplay was the result of intensive collective work by the museum's archaeologists coordinated by current director Nikolaos Kaltsas. The classic scheme of exhibiting objects by collections in a chronological order is preserved while thematic units are now introduced. Yet, the Karouzos' legacy lingered on. This is attested in both academic and popular writings. Long before the opening of the new exhibitions, for instance, the Association of Greek Architects has repeatedly voiced its severe objections to both the structural innovations and the exhibition refurbishment. Interestingly, the Association lamented the end of the Karouzos' era arguing that their exhibition 'was internationally acclaimed and considered exemplary as to its straightforward and plain way of exhibiting' (Rizospastis 2003). In the same vain, journalist P. Katimertzzi had commented, already in 1982: 'This Museum should not change. It is a museum of classical museological philosophy, a museum that is Pan-Hellenic and irreplaceable... The National Museum is some sort of sacred cow...'

This view seems to be endorsed by the museum's curators who assert that 'the central idea of the post-war "Karouzean" vision, that is the diachronic continuity of ancient Greek sculpture, is retained in the new exhibition' (Vlahoyanni 2010: 86), the only concession being the provision of contextual information. Or, 'The excellent bronze works impress and "speak" for themselves without elaborate means and additional applications' (Proskynitopoulou 2010: 88). The reappearance of the nineteenth century parlance is astounding. Moreover, the perception of the museum as a national treasure house is revamped: 'The NAM is ... a showcase of national heritage and also an arc of ancient Greek art' (Vatopoulos 2004), '[Athens'] best museum [is] the cradle with the most desirable tokens of its heritage...' (Xydakis 2004).

Nevertheless, the new exhibitions have been severely criticized as being a 'close dialogue among archaeologists' and as lacking any concrete message. The museum's plain coloring and atmosphere is accused as being 'suffocating', ostensibly sober and dry thus denoting not only lack of sensibility to the civilization on show but also ignorance of or indifference to current museological tenets (Papadopoulos 2004). The redisplay has further been accused for lack of vision, and for inability to respond to some crucial questions such as 'How does one re-reads Greek antiquity in the contemporary world, how does one communicates national heritage as global?' (Vatopoulos 2003).

Conclusion

The NAM is 'the' national museum in Greece as it represents one of the most deeply embedded and dominant national myths, namely the origin of modern Greece from ancient Hellas. The NAM's master narrative, initiated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and fine-tuned by the 1910s was initially accomplished by simply putting the antiquities on display as 'objectified truths' and as a matter of faith. Since then, and despite changing perceptions of how to best view and appreciate the works on display – as exemplified by the aesthetic turn of the post-war period launched by the Karouzos', or by the disputable results of the 2004-2009 renovation, the NAM has retained its character as a national 'icon' and a national 'shrine'. This is mainly evident in all exhibition halls that display either well-known or emblematic 'national' objects such as the ones exhibited in the Mycenaean Hall, the Sculpture galleries, and the Vases rooms. This is not the

case with the display of other ‘minor’ collections, such as the Stathatos collection, the Vlastos-Serpieris collection, or the Egyptian collection (Tourna 2010), which could be treated in a less austere and more visitor-friendly way as they obviously do not ‘threaten’ the canonized view of the NAM as a shrine to national ingenuity.

The Byzantine and Christian Museum

Introduction

The BCM was established in the early twentieth century in order to collect, study, preserve and exhibit the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine cultural heritage of the Hellenic territory. Today the museum houses approximately 30,000 objects from all over Greece, Asia Minor, the Balkans and Russia divided into eleven collections: icons, sculptures, ceramics, textiles, wall paintings, mosaics, paintings, manuscripts and printed books, minor works, replicas, and the Loverdos collection. The Museum’s permanent exhibition is divided in two main parts: The first is devoted to Byzantium (fourth - fifteenth c. AD), and the second to the period from the fifteenth to the twentieth century.

The Museum’s official foundation in 1914 marks the culmination of changing concepts and predispositions towards the nation’s past. Let us remind that already in 1834 the first archaeological law provided for the protection of monuments dating from the ‘most ancient times of Christianity or the so-called mediaeval age’, but this was not implemented at the time, as Byzantium was not yet incorporated into the national narrative. The growing acceptance of Byzantium into the national consciousness began with the work of Papareghopoulos in the 1870s. In practice, however, this change of attitude materialized in the last decade of the nineteenth century with the restoration of important Byzantine monuments and the enactment of a new legislation in 1899. As a clear indication of the ideological shift, the term ‘mediaeval Hellenism’ is now officially incorporated in national legislation to replace the 1834 reference to the ‘most ancient times of Christianity or the so-called mediaeval age’.

1884-1914: Preparation

The history of the Museum is closely connected to the foundation, in 1884, of the Christian Archaeological Society the main aim of which was to protect Christian antiquities thus proving the consistent presence of the Church in Greek matters. The driving force behind these activities was Georgios Lambakis. He enthusiastically and energetically collected Christian material and managed to form a very rich collection that was in 1923 incorporated in the BCM. Lambakis’ vision was a religious one: his quest for ecclesiastical objects was intended to provide proof of the unfailing Christian faith and worship from the first period of Christianity to his days. For him the nation’s continuity coincided with the unbroken continuation of the life of the Church (Gratziou 1986: 56): he collects religious heirlooms not national monuments. Reflecting the power exerted by the Church at the time, Lambakis’ views would prove instrumental in shaping the early character of the Museum.

