

Athens, March 16, 2021

### **The works on the Acropolis**

The Committee for the Conservation of the Acropolis Monuments (henceforth ESMA) has the scientific responsibility for the conservation and restoration works conducted on the Acropolis monuments. ESMA consists of internationally acclaimed specialists engaged in programmes concerning the management, conservation and restoration of single monuments and ensembles (Archaeologists, Architects, Civil and Chemical Engineers, Conservators), and also engages scientifically experienced employees of the Ministry of Culture from similar areas of specialty. ESMA collaborates closely with the scientists (of the above domains) of the Acropolis Restoration Service (henceforth YSMA) of the Ministry of Culture and Sports (henceforth YPPOA). After more than four decades since the beginning of the works, the people who initiated the creation of ESMA (and who since the beginning waived from their statutory rights of payment) are not alive anymore, yet the works continue following the same principles, terms and practices that they established.

ESMA programmes and supervises the necessary interventions which intent to remedy structural, static, physico-chemical and other problems of the monuments, to correct mistakes of previous restorations, and restore the monuments and their surrounding areas. ESMA, placing scientific research in the core of the interventions, documents thoroughly and in depth the conditions of the monuments (the rock, single monuments, ancient construction materials, degradation incidents, the operation of the archaeological site), programmes and supervises the study of necessary measures, publishes academic papers (on research, programmes and results) and submits proposals for consideration to the Central Archaeological Council of YPPOA (henceforth KAS) whose consultation affects the relevant Ministerial decrees. All the process reflects the need for an interdisciplinary approach and interaction.

In 1977 ESMA, in order to achieve the best possible objectivity and transparency in the decision-making process, concerning the interventions in monuments of global significance, inaugurated in Athens – for the first time internationally - the establishing of the *International Scientific Meetings or Conferences for The conservation and Restoration of the Acropolis Monuments*, with the participation of scientists from various disciplines (Archaeologists, Architects, Civil Engineers, Chemical Engineers, Surveyors, Restorers, Scholars of deontological ethics in monument management etc.).

Six International Meetings have been held since then, each one lasting for three days and attended by more than 100 Greek and foreign participants. All the participants, receive beforehand the printed materials of the studies, examine, discuss, agree or disagree with each and every part of the studies and the proposals; afterwards they put forward in writing their scientific observations, which are then published and taken into consideration when writing and submit proposals made to KAS by ESMA.

YSMA, besides these International Meetings, has organised local one-day and two-day conferences for other important issues. All ESMA and YSMA's relevant publications that include many volumes are accessible to any interested party, professionals, students or anyone from the general public on the web page of the service.

The interventions in the Acropolis monuments follow strict and internationally accepted principles, such as:

1. Reversibility: Every intervention should be reversible, so in cases of mistakes or for any other reason to be possible – and cost effective – to return to the previous condition. This principle was for the first time theoretically stated, adopted and put into practice by Charalambos Bouras, a founder member and for many years president of ESMA. This principle, since the very beginning of the works on the Acropolis, has been dictating them and until today has been strictly followed.
2. Respect and safeguard the original structural system of the monuments during the interventions.
3. Safeguarding the material, a vehicle of artistic and historical evidence, against degradation by using on the monuments materials and methods tested many times over the last years.
4. Documented accuracy when dealing with the filling of missing members. This, if other conditions allow it, can only be implemented where there is proof of the original shape, but it cannot allow speculations to influence the interventions.
5. A discreet differentiation of the supplements and fillings, so as not to be confused with original members, without upsetting the aesthetic unity of the members of each monument – noting the intervention year.
6. Protecting the entirety and unity of every monument. In this context, the solution to dismantle and move parts of a monument to the protected area of the museum is only accepted as a last resort and only if there is no other solution to the problem.
7. Rescuing and preserving the material evidence of the monuments (buildings or/and soil formations) and the interventions, through systematic documentation, publication of the relevant information or taking protection measures. This principle, to some extent, is connected with the principle of reversibility.
8. Respect for the features and values of a monument (a building or soil formation) after deliberating on the possibilities and the consequences of every intervention in order to achieve the best possible promotion of these values. This endeavour is demanding and usually contradictory, since the values (historical, artistic, scientific, aesthetic, emotional, symbolic, functional, authenticity, rarity, readability etc) function, depending on the condition of the object and the relevant circumstances, in a variety of associations and can be either supporting or opposing.

