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Field Notes: Athens in Flux

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These Field Notes present a fragmented and diachronic portrait of Athens through the mobilities of people and cultures, which, as they clashed, intersected, and syncretized, defined different aspects of the city. Fourteen short essays and an introduction provide glimpses into an Athens continuously marked by the movement of people, labor, crafts, and capital, from the ancient city-state to the contemporary metropolis, a telling of history that is posed against ethnocentric narratives of continuity of presence. Demonstrating a multitude of historiographical approaches and voices, the essays collected here are treated as 'field notes' because of their brevity in treating a nascent field of study of the Athenian built environment that crosses time periods and disciplines.

Keywords: diachronic histories; urban historiography; migration; mobilities; Athens

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Preface. Gathering in Athens

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Athens has been a deep well of inspiration for millennia, not only for other cities but also for entire cultures and indeed empires. Since antiquity, people have sought to capitalize on its rich legacy. Some have literally exploited its material culture, such as Sulla who, after he sacked the city in 86 BCE, extracted Corinthian columns from the unfinished Temple of Olympian Zeus (Olympieion) and shipped them to Rome where they were reinstalled in the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline Hill. Another less destructive yet equally opportunistic way of gleaning the city's lustre is simply to borrow its name. In 2009, the World of Athens, a nongovernmental organization based in Greece, hosted a conference for all mayors of cities named Athens globally, most of which are in the United States.[1]

The city has also galvanized people in a different, frequently overlooked way, possessing a capacity to draw in and mix together new residents. Having grown so enamoured with Greece that he was dubbed Graeculus (Greekling), the emperor Hadrian became a citizen of Athens and invested heavily in its monumental topography, completing the construction of the Olympieion and leaving behind numerous imposing landmarks such as an arch, library, and aqueduct.[2] Since then, countless others, some privileged, most not, have also come to call Athens home, adding to the city, recasting it, making it their own. More than a mere melting pot, Athens is a city whose fabric has perpetually shape-shifted in response to newcomers, the result of which is an extraordinarily diverse corpus of architectural evidence that has seeded many scholarly subfields. This context is the cornerstone of this specially commissioned Field Notes for *Architectural Histories*.

In 2022, when Athens was named as the host city for the 2024 EAHN conference, many colleagues namechecked its megawatt archaeological sites, but few mentioned any post-antique or modern landmarks. Therefore, the editorial board of *Architectural Histories* decided to commission a group of short essays to align with the EAHN conference that expanded on the role of Athens as the host city by offering a kind of thematic and critical introduction that does not exist elsewhere. By foregrounding the entangled histories of Athenian architecture and landscapes across time, this Field Notes explicitly recognizes and celebrates the city as a palimpsest.

Working from the premise that Athens is not simply a modern European capital built upon classical ruins, this selection of essays makes vividly apparent the value of looking beyond disciplinary limits, especially narrow and constricting timeframes. It also is testament to what collaborative research and practice can produce, gathering specialists not only from architecture but also allied fields. This is in essence what *Architectural Histories* has sought to cultivate over the last decade. It is hoped that this project will both catalyze further collaboration and serve as a precedent for an ongoing series in *Architectural Histories* that introduces the multilayered fabric of each city that hosts an EAHN conference.

Introduction. Athens in Flux

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The summer of 2015, also known as the 'summer of migration' (Kasparek and Speer 2015), highlighted the different mobilities that have been defining contemporary Athens (and Greece). At the same time that the ephemeral passing of droves of tourists continues to be welcomed, acting as a vector for urban planning and development, migrants, war refugees, and asylum seekers are denied space and rights, often being violently threatened, contained, excluded, exploited, marginalized, ignored, and even pushed back, to begin their journey anew. These 'differential mobilities' of global tourism and migration, as Doreen Massey calls them, are embodiments of the 'ever-shifting geometry of social/power relations' (2001: 4). Borders that are lifted for the few — those with passports or visa agreements that secure their transit — rigidly order space and movement for others. Yet movement and mobility are historically active forces that have continuously shaped Athens, against ethnocentric histories of Greece that systematically try to erase their trace (see Hamilakis 2007; Koulouri 2020; Western 2021).

This collection of essays presents a fragmented and diachronic portrait of Athens through the many mobilities that determined the city. By looking at Athens through the lens of 'differential mobilities,' we can move past the colonialist, orientalist, and nationalist narratives of place and 'Greekness' to unearth the multiple

actors, voices, and life experiences that produced the city across time. By presenting Athens as a palimpsest of mobilities, we problematize ethnocentric narratives and the ways they fictionalize a historical continuum of a single ethnic, cultural, racial, and religious presence. Instead, the collection points to the different ways in which people and cultures clashed, intersected, and syncretized across time, from the ancient city-state to the neoliberal metropolis that Athens is today. Episodes of intense population movements had marked Athens' history, well before the nation-state became a frame of reference. In the 20th century alone, 350,000 refugees settled in and around Athens during the immense population exchange that followed the 1922 Greco-Turkish War. During the rural-to-urban migration from the 1950s to the 1980s, the population of the city tripled. In the 1990s, the influx of a few hundred thousands of immigrants from Albania and former socialist countries reconfigured the political and social geography of Athens. And with the most recent ongoing arrival of refugees and asylum seekers from war-ridden Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, as well as Nigeria, Ghana, Somalia, and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, Athens (and Greece at large) has emerged as a major European gateway, enforcing violent EU border controls.

If 'margins come into view through *migration*', as Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi and Rachel Lee propose (2019; italics in the original), then migration and mobility can form an analytical lens by which to unsettle dominant urban orders and values and to expose marginal spaces, voices, agency, experiences, everyday practices, and claims to the city's past, present, and future. In this sense, migration makes cities; it creates spaces of solidarity and community building (Lee 2023) that resist and contest the statecraft attempting to fix mobilities so as to govern them. The buildings, neighborhoods, sites, infrastructures, and monuments examined in this collection are living documents of the mobilities they witnessed, contained, or attempted to fix, offering insights to how these processes unfolded in different historical periods and ultimately complicating more positivist takes on the constructedness of the built environment.

The fourteen short essays in this collection appear chronologically, affording a partial and necessarily fragmented spatio-temporal view of the making of Athens, while registering episodes of movement of people, ideas, labor, capital, and more. Essays focusing on ancient Athens show how the city, although politically weakened after the 5th century BCE, remained a cultural and educational hub during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, whereby the individual privilege and power that travelled along with money, typologies, crafts, and, at times, labor across the ancient world took form in the monumental structures built around the Acropolis and the Agora (Kylindreas, Zarmakoupi). The migrating Muslim populations settling in Ottoman Athens transformed the city into a military, religious, and administrative center, creating an everyday life defined not only by power, socio-religious hierarchies, and

spatial exclusions but also by moments of intercommunal interaction and the sharing of collective spaces (Poulos, Loupis). It was this vibrant urban late-Ottoman landscape that 19th-century European travelers documented in travelogues and drawings. During the same period, Hellenism emerged as a political and cultural project that later helped define the young state of Greece and its capital (Bastéa 2000, Karidis 2014). The major and gradual neoclassical transformation of Athens — a vision born abroad — was tenuous and depended on the extensive mobilization of local labor, techniques, and materials (Kotsaki, Rammou). Similarly, the 'modernization' of Athens through the building and expansion of transportation infrastructures connected the city to the nearby coast and the port of Piraeus, materializing and popularizing experiences of mobility and leisure across the social fabric (Chatzikonstantinou). Athens' urban, infrastructural, and architectural growth at the beginning of the 20th century reflected the country's aspirations for territorial expansion.[3]

The compulsory mass migration that violently uprooted Muslim populations in Greece and Christian populations in Turkey, changed and expanded Athens (Clark 2009; Akcan 2024). Leading to Greece's religious and ethnic homogenization, this 'exchange of populations' settled throughout the country approximately 1.5 million Orthodox Christians, with an unprecedented impact on the countryside and the cities of Athens and Piraeus (Leontidou 1989, Yerolympos 2003). Essays reckon with both formal and informal responses to the resettlement of refugees (Kyramargiou, Amygdalou), highlighting how refugee settlements — whether constructed through the combined efforts of the Greek government and international bodies or created as makeshift shacks and hovels with no drainage, water, or electricity by the refugees — were socially and spatially marginalized. These everyday spaces of shared traumas, collective memories, and struggles for a better life informed a distinct working-class identity, aligned with socialist and leftist views palpable in the city's political landscape well after the exchange.

A second wave of internal migration from rural to urban Greece following the Greek Civil War (1944–1949) equally determined Athens. The demand for housing increased dramatically, leading to an extensive rural and urban reconstruction that carried Cold War geopolitics and accommodated the growing US interventionism in Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean (Voglis 2015; Kalfa 2021; Phokaides et al. 2021). The Greek government, unlike its Central European counterparts and their welfare models, had committed to a development vision of state-led tourism and housing construction based on familial and clientelist relations (Allen et al. 2004; Lampropoulou 2009; Theocharopoulou 2017). The mobilization of local labor and small-scale capital in the construction of *polykatoikìa* — private-based, low-tech, and low-cost multistory residential building — had a multiplying effect on Athens' growth (Kalfa and Alifragkis).

The expanding concretescape of *polykatoikìa* was punctuated by hotels with neon signs, demarcating the growth of tourism, the import of foreign capital and their ties to Cold War geopolitics (Athanasiou).

Attempts to contain metropolitan growth later in the 1980s[4] were accompanied with major infrastructural projects (such as the construction of Athens' metro and the relocation of the airport in eastern Attica) that further facilitated, rather than controlled, urbanization, sprawl, and the depopulation of the city's center. The organization of the Olympic Games of 2004 accelerated the construction of new transport infrastructures (ring road, suburban railway) intended to turn Athens into a regional hub for the global flows of tourists and capital (Vaiou, Mantouvalou and Mavridou 2023 [2004]). Since then, further transformations of the city confronted by successive crises have been marked by the logics and aesthetics of neoliberal capitalism, leading to the privatization of public infrastructures and new development projects (Triantis), even as waves of migration are creating their own temporalities and spatialities within the city (Lafazani, Makrygianni).

The essays here demonstrate a multitude of historiographical approaches and voices, transcending siloed approaches to the study of the built environment.[5] Some employ archaeological methods and approach their site as a palimpsest, cutting across its many historical layers to narrate critical instances within its long existence (Kylindreas, Loupis, Triantis). Other essays use oral history and ethnography to explore the social space that these sites created and the networks they enabled to produce situated histories of the city (Lafazani, Makrygianni). Travelogues — the traveling literature that flourished during the Ottoman Empire — cast light on sites long transformed, albeit through the colonial gaze and ear that recorded them (Poulos, Loupis). Social histories and histories of labor register the agency of workers and migrants in the making of the city (Kyramargiou, Kotsaki). Within this context, certain essays examine the ideological narratives that buildings serve and the political agendas and economies that produced them (Zarmakoupi, Chatzikonstantinou, Athanassiou, Kalfa and Alifragkis). And at times, buildings serve as evidence of competing ideologies and value systems at work (Rammou).

In some ways, this collaborative publication might resemble a travel guide. Yet, unlike the travel guides and the tourist economies that dictate their form and content, this collection sheds light on the social and political conditions from which the stories of these sites arose. Rather than celebrating the ancient core at its center, these fourteen essays look at Athens from peripheral, eccentric, oblique viewpoints, revealing the different ways in which people have inhabited the city, imagining and embodying multiple temporalities and spatialities and offering a view upon the many mobilities that have historically — and at times invisibly — left their mark upon Athens; a city in flux.

Mastery and Money in Movement: The Benefaction of the Stoa of Attalos in Athens

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The Stoa of Attalos in the Athenian Agora was reconstructed in 1956, a project carried out with the help of American capital and led by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (ASCSA), which has been excavating the site since 1931 (Meritt 1984: 175–202) (**Figure 1**). Although the existence of the Stoa of Attalos was known from writing in the 2nd century CE of the Greek rhetorician Athenaios (5.212e–f), it was not until the discovery in 1862 of its dedicatory inscription from the Doric epistyle of the façade that archaeologists were able to identify the remains of the building in the Athenian Agora (Kaye 2016; Wycherley 1957; I.G. II2 3171). The director of the Athenian Agora Excavations at the time, the Canadian classical archaeologist Homer Thompson, envisioned this reconstruction as accommodation for the Agora Museum, storage for the archaeological finds, workrooms, and offices (Sakka 2013: 203, 208). Two Greeks were also involved in the reconstruction: George Biris, a consulting engineer who conducted the original survey, and John Travlos, the architect of the Agora Excavations, who supervised the restoration following the original design of the Stoa (Meritt 1984: 182). The ambitious initiative was funded with $2.2 million, supplied between the American financier John Rockefeller, Jr. and a fundraising campaign by the ASCSA (Vogeikoff-Brogan 2021; Sakka 2013: 213).[6] The restoration involved 198 workers, who combined ancient techniques with those of the mid-1950s and used new materials from the quarries of Mount Penteli and Hymettus (white and blue marble) and Piraeus (limestone) while also incorporating the ancient remains (Mauzy 2006: 31–73; Thompson 1992: 4; Camp and Dinsmoor Jr. 1984: 3) (**Figure 2**). The Greek government more than welcomed this reconstruction, which would clearly demonstrate the modern nation's connections with classical antiquity and its monuments, thus reinforcing Greece's position within Western European culture amid Cold War divides. Likewise, the United States also benefited from the rebuilding of the Stoa because it helped establish its position within global culture as the inheritor of Athenian democracy. The collaboration between the two countries gave the city an imposing monument by which the ancient past was pulled into a modernizing Athens.