At the same time, attempts at establishing a state Byzantine Museum bore no fruit as the relevant legal provision in 1897 and 1909 never materialized. In 1912 the first chair of Byzantine Archaeology is established at the University of Athens. Adamantios Adamantiou, previously Ephor of Antiquities, takes up the position. In 1913, he composes a memorandum on the

foundation of a ‘Central Byzantine Museum’ at Thessaloniki, a city with a weighty Byzantine past and important Byzantine monuments, which was just then liberated from the Ottomans. In this, he expresses the view that a Byzantine museum should collect monuments of national history and *not* religious heirlooms. National history had by then incorporated ‘mediaeval Hellenism’ so Byzantine monuments were not only religious or art monuments but ‘also monuments of national life’ (quoted in Gratziou 1986: 65).

Having furthered his studies at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, Adamantiou represents a new paradigm towards Byzantium that was initiated in the late nineteenth century and was reinforced by the growth of Byzantine studies and the growing interest in Byzantine art in the early twentieth century. As Kourelis (2007: 391) observes, ‘Byzantium was ubiquitous at the turn of the twentieth century’ (see also Biliouri 2009). At the same time Byzantium gains momentum in Greece as is revealed in different facets of public life from literature to female fashion and interior decoration (Kioussopoulou 2003: 20).

1914-1923: Formative years

As a result of the above delineated climate, and following growing pressure by the Archaeological Society, the exhortation of renowned Byzantine scholars and the establishment of a position of Ephor of ‘Christian and Byzantine Antiquities’ in the Archaeological Service in 1908 (Konstantios 1999, 2004, 2009), the museum is finally established in Athens in 1914: ‘A Byzantine and Christian Museum is established ... in which are deposited works of Byzantine and Christian art from the first years of Christianity to the foundation of the Greek state, except from those in Macedonia’ (Law 401/1914 ‘On the foundation of the Byzantine and Christian Museum’ (FEK A’ 347/25-11-14).

Signalling a major ideological shift, Adamantiou, now the museum’s first Director, collects objects of national significance and not Christian heirlooms (Gratziou 1986: 68; Konstantios 1999). The museum’s character is national (Konstantios 2004: 31). This shift, however, is not reflected in the museum’s title which signifies a compromise between the religious understanding of Byzantium by Lambakis and the Christian Archaeological Society, and the understanding of Byzantium as a vital component of national history, as expressed, for example, by Adamantiou.

1923-1960: Shaping the museum

In 1923 the post of Director is taken up by Georgios Soteriou, Ephor of Byzantine Antiquities since 1915. Immediately after his placement the collection of the Christian Archaeological Society and a significant part of a collection named ‘Heirlooms of the Refugees’ brought by the Asia Minor refugees in 1922 are incorporated into the Museum.

Soteriou organizes the first exhibition in five halls of the Academy of Athens. Close to his idea that the Museum would become a ‘prototype museum for the entire East’, he placed objects - and especially sculpture - in environments resembling the space they originally occupied or that from which they were detached. Thus, visitors could gain an impression of an early Christian basilica, a Byzantine cross-in-square church with dome, and a Post-Byzantine single-aisle church (Soteriou 1924: 5).

In the prologue to the Museum’s guide Soteriou presents his view of the Museum that is:

the national museum par excellence since its scope is to picture the evolution of the art which developed in the Greek lands from the end of its ancient life [sic] to the liberation of the Race from the Turkish yoke (from the fourth c. AD to 1830)... it is easily understood that the Byzantine Museum presents the civilization of our Fathers as the [National] Archaeological Museum presents the civilization of our Forefathers... Greek Christian works of art stand closer to us, bear the stamp of a religion followed by us too, and exhibit very clearly the marks of a whole circle of ideas, habits and customs in which we still live. (Soteriou 1924: 3)

The idea was not new: already in 1859-60 in his first lecture at the University of Athens, Papareghopoulos asserts 'yet we are more closely connected to medieval Hellenism', and later in 1888 he repeats that the Byzantine period 'is more close to Modern Hellenism than any other period' (quoted in Demaras 1986: 206, 378). Indeed, Papareghopoulos talks of Byzantium in entirely familiar terms creating a sense of intimacy with the society of his own time (Kitromilides 1998: 29). The ideological connotations of this attitude are to be traced in both the intellectual and the political climate of the time. The shock caused by the 'Asia Minor catastrophe' in 1922 led to a period of self-reflection during which the nation had to reconcile with its roots and reorganize its priorities. It was in the Fathers' 'circle of ideas, habits and customs' that the nation should seek the roots of its identity (Gratziou 1986: 72-73).

