

The British Museum, *Müze-i Hümayun* and the travelling “Greek ideal” in the nineteenth century

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Abstract

In standard architectural history surveys, the British Museum is portrayed as an example of nineteenth-century “neoclassicism”, or the “Greek revival.” Usually cited as among the motive factors in this revival are the writings about European travels and archaeological explorations in the then Ottoman lands of ancient Greece, as well as a general interest in Hellenic culture. Yet the cultural and architectural appropriation of the Hellenic is not analyzed in relation to the possible ties and tensions between European archaeological culture and the Ottoman response to antiquity. This paper is an attempt to align the British Museum’s “Arcadia in Bloomsbury” with the Ottoman Imperial Museum, *Müze-i Hümayun*, in İstanbul, and to look at them afresh beyond the usual discourse of style. The paper analyzes the “neo-Grecian” “Temple of Arts and Sciences” in London, supposedly inspired by those in Priene and Teos in the Ottoman Empire, and the *Müze-i Hümayun*, whose façade allegedly replicates the *Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women*, transported to the museum from Sidon in Lebanon by Ottoman officials, understanding them as charged manifestations of “correspondence” or “transfer” within the web of circulating ideas, models, ancient remains, travellers, and architects of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: *British Museum, Müze-i Hümayun, Philhellenism, museum architecture, neoclassicism, Robert Smirke, Alexandre Vallaury, Osman Hamdi, İstanbul Archaeological Museum.*

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New Perspectives on Turkey, no. 50 (2014): 9-28.

“We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece.”

Shelley, *Hellas*, 1822¹

In fall 2011, I spent two months in London working in the archives of the British Museum. In the morning, I would enter the museum from Great Russell Street, passing through the nineteenth-century British architect Sydney Smirke’s iron railings and his older and better-known brother Robert Smirke’s massive “neo-Grecian” colonnade of 1846, adorned atop with Sir Richard Westmacott’s pediment, *The Progress of Civilization*, added to the façade in 1851, and seen as the epitome of the classical works by this strict adherent of the classical tradition in sculpture (figure 1). Westmacott, professor of sculpture at the Royal Academy, was seen at the time as Britain’s premier official sculptor, and also operated both as the British Museum’s supplier of sculpture casts² and as its advisor in the preparation and arrangement of the newly arriving ancient material, which was, as is well-known, a frequent occurrence back then.³ During my days in the museum, I would read about these nineteenth century men’s rapt fascination with ancient Greece. Westmacott was known for his passion for “pure Greek” and, as a result, became one of the protagonists in a notorious controversy over the museum’s aesthetic preferences.⁴ Ian Jenkins, author of arguably the most authoritative work on the history of the collections of the British Museum, reminds us that:

Greek art was the norm and appealed because its supposed purity provided a model of Western, even British, moral values. The stand-

- 1 Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Preface,” in *Hellas: A Lyrical Drama* (London: Charles and James Ollier, 1822).
- 2 See Marie Busco, *Sir Richard Westmacott, Sculptor* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also Richard Westmacott, *The Schools of Sculpture: Ancient and Modern* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1864).
- 3 In the nineteenth century, not only the British Museum but all the major museums in Europe, including the Louvre in Paris, were in fierce competition to enlarge their collections of antiquities, resulting in incessant grand campaigns to transfer huge quantities of material to Europe, particularly from the Mediterranean, Middle East and North Africa.
- 4 For an assessment of the notorious conflict between Richard Westmacott, who valued the “classical” in Greek art and “aesthetical” criteria in museum display, and Charles Fellows, transporter of the culturally hybrid Lycian remains to the British Museum, who preferred “geographical” and allegedly “scientific” display arrangements, see Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes in the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum, 1800–1939* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 140–153. See also Belgin Turan Özkaya, “Picturing Antiquity, Constructing Museums,” paper presented at the Urban Image Workshop for the European Architectural History Network biannual meeting, Brussels, Belgium, May 30, 2012. For a firsthand account of the disagreement, see *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Constitution and Government of the British Museum with Minutes of Evidence* (London: William Clowes, 1850).

Figure 1: The Great Colonnade, the pediment and iron railings, Robert Smirke, Richard Westmacott and Sydney Smirke, (from mid to late-nineteenth century) British Museum, current view.