This was not the first time that the Stoa of Attalos was the recipient of foreign benefaction that led to collaboration with the locals. During the Hellenistic period, Athens was not as politically powerful as in the 5th century BCE, but it remained

Figure 1: Photograph of the reconstructed Stoa of Attalos in the Athenian Agora in 1956. Courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations; 2012.01.0056.

Figure 2: Photograph of the Stoa of Attalos reconstruction in the Athenian Agora in 1956. Courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations; 2008.20.0091.

the cultural and educational epicenter of the ancient Greek world. As such, the city experienced an architectural blossoming, generated by rulers of kingdoms across the Mediterranean who aimed to demonstrate their power and wealth in monumental buildings. The frenzied building activity in Athens from that period can be seen in the construction of the Gymnasion of Ptolemy III (after 229 BCE), the Stoa of Eumenes II (196–159 BCE), and, although incomplete, the temple of Olympian Zeus (175–164 BCE) by Antiochos IV (Miller 1995: 203–209; Camp 2001: 171–176). It was in this same vein, around 150 BCE, that the Pergamene king, Attalos II erected his stoa in the Agora of Athens, where he had spent his college years under the philosopher Karneades, maintaining the strong bonds between Attalids and Athenians (Camp 2001: 173). Designed and executed by Pergamene architects and workers, the two-story stoa was used for commercial ventures, with 42 rooms for shops inside (Camp 1986: 172). With a length of 116 m and a height of 11.42 m, it dominated the eastern end of the Athenian Agora for over 400 years, before its destruction by the Herulians in 267 CE. The remains of the Stoa were incorporated into the Late Roman Wall, built shortly after the Herulian sack (Theocharaki 2020: 213–215, 231–232).

The Stoa of Attalos was shaped by the movement of peoples and taste across the Aegean. Although built with local materials — Pentelic and Hymettian marble for the superstructure, and Piraeus limestone for the walls — the stoa featured visual language and techniques from Pergamon: a two-story façade and Pergamene palm capitals crowning the second-floor columns on the inner colonnade that resemble those of the North Stoa in the Sanctuary of Athena at Pergamon (Coulton 1976: 69, 72, 126–129; Radt 2011: 160–161). The Pergamene builders who King Attalos II brought for its construction were more familiar with the coarse local stone from Pergamon, which was fragile and did not allow sharp edges on the Doric columns. As a result, even though the Doric columns of the outer colonnade on the ground floor of the Stoa of Attalos were made with local Pentelic marble, their flutes followed the Pergamene style. The construction of the Stoa of Attalos in the 2nd century BCE monumentalized the eastern part of the Athenian Agora and contributed to the shaping of its surrounding landscape, following the Hellenistic trends of enclosed public spaces (Sielhorst 2011: 31–46).

Although some changes were necessary for the Stoa's new function — changes to the basement storage area, the size of the windows, and the positioning of the doors, as well as the omission of internal walls — the 1956 reconstruction reproduced the original design as much as possible, to respect its cultural value and history (**Figure 3**). The resulting edifice drew negative reactions from some prestigious Greek architects and archaeologists of the time, such as Anastasios Orlandos, Ioannis

Miliades and Christos Karouzos, because it went against the general accepted code of restoration practice and because its massive presence and shining white walls overpowered the sparse remains of the other ancient buildings nearby (Sakka 2013: 221). Today, however, the Stoa stands as an imposing reminder in the heart of Athens that innovation and collaboration occur through the movement of people and ideas.

Figure 3: Photograph from 2011 of the interior of the ground floor of the Stoa of Attalos in the Athenian Agora. Courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations; 2013.04.9245.

The Tomb of Philopappos (114–116 CE)

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The Tomb of Philopappos (114–116 CE) gives its name to the hill on which it stands, Philopappos Hill, in modern Athens. In antiquity, it was called Mouseion Hill, named after Mousaios, a mythical singer, seer, and priest who is said to have lived in pre-Homeric times and to have been buried there (Paus. I.25.3). The monument seems to have been deliberately placed to face to a point midway between the Propylaia and the Parthenon (**Figure 4**). Its principal concave-shaped ornate façade, whose deep, shadowed niches feature portrait statues in the round on the upper story and

a chariot scene in high relief in the lower story (**Figure 5**), is turned northeast to face the Athenian Acropolis. The summit of the monument was prominently visible in antiquity, as it is higher than the Acropolis, and it still dominates the modern topography of the city. Commanding and choreographing the urban landscape of Roman Athens, the tomb introduced — for the first and only time outside the Near East — the bricolage Greco-Iranian design mannerisms of the kingdom of the Commagene, which exemplified the socio-cultural developments of the global late Hellenistic world that came under the control of the Roman Empire.

Figure 4: View of the Philopappos monument and its relationship to the Acropolis from the southwest. Photo by Mantha Zarmakoupi, 2021.

The tomb was erected in honor of Gaius Julius Antiochos Epiphanes Philopappos, the grandson of Antiochos IV, the last ruling monarch of Commagene, a small kingdom west of the Euphrates River between Cappadocia and Syria in eastern Anatolia and at the intersection of trade routes from Mesopotamia, Cilicia, and Syria. The Commagene traced their ancestry to both Alexander the Great and Darius. Philopappos and his sister Balbilia were the last known members of the dynasty; they relocated to Greece and Rome after their kingdom was made a Roman province in 72 CE. Philopappos became a Roman consul and an honorary citizen and *archon*, or chief magistrate, of Athens. He probably spent his last years in the city and was granted the site for his tomb due to his background as a Commagenian prince rather than his benefaction to the Athenians (for which there is no evidence). It is indeed his Greek and Persian heritage that affected the form and decoration of the tomb (Kleiner 1983).

Figure 5: View of the principal concave-shaped ornate northeast façade of the Philopappos monument. Photo by Mantha Zarmakoupi, 2021.

The tomb is a tall structure, almost square in plan (9.11 × 9.65 m) and enclosing the burial chamber that was accessed from the middle of the back southwest side. The northeast concave façade of the tomb features a plain podium; a low first story, divided into a tripartite frieze framed by piers; an upper story, also divided in three parts with niches by means of four Corinthian pilasters, only one of which survives today; and quite possibly an attic (**Figure 6**). The frieze in the first story depicts the inauguration of Philopappos as a consul in Rome in 109 CE — probably the most important moment in his life. At the center of the upper story, a large arcuated niche presents a colossal, seated statue of Philopappos. It is flanked by two smaller square-topped niches featuring statues of his paternal grandfather, Antiochos IV, on his right, and Seleukos Nikator, the founder of Seleucid dynasty, from which the Commagene claimed to have descended, and also a distant maternal relative, on his left (now lost). In this way, Philopappos, whose name means 'grandfather-lover', or 'ancestor-lover', asserts his ancestral lineage. The accompanying Greek and Latin inscriptions that allow the identification of the statues and Philopappos' Commagenian lineage survive fully in drawings by the Florentine architect Giuliano da Sangallo after sketches of Cyriacus of Ancona in 1436.

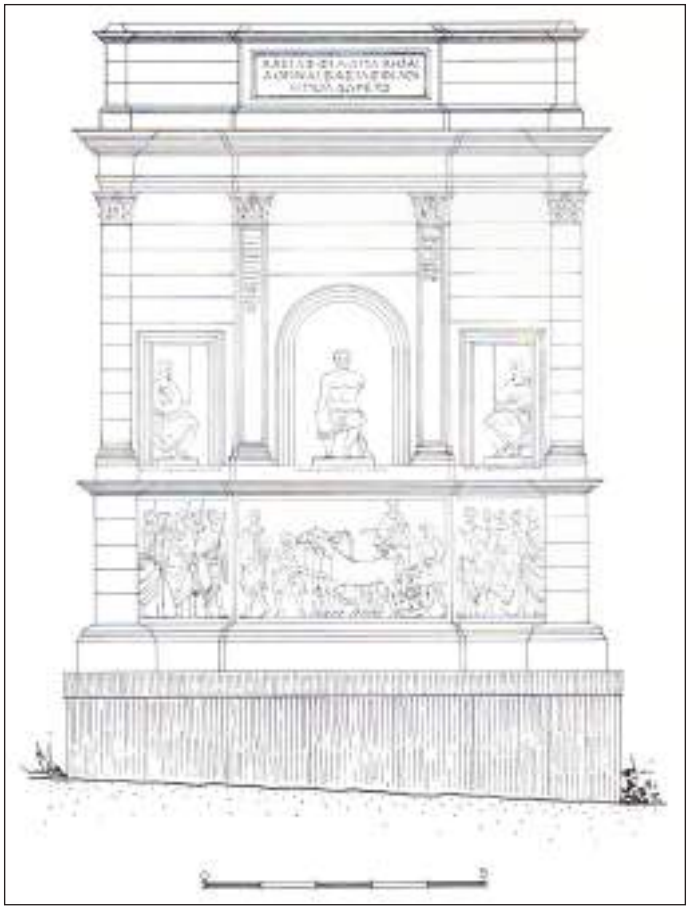

Figure 6: Restored view of the façade of the northeast façade of the Philopappos monument by John Travlos. From Kleiner (1983: pl. XXXIII).

The monumental tomb is a unique structure with no parallels in Athenian funerary architecture, where tombs were small and in low-lying grounds on the outskirts of the city. It follows the tradition of the mausoleum or podium type that was reserved for royalty in Hellenistic Asia Minor, such as the Nereid Monument at Xanthos (ca. 400–380 BCE) and the Mausoleum at Halikarnassus (ca. 365–350 BCE), both of which have sculptured friezes decorating their lower part. This type began to be commissioned in Italy in the first century BCE; for instance, the Tomb of Marcus Octavius and Vertia Philumina on the via Nocera in Pompeii. The multistory façade (podium, two stories, plus an attic) of Philopappos' tomb further draws upon the design of Roman tower tombs, such as the Monument of the Julii at St. Rémy (ca. 30–20 BCE).[7]

There are some particularities, however, that associate the unique design and decorative mannerism of the tomb with Philopappos' native Commagene, as found, for instance, at the royal tomb-sanctuary at Nemrud Dağ, built by Antiochos I (ruled

69–38 BCE). Such tomb-sanctuaries were *hierothesia*, a combination of royal tomb and sanctuary by which the king and his ancestors were honored as divinities. Nemrud Dağ was placed at the summit of the highest peak (2232 m) in the kingdom of Commagene, dominating the surrounding landscape, and its east and west terraces featured Antiochos I flanked by seated ancestral portrait statues.[8] There is no evidence that Philopappos' tomb was used as a place of worship, but being built near the summit of Mouseion Hill, rather than in a low-lying area on the outskirts of the city, certainly relates to the practices of his illustrious ancestors. Indeed, the seated ancestral portrait statues flanking Philopappos' heroic appearance on the upper story of the tomb and the placement of the monument in the Athenian landscape emulate the design and iconography of the tomb-sanctuary at Nemrud Dağ. The Philopappos tomb employed the dynastic mise en scène and bricolage design mannerisms of *hierothesia* to assert the 'ancestor-lover's' lineage of the Commagene and Seleukid kingdoms while establishing new connections with the glorious Athenian past and the Acropolis.

Space, Boundaries, and Sonic Flows: The *Staropazaro* in Ottoman Athens

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The *Staropazaro*, the weekly wheat market of Athens in the Ottoman times, was located at the juncture of the two principal axes of the town: the north–south axis, which was defined by the route from the *exochoro* to the northern slope of the *Kastro* (=Castle) — the Acropolis — via the centre of the Hadrian Library, leading to its main entrance, and the east–west axis, which connected the town with the plain of Mesogea and the sea and passed through the Gate of Athena Archegetis, also known at the time as *Pazaroporta* (=Market Gate) (Karidis 2014: 82–83). This central point of the urban fabric, a vibrant and sonorous area, was further marked by the presence, at the same junction, of the Fethiye Camii built in the 1660s on top of an earlier mosque that was established with the conversion of the Christian church of Mary, known as the Panagia tou Staropazarou (Kiel 2002: 117–118). As recorded in one of the town's foundational narratives, sound held an important role in marking and regulating everyday intracommunal relations, and, overall, in the production of social space in Ottoman Athens (Haşîm 2022: 182).

The wheat market, which was held on Sundays, featured not just agricultural products, like wheat, and handicraft products (Karidis 2014: 83), but sounds. The imprint of the sound of market activities periodically reflected the micro mobilities

between Athens and its environs and constituted a component of the overall soundscape of Ottoman Athens. The rental income and taxation of the local Christian population, which partly covered the salaries of the *muezzins* on duty, indirectly sustained several practices entailing sound that related to the ritual life of the Muslims, such as the call to prayer (*ezan*) and the Qur'anic cantillation performed at the mosques and the *mescit*s (Kiel, in Markou 2015: 77). The Muslim public soundscape of the area around the Staropazaro was enriched by the ritual gatherings (*zikr*) of the Halveti mystical order (Clayer 1994: 268; Mehmed Haşîm 2022: 183) that were hosted for certain in the second half of the 18th century in the Horologion of Kyrristos (aka Tower of the Winds) and by the daily function of the Medrese of Hacı Osman Ben Ali built in 1721 opposite the Fethiye Camii, a demonstrative of the Ottoman building activity of the 18th century.