In 1930 the Museum moves to its permanent premises, the so-called Villa Ilissia, a building complex designed by Greek architect Stamatis Kleanthis in 1848 for Sophie de Marbois-Lebrun, Duchess of Plaisance. The museum was inaugurated in September 1930 on the occasion of the Third International Byzantine Conference held in Athens. In his speech at the opening ceremony, Soteriou describes the Museum as the 'second national Museum in Greece', and reasserts his view on its national significance in providing evidence of the Christian Greek world which still nurtures Greeks in the 1930s (Soteriou 1931a: 649). The new exhibition is based on the principles initiated in the first exhibition at the Academy of Athens:

... the idea of placing the museum objects and particularly the sculptures, in an environment which is reminiscent of the places from which they come or from which they were removed, prevailed. Thus, three galleries on the ground floor were given the form of an Early Christian basilica of the simplest type, a Byzantine cross-in-square plan with dome, and a Post-Byzantine single-aisle church. (Soteriou 1931b: 10)

Thus, Soteriou creates an exhibition space that is recognizable and seems 'familiar' to Christian orthodox Greeks. In structuring the exhibition in imitation of an Orthodox church, he wants to gradually introduce the public to the notion of a Byzantine artefacts exhibition (Katsaridou and Biliouri 2007). As already seen, the 1930s turned to Byzantium as a source of inspiration for modern life (Kourelis 2007: 429-33) and Byzantine objects became fashionable

Lately in Athens many lovers of art, gentlemen and ladies of the high class, manifest a decided inclination for the Byzantine objects... So there are now many Saloons [sic] which are constructed and decorated in the Byzantine style and which deserve a visit. (Philadelfeus 1935: 238)

This may have facilitated Soteriou's efforts to instruct the public in viewing Byzantine art within a museum context, but more research needs to be done in order to assess the impact of such

trends upon the museum itself. Let it here be noted that at exactly the same time, ‘the growing interest in Byzantine art was crystallized in Europe in the *International Exhibition of Byzantine Art* in Paris in 1931’ (Weitzmann 1947: 401), the first exhibition exclusively devoted to this field (Byron 1931).

Soteriou’s museological conception was innovative at the time and despite its didactic orientation, remained basically unaltered until the late 1990s (Konstantios 2004: 35). Gradually, however, the museum was sanctified and became cut off from the city’s life.

1960-1975: Metamorphosis

In 1960 the Museum’s direction is taken up by Manolis Chatzidakis, a renowned Byzantine scholar. The most significant event of the 1960s is the organization of a large exhibition titled ‘Byzantine Art - A European Art’ funded by the Council of Europe. The exhibition was on show at Zappeio Hall from April to June 1964 (for a description and a somehow ‘negative’ appraisal see Beckwith 1964). For three years starting from 1961, Chatzidakis and his team work on a project whose scale is novel to the country. As Konstantios (2004: 37) remarks, this exhibition left its mark on a whole generation and on the Museum itself. It also left a clear imprint on the ideological level as it restituted Byzantine art as an indispensable part of European art. In the exhibition’s catalogue Chatzidakis writes:

... visitors will have the chance of observing the living presence of ancient Greek heritage which was the essential gift of Byzantium to mediaeval art. From this point of view Byzantine art is revealing itself as clearly European and as the only one between East and West that had experienced the values of Hellenic humanism which are recognized as the European values par excellence. (Chatzidakis 1964: 11)

This was in line with developments in Byzantine studies at the time. Dionysios Zakythinos, for example, a leading figure in the field, then Professor at the University and President of the Center for Byzantine Research, had already in 1962 published a seminal article in which he asserted the European character of the Byzantine Empire and its contribution in shaping medieval Europe and anticipating the Enlightenment in the west on the one hand and the national state in Greece on the other (Zakythinos 1962; Nystazopoulou-Pelekidou 1994: 175).

Following these trends, Chatzidakis takes the Museum’s role in substantiating the nation’s unity as granted, and prioritizes its role in the promotion and appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of Byzantine art. As Konstantios (2004: 39) observes, ‘The nation is not threatened any more. Museum objects may be interpreted in different ways as well’.

Throughout the 1960s the Museum is metamorphosed into an active center for research and conservation. Some small scale display work is carried out, but the main exhibition is not changed. Very little work is done during the Dictatorship (1967-1974).

1975-1982: Tiding up

The post-Byzantine art section is redisplayed in the east wing. Extension work is being done and three new exhibition halls are opened by 1982. Yet, no significant changes are observed in exhibition philosophy and the museum retains an outdated character.

1983-1999: Extension

The most significant change since Soteriou's days is the grand-scale project of extending the Museum initiated in the late 1980s with the aim of completely redisplaying its collections. The 1980s are also marked by the introduction of educational programs and the organization of many temporary exhibitions.

In the 1990s the Museum is totally renovated with an impressive extension of 13,000 m², most of which are under ground level. New large exhibition spaces are created; work is completed in 1999.

1999-2010: The golden age

In 1999 the late Dimitris Konstantios is appointed director and initiates the Museum's complete reorganization at all levels. In his words:

... the Museum was unnaturally "sanctioned" not so much because of the objects ... but because of the exhibition rationale and the way it operated. It was a place for the annual visit of pupils, Byzantine scholars and those few visitors who could appreciate ... Byzantine art.
(Konstantios 2009: 122-23)

Setting as a central aim the opening up of the Museum to society, and exploiting the administrative autonomy of the Museum to its fullest, Konstantios managed to overcome the rigid structure of state museum management and ventured into previously unexplored by state museums areas such as cultural marketing, communication policies, European programs, and recruitment of personnel specialised in management, communication, museum studies, graphics, publishing, etc. Under his direction the Museum became one of the most vibrant museums in Athens and managed to cast off the outmoded profile that had characterized it since the 1960s.