Source: Personal archive of the author.

ard *History of Greece* of the day was that of George Grote, who was a trustee of the Museum from 1859 until 1871. Published in twelve volumes between 1846 and 1856, its treatment of the Athenians provided what many Englishmen saw, in Frank Turner's words, as "a reflection of their own best selves."⁵

After I would leave the "Arcadia in Bloomsbury" in the evening, however, it was a different story. From taxi drivers to BBC anchors to my British friends, there was a general discontent and intolerance about Greece and the Greeks, who were experiencing a severe economic and political crisis because of their EU debts. British opinion makers and tax-payers seemed keen to argue that "Greeks were lazy and corrupt," or that "they hadn't worked hard enough" and "had abused EU funds" to which the "hard-working British people," themselves experiencing an economic re-

5 Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 10. Frank Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale, 1981), 213.

cession, were actually contributing. The discrepancy between these antithetical images of the contemporary Greeks and the admirable ancient Greeks of the nineteenth century was quite intriguing. What did this mean? Had there simply been a change in the collective perception of one society by another (if such perceptions can ever be regarded as simple)? Or was there more to this?⁶

I would like to situate my reading of the British architect Robert Smirke's mid-nineteenth century "neo-Grecian" interventions in the British Museum in London and the French Levantine architect Alexandre Vallauray's late nineteenth century "neoclassical" *Müze-i Hümayun* in İstanbul within the context of the web of circulating ideas, models, ancient remains, travellers, architects and, most importantly, the ethereal "ideals" and perceptions of different cultures across time and in different geographies.

Prophetically enough, in 1799 [Smirke] won the Royal Academy Gold Medal with a *Design for a National Museum*. Then away he went for four years—between 1801 and 1805—on an extended Grand Tour. It was, of course, wartime and his adventures make startling reading. Disguised as an American in Paris, beset by bandits in Greece, locked up in a lazaretto at Messina, dancing at a masked ball in Rome, waltzing in Vienna, travelling across the Morea on foot, by mule or on horseback, sleeping in cow-sheds, living off roast sheep and retsina, bribing Turkish officials for fragments of the Acropolis, taking measurements in the burning sun, making drawings under armed guard [...] Through his enthusiastic eyes—in Brussels, Paris,

6 On the other hand, a distinction had apparently been made between the contemporary and ancient Greeks in the nineteenth century, as Shelley reveals: "The modern Greek is the descendant of those glorious beings whom the imagination almost refuses to figure to itself as belonging to our kind, and he inherits much of their sensibility, their rapidity of conception, their enthusiasm, and their courage. If in many instances he is degraded by moral and political slavery to the practice of the basest vices it engenders—and that below the level of ordinary degradation—let us reflect that the corruption of the best produces the worst, and that habits which subsist only in relation to a peculiar state of social institution may be expected to cease as soon as that relation is dissolved." Shelley, *Hellas*. Even if there seems to exist an occasional disdain for nineteenth-century Greeks vis-à-vis the ancient Greeks, the considerable support Greek liberation found among the British points to an acknowledgement of the contemporary Greek identity. For more on nineteenth century European perspectives on the Greeks in relation to antiquity, see Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. 1, *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785–1985* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

Berlin, Potsdam, Prague, Dresden, Vienna, Florence, Venice, Padua, Genoa, Vicenza, Rome, Naples, Corinth, Athens, Delphi, Thebes, Olympia—we can watch the emergence of a Neo-classicist, the making of a Greek Revivalist.⁷

This is how J. Mordaunt Crook in his 1972 work on the British Museum explains the genesis of Robert Smirke's "neoclassicism." Although the British Museum received its latest and one of the largest interventions as late as 2000, when the current covered Great Court was re-modeled by Norman Foster, and should perhaps be seen as a perennial work-in-progress rather than the finished project of one architect, by and large is credited to Robert Smirke among all the others who contributed to its formation over the centuries.⁸ Apparently even Smirke's "neoclassical" (or "neo-Grecian") project was built piecemeal between the 1820s and the 1850s and comprised, among many other rooms and halls, the 1831 King's Library, the 1838 Reading Room, the 1841 Arched Room, and the 1851 Large Room, the West wing with the temporary and permanent Elgin and Lycian Galleries from 1817 to the 1850s, and the 1854 Egyptian Gallery, together with the South wing comprising the 1846 Great Colonnade. During this construction period, the former building, Montagu House, which was "in the French style" deemed most apt when the museum was founded a century before but now seen as outrageously outmoded (perhaps partially because of the recent Napoleonic wars with France) was gradually demolished to be replaced by these new rooms.⁹

If we go back to the "making of a Greek revivalist," in Crook's over-enthusiastic words, Smirke performed the eighteenth-century British gentlemen's almost obligatory ritual of travelling abroad for cultivation and self-realization, that is, for what the Germans call *Bildung*. Like all later grand tourists who were not content with travelling in Italy and Europe, he wandered towards Morea, visited Athens and the other ancient sites of Delphi, Thebes, Olympia, all under Ottoman sovereignty at the beginning of the nineteenth century and largely populated by Greek-speaking ethnic groups. It is noteworthy that the hardship he is said to have endured in those lands is in such stark contrast with the aforementioned British image of ancient Greece. Smirke, seen as emulating the

7 J. Mordaunt Crook, *British Museum: A Case-Study in Architectural Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Pelican, 1973), 74.

8 Notable architects of the British Museum—in addition to Robert Smirke (1820s–1850s)—are Sydney Smirke (1850s), John Taylor (1870s–1880s), John Burnet (1900s–1910s), John Russell Pope (1930s), Colin Saint John Wilson (1970s), and Norman Foster (1994–2000). See Marjorie Caygill and Christopher Date, *Building the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 1999).