These religious sonic practices publicly resounding at the heart of the town and the *Staropazaro* were means for the legitimization of the Ottoman sovereignty over the Christian population of Athens. They also sonically marked the spatial division between the town (*chora*) — the marketplace and the inhabited parts — and the *Kastro*, where the Ottoman garrison and the families of the soldiers was situated. The call to prayer from the mosque in the Parthenon, established in 1458 (Fowden 2019: 80–82) and rebuilt after 1687 (Kiel 1991), and the occasional canon blasting from the battery under the Erechtheion that projected from the top of the hill, blended daily with the soundscape of the daily life of the premodern town. Those sounds coming from the Acropolis were not always positively received by European travellers, whose auditory perception was largely shaped by romanticism and Philhellenism (Hobhouse 1817: 290; Chateaubriand 1818: 151).

However, the prevalence of Muslim sonic practices did not correspond to the demographic structure of the population of Athens, which throughout the Ottoman rule, except for the 18th century, was predominantly Christian (Kiel 1991). Christians, Greeks, and Arvanites outnumbered the Muslim population, and their religious buildings outnumbered mosques. Unlike practices associated with mosques, Christian rituals were confined within the precincts of the churches, which in most cases were also walled, and their sound marks (e.g., bell ringing) were prohibited. Community festivities that included music and dances took place within the walled courtyards of churches (Philadelpheos 1902: 331), yet their sound and visibility was regulated.

The sound hierarchies that emerge from this short overview were by no means undifferentiated and static. Sound, being, a powerful medium implicated in the production of social space, was often turned into a field for the articulation of power struggles and the negotiation of hierarchies (Born 2013; Gandy 2014: 11–12). A

demonstrative example is the conversion of the Panagia of Staropazaro into a mosque, which almost triggered a sound battle, in which the sounds of 'mourning and crying' from Christian clergy, women, and children disturbed the Qur'anic cantillation, leading the judge (*kadı*) at that time to order the performance of the special inaugural call to prayer (*ezân-ı fütûhât*) (Mehmed Haşîm 2022: 182).

In the 18th century, the spatial boundaries between the various ethnoreligious communities were often sonically transgressed, because important socio-political changes affected even intercommunal sonic practices. One such occasion was the end of the tyrannic rule of voivod Hacı Ali Haseki (1775–1796), when Athenians fled the town to avoid becoming forced labor for the construction of the city walls (Skouzés 1975; Kiel 1991). The event was celebrated by the public reading of the sultanic decree, services in the Katholikon and the Fethiye Camii that were attended by both Christians and Muslims, and canon-firing from the *Kastro* (Venizelos 1986: 417). Following this event, for the Greek Orthodox New Year celebrations in 1797, members of the Ottoman administration, including the military band (*mehter*) of the *Kastro*, together with Christian and Muslim children dressed up in colorful costumes, all paraded in the city, accompanied by the sounds of violins, frame-drums, and percussion for three days and three nights (Mehmed Haşim 2022: 182). These bottom-up sonic itineraries spatially inscribed intercommunal interaction and participated in the dynamic constitution of social spaces in Athens under Ottoman rule.

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An Ottoman Dervish Lodge in the Tower of Winds

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In an engraving from 1821, a vivid scene unfolds of Ottoman dervishes performing a ritual inside an ancient octagonal building in the area of the Roman Agora in Athens (Dodwell 1821) (**Figure 7**). This building was likely the tower, known as the Tower of the Winds, that was repurposed as part of a dervish convent and is described in narrative sources and accompanying prints. They describe a niche in the wall denoting the orientation of the *qibla*, holy Islamic calligraphic inscriptions on the walls, candles, and ostrich eggs hanging from the roof. The interior was further furnished with holy books,

banners, candlesticks, portable framed inscriptions, axes, horns, rosaries, and pelts. Here the community of the faithful performed their prayers and dances with the aid of musical instruments, such as a drum. In the engraving, the sheikh and his dervishes are surrounded by male attendants and children. While some sources suggest that the tower was used by either the Mevlevi or the Kadiri denomination of Muslim mystics, a document in the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul mentions that a dervish of the Mısriye branch of the Halveti denomination was appointed head of the lodge in 1792. The last dervishes abandoned the tower in 1821.

Figure 7: Ceremony of Ottoman dervishes in the Tower of Winds. Engraving in Dodwell (1821: vol. 1, pl. [11]), The D. Loupis Visual Collection of Islamic Architecture.

Visitors to Athens in early modern times, who were mainly interested in antiquity, such as the architects James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, also mention the tower, describing it and providing information about its original function (**Figure 8**). Engravings in travel literature also depict the building in detail and present it within the built environment that surrounded it. These writers describe it as a glorious remnant

of antiquity that from the 16th century to the first half of the 18th apparently had no function. The Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi, who visited Athens in 1668, referred to the tower as a building of miraculous and apotropaic character. He called it 'the tent of Plato': a 'tent' because its polygonal design and conical roof reminded him of nomadic Turcoman tents and Seljuk mausolea, and the association with the Greek philosopher because, according to Islamic popular tradition, Plato combined theoretical thinking, holiness, and the hypernatural. Although he does not identify its function, Evliya Çelebi's interpretation shared the view of the Ottoman dervishes who incorporated the building into their lodge sometime in the mid-18th century (Stuart and Revett 1762).[9]

Figure 8: The Tower of Winds with its dervishes and Muslim neighbors. Engraving from Stuart and Revett (1762: vol. 1, ch. 3, pl. I), in the D. Loupis Visual Collection of Islamic Architecture.

The area where the tower stands has gone through a gradual transformation since the late 15th century, when Ottoman Muslim military forces and migrating civilians moved into Athens. The lower town hosted administrative and financial activities, the backdrop for the Ottoman state and its institutions. In this area a church was converted into mosque, and much later, new mosques were built, together with dervish lodges, mausolea of holy Muslim figures, medrese schools, hammams, and fountains, all giving an Ottoman Islamic character to the settlement.[10]

But the history of the structure that hosted the Ottoman mystics extends much farther back than the advent of the Ottomans. The Tower of the Winds, built to measure the passage of time, was designed by the architect and astronomer Andronicus of Cyrrhus in the Roman Agora toward the end of 2nd century or by the middle of the 1st century BCE. The tower features a water clock inside, eight sundials on the outside, and

a wind vane on top. The frieze immediately below the roof cornice presents the eight wind deities in relief, which explains the name of the tower (Webb 2017; Kienast 2014; Frieden 1983) (**Figure 9**).

Figure 9: The Tower of Winds (Horologion of Cyrrestes), Roman Agora, Athens, late 2nd to middle of 1st century BCE. Photo by Dimitris Loupis, 2011.

A well-built and impressive structure, the tower has long been a constant landmark amid an ongoing change of scene. As people and cultures in Athens have come and gone, the tower has been repeatedly reintroduced to the area with new functions. For example, it was likely used as a baptistry, martyrium, or church in late antiquity; recent restoration work has revealed a layer of ecclesiastical wall paintings dating from the 13th and 14th centuries.

This mechanical clock structure of antiquity, built in the heart of a city that is characterized by the constant movement of people, commodities, and ideas, has survived the passing of centuries. It attests to the migration of groups, political, economic, and

social, who carried with them religious ideas and state and cultural institutions, as well as lifestyles and passions. Common or uncommon functions, expected or unexpected, close or far from their original intent, all assisted in the survival of a landmark and help shed light on the human experience of space in a diachronic manner.

Kapnikarea: A Byzantine Relic within the Rising Commercial Street of Modern Athens

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During the planning of the capital of the new Greek State in the early 19th century, the 11th-century church of Kapnikarea emerged as a contentious focal point (**Figure 10**). The location of Kapnikarea, in the middle of one of the primary streets of Athens, prompted much debate about whether the building should persist along the new commercial artery or be demolished in favor of a straight axis leading to the king's new palace (now the Hellenic Parliament).

Figure 10: Exterior of Panagia Kapnikarea church from the southeast, 1889. Photo by Robert Weir Schultz and Sidney Barnsley, 1889. The Warburg Institute Iconographic Database.

Conceived in 1833 by Stamatios Kleanthis and Eduard Schaubert, the initial Athens city plan aligned with Bavarian neoclassical standards (**Figure 11**). The old city would be remodelled by the opening of new streets, which would enable the harmonious coexistence of old and new Athens. To separate the buildable part of the old city from the archaeological part, the plan introduced a new street named Ermou.[11]

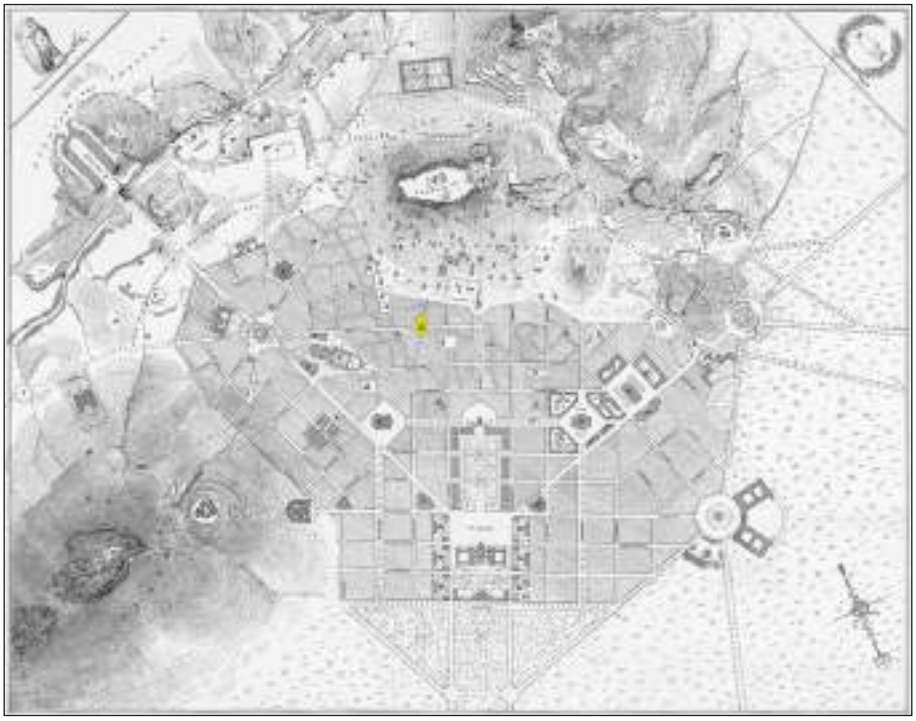

Figure 11: Excerpt of the 'Plan of the New City of Athens' by Stamatios Kleanthis and Eduard Schaubert, approved on July 11/29, 1833 (Biris 1996: 36).

Although that initial city plan for the opening of Ermou Street left Kapnikarea intact, the church disappeared in the second, revised plan of 1834 by Leo von Klenze.[12] Soon Kleanthis and Schaubert, who were members of the Building Committee of Athens, proposed developing a square around the church (Biris 1996: 159). Until the middle of the 19th century, however, no definitive plan for Athens had been decided upon; street arrangements were made through a long series of royal decrees issued by the Ministry of Interiors and ratified by Queen Amalia or King Otto.

In 1852, two royal decrees were issued to try to save Kapnikarea and create a square around the church, but in 1863, the Minister of Interior signed the order for the demolition of the church.[13] By that time, Ermou Street was already a bustling hub

of trade. Following the opening of the new railway station at the street's west end, which connected Athens to the port of Piraeus, the street had to accommodate an increased influx of people and carriages within its disproportionately small width, causing traffic congestion. The church stood in the middle of the street, making driving dangerous; it obstructed the view of carriages passing in opposite directions, causing collisions.

The fact that Byzantine art was gaining recognition in Greece did not suffice to protect the church. The residents living in the surrounding area may have supported the church's demolition (Biris 1996: 159). There was even a plan to dismantle and rebuild the church near today's Omonia Square, 'using the same material, preserving the dimensions and the architectural rhythm of this ancient monument of Byzantine building art'.[14]

News of the proposed demolition caused an uproar not just in Athens but also abroad, where a more sympathetic view of Byzantine art and architecture was cultivated.[15] A manuscript by the French historian and archaeologist Francois Lenormant, addressed to the Greek Minister of Interior, talks about the disapproval of European experts regarding the neglect of Byzantine art by Greek archaeologists. Lenormant underscores the church's popularity in Europe, emphasizing its value as 'one of the purest and most valuable types of 11th century Byzantine style'.[16] He states that the proposed demolition 'would be unanimously considered in Europe as an act of vandalism and would cause the Greeks to be criticized for being totally devoid of a feeling for the arts' (Lenormant 1863). He argued instead that by preserving Kapnikarea, the Greek government would demonstrate to other European governments its progressive views on preservation. A month after Lenormant's report, and in response to this criticism, demolition was permanently ruled out. By February 1889, the configuration of Kapnikarea's square was finalized (FEK 34, 08.02.1889) according to modern principles of monument projection that featured axial alignment, absolute framing of the building, and the creation of a symmetric square around the church (**Figure 12**).