In designing the new permanent galleries, the BCM takes a completely fresh look, and makes a clear break from the previous narrative:

We did not wish to narrate the national "engaged" history not to smooth any disruptions of 'national' time. We knew that we had to deal with material evidence of a past which is - one way or another - our heritage... We try to make up "short stories", images of aspects of Byzantium and of later periods (fifteenth to nineteenth century)... We do not aim at a "unified national narrative" but at self understanding and knowledge of a complex past.
(Konstantios 2004: 42-43)

At a time when the Olympic Games offered a unique opportunity to remind the world of Greece's unbroken cultural production down the centuries, Konstantios (2007a: 19) plainly argues: 'We would not seek after a uniform "national narrative" nor would we try to cover the period having "national time and its continuation" in mind... The notion of a continuous Hellenism was not our aim'.

Byzantium now emerges as a multifaceted empire and society which used types and motifs originating from the Greco-Roman world ascribing new meaning to them, and fused creatively both western and eastern elements within a predominantly Christian society in order to shape a 'Byzantine world' that the Museum was called upon to interpret. Thus, the permanent galleries are structured as follows: the first part is devoted to the transition from the ancient world to Byzantium, and then to an exploration of Byzantium itself through a series of thematic units

deploying various aspects of the state. The second part, titled 'From Byzantium to the modern era', traces developments in politics, society and the arts during the post-Byzantine period. In contrast to previous practices, the new exhibitions are not centred on 'collections' or on 'masterpieces', but on thematic units within a loosely chronological grid (Konstantios (2007a and 2007b).

Work at the BCM was anticipated by changing perceptions of Byzantium both in academia and in museums. First, there had been a shift in research as Byzantine scholars have started focussing on social history: facets of everyday life, the average Byzantine person, reading and writing, and gender are some of the new issues on the research agenda (Aggelidi 2003). Second, a series of important exhibitions paved the way for the BCM. Thessaloniki set the pace in the late 1980s with the exhibition 'Thessaloniki, history and art' at the White Tower, the city's most emblematic monument. Then, the Museum of Byzantine Culture was founded in the 1990s and gradually opened its exhibition halls from 1994 to 1998: staged in a building that is impressive in its simplicity, large thematic units are incorporated into a vaguely chronological line (For a brief outline see Kourkoutidou-Nikolaïdou and Tourta 2002). Finally, in 2001, a large, tripartite exhibition titled 'Hours of Byzantium. Works and Days in Byzantium' was jointly organized in three cities (Athens, Thessaloniki, Mystras) by the relevant Departments of the Ministry of Culture, including the BCM (see the special issue of *I Kathimerini - Epta Imeres*, 25 November 2001). The exhibition was met with enthusiasm as marking a new era in museum exhibiting in Greece (Papadopoulos 2002; Louvi-Kizi 2002).

Work at the BCM can thus be seen as the culmination of the above outlined efforts. Nevertheless, I would argue that this was the first time that a museum's policy was so clearly drafted and so openly put. It was also the first time that a clear statement of a museum's philosophy has been clearly and repeatedly expressed not only in academic writing, but also in the Media:

The fact that our proposal creates an image of the past, does not escape our attention. Our proposal "constructs" a past, by using objects and sources. It is an interpretive approach... We see art not only as an aesthetic phenomenon but also as evidence of culture. The aesthetic value of objects does not vanish if they are included within historical and cultural contexts that imply their function. On the contrary, it rises significantly since aesthetic pleasure is supplemented by the knowledge provided by information.

(Konstantios 2004: 42-43)

Conclusion

The ideological profile of the BCM from the early days to the dawn of the twentieth-first century may be sketched as follows: from Christian heirlooms to national monuments to material evidence of a complex and multifaceted Byzantine past.

Emancipated from the tyranny of a unified national narrative, the Museum has thus ventured into new areas of interpretation, and has come closer to the fourth scheme of perceiving the past that is *critical* and prioritizes the study of silences and neglected periods.

As a consequence, the new galleries include sections on previously disregarded themes such as the Copts in Christian Egypt or the period of Frankish occupation in Greece. What is more interesting is the Museum's effort to talk about the life of Greek communities during the period of the Ottoman rule, and to tackle issues of 'Greek' identity as formed during, for instance, the

eighteenth century (that is, the period preceding the 1821 uprising). In this way, the BCM has introduced a new look to Byzantium and Byzantine society; a look, however, which is not always welcome by visitors. Some entries in the visitors' book are revealing of the difficulty of some members of the public to come to terms with historical 'truth'. They are also very telling of the strong association of Byzantium and the Church in the eyes of a large proportion of the population:

'Nice exhibition but one-sided, and rather "hostile" to Orthodox Tradition'

'How did you render the museum like this? Ten years ago the experience of the visit was captivating. Now ... there is neither a wealth of icons nor any devoutness.'

'And why in the central room do you write transition to "MEDIEVAL"???? Byzantium? Was Byzantium Medieval age? But no! Correct it...' (Gotsis and Konstantios 2007)

A final comment concerns the Museum's effort to address issues of diversity. A recent example is its active involvement in the European project *Roma Routes*. This choice was not accidental as the first presence of Roma populations in Europe is recorded on Greek territories during the Byzantine period. As part of this project a series of events (exhibitions, film shows, discussions, etc.) titled *Gypsies at the Byzantine and Christian Museum* was organised at the Museum from 23 May to 12 June 2011. Members of the Roma communities of Greece were for the first time invited not only to show their work at a respectable national museum but also to co-curate the exhibition of this work (see Triantafyllou 2011).