9 *Ibid.*, 11–46.

rules of ancient Greek architecture in standard architectural histories such as that of Crook's, accordingly "is beset by bandits in Greece [...] takes measurements in the burning sun, makes drawings under armed guard" and "bribes Turkish officials for fragments of the Acropolis." The "trope" of bribing or otherwise convincing oblivious Ottoman officials to cede possession of ancient fragments, officials who were seen as an obstacle for the symbolic and later material capture of ancient Greece by the British, would return in many later incidents as well. As Ian Jenkins wrote, referring to Henry Peacham who propagated the idea in his *The Compleat Gentleman*, "to transplant old Greece into England" had been a peculiarly British idea since the seventeenth century.¹⁰

Of course the most famous case of such a transplant was that of the Elgin Marbles—the fragments, mostly from the temple of Athena Parthenos, known as the Parthenon, in the Athenian Acropolis—in historian Edhem Eldem's words, "[those] ... truly astonishing number of architectural elements and other antiquities that eventually made their way to Britain"¹¹ and were sold to the British Museum in 1816 by Lord Elgin, the turn of the century British ambassador to the Ottoman court. Here, my aim is not to resuscitate the good old repatriation debates, which are often tinged with different levels of nationalism on one side and a covertly hegemonic fiction of a universal world culture on the other, but rather to delineate the overzealous fascination and identification with ancient Greece and the almost complete annihilation of Ottoman agency in the British narratives. Along the lines of Smirke's bribing of the Ottoman officials for fragments from the Athenian Acropolis, Elgin's removal of more than "247 linear feet [of frieze] in 56 slabs; plus 15 metopes, 17 figures from the pediments, and a truly impressive number of other objects and artifacts; sculptures, fragments, urns, cippi, altars and inscriptions"¹² was effectuated with the assistance of an Ottoman *firman*, the original of which has been lost, that granted permission to Lord Elgin. Recent literature, on the other hand, has revealed that the Ottomans were not so relaxed about granting such permissions. Eldem, for one, based on the Italian copy of Elgin's *firman*, has argued that the permission, if there ever was one, was most probably for removing "certain" or "a few" stones not

10 Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 9. Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman: Fashioning him Absolute, in the Most Necessary and Commendable Qualities Concerning Mind or Body, That May Be Required in a Noble Gentleman* (London: Francis Constable, 1622).

11 Edhem Eldem, "From Blissful Indifference to Anguished Concern: Ottoman Perception of Antiquities, 1799–1869" in *Scramble for the Past: A Story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, 1753–1914*, ed. Zainab Bahrani et al., (Istanbul: Salt, 2011), 286.

12 *Report from the Select Committee on the Earl of Elgin's Collection of Sculptured Marbles* (London: John Murray, 1816), xxvii–xlii, quoted in Eldem, "From Blissful Indifference," 324.

“any stone” as in Elgin’s English translation.¹³ As we will later see, the Ottomans, whose agency in standard Western discourses is relegated to the absence or presence of the sultan’s *firman* for the removal of antiquities, were gradually developing a concern for antiquity themselves.¹⁴

For us, the interest lies also in the fact that, after their arrival at the British Museum, “[at] the center of every proposed new arrangement of the collection were the Elgin Marbles, revered in the nineteenth century with near religious awe.”¹⁵ They became the epitome of the desire for ancient Greece across geographies manifested not only in the spaces of prestigious buildings in London such as Charles Barry’s 1841 Reform Club but also in İstanbul, for instance, at the vestibule of the 1892 Ottoman Bank designed by Alexandre Vallauray a year after his project for the *Müze-i Hümayun* (figure 2).

One of the first spaces that Robert Smirke ever designed for the British Museum was the temporary Elgin Room. Later, he would also design the first and second Elgin rooms, the latter of which today houses the so-called Nereid monument brought to London in fragments by Charles Fellows.¹⁶ Yet the most visible side of Smirke’s “neoclassicism” was not his designs for the rooms housing these revered fragments but the Great Colonnade of the Great Russell Street entrance, unveiled to the public in 1846 (figure 3).¹⁷ The colonnade has become the standard

13 Eldem, “Blissful Indifference,” 283–295. For the English copy of the Italian translation of the *firman* and the interesting note about the Italian translation being *qualche pezzi di pietra* for “any pieces of stone,” together with a catalogue of Elgin’s material, see appendix 10 of the *Report from the Select Committee on the Earl of Elgin’s Collection of Sculptured Marbles* (London: House of Commons, 1816). Eldem’s virtuoso close reading of the English translation of the Italian copy also questions the authenticity of some terminology as possible terms that would have appeared in an Ottoman document. On the basis of archival material, including Elgin’s other correspondence, Eldem detects a certain degree of indifference to antiquity on the part of the Ottomans at the beginning of the nineteenth century which, he claims, would have gradually become a matter of concern later. Although at this point there is no evidence that would contradict Eldem’s sophisticated argument and chronology of an emerging Ottoman interest in antiquity, one may speculate about a possible earlier Ottoman resistance to the transportation of huge amounts of material based on the mentioned Elgin correspondence which is only about “some columns and pieces of stones of porphyry abandoned in some places,” alongside the careful phrasing and possible misusage of Ottoman permissions on the part of the British.

