

Leo von Klenze
Memorandum on the Acropolis
and
Address at the Inauguration of Restoration Work on the Acropolis
(1834)
Translated by Jonathan B. Blower

1698 Words

Source: Leo von Klenze, *Aphoristische Bemerkungen gesammelt auf seiner Reise nach Griechenland* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1838), 384–387, 392–395.

Address at the Inauguration of Restoration Work on the Acropolis

Your Majesty! Alongside the many other good deeds for which the new Greece is already indebted to the diligence of your sovereign regency, you also wanted to give the country and the whole educated world a clear sign of the noble paternal interest you take in its august past – the strongest possible historical foundation for the future of this fine country.

Could this message to the whole educated world have been conveyed in a more convincing and affirmative way than by the diligence Your Highness has shown in preserving the visible vestiges of this august past, the monuments of Hellenic art?

Your Highness therefore deigned to give me the noble task of organizing and directing the beginning of the works by which the monuments of this high fortress, this three thousand year-old seat of Athenian greatness—the most accomplished sculptural forms ever to have been created by the human spirit—were to be wrested from the debris and the devastation and preserved and secured for centuries to come.

I am fully aware of the magnitude, dignity and nobility of this task. Neither the inanimate tools, the foremen's orders, nor the exertions of the laborers alone were able to carry it out without the whole seeming to take on a poetic life of its own.

The shadows of the great men who, from here in Athens, from this epicenter of military renown, philosophy and legislation, science and the arts, dominated the intellectual development of their own age and indeed of posterity; the shadows of those men who for two thousand years had been accustomed to hearing every blow of the hammer and chisel, every shout of a laborer in this place as the signal of a new chapter in the destruction of their magnificent works – these shadows, having been startled from their quiet resting places, seemed to rise up around us, anxiously extending their protective arms out over the remaining ruins of their former glory in order to prevent the feared demise of their last traces. It seemed as though everything was against our undertaking, though its aim was preservation rather than destruction: the levers that were to raise and bring order to confused masses of stone buckled and broke, illness dissipated the workforce, rollers and ropes were snapped, and the alarmed foremen soon believed the work would have to be abandoned. Then the banner of hope appeared on the horizon, emerging from the blue lap of Amphitrite. The King is coming to lay the first hand on the continuing preservation work! This was the cry that went up from the ranks of the young, reborn nation, and it reached all the way to the heights where we are now gathered in gladness and anticipation. The discouraged workers were animated with a new zeal, everything became easy and convenient, the confused ruins willingly gave up what was required of them for their

reconstruction, and remnants of sculpture that had been buried for centuries emerged from the rubble: works from the chisel of Phidias, acknowledged as the greatest in Europe.

It was as if the required marble blocks were presenting themselves of their own accord; almost arranging themselves, as though we were living the mythical age of Amphion, to the rhythm of the jubilant chanting that resounded to greet the King. Did the protective shadows of the great men of Athens hear those jubilant sounds as they hovered around these columns and walls? Did they hear the approach of King Otto? Yes! The buzz of joy got through to them, and since his presence can only be beneficent for all that is excellent and beautiful in Hellas, they happily repair to their chill resting places with a wave of approval, continuing their slumber to the rhythm of the same sounds that had earlier startled them from their sleep.

Today, for the first time after many centuries of barbarism, Your Majesty has again set this high fortress back on the path of civilization and renown, on the path of Themistocles, Aristides, Cimon and Pericles, and this will and must be perceived in the eyes of the world as a symbol of the blessed period of Your Majesty's government and of that which you have decided for this rocky stronghold. The traces of a barbaric age, its rubble and formless debris, will disappear here as everywhere in Hellas, and the remnants of a glorious past will arise in new splendor as the surest stanchion of a glorious present and future.

On behalf of Greece and the whole educated world, then, I now venture to ask Your Majesty to consecrate the first piece of column to be erected on the rejuvenated Parthenon, and thus to confer on this work of preservation the best possible guarantee of progress and success.