Kapnikarea reveals a complex narrative of cultural migration and urban development. Initially seen as obstacle to progress, this medieval monument found its place in the modern city as a sign of the new government's capacity to preserve its history and construct a national historical narrative that connected antiquity to modernity, through Byzantium.[17] The interplay between medieval remnants and the imposition of a neoclassical city plan highlights the challenges and decisions faced by an emerging capital striving to reconcile its historical past with the imperatives of modernization.

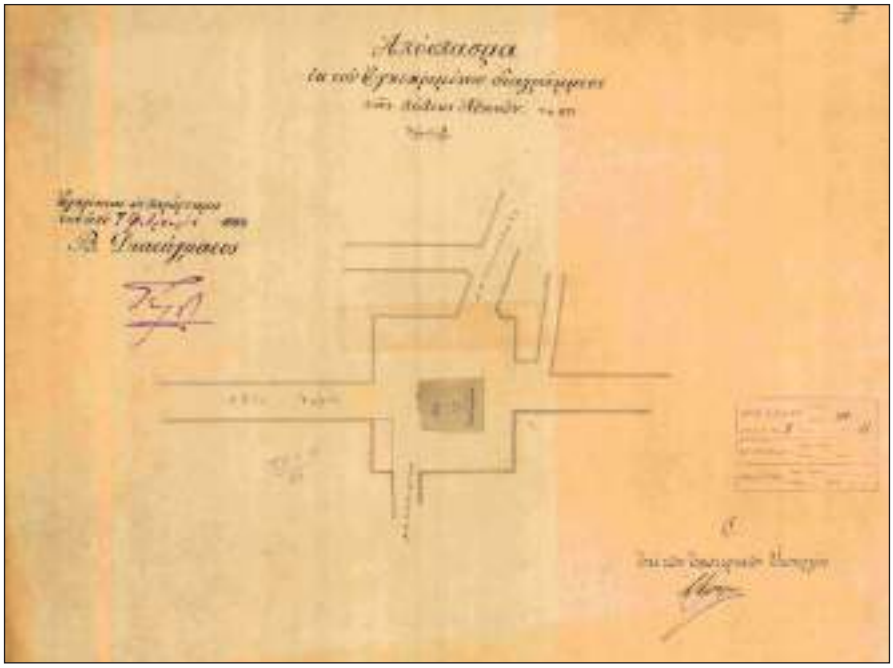

Figure 12: Excerpt of the Athens city plan, as modified by the Royal Decree of February 7, 1889, showing the final building lines around the church of Kapnikarea. Archive of Diagrams, Ministry of the Environment and Energy, Athens.

Proastion: Popular Neoclassicism in a Builders' Settlement in 19th-Century Athens

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With the completion of the Athenian Trilogy — the University of Athens, the Academy of Athens, and the National Library — in 1870, Athenian neoclassicism was established as an architectural idiom distinct from the rest of European neoclassicism. Unlike European neoclassicism, which bequeathed us almost exclusively monumental buildings used for religious, political, and corporate purposes, Athenian neoclassicism found great appeal among the anonymous settlers of the newly established city. Working class families and neighborhoods incorporated neoclassical elements in their buildings, thus giving birth to the phenomenon of 'popular neoclassicism' that the late architect and academic Pavlos Mylonas (1915–2005) described as 'truly humble, naive, graceful' (2017: 14–18). Central to the creation of popular neoclassicism were the builders who transferred architectural ideas and forms, art and technique, from construction sites back to their homes.

But let us start at the very beginning.

On 29 June 1833, Otto, the first king of Greece, issued the well-known decree 'On the Reconstruction of the City of Athens and the Relocation of the Seat of Government', by which the urban plan of Athens was approved and assigned to the architects and city planners Stamatios Kleanthis and Eduard Schaubert. Around the same time, we have the first official appearance of the term 'off-plan' (εκτός σχεδίου), used to describe informal settlements and constructions developed outside the official plan of the city of Athens.

In 1834, Athens became the capital of the Greek State; it subsequently gradually abandoned its rural image. The significant influx of new residents, referred to as 'incomers' or '*epiledes*' (επήλυδες), who arrived in Athens from various areas of the newly established Greek State, and the establishment of a Public Works Department for Athens together marked the transformation of Athens into a city. For the most part, the new settlers, who made their homes in different parts of the city according to their place of origin, worked on construction projects related to the new plan, especially since the building of the Athenian Trilogy initiated the new monumental plan for Athens, creating an urgent need for a labor force.

In a way, the Athenian Trilogy offered construction workers from various parts of the newly established Greek State the opportunity to find work in the capital, although with an important prerequisite: knowledge of marble and experience in the processing of it, marble being the basic material for the construction of these monumental buildings (**Figure 13**).The internal migrants of the time who were qualified to apply for a job at these construction sites were primarily those from the Cyclades, especially the marble workers from Tinos and Paros. There were also carpenters from Andros and masons from Skopelos and Karpathos.

From 1840 onward, when all these internal immigrants began to settle in Athens, they gradually brought their families and attracted other immigrants, creating community. Given the high prices of land in areas within the official plan, the new settlers found shelter on the outskirts of the city, in areas outside the plan, where landowners were subdividing their properties and selling cheap plots to builders who at the time numbered the largest group of the internal migrants.

In the 1840s and 1850s, about sixty houses were built east of the University of Athens, forming an area in the northeast part of the city called *Proastion* (beyond Academias Street and between Canning Square and Zoodohou Pigis Street, part of the area now called Exarcheia), an informal settlement with its own road network, courtyards and vegetable gardens (Biris 2017: 339) (**Figure 14**). Despite efforts to prevent such informal settlements, *Proastion* continued to expand. Eventually, it was

incorporated into the Urban Plan of Athens in 1847 (Biris 1996: 80, 84, 172, 191). With their background in masonry and their apprenticeship alongside such leading figures of Athenian neoclassicism as the Hansen brothers (Theophil and Christian) and Ernst Ziller, the craftsmen who worked on the Athenian Trilogy and other monumental neoclassical structures in Athens assimilated neoclassical forms and rhythms, while acquiring the knowledge and construction techniques necessary for it. They carried all this back to their own houses, where they adapted neoclassical elements according to their limited budget, which often led to inventive solutions that were low cost, daring, and inspired, ultimately contributing to the popularization of a great moment in European architecture and its Athenian expression (Fatsea 2011: 190–217).

Figure 13: The Academy of Athens, designed by the Danish architect Theophil Hansen, under construction, 1868–1882. Photo by Petros Moraitis, undated.

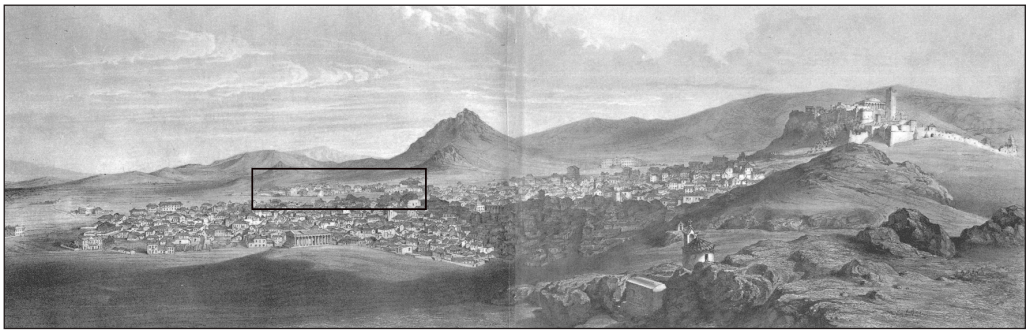

Figure 14: *Proastion* depicted in a panoramic view of Athens in the mid-19th century. (*Théodose du Moncel*, 1842).

The architraves, the moldings at the frames of the doors and windows, and the decoration in general were intended to faithfully replicate classical prototype profiles, though not in dressed marble. The sculptural effects were created with a special tool on the exterior plasterwork, effects known as 'pulled' (τραβηχτά) (Biris and Adami 2001:154) (**Figure 15**).

Figure 15: Typical ornamentation of popular neoclassicism decorating a house in the former *Proastion* area (Eresou Street). Photo by Amalia Kotsaki, 2022.

The transmission of the ideas and forms of classicism as a loan from Ancient Greece to the West, and then as a counter-loan back to its cradle, intersects with another transmission: that of the human — the craftsmen from the Cycladic islands to the capital. The folk craftsmen lent their knowledge and experience in carving the precious material, marble, to the official neoclassicism and the latter, as a counterpart, passed on to them the knowledge of its forms and techniques. This exchange helped popularize neoclassicism, which had a strong ideological content, while also giving birth to a 'popular neoclassicism' for the peoples as reinterpretation of the Bavarian (German) interpretation of neoclassicism.

From a Boulevard to a Highway: The Contested Mobilities of Syngrou Avenue

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Syngrou Avenue, the iconic road that runs straight from Athens to the Phaleron coast of the Aegean Sea, was opened for public use in November 1904 (**Figure 16**). Its design was the outcome of extensive negotiations that involved Greek and foreign engineers, public authorities, local elites, and landowners. The construction of the avenue was tied to modern ideas about networked infrastructure that transformed its ground into a field of experimentation and a contested space for diverse users, transit modes, and speeds. Initially conceived by technocrats and engineers as a multi-lane landscaped boulevard from the Acropolis to the coast, prioritizing mobility and catering to the city's elites, Syngrou Avenue transitioned during the interwar period into an asphalt highway seamlessly connected to the urban development of a modern Athens.

Figure 16: Topographical drawing from 1908 of the area through which Syngrou Avenue was built, from Athens in the northeast to the Pharelon coast of the Aegean Sea. Note Kallithea, the first officially planned settlement at the periphery of Athens, on the north side of the road; Brahami, a small farming community at the far south; and the Phaleron Zoo, under construction, at the coastal end of the avenue. Hellenic Parliament Maps Collection, Map Code 0012204168, Athens.

In the first decades of the 19th century, a wave of modernization initiatives, intertwined with the forming of a national identity, unfolded and shaped the newly established Greek capital. Guided by a neoclassical plan that reflected western planning principles and the aspirations of the Greek State, modern Athens, like both the ancient city and the Ottoman one, was located to the north of the Acropolis, away from the sea, and was conceptualised as institutional centers situated in space (palace, parliament, cathedral). Syngrou Avenue was designed to expand the neoclassical city and to connect these centers to the developing port of Piraeus and the sea. In the 1870s, an officer of the Corps of Engineers, Ioannis Sechos, envisioned the avenue as a multi-lane boulevard, flanked on both sides with sheltered walks planted with two rows of trees, opening new views to the Phaleron coast and catering to the 'modern needs of promenading' (Ministry of Internal Affairs 1874). Sechos' vision set in motion a dual transformation. It triggered the city's expansion, a process that faced resistance from traditional local elites who had the experience of inhabiting premodern environments and held power through ownership and control over space. Concurrently, the plan for the new road played a pivotal role in the development of the Phaleron coast, an area with substantial parts of public land, primarily wetlands, used for the grazing of animals from local communities (Athens City Council 1878).

Sechos' vision was incorporated into the city's expansion plan developed in 1885 by members of the French Engineering Mission who came to Greece to reform the country's technical services (Athens City Council 1885; French Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1885). However, it only materialized at the turn of the 20th century, when socio-spatial dynamics transformed Athens, its surroundings, and its port into an industrial hub. It was a period of accelerated mobility, marked by the influx of migrants and of affluent Greeks returning from abroad during the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. These wealthy individuals formed the emerging Athenian bourgeoisie that attempted to establish their influence in shaping the urban environment. They did so by creating new settlements around the city and introducing speculative modes of urban development that were linked to modern transportation systems, particularly railways. The establishment of the Kallithea and Pharelon areas along Syngrou Avenue were part of this trend.

An embodiment of these intense mobilities, the avenue was named after Andreas Syngros, a banker and member of the Greek diaspora, whose estate contributed to expropriation costs. The avenue's construction was supervised by the State civil engineer Nikolaos Gazis. It featured separate lanes for carriages, pedestrians, and riders, evolving into a mobility hub that looked like a 'true park of a modern metropolis' ('Passing Images' 1901). By 1904, as the newspaper *Acropolis* noted, the king had

prohibited commercial wagons, a restriction aligning with international practices for recreational roads ('Syngrou Avenue' 1904; Zeller 2001; Macdonald 2002). The avenue served as link to the newly established Phaleron Zoo and Aquarium, which together formed a coastal park and a new urban destination at the avenue's end. It became renowned for speeding, a pastime favored by the extremely rich people and the royal family, who organize bicycle and automobile races to showcase their power ('Phaleron Park' 1901; 'The opening ceremony' 1903; Karampatsos 2017).

But despite the avenue's elitist design, urban populations comprising non-elites contested its use, rejecting both traditional and newly emerging elites and instead associating space, movement, and technology with their own expectations for a better future. In the early 1920s, luxurious residences lined the avenue (**Figure 17**). However, much like the broader area, after 1922 the avenue's evolution was shaped by the arrival of refugees from Asia Minor, who dispersed across various areas of Athens and Piraeus, through informal processes or limited state programs, altering the social geography of both cities. New settlements emerged on the outskirts of Athens and Piraeus, near existing communities at their urban periphery, and on the public land of the Phaleron coast, at the avenue's terminus. Resettlement policies aimed at isolating refugees and preventing their participation in the real estate market inadvertently led to granting them control over extensive areas in the peripheral and coastal zones of Athens. During the interwar period, this shift expanded the opening of new land for urbanization, the traditional privilege of the dominant social strata, to include broader segments of the population (Leontidou 1989).