14 Charles Fellows, too, who travelled to Anatolia four times in the 1830s and 1840s, wrote about the resistance the Ottomans showed in granting permission to foreign travellers: “I add some anecdotes which may also show the extreme jealousy the Turks have of their fortresses being visited by Franks.” Charles Fellows, *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, More Particularly in the Province of Lycia* (London: John Murray, 1852), 431.

15 Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 9–10. See also Eric Gidal, *Poetic Exhibitions: Romantic Aesthetics and the Pleasures of the British Museum* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2001).

16 *Ibid.*, 12.

17 Interestingly, the opening of the colonnade coincided with a new vogue for “Gothic” rather than “neoclassical” style in British architecture, and was thus met with general indifference. See Caygill, *Building the British Museum*, 29. For my purposes, indifference in that particular moment does not disqualify

Figure 2: Replica of a Parthenon relief, Ottoman Bank, 1892, Alexandre Vallaury, current view.



Source: Personal archive of the author.

image of the British Museum in mainstream histories on “neoclassicism.” Interestingly, the colonnade did not reference the Parthenon or anything from the Acropolis or even Athens. Mordaunt Crook argues that the Ionian order in Smirke’s colonnade is a combination of those of the temple of Athena Polias in Priene and the temple of Dionysos in Teos, both in Ionia (or Ottoman Anatolia rather than mainland Greece), as they were depicted in *Ionian Antiquities* published by the Society of Dilettanti in 1769.¹⁸ Still, this carrying of “Greek-ness” from inside the mu-

the argument that I will develop below about “neoclassical” features working as triggers of fantasy for the British subject.

- 18 Richard Chandler et al., *Ionian Antiquities Published With Permission of the Society of Dilettanti* (London: T. Spilsbury and W. Haskell, 1769). The supposed reference to Priene and Teos temples or rather to *Ionian Antiquities*, although repeated in many secondary sources, cannot be verified by firsthand evidence. Also, as one of the anonymous referees for this article pointed out, the choice of “Anatolian examples” over Athenian or mainland Greek ones is puzzling given the general privileging of the latter over the former, and this requires further research. For a somewhat speculative explanation and an attempt to situate Smirke’s *Great Colonnade* within contemporary British archaeological culture see Katalin Schober, “Constructing Archaeological Signs in Greek Revival Architecture: Sir Robert Smirke’s British Museum (1832–46),” *Jena Electronic Studies in English Language and Literature* 001 (2012). According to museum records, fragments from Athena Polias in Priene in possession of the Society of Dilettanti were donated to the British Museum in 1870.

seum where ancient Greece was “represented by fragments” to its outside might arguably be seen as a re-enactment of the function of those fragments as triggers of fantasy that mark the façade as well.

In the context of his brilliant anatomizing of nineteenth-century German Philhellenism, Stathis Gourgouris, who sees Philhellenism as a type of Orientalism coupled with an “autosopic idealization,”¹⁹ argues that:

A classical *Bildung* is [...] not merely the appropriation of ancient Greek culture; it is, in effect, its sublimation, which is to say, its re-inscription with new social meaning, its re-socialization. Insofar as this sublimation partakes of the ambivalent exercise of mimicry—here, an autosopic mimicry grounded in the ideal—the classical *Bildung* is no less than an explicit and programmatic *colonization of the ideal*.²⁰

He also asserts that “as a nineteenth-century Germanic subject, Freud, [too], learns to fantasize from early on about the Hellenic world.”²¹ This insight may be extended to the early nineteenth-century British subject, who develops a classical erudition textually and materially through education and travel and learns to see “the reflection of his own best self” in the ancient Athenians.²² The ancient fragments of the museum’s interior, such as the Elgin marbles, or the Ionian order of its exterior, metonymically allude to ancient Greece and arguably work as triggers of fantasy for the educated Briton “who learns to dream about ancient Greece early on.”²³ The collectively learned nature of the dream may also explain the “mediatedness” of the references for Smirke’s colonnade. If Crook’s argument is correct and Smirke was indeed inspired by the drawings in *Ionian Antiquities* rather than seeing the temple of Athena Polias in Priene or

19 Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 124. By aligning the seemingly antithetical concepts of Philhellenism and Orientalism, both of which are for him nineteenth century phenomena whose origins can be traced back to earlier periods, Gourgouris points to both the “Othering” and the idealization in the relation of the Germanic subject to “the Greeks.”

20 *Ibid.*, 124. See also Marchand, *Down from Olympus*. For a more general argument about what he calls “Hellenomania,” see Martin Bernal *Black Athena*, 281–336.