The Museum of Greek Folk Art

Introduction

The MGFA is the central state folk museum in the country. Its collections focus on Greek folk art from the seventeenth to the twentieth century and are divided in the following sections: Embroidery, Weaving, Costumes, Masquerades, Shadow Theatre, Silverware, Metal ware, Pottery, Woodcarving, Folk Painting, and Stone carving.

Today the Museum consists of four annexes:

- the Central Building, housing permanent exhibitions;
- the Tzisdaraki Mosque, housing the Kyriazopoulos folk ceramics collection;
- the so-called Bath-house of the Winds, the only remaining Public Baths of Old Athens, and
- the House at 22 Panos str., Plaka, housing the Museum's latest permanent exhibition '*Man & Tools. Aspects of labour in the pre-industrial world*'.

The background

Towards the end of the nineteenth century efforts to care for material evidence dating from 1453 to 1830 were gathering momentum. In 1887, Nikolaos Polites officially introduced the term 'folklore' for the study of the people (*laografia* in Greek) instead of the previously used terms 'traditions', 'customs', etc. (Loukatos 1992: 66). In 1908, he founded the Greek Folklore Society, in 1909 the journal *Laografia*, and in 1918 the Folk Archive (today the Hellenic Folklore

Research Centre of the Academy of Athens). Polites is considered to be the founder of the discipline in Greece. Under his influence, Greek Folk Studies were shaped into a national science that was enrolled to the national cause of diachronia. In fact, ‘folk studies in Greece were created with one and only purpose: how to connect Modern Greek people to their ancient predecessors’ (Kyriakidou-Nestoros 1993: 19).

Research was initially confined to the ‘monuments of speech’ in order to trace similarities in language and oral tradition. This trend would color the development of Greek folk studies up until the 1950s. At the same time, care was given to the study of ‘traditional’ customs. In 1911, for instance, Kallirhoe Parren, one of the most prominent figures of early Greek feminism, founded the Lyceum Club of Greek Women, which apart from serving the cause of women’s progress, also aimed at the ‘recovery and safeguarding of Greek customs and traditions’ (Bobou-Protopapa 1993: 51).

1918-1923: Formative years

Against this background, the ‘Greek Handicrafts Museum’ was established in 1918 as an initiative of poet Georgios Drosines, and archaeologist Konstantinos Kourouniotis. According to its foundational law, in the Museum are deposited:

... Handicrafts which are to be found in Greece and in all countries where Greeks reside, and date from the [years] after the fall of Constantinople to the foundation of the Greek Kingdom... These handicrafts may be embroideries... costumes, domestic furniture and vessels made of any kind of material, tools... and weapons (Law 1407/1918 ‘On the Foundation of a Greek Handicrafts Museum’, FEK A’ 101)

Interestingly, the term ‘handicrafts’ covered not only objects of art but also common, everyday things. In practice, the Museum initially collected items that bore decoration, had some artistic value and could be interpreted as testimonies to the continuity of Greek art. Collections included embroideries and textiles, and objects were bought from antiques shops or art dealers, a fact showing that already in the first quarter of the twentieth century folk art had acquired commercial value (Hadjinikolaou 2003: 14).

The museum was under the tutelage of archaeology and aesthetics (Toundassaki and Caftantzoglou 2005: 237). The terms ‘folklore’ and ‘tradition’ were missing from its foundation texts; what is more, Nikolaos Polites, the founding father of Greek Folk studies, was not included in the Museum’s Board, which however included men of letters, artists, and archaeologists (Hadjinikolaou 2003: 14).

1924-1956: Shaping the museum

In 1923 the Museum was renamed as ‘National Museum of Decorative Arts’ in conformity with the ideology of the time and the models established by other European museums such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Musée de l’ Homme in Paris (Romaio-Karastamati 1995: 155-56). The Museum now aims at

the creation of national decorative art in its various applications ... by means of collecting decorative works from antiquity up until our times, mostly of Greek origin but also of other nations ... insofar as they are considered useful for study and comparison with the Greek

material. (Decree of 22-8-1923 ‘On the renaming etc. of the Greek Handicrafts Museum’, FEK A’ 245)

This brings about a change in both the Museum’s character and the chronological limits of its collections: objects of Greek decorative art from antiquity to the present are to be collected in order to form a *national* collection of decorative arts. Collections are also enriched with archaeological material insofar as this is appropriate for testifying the continuity (in form, motifs, and techniques) of Greek art.

In 1924 archaeologist Anna Apostolaki is appointed curator and then in 1932 director of the Museum. Apostolaki belonged to a new type of educated and emancipated women of the middle classes that emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Nikolaïdou and Kokkinidou 1998: 239-41). Her main interests included the comparative study of ancient and contemporary folk textiles. Apostolaki works with real zeal in order to organize the Museum which was then housed in the so-called Tzisdaraki Mosque.