For all these and especially for the difficulties that emerge from the contradicting relations of the different intervention features and values, the long European experience (already systematic since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and quite advanced during the 20<sup>th</sup>) led to the creation of international Charters, culminating firstly in the Venice Charter and then in the Italian Carta del Restauro (which comprises consecutive improvements), sharing the

resolution that such interventions should be conducted and designed by specialized professionals and only after an interdisciplinary and dialectic process.

The way the interventions on the Acropolis have been planned and monitored reflects exactly all the aforementioned and despite the difficulties posed when trying to identify the original position on the buildings of every scattered block or fragment found on the ground, despite the difficulties of mapping every fracture of the rock and come up with the right diagnosis of the dangers, despite the difficulty of solving complicated structural and physico-chemical problems, despite the difficulties of combining aesthetic and scientific views related to the interventions in the buildings and the ground, the works have progressed so much on the ancient buildings (the restoration of three out of the four main monuments of the rock – the Erechtheion, the Propylaea and the temple of Athena Nike has been completed), that nowadays it is possible to study and re-examine the long lasting issue of the restoration intervention of the ground and the accessibility to the Acropolis monuments. A part of this work, the replacement of the old (1977-2004-2012) overlay of the Panathenaic way with new, also made of concrete, was combined with the conservation of the walkways, pending since 2018, and the installation of a new elevator. The fact that the Acropolis was closed, due to the pandemic, helped to finish the work quickly and safely at the end of 2020.

Another International Scientific Conference is to happen in the following October to discuss all the works that have been completed or are programmed to be conducted, following the tradition of the previous International Scientific Meetings organised by ESMA.

The text including the objections to the conducted works of overlaying and the proposed restoration of the Roman ascent to the Acropolis.

The text *Plea Against the Interventions on the Acropolis, Acropolis: SOS* including objections for the conducted until today overlaying works and the proposed restoration of the Roman ascent, which the social media have been promoting during the last few weeks (starting a signature petition) points out:

- A. Ideological aspects with which someone can agree or not and
- B. Some other issues that are open to interpretation and need clarification.

Specifically:

1. The announcement of the works has taken everyone by surprise.  
Inaccurate. The discussions and approval of the intervention designs took place between April and June 2020, following the same thorough research as every other project and lasting for many months before the commencement of the works.
2. The use of reinforced cement for overlaying the walkways.  
Inaccurate. In reality what was used was unreinforced cement. Only in some key places was reinforcement used (small pieces of galvanised grid Ø6).
3. Non-reversible construction  
Inaccurate. The fundamental Principle of Reversibility has always been implemented in ESMA's works, thus, the adhesion of the rock to the overlayer is prevented from a separation film.

4. The destruction of the rock and ancient remnants.

Inaccurate. During the overlay works there has been no destruction of the rock or of any ancient remnant.

5. Redesigning the area without enough information.

Inaccurate. The limits of the main walkway (central passage), of the monuments next to the walkway and the surrounding walls were accurately defined by two highly qualified architects working for YSMA and Manolis Korres.

6. Burying precious archaeological evidence, which thus becomes inaccessible.

Backfilling archaeological evidence, after studying and documenting it, stems from the need to protect and restrain its further destruction from their exposure to destructive environmental factors. It is a legitimate method, which is also enacted and demanded by the international normative texts of archaeological monumental protection. In addition, in the case of the Panathenaic way a photogrammetric surveying of high accuracy had preceded.