Figure 17: Aerial photo of Syngrou Avenue in 1935. Aerial Photo Archive. Hellenic Cadastre.

During the interwar era, the advent of automobility changed attitudes toward road design and construction. In 1925, P. G. Makris & Co. oversaw the asphalting of the avenue, a project that coincided with the Makris company's negotiations for the national road construction program, which engaged with both democratically elected and authoritarian governments, the SHELL company, and representatives from international banks (Chatzikonstantinou, Sakellaridou, and Samarinis 2015). The construction of roads across the nation was initially assigned to ten large building firms, but it was soon subcontracted to numerous smaller companies, contributing to the diffusion of knowledge and technique. Like the production of urban space, road construction became an arena of alliances and consensus among diverse social groups (Chatzikonstantinou 2014). Syngrou Avenue's transition from a 19th-century recreational avenue to an interwar motorway embodies these broader social conflicts — the promises, and exclusions, of modernity and the different yet equally modern appropriations of the western socio-technical and spatial paradigm. Even though Syngrou Avenue was a powerful symbol of Greek modernization that was employed in the turbulent interwar years by modernist poets and novelists and by the liberal party, it was the avenue's materiality that activated the experiences, practices, desires, and a new form of fetishization associated with space, technology, and social mobility that allowed non-elites visions and identities to emerge and the avenue to be claimed from below (Margariti 2005) (**Figure 18**).

Figure 18: This illustration depicts an industrial landscape with a road, a car, and an airplane, seen from the window of a working bourgeois. It was published in several issues of the journal *Ergasia* (Labor) (1930–1941) that was connected to the liberal party and conveyed a technocratic viewpoint.

Shacks and Hovels: The Refugee Settlement of Drapetsona

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In 1922, the end of the Greek-Turkish War resulted in an unprecedented episode of human mobility: hundreds of thousands of refugees fled from the former Ottoman Empire, while a bilateral treaty between Greece and Turkey in 1924 marked the

exchange of religious minorities between the two countries. Over two years, Greece received approximately 1.5 million people, resulting in 'refugee shock'. Following the military defeat of Greece in 1922, however, the Greek State was in disarray, financially crippled after ten years of military expeditions and socially in turmoil, as the arrival of the newcomers transformed established patterns and introduced the question of their integration (Hadjiosif 2002). The refugee question became a pivotal issue in interwar Greece, leading to the evolution of a diverse ecosystem of agencies for addressing the humanitarian crisis and forced the State to develop ambitious plans to house and employ those who had left everything behind.

This story of refugee integration has been often portrayed as a success of the combined forces of the Greek State and international bodies under the auspices of the League of Nations. There are exceptions to the rule, however. The working-class and refugee neighborhood of Drapetsona, on the outskirts of the port of Piraeus, offers an alternative understanding of the dynamics of refugee integration. Until 1922, Drapetsona was a semi-deserted area that hosted a number of isolated industrial units (**Figure 19**). Within just a few months, it was transformed into a major refugee settlement, its 25,000 people living in makeshift shacks and hovels that formed a chaotic maze surrounding the expanding industrial units of the area. This rapid transformation exemplifies the dynamics of refugee arrival in Greece. Many of those who disembarked from the vessels at Piraeus could not rely on support networks of any type, so they erected makeshift 'houses' for themselves and family members in the nearest available space — Drapetsona. These 'houses' were essentially rudimentary huts that multiplied over time into a refugee settlement. This settlement was far from the city center, but close to the port and industrial units that offered various types of employment to the newcomers, transforming the former refugees into workers (Kyramargiou 2019: 100–106).

According to the 1928 census, Drapetsona was the most populous refugee settlement in Piraeus, with a total population of 36,485 across seven neighborhoods. Of those 36,485 people, 25,643 were refugees who had settled there in September 1922 or in the next few years (Census of 1928: 30–34). In spite of its large population, Drapetsona remained 'secluded and geographically separated' from the refugee projects developed by the Greek State and the Refugee Rehabilitation Committee (League of Nations 1924, 1: 2–12). This led to the portrayal of Drapetsona as an aberration of the integration policies of the interwar years, in essence a place and a process of urban rehabilitation 'invisible' to the State authorities and the urban classes of Piraeus.

Figure 19: Topographical diagram of the coast of Drapetsona, by the engineer L. Karabelas, dated March 15, 1899. It shows the industrial units that existed at the end of the 19th century. The diagram was created in the context of the sale of land by D. Soutzos to M. Kambanis. Source: Loulis Museum, Keratsini.

Until the end of 1960s, following the initial influx of people in 1922, housing in Drapetsona remained the most important issue. The initial rough shelters that eventually developed into a slum of huts and tents lacked drainage, water, and electricity, yet thousands of people lived there for years. The residents encountered social segregation and marginalization; they had no healthcare, public transport, postal services, or state-run facilities (**Figure 20**). This reality led to social upheaval, strikes, and local protests, and to the growth of the communist movement that offered the working-class and refugee communities a vision of social and political equality. Drapetsona thus became a stronghold of the Greek Left in the 1940s, a development by which its inhabitants would be labeled as 'dangerous citizens' in the early years of the Cold War (Panourgiá 2009).

The confrontational nature of the relationship of Drapetsona with the Greek State reached a climax in the late 1950s. The area still bore a striking resemblance to its image confirmed by the 1928 census: still dominated by shacks, though now there were 4,000 of them, housing more than 16,000 inhabitants. In public discourse, Drapetsona was seen as a failure of the integration policies of the interwar years and calls for action intensified (**Figure 21**). A State-orchestrated plan envisioned the eradication of the makeshift houses and the erection of social housing for those who met the ideological criteria of the anti-communist State. The plan entailed a temporary resettlement

of those living in Drapetsona for an unspecified period of time until they could be admitted into the social housing projects that would be constructed in the meantime. This led to the outbreak of a diverse and dynamic movement against the plan. The locals refused to abandon their homes and organized collectively to stop the demolition works (Theodorakis 1960: 9–10).

Figure 20: Shacks and tents in Drapetsona, 1920s. Source unknown.

Figure 21: Aerial photograph of Drapetsona, 1937. Digital archive of the Urban Environment Laboratory, School of Architecture, NTUA, Athens.

Their resistance was fueled by the conviction that, after enduring years of deprivation, they were entitled to better housing than that proposed by the Ministry of Social Welfare. Termed the 'battle of the shack' (μάχη της παράγκας), this movement was, for many, an acknowledgment of their social standing, personal choices, and historical context — an acknowledgment of their own lives. Regardless of the ultimate outcome, this 'battle' stood as an honorable chapter in the lives of those who participated and remains so in the memories of those who recall it today. The shacks were eventually demolished in 1967 under the military dictatorship, and the construction of new apartment blocks was completed five years later (Kyramargiou 2019: 433–434). By the late 1970s, Drapetsona had transformed into a 'modern' city — one in which its working-class past is still visible, in the abandoned factories of the de-industrialization process and the dense remains of the refugee experience of the 20th century.

Mass Housing for Refugees in the 1930s: The *Prosfygika* on Alexandras Avenue

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The refugee housing complex (προσφυγικά/*prosfygika*) on Alexandras Avenue was constructed between 1933 and 1936 and constitutes one of the most important examples of modernist mass housing in Greece. The complex consists of eight rectangular blocks with 228 apartments in total, aligned parallel to one another, four of which were designed by the engineer Dimitrios Kyriakos (1881–1971) and the other four by the architect Kimon Laskaris (1905–1978) (**Figure 22**). The complex was constructed, as part of a country-wide and decades-long process of refugee resettlement, to house Greek Orthodox refugees displaced from Anatolia and Eastern Thrace to Greece because of the mutual and compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey after the end of the war in 1922.[18]

While in the early years after their arrival, the refugees mostly lived in tents, wooden shacks, mudbrick housing, and requisitioned buildings, in the 1930s the government commissioned better quality housing in stone and concrete, as exemplified by this building complex (Vasileiou 1944). Kyriakos and Laskaris worked at the time in the Technical Service of the Ministry of Social Welfare, a service which was constructing housing complexes throughout Greece over that period. Laskaris, who had studied in Paris and had also briefly worked for

Figure 22: The *Prosfygika* building complex on Alexandras Street today. Photo by Stelios Gidis, 2024.

Le Corbusier, was also involved in the design of refugee housing in nearby Stegi Patridos (1933–6) in Nea Kokkinia (1934–5), and also in Dourgouti (1935–6), the latter again a collaboration with Kyriakos (Georgakopoulou 2003). The contractor for the *Prosfygika* complex on Alexandras was Odysseas Pouskoulous (1880–1945), an architect born in Cappadocia and who had studied in Istanbul. Although unique in its aesthetics, this complex was part of a larger refugee settlement effort in the area, which included the nearby Stegi Patridos and Panormou complexes, as well as 'self-help' housing (constructed by the refugees themselves, with help from the state in the form of land and sometimes financing) and various slum areas (**Figure 23**).

The buildings of the *Prosfygika* complex on Alexandras, which are still in use today, are three stories each, organized into groups of six apartments around separate entrances and staircases, eliminating long corridors. Around 40 square meters on average, each apartment consists of one or two rooms, a kitchen, a toilet, and sometimes a small storage space. On the terrace are communal washing areas, each shared by three apartments (Mpersis 1936: 611). The construction combines reinforced concrete slabs with stone masonry (**Figure 24**).

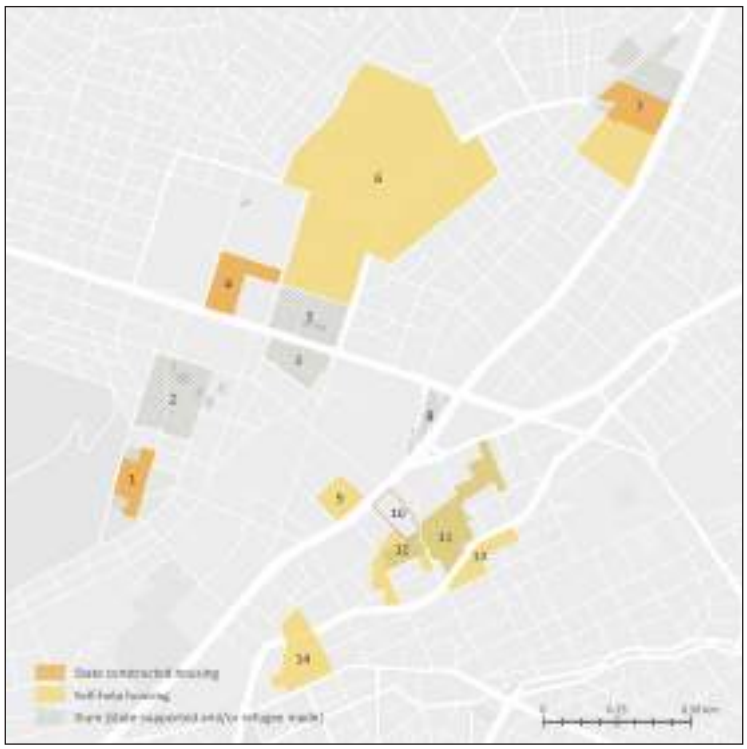

Figure 23: Refugee settlements in the area of Ampelokipoi-Ilisia in Athens that appeared before the Second World War. Few of these survive today. Map created by Stelios Gidis for the Homeacross project of the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, 2024.

(1) Stegi Patridos complex (1930s); (2) Kountouriotiou settlement; (3) Kadmos settlement; (4) Alexandras Avenue complex; (5) Nea Anatoli settlement; (6) Tourkovounia settlement; (7) Panormou settlement; (8) Vosporos settlement; (9) Estia settlement; (10) Refugee Hospital of Athens ('Ippokratio' Hospital of Athens); (11) Ilissos settlement; (12) Stegi Miteron settlement; (13) Hagios Thomas settlement; (14) Neos Pontos settlement.

The architects' commitment to certain principles, such as orientation (northwest–southeast), equal access in all apartments to sunlight and cross-room ventilation, a functionalist organization of the apartment plan and the division of spaces into primary and secondary, and the architectural language of the buildings, all reflect the modernist perspective of their designers and the discussions that had just taken place at the 1933 CIAM congress in Athens (Philippidis 1984: 203, 225; Giakoumakatos 2000: 149; Gkiotsalitis 2013: 68–72; Fessa-Emmanouil 2001: 43). It is worth noting that throughout the refugee resettlement process, the institutions and architects involved were aware of similar approaches abroad. Moreover, the construction of multistory buildings had just started gaining wider popularity, after the passing in 1929 of legislation 3741/1929, which allowed flat ownership (Vlachos, Giannitsaris and Hatzikostas 1978: 118).