21 *Ibid.*, 127.

22 The best-known and most tragic example of this is the half-Scottish Lord Byron, who died of natural causes in Missolonghi in 1824 during the Greek uprising against the Ottoman Empire. Byron’s condemnation of Elgin in his poem of 1811, *The Curse of Minerva*, does not disqualify him from the type of Orientalism Gourgouris talks about. Nevertheless, the motivations of this quite complicated figure deserve a more meticulous analysis.

23 This issue of “learning to dream about a culture early on” first arose for me when a curator of the British Museum told me that she was fascinated by antiquity even as a child and always wanted to do what she was currently doing.

the temple of Dionysos in Teos with his own eyes, this may be explained by the emphatic intertextuality of such Orientalizing discourses as Philhellenism, that continually reproduce their own invented internal referents rather than representations of things “out there” in the world.

But what was going on “out there,” then, in the lands where ancient Greece had been, that is, in the contemporary Ottoman territories? While Smirke was producing his initial designs for the British Museum in the 1820s, the Greeks were pursuing an uprising against Ottoman rule; a revolt which ended in 1832 with the establishment of a Greek state, a monarchy ruled by a Bavarian prince, under the protection of European forces until 1864. What was the attitude towards antiquity of the Ottoman state, which, in the aftermath of Greek independence, was forced to draft a series of reforms concerning its non-Muslim population in 1839 and which seems to be almost non-existent in Western accounts of the appropriation and “transplanting of ancient Greece” to modern Europe?

Apparently, in the 1830s, members of the Ottoman elite already held some private collections of antiquities. Charles Fellows, who would be instrumental in the discovery and transportation of the so-called Xanthian marbles to the British Museum *à la* Elgin, was in Aydın in March 1840, and mentions the much visited “museum” of Tahir Pasha who discovered statues and preserved them in his mansion, and that Fellows finds to be “of a base Roman age.”²⁴ He writes:

How strange it seems that such specimens as the following should alone be prized, when the country is rich in the works of the ancient Greeks! Upon two marble blocks, apparently pedestals, which are now built into the wall on either side of the entrance to the Pasha’s house, are bas-reliefs of a low age, probably Byzantine, or perhaps as late as the Crusades: they each have a superscription.

On the other side of the door is a somewhat similar pedestal, with this inscription: [...] These were found only a few months ago, as

24 Charles Fellows, *An Account of Discoveries in Lycia, Being a Journal Kept during a Second Excursion in Asia Minor* (London: John Murray, 1840), 19. Fellows does not use the word “governor” but the governor of Aydın around 1838 and 1839 was Kaptan-ı Derya Çengaloğlu Tahir Pasha. See, M. Çağatay Uluçay, *Onsekizinci ve Ondokuzuncu Yüzyıllarda Saruhan’da Eşkiyalık ve Halk Hareketleri* (İstanbul: Berksoy Basımevi, 1955), 3, 338. Mehmet İzzet, *Harita-ı Kapudanan-ı Derya*, (İstanbul, 1249), 214, 215. I am grateful to Zeki Arıkan and Şerafettin Turan for these sources.

well as several broken statues, which are preserved with great care by the Pasha, who is anxious to acquire the European taste for such things; at present a well-sculptured eagle, which has lost its own head, is supplied with that of a female figure [...] My object for travelling is to see the people and the country, its natural history, and its remains of ancient art, and not to waste time and money in visiting the higher classes whose attempts to act the European rather disgust than amuse. I was told by my Smyrnesse friends that I must take a letter of introduction to Tahir Pasha, as he was one of the most powerful and enlightened men in the country—an excellent fellow, who speaks Italian, drinks champagne, smokes cigars, dances, and wears white-kid gloves!²⁵

Likewise, the current literature on the history of Ottoman museology argues that around 1845–1846, roughly around the time of Robert Smirke's Great Colonnade of the British Museum, in İstanbul too, a modest imperial collection of antiquity (*Mecma-i Âsâr-ı Atika*) did exist in addition to a collection of old weapons (*Mecma-i Esliha-i Atika*) on the grounds of the Topkapı Palace, housed in the sixth century Byzantine church of St. Irene (*Hagia Irene*) that had been used as an arsenal for war spolia and collections of antique arms since the fifteenth century.²⁶ Damat Rodosizade Ahmed Fethi Pasha, who became the Grand Master of the Artillery in 1846, is generally credited with this idea of collecting and displaying ancient artifacts.²⁷ The existing literature suggests that, in the church, in addition to holy relics and ancient weapons, Byzantine and ancient artifacts were on display too, although in a rather