Memorandum on the Acropolis

In my report on the plan of Athens I have already presented the necessary general considerations on how the Acropolis of Athens should be treated and developed in future, and since the views elaborated there have been approved and adopted by His Majesty the King and by the Regency it only remains for me here to provide a few details on the disposal of the works.

According to the views I elaborated at an earlier stage, the supervision of these works ought to be entrusted to Doctor Ross and to the architect Schaubert, and I myself should be kept informed by way of occasional reports from them as to the status, progress and any possible hindrances that might occur. In my opinion, and I have explained this to the abovementioned gentlemen on a number of occasions, the manner and order in which these works are to be carried out should be as follows:

The very first task ought to be the removal of the fortifications, which are of no archaeological, structural or picturesque interest and represent a potential hazard on account of their highly ruinous state, this particularly being the case at the main entrance in front of the Propylaea.

The Parthenon would then initially be exposed and restored, and I am told the expenses and funds that I calculated for allocation over a period of three years have in fact been made available for this purpose. The excavation that has been started at the Parthenon should be continued and completed at a breadth of twenty feet around the steps of the temple, initially on the north side, then to the west, the south, and finally on the east side, this partly to facilitate the restoration, and partly to ease the transportation of rubble and stones that are to be removed, which can only be done on

the west side. It may however also be advantageous for the removal of rubble if one were initially to proceed with a major clearance at the north-west corner.

Any plastic works of art that are found during the excavation are to be given to the conservator immediately and temporarily brought to the extant mosque as soon as this has been vacated by the soldiers of the fortress garrison. The Theseion would also be a most suitable place for the provisional storage of such fragments of antique sculpture. Any pieces that are found during the excavation and are required and still fit for the actual restoration should immediately be taken to the place where they are to be installed and used, or to somewhere as close as possible. Any pieces that are no longer serviceable for this purpose but are still of some interest on account of their preserved architectural forms, profiles, cornices, plastic ornamentation or painting should likewise be kept and grouped in and around the ruins in a convenient and picturesque manner, so that the ruins do not lose the picturesque character which the passing of time has inevitably impressed upon them. Any blocks of stone or marble that do not fall under one of these three categories are to be taken down from the citadel and conveyed to wherever they can best be used as building material, otherwise they are to be sold to the highest bidder. The rubble itself, I think, had best be tipped over the walls or the rock face in the direction of the Areospagus and from there taken on wagons for use as material for the terraces of the palace, whereby a twofold purpose would be achieved for the price of one.

The restoration would take place in such a way that all the column drums would first be used to erect all the columns of the peribolos on the north side of the temple in their entirety, since this side is visible from the city and the palace, i.e. it is the main side. If one or two pieces are lacking for a complete column, replacements are to be made from the available marble, though without any pretensions to concealing the restoration or making it unrecognizable. Whenever possible, any pieces of architrave, cornice, triglyphs or metopes that are found ought to be re-established on top of the columns in a picturesque manner and in accordance with the character of the ruin, and this is to be continued throughout the building in that the walls of the cella should also be re-erected so far as the available pieces allow. A few columns will probably be missing on the south side and can be left out without detriment to the effect of the whole; otherwise it is to be treated in the same way as the north side. The spiral stairs built into the west side between the antae and the columns are to be removed, but since it is desirable that the heights of the temple be accessible, they may be replaced with a light stairway inside the cella.

Scaffolds and machines will be necessary for raising the stones, some of which have already been made, whilst I have given the architects specifications for the others. It may be necessary and advisable to have strong pulleys, stone bells, etc. made in Germany, and I would gladly arrange this if requested to do so.

After the Parthenon, the plateau to the west where the museum is to be built would then also be cleared and restored in the manner detailed above, followed by the Erechtheion, and finally the Propylaea with the area around it.

It goes without saying that during all these works the antique flooring is to be preserved in its entirety, just as it is found, with all its recessions, terraces, pedestals and substructures.