The complex's listing for preservation in the first decade of 21st century reflects the State's overall reaction, and delay, in valuing and protecting buildings of modern

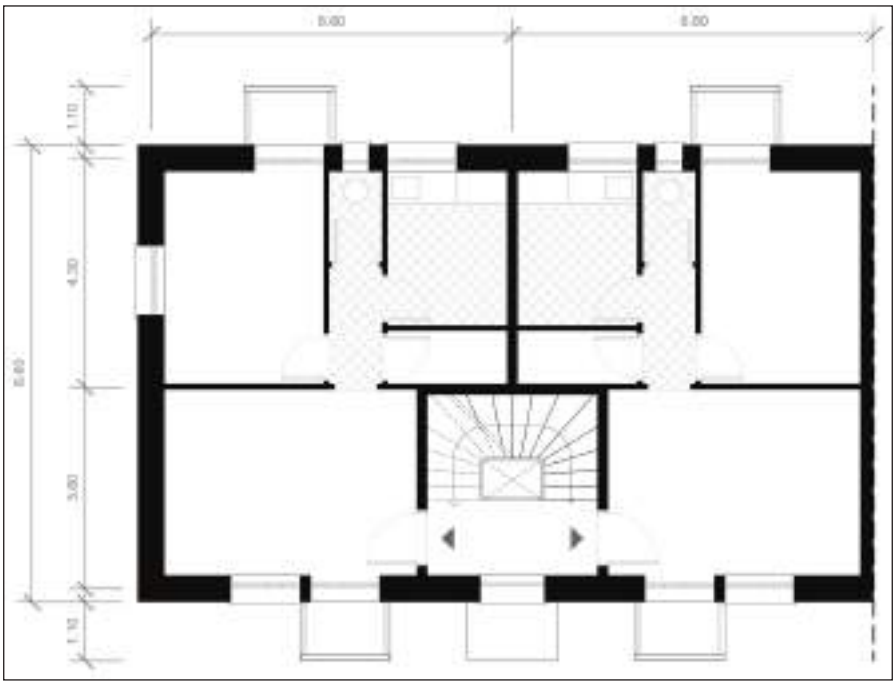

Figure 24: Typical floor plan of the Alexandras Avenue mass housing complex for refugees. From Mpersis (1936: 612), redrawn by Stelios Gidis for the Homeacross project of the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, 2024.

architecture in general and refugee heritage in particular.[19] The earliest proposal for demolition, from the late 1960s during the dictatorship (1967–1974), came with the announcement of plans to construct a courthouse on the site, and a later proposal in the 1990s was allegedly for the construction of a park (Ntiniakos 2007: 57–63; Sarigiannis and Papadopoulou 2006: 41). Following extensive mobilization from representatives of the civil society, academics, and professional organizations, two of the blocks were listed as monuments for preservation in 2003 and the remaining six in 2009 (Vrychea 2004: 146–7). Currently, a small number of the apartments are inhabited by their owners, while a larger number are occupied by different social groups, including both anarchists and migrants. All efforts to restore them have so far met with obstacles. The most recent effort was in 2019, when a proposal was approved by the Ministry of Culture to restore all eight buildings and turn the apartments owned by the Region of Attica (177 out of 228) into social housing, accommodation for individuals accompanying patients of Agios Savvas hospitals, and a museum memorializing refugees. However, that process has stalled.

Acknowledgements

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Polykatoikìa at 26 Argolidos Street, 1961–1962: Notes on Athens' Bread-and-Butter Architectural Undertakings

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In Greece's tumultuous post-WWII reality, rural-to-urban migration took on a distinct dimension. Rather than being motivated by burgeoning job opportunities in the cities, this migration was driven by the relative decline of the rural economy and the surge of the Civil War. As a result, not only did the demand for new housing in Athens and other cities rise exponentially, but so did the availability of cheap, unskilled labor, which was funneled to the housing construction industry, as Greece's industrial sector was virtually non-existent. Thus, a privately led, low-tech house-building boom was propelled by both an internal migration backed by favorable state regulations and the limited state-run programs for social housing.

A quid-pro-quo construction practice that came to be called *antiparochì*, whereby landowners traded their urban plot for a multistory condominium known as *polykatoikìa*, with developers exploiting an agreed percentage of its apartments, became a key driver of social and economic mobility. It enabled upward social mobility for the tradespersons and professionals associated with housing, as well as landowners and developers. Most crucially, the eventual prevalence of *polykatoikìa* in the urban fabric of Athens facilitated social mixing: occupants of diverse social backgrounds, from the affordable basements, ground-floor shops, mid-floor offices, and advantageous penthouses, interacted within the shared spaces of the building: entrance lobbies, terraces, access corridors, stairwells, and even across backyard balconies (Maloutas and Karadimitriou 2001).

The ensuing commodification of housing led to the banalization of the *polykatoikìa* as a design project, accounting for the apparent homogeneity of the Greek city. Yet, while the architectural profession by and large regarded the *polykatoikìa* as a bread-and-butter undertaking for *antiparochì* developers, instances of critical reappraisals of the commonplace are not rare. In the residential neighborhood of Ampelokipi, the *polykatoikìa* at 26 Argolidos Street (**Figure 25**), designed by Suzana Antonakaki,

Dimitris Antonakakis, two of the co-founders of Atelier 66, the renowned Athens-based architectural firm, and Kostis Gartzos, embodies these dynamics, while introducing unconventional circulation patterns and typologies to the habitual architectural brief.

Figure 25: The *polykatoikìa* on Argolidos Street today. Photo by Stavros Alifragkis, 2024.

Atelier 66 would gain international recognition for another of their *polykatoikìa* projects, constructed in 1973 at 118 Benaki Street, which was hailed by Kenneth Frampton and others as an iconic building of Greek critical regionalism (Frampton 2020: 364–365). Unlike the latter, which was executed by a consortium between the landowners and the future flat owners, the *polykatoikìa* at Argolidos Street was

designed for an *antiparochì* developer, Nikos Konstantinides, who was an unusually perceptive and active entrepreneur convinced that an elaborate architectural design would set his apartment block apart from the competition (Antonakaki and Antonakakis 2019).

The project, along with similar ventures, served as a testing ground for the main design principles that would characterize Atelier 66's urban housing over time. First, drawing from the main façade feature of the typical *polykatoikìa*, the repetitive 1.20 × 2.20 m *portes-fenêtres*, the architects creatively dealt with the building envelope in a manner that reflected their modernist formation at the National Technical University of Athens, either placing the windows right next to the support columns/walls or rotating them by 90° to create a sort of *fenêtre en longueur* effect. Moreover, they inserted horizontal transom windows between the beam and the exterior infill wall. Both treatments were intended to bring the reinforced concrete structural frame to the fore (**Figure 26**), which otherwise remained hidden underneath a thin layer of plaster. Similarly, they strategically reconsidered the typical *polykatoikìa* of an *antiparochì* layout, which usually involved a narrow street-level entrance, a dimly lit stairwell and adjoining lift, and several two- or three-bedroom apartments. Typically, the main living quarters (sitting/dining-room) of a standard apartment were lined along the main façade, while the sleeping quarters were arranged at the back, and the connecting corridor, kitchen, and bathroom occupied the limited 'grey area' between the two zones. In this *polykatoikìa*, the common areas of the flats were placed across the building mass in order to secure double frontage, thus creating far more inviting, well-ventilated, and sunlit spaces that afforded unobstructed internal vistas and greater extraversion (**Figure 27**). Lastly, roughly plastered walls and rough stone flooring lend an air of informal intimacy, influenced by the architects' in-depth study of the Greek vernacular architecture of the Cyclades, Crete, Hydra, or Mount Pelion, among other locales.

Overall, by embodying the collective co-production of spatialities of Athenian urban life — and the multifaceted mobility associated with it — that was simultaneously a commercial product and a field for architectural experimentation, the *polykatoikìa* at Argolidos Street recalibrates the discussion on Athens' urbanization beyond the historiographic canon set by illustrious projects and 'talented' individuals (Giamarelos 2022: 363). What such rarely celebrated works suggest is that architectural agency, and hence 'talent', is hardly external to varied historical intricacies and regional modalities, wherein it is seldom the sole factor of change. Rather, it is shaped amid intense negotiations for control among a diverse range of stakeholders in the daily bread-and-butter practice of architecture.

Figure 26: Elevation. The *portes-fenêtres* have the typical size and relation to the whole with the typical commercial *polykatoikìa*, but in this *polykatoikìa* they are treated differently to bring the structural frame to the fore. Designed by Suzana Antonakaki, Dimitris Antonakakis and Kostis Gartzos in 1961 and reproduced with the permission of Dimitris Antonakakis.

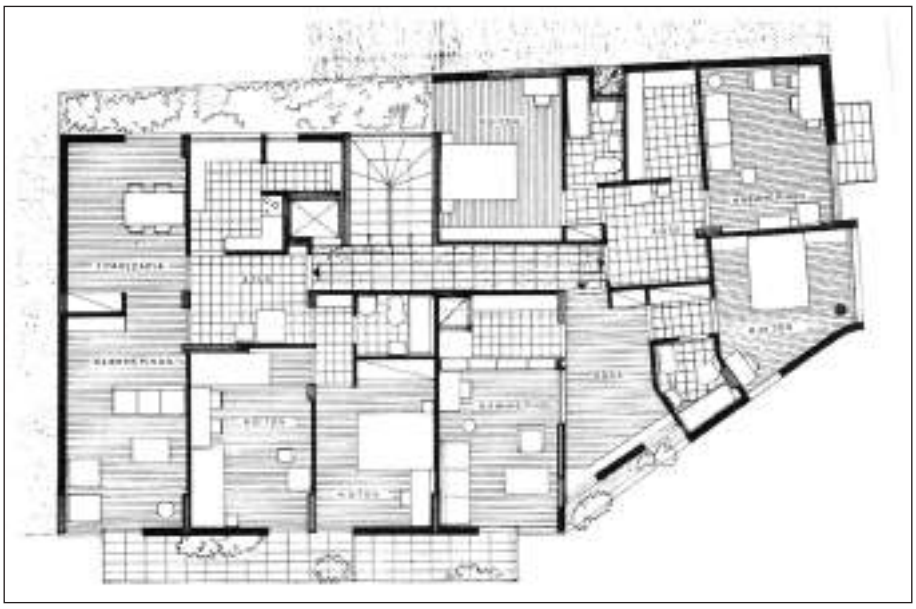

Figure 27: Typical floor plan. Designed by Suzana Antonakaki, Dimitris Antonakakis and Kostis Gartzos in 1961 and reproduced with the permission of Dimitris Antonakakis.

The 'New Monumentality' of the Athens Hilton and the US Embassy

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The inauguration of the US Embassy in 1961 and the Athens Hilton Hotel in 1963 was the material culmination of post-WWII developmental synergy between the Greek State and the American factor. This synergy epitomized US interventionism in local politics and boosted the nascent tourism industry, paving the way for American corporate mobility in Greece. The interjection of these two spectacular architectural instances of International Style, with their immense rhetorical power, into the city's modern residential fabric characterized Athens' urban landscape and solidified collective confidence in a modernizing future tied to the West. In the years that followed WWII, Conrad Hilton became a seminal figure in the network of American actors involved in the reconstruction programs of European countries who were recipients of Marshall Plan aid, by which overseas entrepreneurship was introduced to local economies (Salles-Djelic 2002) with the goal of strengthening the southeast Mediterranean frontier against communism (Pyla 2022).

Within this cross-national transfer of new corporate models, Hilton envisioned his international hotel-chain as a means of solidifying American influence by propagandizing world peace through trade and travel (Baird 2004). To build his luxurious hotels, all of comparable status and based on a business model that separated ownership from management (Maclean et al. 2018), he secured maximum state involvement from the host country, usually in the form of free public land and favorable legislation. He then engaged local private investors and commissioned local architectural firms to develop the designs in collaboration with American experts. In the case of the Athens Hilton, the local investor was the Ioniki Banking Group and the Greek architects were Prokopis Vasileiadis, Emmanouel Vourekas, and Spyros Staikos (**Figure 28**). The concave, marble-faced volume of the Athens Hilton, positioned perpendicular to Vasilissis Sofias Avenue in order to face the Athenian Acropolis, contributed to the transformation of the undeveloped residential area 'behind the Hilton', as the neighborhood came to be known. The construction of the Hilton accelerated the development of that area through the system of *antiparochi*, which triggered a considerable population shift, as the then emerging Athenian middle class competed for a modern apartment in the area, thus leading to an increase in land values (Wharton 2001: 66).

Figure 28: The west façade of the Athens Hilton in 1963, at about the time of its inauguration. Photograph by Dimitris Harissiadis (1911–1993). © Benaki Museum Photographic Archives.

Invariably, Hilton hotels adopted the International Style, thus echoing Walter Gropius's 1925 posits: implementing new materials and cutting-edge construction methods in all developed countries would create a unified image of the world with universal relevance (Gropius 1925; 1943). Although Gropius had renounced the term 'international style' by 1943, its wide diffusion contributed to the post-WWII proliferation of American corporatism around the world. In Athens, subtle references to the local culture, such as Yiannis Moralis's abstract, Pentelic marble façade reliefs that echo the Panathenaic Procession from the Parthenon frieze, were intended to elicit a warm reception from the local community. Although the Athens Hilton was harshly criticized, mostly for its height irregularities, it was mainly targeted as a palimpsest of power representation and as a material expression of an imported cultural model. Its monolithic volume established a typology, now reprehensible, of mega-hotel design that at the time was insensitively applied across coastal Greece (Philippidis 1984: 276). Nonetheless, Hilton International identified completely with Siegfried Gideon's call for a modern public architecture of 'new monumentality' (Giedion 1944), implicitly recognizing that its hotels would become the unchallenged symbols of the new age.