25 Ibid., 18–20.

26 Mustafa Cezar, *Sanatta Batıya Açılış ve Osman Hamdi*, 2nd ed. (İstanbul: Anadolu Sanat Yayınları, 1995), 230–231; Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Osmanlı Müzeciliği, Müzeler, Arkeoloji ve Tarihin Görselleştirilmesi*, trans. Esin Soğancılar (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004), 45 (Shaw's work was originally published in English as *Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (California: University of California Press, 2003), and is the first extensive study on the history of Ottoman museology); Pelin Gürol Öngören "Displaying Cultural Heritage, Defining Collective Identity: Museums from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Early Turkish Republic" (PhD Dissertation, Middle East Technical University, 2012), 64. Eldem, on the other hand, although acknowledging the importance of the establishment of these collections, points to their lack of a legal status and underlines the importance of 1869 as the date of the first Ottoman *Âsâr-ı Atika Nizamnamesi*. Eldem, "From Blissful Indifference," 281–283, 312–321. Despite the increasing interest in the subject, the history of archaeology in Ottoman lands needs to be further studied. Just a quick search in the catalogue of the Ottoman archives reveals many documents about the discovery of ancient fragments in different parts of the empire and their transportation to the imperial museum, especially at the end of the nineteenth century.

27 Cezar, *Sanatta Batıya Açılış*, 228. Ogan, *Türk Müzeciliğinin 100. Yıldönümü*, 3–4; Eldem, "From Blissful Indifference," 314.

haphazard fashion.²⁸ A small catalogue was even compiled by Albert Dumont, who visited St. Irene in 1867, and published in 1868 in *Revue Archéologique* under the title “Le musée Sainte-Irène a Constantinople Antiquités Grecques, Gréco-Romaines et Byzantines.”²⁹ Art historian Mustafa Cezar argues that, from 1869, the depot was officially established as a museum and began to be called, *Müze-i Hümayun*, the Imperial Museum.³⁰ This was also the year of the first Ottoman regulation about ancient artifacts (*Âsâr-ı Atika Nizamnamesi*), which would, through its various revisions in 1874, 1884, and 1906, completely ban the transportation of any ancient artifact outside Ottoman territory.³¹ For the Ottomans, the second half of the nineteenth century was, although admittedly very modest when compared to what was going on in Europe—described by a recent exhibition in İstanbul and related publication as a “scramble for the past”—a time of a growing interest in and an “anguished concern” for antiquity.³²

What is most interesting is how a whole “founding” narrative of discovery, transportation, and construction was played out by Ottoman officials apparently re-enacting the experience of European archaeologists. In 1891, a new “neoclassical” museum building was constructed opposite the *Tiled Pavilion* to which the *Müze-i Hümayun* had been transferred in 1880.³³ The *Tiled Pavilion* was one of the oldest and most peculiar buildings on the Topkapı Palace grounds, arguably conceived in the quite unusual Persian or Timurid style. Alexandre Vallauray, by contrast, designed the new “neoclassical” building (figure 4) upon the request of the son of the Grand Vizier Edhem Pasha, Osman Hamdi Bey, a French-trained bureaucrat and painter, self-styled archaeologist, and the contemporary authoritative director of the imperial museum.³⁴ Val-

28 Öngören “Displaying Cultural Heritage,” 67-68. See also Shaw, “Osmanlı Müzeciliği,” 86-100.

29 Albert Dumont, “Le Musée Sainte-Irène a Constantinople Antiquités Grecques, Gréco-Romaines et Byzantines,” *Revue Archéologique* 18 (July-December 1868), 237-263. In 1871 Edward Goold, the museum director at the time, would publish an expanded catalogue, *Catalogue Explicatif, Historique et Scientifique d'un Certain nombre d'objets contenus dans le Musée Impérial Constantinople fondé en 1869 sous le Grand Vizirat de Son Altesse Aali Pacha*, (Constantinople: A. Zellich, 1871).

30 Mustafa Cezar states that the names *Nümünehane-i Osmani* and *Müzehane-i Osmani* were also used in the documents. Cezar, *Sanatta Batıya Açılış*, 231. Kamil Su, on the other hand, claims that the idea of a “national” museum that would be assembled with material from its own excavations had first emerged in 1868. Kamil Su, *Osman Hamdi Bey'e Kadar Türk Müzesi* (İstanbul: ICOM Türkiye Milli Komitesi Yayınları, 1965) 7-8.

31 Eldem, “From Blissful Indifference,” 281-283, 312-321. See also Cezar, *Sanatta Batıya Açılış*, 328-332, Shaw, *Osmanlı Müzeciliği*, 168-175.

32 Eldem, “From Blissful Indifference,” 281-329.

33 Öngören “Displaying Cultural Heritage,” 78-79.

34 Unfortunately not much is known about Vallauray. See particularly, Mustafa Akpolat, “Fransız Kökenli Levanten Mimar Alexandre Vallauray” (PhD Dissertation, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 1991). Osman Ham-

Figure 4: Museum of Sarcophagi, 1891, Alexandre Vallauray, current view.