In 1932, the Museum changes again its title into ‘Museum of Greek Folk Art’ to return to its previous name ‘National Museum of Decorative Arts’ in 1935. From then on, and despite the fact that up until the 1950s folk studies in Greece continue to develop as a national discipline; the Museum’s collecting policy ‘had been to collect works of art, entire, “beautiful” objects’ (Romaïou-Karastamati 2009: 12). The emphasis on a collection of decorative objects as representative of the nation at a time when academic folk studies were serving the nationalist project may be interpreted as a ‘safe’ option ‘for surpassing the tension between the immense variety of cultural forms and the national necessity’ (Toundassaki and Caftantzoglou 2005: 237-38). Paradoxically then, while the Museum’s character is national, its development did not run in parallel to the development of folk and anthropological studies in Greece, a trend that carried on until the 1990s.

1956-1980: The golden age

In 1956 the Museum enters a golden age under the directorship of folklorist Popi Zora, who in 1959 established its name definitively as ‘Museum of Greek Folk Art’ as more representative of the efforts to collect and promote the artistic creation of Greek people. Zora reorganizes the exhibition at the Mosque that re-opens to the public in 1958.

For her the Museum was the work of a lifetime. Initially devoted to the collection of objects from around Greece, she also managed to ‘repatriate’ many items that were bought from European dealers especially in Paris. Implicating the notion of ‘folk’ that prevailed at the time, she would much later recall:

... people who had collections... didn’t know what to do with them, they kept objects in their chests, they found a place with a name, it was a museum..., and anyway [objects] found a place in a showcase... and this satisfied them [the collectors]... Money was always a problem of course, but ... I didn’t encounter significant difficulties. It was perhaps the notion of folk art... that moved them ...for I didn’t encounter difficulties. (MGFA 2007)

In 1973 the Museum is transferred to its current premises; space is still inadequate but much larger. One year later the first exhibition is ready (Megas 1974).

While her understanding of ‘folk’ is rather conservative and her view is art oriented, Zora is very keen to establish the MGFA as a prototype museum. In the 1970s she orchestrates the MGFA’s complete reorganization and pioneers in many fields of museum operation such as conservation of textiles, temporary exhibitions, public lectures, publications, educational programs, collaboration with European museums. Gradually, the MGFA is established as the ‘national’ museum of folk art and contributes to the establishment of many folk museums around the country.

1981-2008: New readings

In 1981, archaeologist Eleni Romaiou-Karastamati takes up the Museum’s directorship. In the 1980s, following a trend initiated by Zora, all the Museum’s curators are sent abroad to further their studies in Ethnology, Cultural Anthropology, Museum Studies, and Conservation. In the decades to follow the Museum is bursting with activities, and establishes a very friendly and active profile.

In 1989, permanent exhibitions are renovated mainly with the provision of textual information and visual aids. Prominence is given to the features that formed the cultural identity of modern Greeks in the period from the seventeenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. However, no coherent central narrative is followed; rather, piecemeal glimpses of folk art are offered ranging from traditional costumes, embroidery and hieratic vestments to ceramics, wood-carving work, figures from the Greek shadow theatre, weapons used during the 1821 Greek uprising, and ecclesiastical heirlooms brought by refugees from Asia Minor.

Many temporary exhibitions are set up in the 1980s and the 1990s. Among them, ‘Olymbos on Karpathos. Ethnographic pictures of today’, set up in 1994, arguably marked the beginning of a new understanding towards material culture (Kaplani 2003), while at the same time retaining a traditional communicative approach.

In 1999, a team was formed to develop an exhibition based on a collection of tools donated by the Society for Ethnographic Studies. In the words of the MGFA’s Director:

Accepting such a donation overturned the Museum’s collection policy, the main focus of which had been to collect works of art, entire, “beautiful” objects. For the first time the Museum’s Registry would include humble tools, practical objects in the service of traditional craftsmen. The permanent exhibition “*Man and Tools...*” is the first tangible result of a new way of thinking about, exhibiting and interpreting traditional culture. (Romaiou-Karastamati 2009: 11-12)

The aim was to present a ‘folklore collection’ that would break new ground in a ‘national museum’ (Nikiforidou 2009: 41). Indeed, there was a - rare for a national museum - ideological unanimity and the approach taken was whole-heartedly embraced by the MGFA’s director. As a consequence, the ‘*Man and Tools*’ exhibition is the first concrete example of a new way of interpreting the MGFA’s collections. It may be seen as the culmination of a series of wider changes observed in both the Museum’s collecting policy and the interpretation of its collection initiated in the 2000s. Thus, the new permanent exhibition raises questions that are at the centre of current discussions on folk culture but are rarely addressed to in Greek folk museums; namely, questions of continuity and discontinuity of ‘traditional’ life in contemporary society, the idea of difference as opposed to stereotypical images of the past, a realistic approach to traditional life as

opposed to the usual romantic gaze into the past, hidden aspects of labour such as children's work, etc. (Nikiforidou 2009). Further, the importance of multifaceted interpretation of themes was central to the team's approach: 'We show them [i.e. visitors] that there are many ways to look at an object, this is important to us' (Polyzoi quoted in Gatou 2009a: 77)

The exhibition was completed in 2003. Through the extensive use of many interpretive voices and a clear effort to engage visitors in contemplation between present and past, it manages to overcome the customary static, a-historical, 'folkloric' images of the majority of folk museums in the country (Caftantzoglou 2003). The positive impact of this approach to visitors and its success in engaging them in the exhibition has been confirmed by a summative evaluation study (Gatou 2009b).