The Athens Hilton served as the landmark of the city's inconclusive modernization, while its construction coincided with the Eisenhower Doctrine and

the erection of the US Embassy in Athens, on a nearby plot also provided by the Greek government (Pagedas 2006).[20] It was designed by the Gropius/TAC firm with the aim of being 'accessible and therefore democratic' (Kidder Smith 1962: 147), an objective that proved unattainable, since the ever-growing American interventionism of the 1960s and US tolerance toward the Junta regime (1967–1974) transformed both buildings into typical Cold War geopolitical hotspots (**Figure 29**). Following the restoration of democracy, the embassy became the site of the annual rallies commemorating the Polytechnic Uprising of 1973, resulting in the construction of heavy fencing around it, while recent ill-designed additions undermine its balanced architectural modernism. Similarly, the Athens Hilton presented a non-neutral locus of political mobility (Fregonese and Ramadan 2015), providing a meeting point for lobbyists, businesspeople, and spies, while over time it strengthened its civic role by hosting all kinds of political events, such as the 2015 bailout meetings between the Greek Government and the Troika.

Figure 29: The southeast façade of the US Embassy in Athens in 1961, at about the time of its inauguration, without the perimeter fence. Photograph by Louis Arthur Reens (1920–2002). From 'Embassy Building of the United States Athens, Greece', *Arts & Architecture* (May 1962: 12–13), online at http://www.artsandarchitecture.com. Copyright © 2007–2024 David F. Travers (assigned to Travers Family Trusts). Used with permission.

Over the years, the public areas of the Athens Hilton have hosted numerous cultural and social events (art exhibitions, conferences, balls, fashion shows, etc.), thus affirming the 20th-century hotel as a cultural signifier of liberal urban life, a place that provides a sense of equality, freedom, and social mingling (Kracauer 1995) (**Figure 30**). Today, its clear-cut morphological power has been mitigated by later interventions, while its future transformation into a meta-hotel[21] will deprive the Athens Hilton of

the public character that great urban hotels of the last century proudly carried, further shrinking the 'space of public appearance' (Arendt 1998: 199–212) in the current, rapidly depoliticized metropolitan environment. The 'new monumentality' of a vigorous modernism that both the Athens Hilton and the US Embassy possessed is being progressively lost, along with their rhetorical and historic surplus value that associated them with both antiquity and democratic ideals, marking public architecture's significant retreat from the Athenian public sphere.

Figure 30: The Athens Hilton ground-floor lobby in 1963, at about the time of its inauguration. Photograph by Dimitris Harissiadis (1911–1993). © Benaki Museum Photographic Archives.

The Language of the City Plaza Refugee Accommodation Space, April 2016 to July 2019

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The massive arrival of refugees upon European shores in the summer of 2015 was characterized as a 'refugee crisis' in the language of EU states and international organizations. However, from the perspective of the struggles for freedom of movement and solidarity initiatives, this period was known as the 'summer of migration' (Kasparek and Speer 2015). In April 2016, after the EU-Turkey Common Statement, over 60,000

refugees were trapped in Greece, many of them homeless or residing in camps under very difficult conditions. It was at this point that City Plaza Hotel, which had been shut down during the economic crisis in Greece, was occupied and transformed into a temporary shelter for refugees.[22] Over the years, more than 2,500 refugees have found a safe home at City Plaza (**Figure 31**).

Figure 31: The City Plaza building, June 2016, view from Aharnon Street. City Plaza collective archive.

However, City Plaza became more than just a safe home; it became a symbol of resistance against the prevailing policies that aimed to discourage migrants from reaching EU territory and confine those who did manage into various types of camps. During a period when the camp model was presented as the only possible solution to detain or provide shelter to refugee populations (Kreichauf 2018), the case of the City Plaza community, along with other similar self-organized and squatted spaces in Athens, provided a counterexample (Tsavdaroglou 2018; Raimondi 2019). Against the social and spatial isolation of the camp, City Plaza showed that cohabitation in the center of the city was possible. Against the segregation of nationalities and the filtering of people based on age, gender, and legal status in the camps, the City Plaza community welcomed everyone: people from at least 15 different nationalities, people with or without papers, people in families, as well as single men, women, and LGBTQI+ refugees. Day by day, City Plaza demonstrated that if social movements, with no institutional funding, employees, or experts, and only grassroots resources, could successfully run one of the most organized and safe accommodation spaces for

refugees in the center of Athens, then the refugee 'camp' was not the only possible solution. Instead, the camp was an outcome of a certain sociopolitical logic. Even when this logic was disguised as a 'humanitarian emergency' response to a 'refugee crisis', at its core it still involved the segregation of people based on race and the perpetuation of fear and threats posed by strangers.

City Plaza was a sociopolitical space that involved struggles on multiple and interconnected scales, from the body to the globe (Smith 1987). It combined claims around social reproduction with wider struggles on rights, on freedom of movement, and against neoliberalism and capitalism. It combined, in other words, the individual and collective histories of dispossessed people from around the world with the specific histories and codes of the solidarity movements in Europe. Although the people of City Plaza did not speak the same language, a new hybrid language developed in the squat over time: every sentence started with 'my friend.' It was a language of feelings, glances, and gestures rather than words, of sharing griefs and joys, of actions of mutual care and respect, of inhabiting a common space and sharing responsibility. It was a language of common struggle for open borders, the right to stay, the right to the city, and the right to have rights. This language was eventually understood and enriched by all the people who lived there, regardless of their background. While abstract concepts like squatting and self-organization may have been difficult for some of the residents to comprehend in the specific sociopolitical context of Greece at that time, everyone could understand, through small everyday actions and decisions, that City Plaza was a common, shared space that relied on the care and contribution of everyone who lived there (**Figure 32**).

Figure 32: In the dining room of City Plaza, 2018. City Plaza collective archive.

However, self-organization and living together is not a simple language or a romanticized narrative. A complex syntax is required that acknowledges differences and power structures operating on various scales (Lafazani 2018). Such a language requires self-reflection and is always under construction. Self-organized structures demand hard work, responsibility, engagement, conflict resolution processes, and collective problem-solving methods. Still, within the wider conditions of inequality, racism, dispossession, and oppression, City Plaza could not be a safe haven of freedom, equality, and justice. To put it simply, we are not all equal and cannot be equal simply because we want to be. For example, the status of a woman from Afghanistan with two children, no money, and no papers in Europe is very different from that of a young student from Germany who joins a solidarity project in Athens. These structural social differences in terms of race, gender, class, and legal status should not be silenced or ignored. Instead, privilege and dispossession should be collectively recognized and challenged both inside and outside self-organized structures.

Can a temporary structure leave a lasting impact? I believe the most enduring impact is the language that, despite the numerous difficulties, most of us learned to speak while living in City Plaza. It is a language of tolerance and acceptance, a means of communication and standing together, a multitude of actions of mutual care and struggle. This language is still spoken in certain hubs in Athens, in cafes or parks in Berlin, Paris, Zurich, or wherever smaller or larger City Plaza communities gather. It is a language that is transmitted, expanded, deconstructed, and reconstructed daily in different social struggles in Europe and beyond (**Figure 33**).

Figure 33: Demonstration against the EU-Turkey Joint Statement organized by City Plaza in the center of Athens in 2018. City Plaza collective archive.

Victoria Square: Conflictual Imaginaries of Mobile Populations in the Heart of Athens

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'A huge square with hanging plants from kiosks.' 'Lots of flowers.' 'And plants and birds! ... 'And colors and big fountains!'[23] This is how four teenage Syrian girls from Aleppo and Damascus recollected their perceptions of Victoria Square in Athens before embarking on their migratory journey in 2016.

Located at the heart of Athens, Victoria Square is an urban space situated between September 3rd and Aristotelous Streets. With a rectangular layout, it covers an expanse of approximately five acres. Concrete slabs pave the perimeter of the square and the area around the entrance to the train station. Mulberry trees grow from spaces left open in the concrete, providing shade for a series of wooden benches. Three fenced squares in the middle provide green spaces, with grass, palm trees, and smaller shrubs. Designated in 1867, the square took shape in the early 20th century and in 1901 was named Victoria Square, after Queen Victoria (Melampianaki 2006: 373–379). As the city center expanded and the first below-ground railway was constructed, Victoria Square gradually became a major node of urban flow in modern Athens. During the interwar period, the square underwent significant transformation, becoming a vibrant social hub and one of Athens' most lively and prosperous districts, taking on the name of the square. At that time, the train station beneath the square was transformed into one of the city's most notable Art Deco-style train stations, and a bronze sculpture titled *Theseus Saving Hippodamia*, depicting a hero from ancient Greek myths rescuing a seemingly helpless female figure from a centaur, was placed at the heart of the square. Following the post-WWII era, however, the area around the square gradually lost its appeal and was abandoned by many of its inhabitants in favor of the suburbs.

After the 'long summer of migration' of 2015 (Kasparek and Speer 2015), the municipality planted over 400 bushes around the perimeter of the square to dissuade migrants and refugees from settling with their tents on the soil of the flowerbeds. The neighborhood, with its modernist office buildings, interwar houses, *polykatoikìa*, small cafes, and migrant shops that frame the square, is currently being further gentrified, with immense hikes in rental and housing prices, while the square itself continues to serve as a pivotal transportation hub, a meeting point for locals, and a transitional space for those on the move. But a paradise it is not (**Figures 34**, **35**).

Figure 34: Victoria Square. View from the east. Photo by Vasiliki Makrygianni, 2024.

Figure 35: Victoria Square. View from the west. Photo by Vasiliki Makrygianni, 2024.

Over the past couple of decades, the square has become a prominent destination, a landmark for those on the move, particularly for migrants arriving from Africa and the Middle East on their way to somewhere they can call home. Word of mouth, spread mainly via digital devices, has raised the square's profile among people living in places

like Kabul, Damascus, and Ismir. Ali, an Afghan migrant, noted in 2016 that 'Victoria Square is one of the most renowned places in Kabul'. Lina from Damascus recalled that 'while waiting in Ismir to embark on a boat, I imagined my landing in Victoria as a moment of relief'. However, for many, this vision of spatial perfection quickly dissipated upon their arrival. Mamadou, a Senegalese migrant, described his first impression: 'We took a taxi and reached Victoria to find some people, late at night. Looking at the streets and the people moving like shadows I said to myself, what is this? Is this really Athens?' Salma from Egypt said, 'First impression? Oh … it looked dark and stormy… but rather bitter than sweet.'

Despite the evident disappointment many experience when they arrive at the square, it still serves as a crucial hub for migrants, some of whom end up staying within its precincts for a time. In fact, within the precincts of Victoria Square, new forms of solidarity and networks of care between migrants and locals thrived, especially during the turbulent period of 2015 and 2016. At that time, a neighborhood migrant women's group called Melissa provided crucial support to those migrants who were minors living with their caretakers in the square, while a group of local doctors offered health care once a week on the square grounds (Bak Jørgensen and Makrygianni 2020). The square became a node in a wider local network of spaces where migrants collected and began to live (such as Pedion tou Areos, City Plaza hotel, and the Exarcheia neighborhood) and a focal point for manifestations and gatherings in favor of freedom of movement (**Figure 36**).

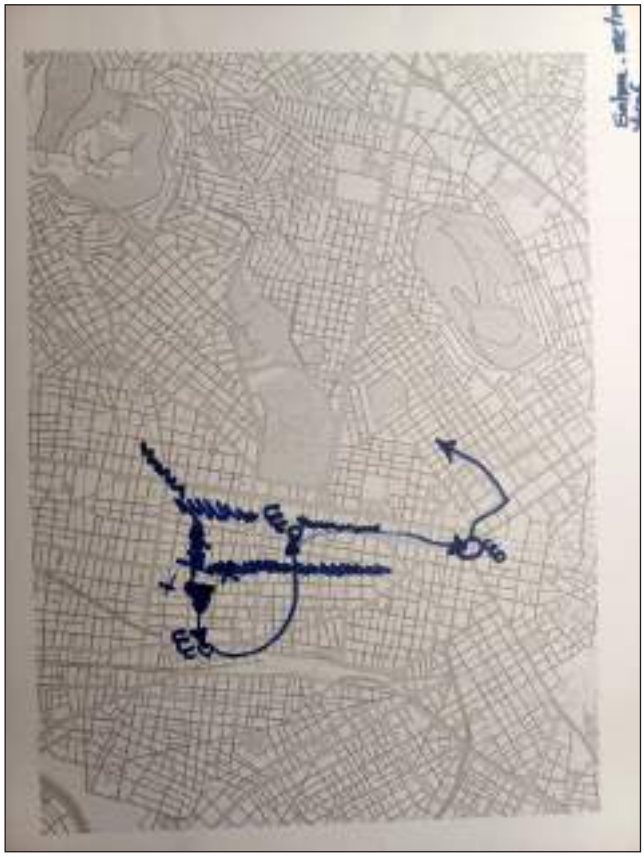

Figure 36: Drawing on printed map showing how three young refugees of the LGBTQ+ community moved from their apartment (marked with a heart) to Victoria Square (marked with a circle in the center) and other squares connected with metro stations for internet access to avoid the scribbled areas in fear of homophobic attacks. Drawing by Salma, one of the refugees.