Source: Personal archive of the author.

lauray, according to Mustafa Akpolat, came from a well-known Levantine family of confectioners, and was professor of architecture at the newly founded Ottoman School of Fine Arts (*Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi*), directed again by Osman Hamdi, and designed the school itself in different phases starting from 1882 in “neoclassical” and “neo-renaissance” styles” (figure 5).³⁵ The construction of the museum building, also called the *Museum of Sarcophagi*,³⁶ was justified most importantly by the need for a new space to house the formidable sarcophagi discovered by a peasant called Mehmed Şerif Efendi in a Phoenician necropolis in Sidon in present-day Lebanon, then in the *sanjak* of Damascus, excavated and transported to the Ottoman capital personally by Osman Hamdi Bey, and which lay waiting outside the *Tiled Pavilion*.³⁷

di writes his name as Vallauri. See O. Hamdy Bey and Théodore Reinach, *Une Nécropole Royale a Sidon: Fouilles de Hamdy Bey* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1892).

35 Ibid., 7-9, 52.

36 For a detailed analysis of the construction of the museum including its later phases, see Öngören “Displaying Cultural Heritage,” 91-115.

37 For the letter Osman Hamdi wrote to the Ministry of Education on June 26, 1887, which makes a cunning argument about the necessity for a new museum building, see Cezar, *Sanatta Batiya Açılış*, 257-258. For the story of the excavation and transportation of the sarcophagi, see O. Hamdy Bey, *Une Nécropole Royale a Sidon*.

Figure 5: Mekteb-i Sanayi-i Nefise, second phase, Alexandre Vallauray 1880s, current view.



Source: Personal archive of the author.

Let's go back to the moment of discovery, in American archaeologist and historian John Punnet Peters words, when Osman Hamdi saw the so called Alexander Sarcophagus, deemed the most significant of the whole group of sarcophagi:

The sight so overcame him with wonder and delight that he fell a-trembling, grew faint, and would have fallen to the ground had not the foreman caught him and dragged him back through the opening, thinking he had been overcome by the bad air. So he tied the rope about him, and they raised him to the surface, where he lay at the brink of the shaft, totally unmanned by astonishment and joy, trembling like an aspen and, weeping like a woman. He could not sleep a wink that night but tramped up and down watching for the dawn, planning and dreaming about the wonderful sarcophagus which he had seen as in a vision in some enchanted cavern. Such is the account of the discovery, which I have from his own lips, but I fear that only the inventor or explorer can appreciate the nervous excitement and utter collapse produced by the joy of the discovery. And if any discovery was ever likely to produce such an effect upon the nervous system of the discoverer, certainly it was this one. Even I, a disinterested

spectator, when this sarcophagus was first unboxed in my presence, I found myself wild with amazement and enthusiasm. With its beautiful colors and perfect lines and real perspective, it came to me as a dazzling revelation of the possibilities of vivid realism in marble.³⁸

Such drama of discovery is eloquently probed by Can Bilsel, in his work on what he calls the most prominent of the “hero-archaeologists” of the nineteenth century, Carl Humann who “discovered” the fragments of the gigantomachy of the Great Altar of Pergamon in 1879, who writes:

There is a recurrent plot in the annals of the great archaeological discoveries of the nineteenth century: great men, with a keen interest in the founding myths of Western civilization, travel to the East and, to the surprise of their disbelieving compatriots, discover some of the greatest monuments of antiquity [...] If the hero’s discovery is to be understood as the recovery of a trace, a monument, an artefact of universal civilization, the immediate problem arises that the locals, at least, at the moment of discovery, were often not yet initiated into its world historical significance.³⁹

The French-educated Osman Hamdi, who was apparently familiar with Ernest Renan’s work on Phoenicia in his *Mission Archéologique de Phénicie*, and with whom he communicated about his Sidon findings, had obviously already been initiated into the world historical importance of such “discoveries.”⁴⁰ The whole narrative of miraculous discovery, arduous transportation, and ensuing construction was also re-enacted in the Ottoman capital. Unsurprisingly, the resultant building, the *Museum of Sarcophagi*, designed by Vallauray, followed the earlier (European) examples such as the British museum in its “neoclassicism,” and its façade was supposedly inspired by one of the Sidon sarcophagi, the *Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women* (figure 6).⁴¹ The mere existence of such a discourse, a supposed doubling of an ancient fragment on the façade, is in line with the case of the Great Colonnade of the British Museum, with

38 John Punnet Peters, “An Art Impetus in Turkey,” *Century Illustrated Magazine* 45, no. 4 (1893): 553-554.

39 Can Bilsel, *Antiquity on Display Regimes of the Authentic in Berlin’s Pergamon Museum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 89.

40 See O. Hamdy Bey, *Une Néropole Royale a Sidon*. For the changing relationship between Osman Hamdi and Ernest Renan see Edhem Eldem, *Osman Hamdi Bey Sözlüğü* (Istanbul: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2010), 448-449.

41 This oft-repeated argument in the existing literature cannot be traced back to Vallauray or Osman Hamdi. The oldest source that seems to mention it is Ogan, *Türk Müzeciliğinin 100. Yıldönümü*, 9.

Figure 6: The Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women, fourth century BCE., current view.