Conclusion

The MGFA's foundation may be seen as the final step in the process of consolidating the tripartite evolution of Hellenism in the early twentieth century: since there was already a National Archaeological and a Byzantine Museum the missing link of modern Hellenism would be provided by the establishment of a national museum for material evidence dating from the fall of Constantinople to the foundation of the Modern Greek State (Hadjinikolaou 2003: 14).

Overall, the Museum's character has not changed. In the Museum's official website, for instance, we read: '... objects representing one of the most splendid branches of Modern Greek Folk Art, which has a strong tradition and presence from ancient times to the present day'. Interestingly, however, the Museum has adopted a completely different approach in more recent endeavours such as the permanent exhibition '*Man and Tools...*' which adopts a *critical* scheme at looking at the past.

The MGFA presents us with some very interesting paradoxes. First, it evolved rather insulated from changing notions of 'folk' culture and 'traditional' life in ethnographic research and academia (see above). Second, despite the fact that it has always been seen as the 'national' museum in the field, its collecting policies had until very recently been geared towards a 'safe' option of collecting the 'beautiful' rather than the culturally representative. Third, although this is not evident in the museum's profile as shaped in the central permanent exhibitions, the MGFA has throughout its long history been innovative in many fields such as education, training of personnel and curation of collections.

The National Historical Museum

Historical outline

The history of the Museum begins with the foundation of the Historical and Ethnological Society in 1882 (Lappas 1982; Demakopoulou 1982). The Society aimed at 'the collection of historical and ethnological material and objects for elucidating the middle and more recent history and philology ... of the Greek people and the establishment of a Museum and Archive comprising these monuments of national life' (Royal Decree of 27-3-1889 'On the approval of the statutes of the Historical and Ethnological Society in Greece', FEK A' 85).

The Society's views reflect the dominant ideology of the period: 'influenced by the unified concept of the History of the Greek Nation according to Konstantinos Papareghopoulos' teaching, all members had understood the national duty of promoting the mediaeval (Byzantine)

and modern Greek history' (Statutes of the Historical and Ethnological Society). Eloquently enough, Papareghopoulos himself supervised the Society's first public exhibition titled 'Display of Monuments of the Sacred Struggle' inaugurated on 25 March 1884 to coincide with the national commemoration day of the 1821 Greek uprising. The exhibition was a huge success and led to many donations to the Society. For a number of years the Museum was housed in one large room in the Polytechnic School, and was described as 'a sacred pilgrimage' to the nation's history (Mazarakis-Ainian 1994: 5) in tune with notions also expressed in relation to the NAM (see above).

The museum was officially founded in 1926 (Decree of 21-5-6-1926 "On the foundation of a Historical and Ethnological Museum", FEK A' 185) with the aim of collecting monuments referring to the history, and the public and private life of the Greek Nation from the fall of Constantinople forward (Lada-Minotou 1995).

In 1960 the museum moved to its permanent home, the Old Parliamentary Building, and opened to the public in 1962. Its collections are divided into nine large sections: paintings, engravings and graphic arts (including maps), architectural drawings, sculpture, flags, weapons and memorabilia, coins and seals, costumes and jewellery, household and professional apparatus (including ceramics, embroideries, utensils).

Narrative

Through its permanent exhibition the Museum narrates the story of the Greek nation from 1453 to 1940 (Greek-Italian war). The display is 'populated with named heroes and their artefacts' (Aronsson 2010: 33); usually objects connected to emblematic figures of Greek history such as warriors of the 1821 Greek uprising, prime ministers, etc. To a large extent the Museum acts as a site of pilgrimage to the heroic spirit of the ancestors. A telling example is the heart of Konstantinos Kanaris, celebrated hero of the 1821 naval battles, which is exhibited in an urn bearing the epigram: 'Heart of Kanaris we salute you'. Interestingly, this practice is also adopted by the Historical Archive-Museum on the island of Hydra where the heart of admiral Andreas Miaoulis is displayed in a silver urn. Although extreme, these two examples illustrate an approach according to which objects act as symbols of national pride; they are entrusted with the role of keeping alive the memory of great men and heroic times thus reinforcing and perpetuating official history. As a site that produces and confirms official history, the Museum also acts as a companion to textbooks; not surprisingly, school groups heavily attend it.

Comment

Today, the Museum retains its conservative character and shows no signs of a will to open up to the public, yet alone to other voices:

We have no visitors book... there have been no negative remarks so as to make us change or add something. The same holds true for evaluation: there was no negative experience so far, so the need has not arisen. (Galanopoulou 2010: 72)

Despite its stated objective which also includes the study of public and private life of the Greek nation, the Museum retains a strong emphasis on political history which is narrated as a series of acts of great men illustrated by iconic objects such as flags, weapons, seals, personal memorabilia and the like. This paradigm is followed by traditional history museums all over the country.

It is only recently that social history museums emerged in Greece as a consequence of societal changes and demands, and developments in Greek historiography. Interestingly, these new museums directly tackle issues of difficult heritage such as exile, World War II persecutions, etc. (Hadjinikolaou 2011). Examples include the *Museum of the Asia Minor Hellenism Filio Chaidemenou* (Athens), the *Municipal Museum of the Kalavryta Holocaust* (Kalavryta), the *Museum of Democracy* on the island of Ai Stratis (a notorious place of exile), and the *Museum of the Ai Stratis Political Exiled* (Athens; Pantzou 2011). These new museums break away from official narratives as they deal with neglected periods, confront silences and deploy personal memories and oral history as a means of talking about the past. They aim at elucidating difficult and traumatic periods in order to diffuse discussion about them outside the confines of academia. In doing this, they move towards a *critical* approach to the past.