7. Ignoring the Greek and International legal and institutional frameworks.

Inaccurate. Throughout the implementation of the works and the principles applied in the interventions, the Greek and international legal and institutional frameworks are strictly followed.

8. Overlaying the ancient walkway exposes the area to flood risks

Inaccurate. The flooding incidents are linked with the existence of huge pits created during the excavation of 1885-1890 in many places near the walls and had always occurred, regardless of the existence of the present or older overlay near the ridge of the rock. In many cases the experts adopted the firm view that to deal with this problem the ground of the Acropolis had to be restored in order to create flat surfaces of a constant slope from the middle towards the walls, thus, not only would the rainwater not stagnate but it could also be directed towards the gutters of the wall. This was one of the serious reasons that the ancient land levelling had to be restructured. This is possible because of the collected evidence from the elevations and limits of the Acropolis internal divisions. The original soil leveling of the terraces covered even the pre-levelled rock. What was used as a restoration material, approved years ago, was a mixture of gravel, small gravel, sand and clay similar to the original (which still remains intact in some areas).

9. Choosing the Roman phase for the ascending stairway to the Propylaea and opting for the classical period for the walkway on the artificial plateau of the rock.

The co-existence of remnants from various periods in archaeological sites with continuous, century-long use is quite common. Regarding the particular case, in 431 BC, due to the Peloponnesian War, the Propylaea remained unfinished, unfortunately the works were never completed. A huge ramp with a landing of 21.6x4m was built in front of them, but the designed stone-made stairway leading to the central building was never constructed (21.6x18m which had three in-between asymmetrical landings). In 40 AD this loose end was tied up. The stairway was constructed, although the designs were not exactly the same as the ones of the unfinished classical stairway. After centuries of use and even more destructions, there still remain intact large parts of it. These act as evidence of its original shape. The present condition of the ascent is the result of arbitrary, totally unsubstantiated, gross misinterpretations (1900, 1934, 1957), which had led to the covering of any existing traces and remnants of the ancient and Roman layout, whereas it has no relation with any historical phase of the west access to the Acropolis.

10. The re-building of the Roman stairway will hinder the access to ancient remnants.  
For every place that will be buried the protection measures mentioned above (see number 6) will be in effect. However, for the present open area on the north of the ancient ramp, the proposal, as it was presented to ESMA and KAS, specifies that the area remains intact.

11. The future of the Beulé Gate is precarious.  
Inaccurate. ESMA's proposal does not at any moment put at risk the Beulé Gate. Never has also the issue of its dismantling been raised.

12. Configuring the new west access with backfilling of a height around 3m. In addition, the demand of massive foundations.

Inaccurate. The backfilling will have similar composition as the ancient one and an average thickness of 55-60 cm. Gaps will be left though, where there are ancient traces, its volume will be 35% smaller than what is theoretically proposed, as if its average thickness was 36 cm (in a percentage of 3% of the whole area), the maximum thickness will reach up to 1.5m.

13. The proposed walkway will hinder visitor mobility.

An oxymoron. How can visitors passing through 5 gates be more cramped than passing through one gate (the central one of the Propylaea) as it is the case today? On the contrary, if the gates found on both sides of the Propylaea were to be used, then overcrowding would be reduced to one third of the present. In any case ESMA's proposal is not dictated by its wish to increase the number of visitors but from its desire to enhance the visiting experience. We do wish to point out that what matters, even for a small number of visitors, is for them to see what had really existed and not the arbitrary and misleading invention of 1957.

14. Not solving the problem of the large number of visitors.

We agree. A programme of distributing equally the number of visitors throughout the opening hours of the archaeological site should be implemented, observing that the number of visitors per hour and day would not exceed the maximum.

15. The safety of the Propylaea is exposed, because the visitors pass through more gates and that increases their mobility inside the monument.

Inaccurate. There won't be any danger (i.e., from visitors who want to touch) because the visitors will abide by the same rules applied at present for the movement of the visitors in the central walkway.

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