Source: Personal archive of the author.

its own supposed ancient models.⁴² In this case, the model is a fragment that the museum would envelop, the *Mourning Women*, with its Ionic order, the most “Greek” of the Phoenician sarcophagi. In the context of classical *Bildung* or Philhellenism, this would have metonymically alluded to ancient Greece and worked as a trigger of fantasy for the educated subject “who would have learned to dream about ancient Greece early on.” Yet the late Ottoman imperial subject was quite heterogeneous. In contradistinction to an educated German or, to an extent, British subject who might have been by and large inculcated with a classical *Bildung*, the Ottoman subject could have had different types of education due to the existence of, variously, foreign schools following a European curriculum, ethnic minority schools with their own curricula, more “Westernized” *nizami* (*rüştiye*, *idadi*, *sultani*) schools, and the conventional *medrese* education, in addition to the European training of the upper classes.

On the other hand, the existence of a probably limited but initiated group of Ottoman subjects who had learned to dream about antiquity can be discerned.⁴³ To take one example, Dimitri E. Danieloğlu was an

42 For a different reading of the *Müze-i Hümayun*, see Wendy M. K. Shaw, “From Mausoleum to Museum: Resurrecting Antiquity for Ottoman Modernity,” in *Scramble for the Past: A Story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, 1753–1914*, ed. Zainab Bahrani et al., 423–441; Shaw, *Osmanlı Müzeciliği*, 218–34.

43 The late nineteenth-century circles Osman Hamdi moved in, such as those of *Sanayi-i Nefise* and

intellectual belonging to a wealthy Greek family in Ottoman Antalya, and was educated in Athens and Paris. In 1855, about forty years before the opening of the *Museum of Sarcophagi* in İstanbul, and almost contemporaneously with the display of the Lycian material in the British Museum transported there by Charles Fellow, Danieloğlu published a guide entitled *A Trip to Pamphylia* in which he wrote:

It was 1850. While talking with my friends we decided to make a trip. We asked, 'Why don't we go to see the nearby ancient remains?' Learning about these remains from British and French travellers' writings was embarrassing.⁴⁴

The guide relates Danieloğlu and his friends' 13-day ramble, with the travelogues of Charles Fellows and Colonel Leake in their hands, to see and record the ancient remains of Pamphylia, and was published by a small Greek publishing house in İstanbul, the Anatoli Press. The fact that the miniature guide was written in *katharevusa*, the nineteenth-century elite Greek shorn of new and foreign elements to more closely approximate ancient Greek, and Danieloğlu's conspicuous preference for Greek remains over Roman ones, were in line with both European Philhellenism and nineteenth century Greek identity formation.

Now we may return to our initial question: Can the British Museum's "neo-Grecian" Temple in London, allegedly inspired by those in Priene and Teos, contemporary Ottoman lands, and the *Müze-i Hümayun*, which supposedly replicates the *Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women* on its façade, transported from Sidon in today's Lebanon to the Imperial Museum by Ottoman officials, be seen as charged manifestations of "correspondence" or "transfer" within the nineteenth century culture of "travelling" ideas, ancient remains, travellers and architects? Despite being conventionally situated on the opposite ends of an asymmetrical relationship that privileges the British as a pioneer subject of travel, collection, and display over an "oblivious" Ottoman subject with almost no historical agency, a comparative analysis reveals that the Ottomans, just like the British, had developed their own imperial archaeological agenda. For us, what is especially interesting is the form in which this agenda

Müze-i Hümayun, from Vallauray himself to the sculptor Yervant Osgan, and from his student İhsan Bey to the painting tutor Salvatore Valeri, were often European-trained "cosmopolitan" Levantines or Ottoman subjects who were arguably also acquainted with European classical traditions. For the intellectual context of the time, see Zeynep Rona, *Osman Hamdi Bey ve Dönemi* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1993).

44 Antalya D.E. Danieloglu, *1850 Yılında Yapılan bir Pamphylia Seyahati*, trans. Ayşe Özil (Antalya: Suna İnan Kırış Akdeniz Medeniyetleri Araştırma Enstitüsü, 2010), 7. My translation from Turkish to English.

was expressed; the “neoclassical” or “Greek revival” visual language of the Ottoman Imperial Museum with its supposed “Ionian” model and Philhellenic roots. That a political version of this movement actually fought against the Ottomans several decades before reveals the surprising and autonomous dissemination of cultural ideals that acquire situated new meanings in different geographical and temporal locations. Just like the changing image of the Greek for the Britons since the nineteenth century, the web of intertwined nineteenth century cultures from London to İstanbul to Athens worked on given cultural expressions in unexpected ways. As such, by metonymically alluding to ancient Greece, the features incorporated into the museum façades in London and İstanbul helped educated nineteenth century subjects touched by European classical *Bildung* and Philhellenism, who were admittedly fewer in Ottoman lands than in Britain, to dream about these imagined and “invented traditions” in their own distinct ways.

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