Discussion

This report has attempted to examine the main national museums in Greece by mapping their development in view of their dependence to or deviation from the canonized national ideals of each particular period. As it has been shown, Greek national museums function within a strict legislative and operational scheme. State control facilitates museums' dependence to official, sanctioned views of the past, and makes any shifts in the ideological paradigm difficult to implement. As a consequence, national museums – and Greek museums in general – are normally very slow in adopting a *critical* approach to the past; an approach which would be open to continuous interpretations and would give priority to the study and presentation of disruptions, silences and neglected periods.

More specifically, Greek national museums have perpetuated the canonized master narrative that was adopted by each particular period. Overall, the *archaeological* model has persistently and recurrently acted as the ‘golden canon’ for the construction of Greek national identity. Similarly, Greek antiquity has always represented a ‘title of honour’ that contributed to strengthening national self-esteem and boosting the country’s image every time this was needed. All other models have been much less compelling, with the exception of the *romantic* model which recurred mainly in periods of political oppression and/or conservatism as a quest for ‘return to the roots’.

The predominance of the art-history paradigm and of the ‘archaeologist’s gaze’, as outlined above, comes out very clearly from all case studies: material evidence from the past - be it ancient, Byzantine, or modern - has regularly been studied and exhibited as art. Yet, apart from being an obvious reflection of a long-standing and deeply-rooted intellectual and ideological tradition, this practice may also be seen as a desire to keep away from ‘difficult’ or simply ‘different’ aspects of heritage by retreating into safe, neutralised and a-political views of the past; what is described as ‘the strategy of exit’ (Aronsson 2010: 45-46). This may be said for the NAM’s aesthetics-oriented exhibitions organised in the midst of the Civil War in the 1940s, the decorative collections been formed by the MGFA from the 1930s to the 1970s, or the sanctified exhibits of the NHM.

As a rule, national museums have consistently kept away of disturbing issues and have tended to portray a coherent, rounded-up, view of the past which forms part of a wide-spread and well-taught national narrative based on the continuity of the Greek spirit through time. Consequently, reference to or representation of other ethnic, religious or minority groups has been either non-

existent or only accidentally and superficially addressed. This is clearly evident, for instance, in the displays of the NHM that outline Greek history as inhabited almost exclusively by brave men; especially the men that official history has endorsed as national heroes. Or, in the displays of the NAM which present the various civilizations that developed on the Greek lands but do not tackle any social issues such as the role of women or the position of slaves in ancient Greek society. Interestingly, the same approach is adopted by the most recent addition to the group of national museums in the country; that is, the New Acropolis Museum. There objects, statues and architectural structures are displayed as icons to be adored for their aesthetic merits and no attempt is made at elucidating the social milieu that gave birth to them.

Returning to the specific case studies examined in this report, the NAM has consistently acted out as place of pilgrimage to the nation's ancient roots, while the BCM has pioneered in breaking the national canon of historical continuity but has not as yet fully endorsed a comprehensively critical approach. Both museums may be said to follow and to a large extent reproduce developments in their relative fields, although the NAM is clearly more reluctant to change. The MGFA is a more complex case: conservative with an emphasis on well-established, largely a-historical views of 'tradition', but with significant innovations in other areas of museum work such as education and outreach programs. It has largely developed away from developments in the field of folk studies and cultural anthropology, but has managed to 'catch up' lately by introducing a much more critical approach to material culture and the past in its new permanent exhibition at 22 Panos street. The NHM is the most conservative as it has retained the character of a shrine to the nation throughout its long history. In contrast, new social history museums that have lately been developed put the emphasis on neglected themes very much in tune with initiatives already observed in the BCM and the MGFA.

With reference to diversity, there is clearly no representation of ethnic groups within Greece in the permanent displays of all case studies examined here. In general, national museums only tackle sensitive or neglected issues in their temporary exhibitions or other programs such as the *Gypsies at the Byzantine Museum* series of events mentioned above.

Similarly, difficult modern historical and national traumas are normally not dealt with. In the permanent exhibition of the National War Museum in Athens, for example, there is reference neither to the traumatic period of the Greek Civil War (1945-1949) nor to the harsh years of the military Junta (1967-1974). On the contrary, incidents that boosted patriotic feelings among the Greek population, such as the conflict with Turkey over Cyprus, are narrated (Aronsson 2010: 33).

A final comment concerns the role of national museums as seen by their audiences. Because of the highly centralized educational system, there is a high degree of uniformity in the Greeks' perception of their collective memory and identity. This identity, along with language, monuments and antiquities, has come to be seen 'in an a-historical way as something eternal and unchanging' (Mackridge 2008: 303). As national imagination is nurtured by strong myths, the public expects museums to display history as taught at school, as propagated by the Media, the Church, politicians, etc. When the view of historians is confronted with popular views of history, culture, and tradition the result is not always welcome as the example from the BCM's visitors' book referred to above illustrates.

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