Meanwhile, the perception held by migrants of Victoria Square as a 'garden of eternity' sharply contradicted the views held by many Athenians. Depictions of it, largely influenced by media portrayals, as a degraded space are still part of a broader battleground where 'legal inhabitants' defend their lives and territories. Imaginaries of exclusion deeply rooted in the collective consciousness manifest a contentious conflict among various social groups. By depicting dangerous sites of a ghetto that besieges the city from within, those who do not fulfill the nation state criteria for joining imaginary national communities are targeted for exclusion (Makrygianni 2023).

In the context of Victoria Square, perceived spaces often override both the lived experience of the inhabitants and the intent of those spaces conceived by the architects (Lefebvre 1991). The parallel of representations and lived experiences emerging from different standpoints gives rise to contradictory spaces, making it challenging, if not impossible, to reach an objective 'common sense' of the square's reality, while raising questions about who has the right to access this space. Athenians' trash became newcomers' treasure. As the square's urban space evolves into dimensions detached from the tangible physical space, the assignment of diverse characteristics to the square signifies both the construction of an 'otherworld' (Frog 2020) and the rise of parallel 'heterotopias' (Foucault 1967) in the same architectural space.

The mythologization of urban space is a mechanism by which migrants forge models of space, a process of representation not necessarily bound to empirically proven realities but rather a means by which to sustain hope and obtain relief. Migrants' imaginaries seem to overcome western spatial barriers, such as those of nationalistic enclosures and patriarchal mythologizations. In the case of mobile populations, Victoria Square reveals that sometimes to fulfill the migratory trip, imagination is more important than knowledge, digital representations overcome analog realities, and imaginary perceptions of urban space constitute one of the most powerful forces driving the will to embark upon a journey.

Privatizing the Hellinikon: Populations, Capital, and Imaginaries in Motion

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Along the southern coast of Athens — the so-called Athens Riviera, 9 km from the city's center — is the privatized state land of the city's former international airport, Hellinikon (**Figure 37**). Currently under construction on this 620-hectare site is the

Ellinikon, a large-scale urban development project expected to enter its first stage of operation by the end of 2025. The site is destined to be a new metropolitan center of luxury housing and retail, high-end tourism and recreation, with offices, a themed park, private education and healthcare infrastructures, and other amenities of a local, national, and global nature. The project, facilitated by the state but privately led, intends to be a model of neoliberal urbanism, an acknowledgement of the global mobility of capital, people, and lifestyles. For the Ellinikon project, successive layers of collective experiences, urban memories, and legacies have been privatized, commodified, and dispossessed. This essay examines six episodes in the movements of population, state policies, capital, and imaginaries that shaped the site's complex urban history over the last century (Urban Environment Lab 2016; Spanaki 2021).

Figure 37: Aerial photograph of the former Hellinikon airport in 2015, prior to that area's privatization and the beginning of its redevelopment. Hellenic Cadastre.

(1) East Terminal, a listed monument, designed by Eero Saarinen (1960); (2) American Girls' College, designed by Stuart W. Thompson (1930), demolished in 2020; (3) the Olympic marina constructed for the Summer Olympic Games (2004), destined to become one of the the major commercial and residential centers of the Ellinikon project; (4) Aghios Kosmas National Youth Athletic Center, designed by Doxiadis Associates (1959), demolished after 2020; (5) West Terminal, designed by Thucydides P. Valentis in 1948, were refugees were temporary accommodated between 2015 and 2017. It was demolished in 2020; (6) Hellinikon Olympic Complex constructed for the Summer Olympic Games, 2004; (7) American Military Base, United States Air Force (1947–1993).

[1] In June 1938, during the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas, construction began for a civilian and military airport in the Hasani area (later known as Hellinikon). The area was still inhabited by refugees from the Black Sea, Asia Minor, and Thrace following

the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) and the population exchange in its aftermath. The refugees had been promised a new life on land allotments at the city's edge, which the Ministry of Agriculture provided according to the guidelines of the Refugee Rehabilitation Committee. To empty the area and facilitate construction for the city's new airport, the Metaxas government expropriated some of the land and demolished refugee houses on it, a process that intensified under the Axis Occupation (1941–44).

[2] After the country's liberation and during the Civil War (1946–49), the US-led Marshall Plan had provided for the expansion of airport facilities, which involved more land expropriation and further demolition of existing housing. After Greece joined NATO in 1952, the US government established an American military base in Hellinikon, highlighting Greece's position in Cold War antagonisms. In July 1956, the tycoon Aristotelis Onassis bought the national airlines of Greece and founded the monopoly of Olympic Airways. In 1961, the operation of the National Sports Youth Centre of Aghios Kosmas nearby (demolished after 2020), designed by Constantinos A. Doxiadis, further bolstered tourism and leisure infrastructures along Athens' coastline. The airport further expanded again in 1969, with an East Terminal designed by Eero Saarinen, demarcating the rising economic significance of tourism.

[3] In July 1974, Konstantinos Karamanlis, the former prime minister, landed at Hellinikon airport amid a celebratory crowd. His return from self-exile in Paris signaled the political turnover after the fall of a seven-year military dictatorship, marked by democratic elections, a referendum that abolished the monarchy, and a new Constitution. In 1975, Aristotelis Onassis died, and Olympic Airways was returned to state management. In 1981, Greece joined the European Union. As the flow of international tourism continued to intensify, the idea of building a larger and updated airport toward the city's outer eastern agricultural areas (Mesogeia) gained more support.

[4] In August 2004, the Summer Olympic Games took place in Athens. The Hellinikon airport had already stopped operating in 2001, when the Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport opened in Mesogeia. Greece had entered the Eurozone in 2001, and Athens was experiencing the impact of globalization, exemplified not only by the preparation of a mega-event but also the influx of migrants from the Eastern Bloc after 1989. Part of the decommissioned Hellinikon airport turned into the Hellinikon Olympic Complex and an Olympic marina — all construction that relied heavily on immigrant labor. In 2003, an international architectural competition for the site's reuse as a Metropolitan Park did not come to fruition, as the country was heading toward the post-Olympics debt crisis (Wassenhoven 2018).

[5] In 2015, the Hellinikon facility acted temporarily as accommodation for the waves of asylum seekers arriving from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq on their way to other EU countries. Mandates from the UN and EU agreements with Greece and Turkey

shaped the harsh living conditions in the Hellinikon camp, in the midst of an economic recession and a socio-political crisis under neoliberal austerity measures. In June 2017, after operating for two years, the temporary 'accommodation facility' in the Hellinikon Olympic Complex was evacuated, and refugees and asylum seekers were transferred to camps outside of Athens, also known as 'hospitality structures'.

[6] In June 2021, Hellinikon SA, the public limited company, established in 2011 to manage the site's privatization process (together with the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund, under the First Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece), transferred its shares to the private company Lamda Development SA. This marked the moment of Hellinikon's privatization. Over the span of a decade, the vision for a new city of 25,000 residents, 100,000 visitors per day, and 1,000,000 tourists per year, initiated as a neoliberal response to Greece's debt crisis, sustained the processes of state land privatization/dispossession (Hadjimichalis 2014), of creating privately led governance structures, and of deregulating institutional frameworks (Triantis 2021, forthcoming). The renowned architectural firms of Norman Foster, Kengo Kuma, BIG, and Aedas, who were commissioned by Lamda Development, prepared masterplans and architectural renderings. The new urban typologies and planning tools available to them effectively manifest restructured public/private relations and development patterns regarding property rights and rent allocation. The new ways of living, leisure, working, and consuming associated with the project incorporate neoliberal ideas of privatization and cultures of privatism along the Athens Riviera (**Figures 38, 39**).

Figure 38: The physical model, produced by Lamda Development, exhibited at the Ellinikon Experience Park, showing the extent of the Ellinikon redevelopment project. Photo by Loukas Triantis, 2022.

Figure 39: The projection behind the physical model shows renderings of the proposed high-rise buildings designed by architectural firms such as Norman Foster, Kengo Kuma, BIG, and Aedas, all part of the Ellinikon redevelopment project. Photo by Loukas Triantis, 2022.

This chronology of the Hellinikon site reflects the successions, transitions, and overturns of populations, state policies, local-global dependencies, and social and architectural imaginaries. As an exemplary model of neoliberal urbanism, the Ellinikon project privatizes, commodifies, and dispossesses land along with successive layers of collective experiences, memories, and legacies. The Ellinikon project exemplifies the effects of the global trends of housing, tourism, digital nomads, and capital mobility in Athens and Greece. But as spatial segregation and inequality throughout the world only intensify, such current global mobilities are coming under scrutiny — and so are the projects being developed in response to them.

Notes

[1] Lina Giannarou, "World of Athens Holds Its First Meeting," *eKathimerini*, December 29, 2009. There are at least 23 cities named Athens.

[2] Aelius Spartianus, "Hadrian," in *Historia Augusta*, vol. 1, trans. David Magie (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 4–5.

[3] Athens remained the capital of the Greek State during subsequent substantial territorial expansions after incorporating Ionian islands (1864), Thessaly (1881), Crete, Epirus, Macedonia and Western Thrace following the Balkan and First Word War (1913). The exception was the Dodecanese, which remained under Italian rule until 1947.

[4] The *Regulatory Plan 1983: Propositions for the Re-creation of the Capital* aimed to halt the city's spatial growth and decentralize state services. Among its key goals was also the preservation of the center's historical, cultural and social significance, by regulating land uses, economic restructuring, addressing environmental degradation, and improving the quality of life.

[5] This collection builds on and converses with an emergent interdisciplinary scholarship on the built environment of Athens including projects such as the Social Atlas of Athens, an online, tri-lingual, open-access collection of essays conceived as a 'broad thematic dictionary' which surveys the social geographies of modern Athens (Athens Social Atlas 2024).

[6] John Rockefeller, Jr. was convinced to fund the reconstruction of the Stoa because he did not want the finds from the Agora Excavations that he had helped to fund to languish or get lost; moreover, he saw great potential in the building of a museum housed in a fully reconstructed ancient monument (Vogeikoff-Brogan 2021).

[7] For the reconstruction and Hellenistic and Roman *comparanda*: Kleiner 1983, 'Chapter Three. The Reconstruction', 37–79; Fedak 2006.

[8] On Nemrud Dağ and Commagene's design mannerisms and identity construction: Versluys 2017.

[9] Taking into account the narrative sources of travelers, this took place sometime between 1745 and 1751. Authors like G. Wheler and J. Spon (1675–1676), Ch. Perry (1743), and R. Pococke (1745) made no reference to its being in use, while J. Stuart and N. Revett (1751) and J. D. Le Roy (1755) are the first to mention that the tower was used by Ottoman Sufis.

[10] According to Evliya Çelebi, there were two lodges, one of which was of the denomination of Halvetis.

[11] Ermou Street means the street of Hermes, who was considered to be the god-patron of commerce.

[12] According to a royal decree (FEK 30, 22.08.1834), Kapnikarea became a property of the Municipality of Athens, since it was a working parish church.

[13] Government Newspaper, FEK 30, 17.08.1863, Enactment '*Regarding the Dissolution of the Temple of Kapnikarea and its Reconstruction in the District of Gerani*', signed by the Minister of Interiors Athanasios G. Petimezas.

[14] Ibid.

[15] August Mommsen published *Athenae Christianae* five years later (1868), a landmark work for the study of the Christian monuments of Athens.

[16] Lenormant refers to André Couchaud, Albert Lenoir, Adolphe Napoléon Didron, Wilhelm Salzenberg, and Daniel Ramée, who published drawings of this building and cite it as one of the most precious types of the Byzantine style of the 11th century.

[17] In 1921, Kapnikarea was declared Byzantine monument via law 2447/21.

[18] Between 1922 and 1924, more than a million Greek Orthodox refugees and around 400,000 Muslim refugees crossed the Greco-Turkish border in opposite directions. The 'Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations' was signed at Lausanne, on 30 January 1923, in the aftermath of the Greco-Turkish War of 1919 to 1922.

[19] Over the years a series of stakeholders have fought to save the complex, starting with the 51 homeowners who refused to sell their apartments to the state in the late 1990s/early 2000s. Many others joined this effort, including architects, academics, and institutions such as the Chamber of Architects, the International Association of Architects, ICOMOS, NTUA's School of Architecture, the 1st Ephorate of Modern Monuments of the Ministry of Culture, the Hellenic Institute of Architecture, the History Department of the University of Crete, refugee associations, and ELLET.

[20] Construction of the US Embassy began on September 15, 1958, and was completed on July 4, 1961, at a cost of US$1,500,000. The project was carried out during the tenure of Ambassador Ellis Ormsbee Briggs (1899–1976), who served in this position from July 15, 1959 to February 1, 1962.

[21] In the near future, the Athens Hilton will be renamed the 'Conrad', and, as communicated in the press, is set to become a meta-hotel, representing deservedly the meta-democracy that threatens to dissolve political consciousness.

[22] City Plaza was built in the 1970s in Aharnon Street, next to Victoria Square as a modern hotel during a time when these parts of the Athenian center were known for their middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. However, as parts of the Athenian center perpetually declined (Maloutas 2007) and the economic crisis hit (Hadjimichalis 2017), the hotel was forced to close its doors. It remained unused for over six years.

[23] All quotes in this text come from ethnographic research conducted in Athens by the author between 2014 and 2018 (Makrygianni 2023).

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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